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## **Foreign Policy Legacy of Prime Minister of Japan Shinzō Abe**

**A. N. Panov**

### ***Abstract***

The article analyzes the foreign policy of Shinzō Abe, one of the most notable and unusual political figures of contemporary Japan, who was the head of Japanese government twice for a total of almost nine years. It traces how his political philosophy formed under the influence of ideological views of his relatives, prime ministers N. Kishi and E. Satō, as well as his father, Shintarō Abe. It also considers Abe's approaches to building Japan's relations with the countries which are most important for its interests.

Abe was perceived as a devoted ally of the U.S. in Washington. He established relations of confidence with presidents Obama and Trump. For this purpose, he strengthened Japanese-American military-political cooperation, took steps to support American strategy in the Asia-Pacific region. He implemented, even if without substantial results, steps to stabilize relations with China, trying to combine policy of containing Beijing with efforts to develop bilateral ties. Abe paid substantial attention to relations with India, including for the purpose of the idea, which was put forward by him and supported by the U.S., to establish quadrilateral cooperation of “democracies” in the Indo-Pacific region – the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia.

His policy in the Korean direction was not successful. The relations with Pyongyang remained in deadlock, and, with Seoul, the most acute bilateral problems were not finally solved. Abe also paid great attention to policy aiming to conclude a peace treaty with Russia on the basis of a radical improvement of Japanese-Russian ties in all spheres. The reasons for his failure in these directions are discussed in this article.

The article evaluates Abe's efforts aimed at developing governmental documents and making the Diet adopt laws determining the basic directions of the foreign and military policy of the state. The author characterizes the results of the activity of S. Abe in the sphere of foreign policy and assesses its influence on the formation of the course of the Japanese government after his resignation.

**Keywords:** political philosophy of Abe, Japan-U.S relations, Japan-China relations, Japan-India relations, Japan-Republic of Korea relations, Japan-DPRK relations, Japan-Russia relations, Japan's security policy.

On July 8, 2022, Shinzō Abe, one of the most prominent and charismatic politicians of Japan, not only of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but also in the entire postwar history of Japan, was fatally wounded by a shot in the back at an election rally. In terms of the number of days in the prime minister's chair – 3,188 (and 2,822 days continuously), he surpassed the prewar record holder, Prime Minister Tarō Katsura.

Abe was born in 1954 into a family of statesmen who have left, starting from the prewar period, a substantial, but at the same time a controversial trace in Japan's political life. His grandfather Nobusuke Kishi, as the head of the Ministry of Armaments in the 1930s, supported the war with the United States and oversaw the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of Chinese and Koreans for the production of weapons for the Japanese army. After the war, he was convicted as a war criminal and sentenced to prison.

After the release, Kishi returned to active political life and quickly adapted to the new realities, changing his views from the anti-American to the pro-American ones. It helped him build an impressive career. With the support of the Americans, he became Japan's prime minister (1957–1960) and justified their trust. Despite a large-scale movement in the country against the conclusion of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security (Security Treaty) between Japan and the United States, he achieved its signing and ratification.

Shinzō's father's uncle, Eisaku Satō, headed the Japanese government in 1964–1972. Under his cabinets, Japan reached the second place in the world after the United States in terms of economic power. Sato was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts focused on the signing and the ratification of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (in Japan, many consider the grounds for awarding him greatly exaggerated).

Shinzō Abe's father Shintarō was a prominent figure in the Liberal Democratic Party. As minister of foreign affairs in the late 1980s, he energetically launched a personal diplomatic activity, focused, among other things, on improving Japan's relations with the Soviet Union. Only a serious illness and his early demise in 1991 prevented him from becoming prime minister.

It was while serving as his father's secretary that Shinzō first became acquainted with the backstage of Japanese politics. After his father's death, in 1993, he was for the first time elected to the House of Representatives and was subsequently re-elected nine times. Abe served as secretary general of the LDP and chief cabinet secretary, and, in 2006–2007, he headed the Japanese government. In 2007, Abe was compelled to resign from the prime ministerial position due to health problems, but soon he returned to active political life, overcoming the disease with the help of a latest medicine. Five years later, he was elected prime minister again and held this post for a record period, from September 2012 to September 2020. After retiring due to an aggravated illness, for the rest of his life he remained a member of the Diet and an influential politician heading the largest faction in the ruling party.

### **Shinzō Abe's Political Philosophy**

As a member of a prominent Japanese political clan, Shinzō, of course, could not help but feel the influence of its views on shaping his vision of how and where the country's strategic course should be directed. His assessments of Japan's state policy in the period of war and the



subsequent occupation of the country by the United States were largely influenced by the views of Kishi. The latter believed that Japan was waging a “just” and even a “holy” war, advocated the creation of a “new Japan”, implying, not least, the revision of the constitution “imposed by the victors.”

Kishi was not alone in his views. At present, disagreement with the “post-war system imposed on Japan,” generated as a result of the “historical humiliation” brought about by the defeat in the war, is quite deeply rooted in a solid part of the Japanese establishment, the core of which is concentrated in the Liberal Democratic Party.

In contrast to these views, various political circles of Japan remain critical of the country’s militaristic past. Socialist Tomiichi Murayama, who headed the Cabinet in 1995, issued a statement on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, expressing deep regret and apologizing for the suffering that colonial rule and Japanese aggression brought to the Asian peoples. A similar statement on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war was made by the LDP President and Prime Minister of Japan Jun’ichirō Koizumi.

Judging by his statements, Shinzō Abe was in solidarity not with the above-mentioned views, but with the position of his grandfather and his followers. He described as “stupidity” a statement made in 2010 by Naoto Kan, who then headed the DPJ cabinet, in which he apologized “for the trauma of colonial oppression” inflicted by Japan on the Korean people.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, having headed the government for the second tenure in 2012, Abe had to take into account the fact that more than 50 percent of Japanese public opinion, according to polls, considered the actions of the Japanese wartime leadership as aggression and believed it justified to apologize for them.<sup>2</sup> The countries which were particularly affected by these actions, China and the Republic of Korea, with whom Abe intended to intensify relations, also strongly condemned these actions.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Japan Times* 21.03.2015.

<sup>2</sup> *Mainichi Shimbun* 19.06.2015.

Moreover, being aware of Abe's views on the Japanese militaristic past, Washington disapproved of his statement about the "illegitimacy and injustice" of the decisions of the International Military Tribunal, which condemned Japanese aggression and the crimes of wartime Japanese military leaders. Abe's visits as head of Japanese government to the Yasukuni Shrine, a "symbol of Japanese militarism," were perceived critically by the U.S. When Abe visited the shrine in 2013, the Obama administration issued an unprecedented statement of "disappointment" with the Japanese Prime Minister's action. Washington feared that Abe's revisionist views excusing Japan's aggressive actions could also lead to justifying the Japanese attack on the United States as "righteous" and, ultimately, to the cultivation of anti-American sentiment in Japanese society. It is no coincidence that the U.S. Congressional Research Service, in its report analyzing Abe's political views, described him as a "historical revisionist" (see [Panov 2016]).<sup>3</sup>

As a result of internal and external pressure, Abe adjusted his position. Now it looked ambivalent. On the one hand, in his statement as the head of the Japanese government dated August 14, 2015, issued in connection with the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II, he mentioned recognition of the "immeasurable damage" and suffering inflicted by Japan on "innocent people," and expressed his "deep remorse for the war." On the other hand, the statement did not contain an apology for what the Japanese military had done, but only stated that Japan had "repeatedly expressed a sense of deep remorse and sincere apology for its actions during the war" and that such a position, set out by previous Japanese governments, would remain unchanged "in the future." At the same time, his speech carried out the idea that, since the post-war generation makes up more than 80 percent of the country's population and has nothing to do with the war, then he and the next generations do not need to continue to apologize for the past.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Japan Times* 01.04. 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Statement by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. August 14, 2015. *Prime Minister of Japan and his Cabinet*. <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97abe/statement/201508/0814statement.html> (date of access 04.05.2024).

Abe followed the “recommendations” of the Obama administration to refrain from visiting the Yasukuni Shrine, but, at the same time, he did not stop sending “commemorative offerings” to the shrine and did not prevent the pilgrimage to it by his cabinet ministers and the Diet members from the ruling party.

Abe made considerable efforts to remove the Americans’ “concerns” about his assessments of the Japanese aggression during World War II and to regain their trust. He paid special attention to his official visit to the United States at the end of April 2015. The speech of the Japanese prime minister in the U.S. Congress was prepared with special care, given the sentiments of American lawmakers.<sup>5</sup>

Abe began his speech (he spoke in English), with assurances of his love for America in all its guises. On behalf of Japan and the Japanese people, the Japanese prime minister expressed deep condolences to “the souls of all Americans who died in World War II” and expressed deep regret that “Japanese actions brought suffering to the peoples of Asian countries.” He also put forward an idea that the former adversaries, Japan and the United States, had won, in cooperation with the Western world and other democracies, in the Cold War and that they could now work together to spread and strengthen the common values of democracy and freedom around the world.

Abe then outlined the main parameters of Tokyo’s policy, which was proclaimed under the new slogan of “making an effective contribution” to ensuring peace and stability by Japan assuming greater responsibility in the interests of peace. Further clarifications indicated that this should be ultimately done in order to further strengthen cooperation between the two countries, including the military sphere. As a result, the Japan-US alliance would become, as Abe argued, more durable, “trustworthy and providing deterrence in the interests of peace in the region.” The “Union of Hope” – this is how he pompously described the Japan-U.S. military-political alliance.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Japan Times* 29.04.2015.

The members of the Congress liked the speech of the Japanese Prime Minister; it was repeatedly accompanied by ovations. And although the words “apology” and “aggression” were missing there, the American political elite understood the main thing: in the person of Abe, the United States acquired a faithful and loyal ally on whom it could fully rely in the implementation of its strategy in the Asia-Pacific region.

U.S. President Obama welcomed Prime Minister Abe more than cordially. At a dinner at the White House, he read a haiku of his own composition; the tables were set not only with European cutlery, but also with chopsticks. The American president made a toast, raising not a glass of champagne, but a glass of sake made in Yamaguchi, the Japanese prime minister’s native prefecture. Obama also thanked the Japanese for introducing karaoke and anime into American culture. The American president described Abe’s visit as “historic” and stressed that the US-Japanese relations had never been so strong before.

The official visit of the Japanese prime minister to the United States convinced the American establishment that, in the person of Abe, the United States had “its own man” in Tokyo.

### **From Philosophy to Practical Actions**

Shinzō Abe proved himself a proactive, strategic-minded politician, an authoritarian person not corresponding to the Japanese style, a skilled administrator who created a team of associates devoted to him, and a talented speaker, again, not in the Japanese tradition.

First of all, he built a system of making and implementing the most important decisions on domestic and foreign policy issues personally subordinate to himself. The role and responsibility of the Prime Minister’s Office increased significantly, and it effectively transformed from a secretariat under the head of the Cabinet into the main coordinating, executive, and control body of the Government. The National Security Council was established and tasked with intensifying the analysis of information on issues of international politics, bilateral

relations with the most important countries and security problems, and developing the pivotal decisions in the area of military and defense policy on the basis of this analysis. The NSC included, in addition to the prime minister, the chief secretary of the Cabinet of Ministers, and the ministers of foreign affairs and defense. High-level representatives of various ministries and departments were involved in its work.

In the matters of foreign policy, Abe had little confidence in information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, with rare exceptions, did not listen to the advice and opinions of diplomats.

Among his closest advisers on foreign policy issues were the people from business, academia, and journalistic circles. In addition, Takaya Imai, a native of the bureaucracy of the economic bloc, joined the circle of special confidants, taking up the post of special advisor to the prime minister. In general, Abe preferred personal diplomacy based on establishing trusting relationships with leaders of other countries [Mulgan 2018; Abe 2021].

## **Relations With the United States**

For every head of the Japanese government, it is very important, even necessary, to establish friendly, trusting relations with the occupant of the White House and, accordingly, with the members of his administration. Japan's entrenched dependence on the United States, in the alliance with which Tokyo occupies a subordinate place and is often forced to follow Washington's decisions, even negatively affecting Japanese interests, puts the Japanese government and its head in front of a difficult choice.

For the Japanese side, the question thus becomes acute: by what means can it ensure that its opinion is taken into account, especially in the context of inevitable trade and economic contradictions, and at the same time not causing serious discontent of the American ally?

Having achieved a significant role for the country in the sphere of global economic relations, the Japanese political elite have been

looking for opportunities to increase Japan's political authority in the international arena since the 1970s. It is obvious that the solution to this problem is hampered by the strict binding of Japanese strategy to American policy. Not a single Japanese prime minister has set the task of radically restructuring the military-political alliance, much less abandoning it in favor of complete independence. Attempts have been made and continue to be made to simply achieve greater consideration of Japanese interests by Washington. This would seem an intractable task. However, practice has shown that even simple rhetoric in favor of independence within the framework of allied relations can have the most negative consequences for its authors.

The most striking example is related to Yukio Hatoyama, a prime minister from the Democratic Party, who, in the opinion of the American side, allowed himself to make statements that could translate into actions not fully meeting the interests of Washington's policy. As a result of active steps to discredit the policy of the "non-standard prime minister" with the support of the influential pro-American lobby in Japanese political circles, Hatoyama was forced to resign before serving for a full year as head of the cabinet.

Abe took a "different path." He emphasized his commitment to Tokyo's allied relations with Washington in every possible way. He tried and achieved recognition that he was a loyal ally of the White House in implementing its strategic objectives.

To ensure such an image in the American establishment, Abe acted in several directions. First, he took steps to develop military cooperation with the United States, as well as to increase Japanese military potential as a contribution to the American strategy in the Asia-Pacific region. This course was fully approved by Washington.

Secondly, the Abe cabinet demonstrated its willingness to "work" with Japan's Asian neighbors in order to involve them in supporting the American strategy in the region.

Thirdly, Tokyo made concessions to the U.S. administration, especially under President Trump, in order to resolve a number of trade and economic contradictions. At the same time, it should be noted that

the Japanese negotiators defended the interests of Japanese companies without bringing the matter to an acute negotiation stage.

Finally, fourthly, Abe achieved the establishment of personal trusting, friendly relations with the heads of the White House during his premiership – with Barack Obama and Donald Trump. Having achieved such relations, he purposefully used them in the interests of his policy.

He managed to persuade President Obama to visit Hiroshima in 2016. Although the latter did not apologize or express regret for the American nuclear bombings of Japanese cities, it was the first time an acting American president visited the site of the barbaric U.S. attack. In turn, Abe visited Pearl Harbor. With the Japanese attack on the naval base located there, the Japanese-American war started. Although Obama spoke out against Abe's intention to launch negotiations and improve relations with Russia at the time when the G7 was pursuing an anti-Russian policy after Russia's reunification with Crimea, he did not resort to any "punitive measures" against this course of the Japanese prime minister.

Not trusting the forecasts of the Foreign Ministry and of political scientists, Abe assumed that Donald Trump, not Hillary Clinton, would win the presidential race. It would seem that Clinton's victory would be preferable for Japan, since Trump had been known for his anti-Japanese sentiments since the 1980s, harshly criticizing Tokyo for depriving Americans of jobs by increasing its exports to the American market and restricting access of American goods to the Japanese market, and for manipulating the Japanese currency for the same purposes. Trump did not forget to reproach Japan for ensuring its defense "at American expense." It is noteworthy that Trump began his presidential activity in the Japanese direction in line with his long-standing "dislike" for Japan. However, with his political intuition, Abe realized that he would be able, albeit not without difficulty, to "tame" his obstinate counterpart, who was simply not aware of all the nuances of the U.S.-Japan relations.

Just ten days after the election results were announced, Abe managed to secure a meeting in New York with the new head of the White House. The Japanese Prime Minister prepared well for this meeting, he carefully

studied and took into account Trump's "weak points" – golf accessories and gold jewelry. He presented the future American president with a set of gold-plated golf clubs worth \$4,000. And Trump liked Abe. It was already on February 10, 2017, immediately after the inauguration, that Trump hosted the Japanese leader, who arrived in Washington on an official visit. The Japanese Prime Minister turned out to be the first head of a foreign state to receive such attention [Abe 2020].

## **Relations With China**

In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China, Japan's most important neighbor, was also assessed in Japan as the partner posing the most serious problem in terms of building bilateral relations. Abe had to answer a hard question: how to combine the response to the "Chinese challenge" (and many in Japan believed that there was already the "Chinese threat") with the need not to close access to such a profitable and huge market for Japanese manufacturers.

The National Security Strategy, first adopted in 2013, emphasized that a comprehensive policy would be pursued in the Chinese direction. However, there were no specific details explaining this thesis.

Abe sought to ensure Japan's role as a full-fledged world power and a regional leader. China, which in 2011, according to the World Bank, ranked second in the world after the United States in terms of economic potential, was clearly on the path to implementing such plans, as it demonstrated an assertive policy in the East China and South China seas, built up its armed forces and pursued a proactive global diplomacy. It was to be taken into account.

Initially, Abe tried to establish a personal, if not friendly, then at least a politely businesslike contact with Chinese President Xi Jinping, something similar to his relationship with the U.S. president. In October 2014, he paid a visit to Beijing. In 2016, he met with the president of the People's Republic of China in Hangzhou. In October 2017, at a bilateral meeting in Vietnam, he obtained the PRC President's consent to give



a “new start” to bilateral relations. This was regarded in Japan as a return to “normal Sino-Japanese relations.”

In the same 2017, Abe spoke positively about China’s “One Belt, One Road” strategy. However, later, in June 2017, he publicly stated that Japan was ready to cooperate with China’s “One Belt, One Road” initiative only if it did not contradict the principles of the Trans-Pacific Partnership concept, in which China does not participate. As the Japanese prime minister emphasized, cross-continental infrastructure projects should be open to everyone who wants to participate in them, under the condition of their transparency and honesty. In addition, these projects should be economically significant, and their financing should not lead to a serious debt for the countries in which the projects are being implemented.<sup>6</sup> The Japanese Government has not taken any steps to join the large-scale transcontinental Chinese project since then. Apparently, Abe took into consideration the negative attitude of the United States towards it.

Ultimately, Abe’s strategy of trying to “sit on two chairs” in relations with Beijing (on the one hand, together with the U.S. actively pursuing the China containment policy, and, on the other, maintaining normal relations with Beijing) did not bring the desired results. As expected, the perception of China as a “threat” prevailed and materialized in a series of anti-Chinese steps.

After his resignation, in an interview with the Economist, Abe noted that Japan alone could not balance China’s growing military power, and “therefore Japan and the United States must cooperate with each other to achieve this balance.” To that end, he said, “I have applied the interpretation of the right of collective self-defense and initiated the legislation under which Japan and the United States can cooperate closely in such situations.”<sup>7</sup>

It was Abe who prompted Washington to support and use the Indo-Pacific concept of regional cooperation, which he had put forward in a speech to the Indian parliament in 2006. Initially, Washington had

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<sup>6</sup> *Mainichi Shimbun* 06.06.2017.

<sup>7</sup> *The Economist* 26.05.2022.

essentially ignored the initiative of the Japanese prime minister: Obama was busy implementing the concept of “rebalancing” to the Asia-Pacific. However, at the end of his term in the White House, Trump drew attention to it, and the U.S. administration proceeded to the documental conceptualization of the idea of the “Open and Free Indo-Pacific region.” The basis for it was taken from Abe’s statement on the “Democratic Security Diamond,” made in late 2012, which concretized his concept of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Now it was about creating a coalition of four countries in the region, the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, actually aimed at “detering the advance of authoritarian China” into the security zone of the democratic countries.

## **Relations With India**

Abe’s achievements include his “opening” of India to Japanese foreign policy. Apparently, already in his first term as prime minister, he realized the significance of relations with India as a counterweight to China. It was during his visit to Delhi in August 2007 that Abe strongly emphasized the importance of Japanese-Indian relations, and, in his speech to the Indian parliament, he put forward a concept that essentially envisaged the formation of a “belt of democratic countries” surrounding authoritarian China.

Abe prepared for his visit to India thoroughly. It should be noted that, in drafting the speeches for a foreign audience, he paid special attention to their content. His speeches were prepared by a small group of speechwriters who, with professional skill, embodied his ideas into meaningful, but at the same time easily digestible and memorable statements addressed to a specific audience. Abe’s speech to the members of the Indian parliament was vivid and emotional. He noted the historical and ideological proximity of the two countries. In the ideological sphere, it manifests itself in the commitment to democracy, in the religious sphere – in the postulates of Hinduism and Buddhism.

The Japanese prime minister met with relatives of Subhas Chandra Bose, an Indian nationalist who, with the support of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, tried to achieve the liberation of India from the British colonial rule during World War II. Although the attitude towards this politician is controversial in India, there are those who revere him. Abe appeared to share the view that Imperial Japan “helped” Indian patriots in their fight for independence.

Abe met with the son of Radhabinod Pal, one of the judges of the Tokyo Military Tribunal, who questioned its legality and, on this basis, believed that the Japanese defendants should be acquitted. Needless to say, Abe himself repeatedly spoke negatively about the “victors’ tribunal.”

During his second term as prime minister, especially after Washington drew attention to his idea of the Indo-Pacific Partnership and to some extent began to attribute its authorship to itself, Abe paid special attention to the development of Japanese-Indian relations. And now, largely due to his efforts, there is noticeable progress in the contacts and exchanges between Japan and India in the military sphere. Since 2019, consultations have been held in the “two-plus-two” format between foreign ministers and defense ministers. In 2018, the first joint maneuvers of the ground forces of the two countries were held, followed by bilateral naval exercises, and deliveries of Japanese amphibious aircraft and naval reconnaissance aircraft to India started. An agreement was signed on the admission of Japanese warships to Indian ports on the islands of Andaman and Nicobar, and of Indian warships to the Japanese base in Djibouti. Cooperation in the technological field is being established. It is planned to build high-speed railways in India based on Japanese technologies at a cost of \$17 billion.

### **Relations With the DPRK and the Republic of Korea**

Abe largely made his political name as a fighter for the return to Japan of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korean special services in the 1970s and 1980s. In the late 1990s, this problem, along with Pyongyang’s

nuclear missile program, became one of the most acute in relations between Japan and the DPRK. At that time, an aspiring politician and a member of parliament, Abe actually led a broad public campaign for the return of the abductees to their homeland.

And the very beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was marked by a brief period of thaw in Japanese-North Korean relations. In 2002 and 2004, Prime Minister Koizumi paid two visits to Pyongyang at the invitation of the North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, during which the Japanese side succeeded in securing the return of some of the abducted Japanese. However, the issue was not finally closed, since, according to the Japanese side, several more abductees remained in the DPRK. But the North Korean side refused to provide any information about their fate.

After taking over the post of head of cabinet in 2012, Abe regularly stated his serious intentions to solve this problem and to hold at any time a meeting with the new leader of the DPRK, Kim Jong-un. However, even at present, the abduction issue remains unresolved, manifesting itself in constant demands to the Japanese government from relatives of the abductees and representatives of the general public to take measures for their return.

The thaw in Japanese-North Korean relations ended quickly. Japan resolutely condemned Pyongyang's nuclear and missile tests and imposed anti-North Korean sanctions. The DPRK's response was decisive and undiplomatically rude: the Japanese were called "disgusting devils," "enemies of the Korean nation," "insulting Pyongyang's legitimate measures to ensure self-defense." Abe was advised "to never think about visiting the DPRK or meeting with the North Korean leader." Thus, the Japanese prime minister's policy regarding North Korea ended in failure.<sup>8</sup>

Abe could not boast of any serious achievements in Japan's relations with South Korea either. Overcoming the contentious, often tragic legacy of Japanese colonial policy in Korea turned out to be a very difficult task, although certain efforts of Abe's cabinet in this direction were made. In December 2015, a Japanese-South Korean agreement was signed,

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<sup>8</sup> *The Japan Times* 11.08.2019.

in which the Japanese side acknowledged its historical responsibility for the problem of Korean “comfort women,” whom the Japanese military forced to provide sexual services to Japanese soldiers during World War II. A special fund was created to help the “comfort women” who survived to this day. Abe apologized to President Park Geun-hye in a telephone conversation. However, in South Korean political and public circles, the actions of the Japanese side were assessed as insufficient, and it was announced that the aforementioned problem in relations with Japan was “not closed.”

There was no settlement of the territorial dispute between Tokyo and Seoul over the ownership of the island of Dokdo (Takeshima in Japanese), which is under the control of the Republic of Korea. The sovereignty of the Republic of Korea over Dokdo/Takeshima is not recognized by Japan. In general, under the Abe cabinets, Japanese-South Korean relations continued to remain unstable: periods of warming were followed by periods of frost.

## **The Sphere of National Defense and Security**

Abe’s political dream of raising Japan’s international status and increasing its presence in world affairs was not new. Almost all of his predecessors dreamed of a “beautiful Japan,” which, due to its peacefulness, non-participation in conflicts, generous financial and economic gifts to developing countries, and the charm of its distinctive culture, is effortlessly able to secure a place in the first row of the most influential and revered countries of the world.

However, dreams were shattered by prosaic reality. Times were changing rapidly, but Japan remained frozen in its post-war shell. First, China bypassed it, then India, and even the Republic of Korea began to demonstrate their willingness to surpass their pre-war colonizer. Moreover, Tokyo ceased to be perceived as a model of advanced scientific and technical innovations. The money allocated to development assistance, mainly to African countries, did not make much impression

against the background of the huge economic assistance provided by China to developing countries. Even sophisticated Japanese culture began to lose ground under the onslaught of the Korean wave of pop culture.

Japan could not boast of attractive foreign policy initiatives either. The work of the Japanese diplomatic apparatus, the members of which were traditionally focused on supporting the American strategic course, was characterized by a lack of activity and initiative.

Apparently, Abe was aware of the limitations of Japan's foreign policy potential. In his view, a country that occupies a subordinate position and, being unable to independently ensure its defense, is forced to rely on a powerful ally, cannot claim full consideration of its national interests and honorable treatment in the outside world. It is no coincidence that Abe so persistently set the task of revising the provisions of Japan's constitution limiting the development and use of its armed forces.

However, Abe failed to achieve what he called a "historic mission" in his speech delivered in January 2020 to the Diet: to amend the constitution and provide the Self-Defense Forces with the status of a full-fledged army.<sup>9</sup> The widespread domestic opposition to the "modernization" of the constitution did not allow him to realize his dream.

However, he compensated for the failure of his plan with practical steps to improve and increase the military potential of Japan's armed forces. In the field of military defense, Abe achieved the adoption of several important documents and decisions aimed at increasing the combat capability of the Self-Defense Forces. Among them are the National Security Strategy (2013), the Law on the Protection of State Secrets (2013), the new edition of the National Defense Program Guidelines, and the Medium-term Defense Program for 2019–2023.

The National Security Strategy, adopted for the first time in 2013, emphasized the importance of developing Japan's own defense potential, but the main focus was aimed at cooperation with the United States in the development and production of military equipment. The importance

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<sup>9</sup> *Asahi Shimbun* 20.01.2020.

of providing the Self-Defense Forces with the capabilities in new areas – space, cyber, radio-electronic – was pointed out. In line with Abe's concept of "proactive pacifism," an increasingly active participation of Japanese military personnel in UN peacekeeping missions was envisaged, raising Japan's contribution to international cooperation for maintaining security in the Asia-Pacific region, but, of course, in active interaction with the United States.

The adoption by the Diet, thanks to Abe's insistence, of legislative measures to implement Japan's right to collective self-defense, was particularly significant. Under his leadership, on May 25, 2015, the Cabinet submitted bills to the Diet for approval, which define situations in which Japan can use its armed forces in order to exercise the right to collective self-defense.

According to the Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan, "the Japanese people forever renounce war as the sovereign right of nations" and "the right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized." In 1959, the Supreme Court ruled that this article allows for the exercise of the right to self-defense in a limited form in the interests of ensuring the existence of the country. Accordingly, Japan's right to create Self-Defense Forces was recognized. In other words, self-defense is not the war referred to in Article 9 of the Constitution.

In 1972, the Japanese Government stated that the Constitution prohibits the use of the right to collective self-defense. It turned out that, in the event of an attack on Japan, the Japan Self-Defense Forces would have to repel the aggression and, according to the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, await the arrival of American armed forces for help. A strange situation arose. The specified interaction between the armed forces of the two countries did not fall under the definition of collective self-defense. However, Japan preferred not to think about such an interpretation of the right to collective self-defense.

Prime Minister Abe was the first to dare to state that the constitution does not deprive the country of the right to collective self-defense, and that the Self-Defense Forces can act jointly with the U.S. armed forces, both in Japanese territory and abroad, in the situations prescribed in

the bills. Among the latter, the bill specified an armed attack against Japan or against a foreign state in close relations with Japan, which could pose a threat to the existence of Japan. This was the most significant provision of the bill and caused heated debate both in the Diet and among the general public. Opponents of the bill demanded specific clarification of situations in which Japanese military forces would be used outside the country. It was pointed out that the lack of specifics allowed for different interpretations of security-threatening situations and enabled the government to single-handedly and arbitrarily determine the grounds for the use of armed forces within the framework of collective security.

The explanations from Abe himself and the representatives of his cabinet were contradictory, indicating that the expedited preparation of the bill drafts was not carefully verified. Ultimately, the most convincingly cited example of a situation where the right to collective self-defense could be used was when an attack was carried out on an American warship that was evacuating the Japanese from a dangerous area, which meant, first of all, the Korean Peninsula.

The Cabinet's unconvincing explanation of the need for a new law caused growing discontent in wide public circles of Japan. Mass protest demonstrations were held. Even some Diet members from the ruling party were demonstratively absent during the voting, and deputies from five opposition parties left the meeting room and did not participate in the voting. Nevertheless, the law was passed on July 16, 2015, by the majority of Diet members from the LDP and the Komeito party, which was its partner in the ruling coalition.

Washington officially approved the adoption of new legislation, reasonably believing that the main thing was to create a legal basis for the use of Japanese armed forces abroad. If necessary, specific situations of application of the right to collective self-defense could be "worked out" together with the Japanese government.

China reacted in a sharply negative way, officially declaring that the new legislation, which allowed Japan to send troops abroad for the first time since World War II, "complicated regional security and global



stability” and called into question Tokyo’s commitment to the “path of peaceful development.”<sup>10</sup>

Abe has done a lot to strengthen the country’s military potential. Even during his first premiership, he achieved the elevation of the status of the defense department of the government from an agency to a ministry. The prime minister initiated a regular increase in budget spending on defense. Although the annual growth was not so significant, and the allocations have not yet gone beyond 1 percent of GDP, the first steps have been taken.

Purchases of modern weapons have increased. In the arms procurement program for 2019–2023, the Japanese government has earmarked funds for the purchase of 105 F-35 fighter-bombers, missiles and anti-missiles, helicopters, and reconnaissance drones from the United States. These purchases were to some extent consistent with President Trump’s wishes for Japan to acquire more American weapons, but they also met the interests of modernizing the Japanese Self-Defense Forces. In particular, some F-35 aircraft were purchased for use on the Izumo and Kaga ships converted from helicopter carriers to aircraft carriers.

In June 2013, the first Cybersecurity Strategy was adopted, according to which the Ministry of Defense was tasked with countering cyber-attacks at the national level. This was preceded by cyber-attacks on the information systems of government agencies, the Diet, as well as the largest companies in the defense sector. It was suggested that these attacks were associated with “relevant Chinese structures.” In May 2020, the creation of a space operations unit within the Air Self-Defense Force was announced, primarily for military purposes, with the main task of ensuring the protection of Japanese satellites.

As a response to China’s growing military power, and primarily for the necessity of fending off Beijing’s forceful seizure of the Senkaku Islands, in 2016, the deployment of Self-Defense Force units of 500–600 people began on the southern islands of Amami – Oshima, Miyakojima,

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<sup>10</sup> *The Japan Times* 17.07.2015.

Ishigakijima. In 2018, for the first time in the post-war period, an Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade was formed with the task of conducting amphibious operations in the event of attempts to capture the southern Japanese islands.

In June 2020, at the initiative of Defense Minister Tarō Kōno, Prime Minister Abe and then the Japanese Cabinet made a decision to abandon the deployment of ground-based Aegis missile defense batteries in Akita and Yamaguchi prefectures, which were supposed to cover the country's territory primarily from possible missile attacks by the DPRK and China. This decision was justified by the high costs of purchasing, deploying, and maintaining interceptor missiles. The negative attitude of the residents of these prefectures towards the placement of anti-missile missiles in close proximity to their places of residence was also taken into account.

As an alternative to the option of ground-based missile defense, it was decided to increase the number of destroyers of the Maritime Self-Defense Force with Aegis missile systems. Abe announced his intention to consider the possibility of creating a potential for preemptive strikes on enemy military bases, in case there begin preparations for a missile attack on Japan. With Abe's light hand, the idea of preventive strikes became an object of active debates in Japan and materialized in the National Security Strategy adopted at the end of 2022.

## **Relations With Russia**

One of the most important directions of Abe's foreign policy, and, in fact, the most important one, was the strategic task of building a new quality of relations with Moscow. He set this task from the first days of his premiership and consistently moved towards its implementation, stubbornly sparing neither time nor effort.

Solving the primary task of radical improvement of relations with Russia pursued two organically combined, but outwardly divergent goals. The first one was to prevent, as far as possible, rapprochement

and, moreover, cooperation between Moscow and Beijing on an anti-Japanese basis, especially in the military-political field. It had to be shown to Moscow that the benefits of multifaceted relations with Tokyo in all spheres – from politics to culture – could outweigh its ties with Beijing, by developing which the Russian side would inevitably play the role of a “younger brother” [Kensho 2022, p. 176]. Abe openly stated that, since China has significantly increased its expansion in the Southeast and Southwest seas, and Japan has maritime borders with China, it is necessary to improve relations with Russia.<sup>11</sup>

The second goal, a more ambitious one, the achievement of which would be of historical significance for both Japan and Russia, and for the bilateral relations between the two countries and their peoples, seemed at its core quite logical: by actively changing the nature of bilateral relations, radically improving them, to create an environment conducive to the settlement of the territorial problem and the conclusion of the “ill-fated” peace treaty. As a result, the international positions of both Japan and Russia would be substantially transformed into much more serious and influential ones, both in the world and especially within the regional Asia-Pacific balance of power.

Implementing his strategy in the Russian direction, Abe began with small steps. Essentially ignoring the boycott by Western countries of participation in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in Sochi in February 2014, he defiantly attended this ceremony. Then, the Japanese government joined the condemnation by the G7 countries of Russian measures to reunify with Crimea but did it for the most part symbolically. Moreover, Tokyo welcomed Russia’s actions to defeat terrorist groups in Syria, which were actually condemned by Western countries.

Finally, preparations began for Abe’s meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, which took place in Sochi in May 2016. It lasted 3.5 hours and was of particular significance. First of all, the meeting opened the way for the establishment of personal friendly relations between the leaders of the two countries. Subsequently, they met 26 more times. They

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<sup>11</sup> *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.

talked with each other for 48 hours, including one-on-one negotiations for 9 hours. It was obvious that the leaders had the feelings of personal affection and trust for each other.

The previously united front of the Western powers on large-scale restrictions on contacts with Russian officials, who were included in special lists of “untouchables,” was broken through. Almost all of them, starting with members of the leadership of the Federal Assembly, ministries and, most importantly, high-ranking Russian military officials, received invitations and visited Japan. It is worth noting the visit to Tokyo in December 2017 of the First Deputy Minister of Defense, Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, as well as the visit of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, Colonel-General Oleg Salyukov. Nikolai Patrushev, the Secretary of the Russian Security Council, and Shōtarō Yachi, the Secretary General of the National Security Council of Japan, met several times in Tokyo and Moscow. The “two-plus-two” dialogue – between the foreign ministers and defense ministers of the two countries – was resumed.

Abe proposed an eight-point plan to boost economic cooperation. It is noteworthy that Shintarō Abe, the father of the prime minister, while serving as foreign minister in the late 1980s, also put forward an eight-point plan for the development of bilateral ties in the interests of improving Japan’s relations with the Soviet Union. It is no coincidence that, when starting his policy in the Russian direction, Abe visited his father’s grave and promised there to solve the territorial problem with Moscow.

The economic plan of the Japanese prime minister provided for the establishment of cooperation in the energy sector, in the fields of urban planning, medicine, cooperation between small and medium-sized businesses, advanced technologies, agriculture and fisheries, the development of the Far East. It was proposed also to significantly intensify and expand cultural, scientific and humanitarian exchanges.

At the Sochi meeting, an exchange of views took place on the issue of peace treaty. An agreement was reached to hold regular consultations at the level of foreign ministers and their deputies. The Japanese side

noted its principled position on the simultaneous implementation of economic cooperation projects and the negotiations on a peace treaty.

The meeting in Sochi testified to Japan's withdrawal from the united anti-Russian "sanctions front" of the United States and European countries. The Japanese prime minister showed political courage and, despite Washington's statement, made a choice not in favor of "Western solidarity," but in favor of Japan's national interests.

The Sochi agreements contributed to a significant improvement in the general atmosphere of Japanese-Russian relations [Brown 2016]. At the first stage, Abe's plan for economic cooperation was received with particular enthusiasm. According to the Russian Ministry of Economic Development, by 2021, more than 200 cooperation projects had been put forward and considered by both sides. However, only a small part of them reached the implementation stage. Significant differences emerged in the approaches of Russian and Japanese companies to the goals and formats of cooperation. Many projects of the Russian side were not sufficiently prepared, set inflated, unrealistic production goals, and offered cooperation on terms that did not correspond to the practice of Japanese companies.

As Abe himself noted later in his interview, "not everyone in Japan correctly understood the purpose of the economic cooperation plan... Some believed that this was government assistance, but it was meant that Japanese companies and businesses would participate. If it is not profitable for them, if there is no profit, they will not participate."<sup>12</sup> At the same time, explaining his approach to economic cooperation with Russia, Abe proceeded from the fact that Russia would understand the importance of pushing forward relations with Japan and developing the Russian Far East with the help of Japanese technology. However, according to his assessment, "in Russia, this understanding has not been achieved."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.

<sup>13</sup> *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.

Nevertheless, a number of important projects, especially those aimed at solving socio-economic problems in the Far Eastern regions of Russia, have been successfully implemented. Of particular importance were the energy projects Yamal LNG, Arctic LNG-2, and the construction of a polymer plant in the Irkutsk region. At a time when Western financial institutions did not issue loans to Russian companies, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation allocated a loan of 200 million euros for the implementation of the Yamal LNG project, and LNG shipments to Japan began. The Japan Bank for International Cooperation, together with Mitsui Corporation, invested about \$3 billion in the Arctic LNG-2 project, becoming the owner of 10 percent assets of the project operator.

Attempts were made to approach the implementation of the idea of joint economic activity on the South Kuril Islands. In September 2017, a roadmap was even approved with a list of possible joint activity projects: aquaculture, wind energy, creation of greenhouses, waste disposal. However, no specific agreements were reached. Fundamental disagreements on legal issues were the main obstacle. For the Japanese side, economic activity on the islands based on compliance with Russian laws, which would mean recognition of their belonging to Russia, was unacceptable.

There was no progress in political-level negotiations on the peace treaty issue either. In September 2018, President Vladimir Putin, speaking at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, proposed to the Japanese prime minister to sign a peace treaty without preconditions by the end of the year, and to resolve other issues, i.e., territorial ones, later.

At a meeting with Putin in November of the same year in Singapore, Abe made a counterproposal that indicated a radical change in the Japanese side's approach to the problem of settling the territorial issue. In contrast to Tokyo's previous principled position "on the simultaneous return of the four islands," Abe demonstrated the Japanese side's readiness to negotiate on the basis of Article 9 of the Joint Declaration of 1956, which envisaged the transfer of the Habomai and Shikotan islands to Japan. The negotiating plan proposed by Abe was not disclosed

in more detail. However, according to unofficial information, it was intended to sign a peace treaty, transfer the Habomai and Shikotan islands to Japan within a certain time period, and fix the Russian-Japanese border between the islands of Shikotan and Kunashir.

Abe himself explained the radical, hitherto unthinkable change in the Japanese position as follows: if you set the task to achieve 100 percent success, but foresee that the result will be zero, then there is no point in setting such a task. First of all, it is necessary to determine the achievement of the possible. If we seek the return of not two islands, but four, then this is the task of achieving 100 percent success, but then Japanese-Russian relations will be thrown back.<sup>14</sup>

Abe saw the possibility of solving the most difficult problem in Japanese-Russian relations in the strong, stable leadership of President Vladimir Putin and in his determination to use the stability of his political position in Japan. “To solve the territorial problem and conclude a peace treaty,” he emphasized, “a strong governance is necessary in both Japan and Russia. I believe that Putin’s governance is very strong.”<sup>15</sup>

After Abe put forward a new proposal to resolve the peace treaty issue, negotiations began in January 2019 at the level of the Foreign Ministers. The parties did not disclose the content of these negotiations. However, according to a number of statements by representatives of the Russian side, already at the first stage the Russian delegation actually put forward a preliminary condition – the Japanese side had to officially recognize that Russia legally possesses all the territories received as a result of the war with Japan.

Apparently, the Japanese delegation was not inclined to start negotiations with such recognition, obviously fearing that the negotiations might not lead to an agreement on a peace treaty, and that the Japanese side would lose one of its fundamental positions: non-recognition of the settled state of the territorial problem. However, Abe himself was optimistic about this issue, “I think,” he said, “diplomats would be able

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<sup>14</sup> *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.

<sup>15</sup> *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.

to solve the question posed by the Russian side that Russia received the islands as a result of the war.”<sup>16</sup>

The Russian side expressed concern over the scenario by which the Habomai and Shikotan islands, after their transfer to Japan, would fall under the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and the U.S. armed forces would appear on them. Abe’s statements during his talks with Putin that Japan was capable of pursuing an independent policy regardless of its relations with the U.S. seemed unconvincing to the Russian side. At the same time, according to Abe, the negotiations did not reach a specific discussion of security issues.<sup>17</sup>

In general, the Russian side developed a two-stage approach to solving the problem of the peace treaty and the territorial issue. Since, as the Russian side believed, at this stage, Japan is an ally of the United States, which is pursuing an openly anti-Russian policy, and Japan has joined many anti-Russian sanctions, occupies positions in the UN and other international structures identical to those of Washington and NATO countries, this creates serious contradictions in Russian-Japanese relations. Therefore, it was proposed to conclude a peace treaty contributing to a new quality of bilateral relations in all areas, a treaty which would ultimately help to find a solution to the problem of territorial demarcation. In turn, the Japanese side, apparently, continued to insist on concluding a peace treaty, the essence of which would be to determine the conditions for the transfer of the Habomai and Shikotan islands to Japan.

The negotiations actually reached an impasse. Abe attributed this to the fact that, as he noted, “the positions of opponents of negotiations have strengthened in Russia.”<sup>18</sup>

It should be noted that opponents of the solution of the territorial problem according to the “Abe formula” also became more active in Japan. If, at the initial stage of the negotiations, criticism of Abe’s policy

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<sup>16</sup> *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.

<sup>17</sup> *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.

<sup>18</sup> *Hokkaido Shimbun* 26.12.2021.



in the Russian direction was rarely heard in statements by politicians, political scientists, and journalists, then, after their interruption with the Covid-19 epidemic and especially after Russia launched the Special Military Operation in Ukraine, disagreement with the course of the Japanese Prime Minister began to prevail. Summarizing the complaints about Abe's policy, Director of the Slavic-Eurasian Center at Hokkaido University Akihiro Iwashita concluded that the Japanese Prime Minister had seriously damaged Japan's interests, since he offered Russia a lot, but received nothing in return [Iwashita 2019, pp. 111–133].

This perspective is generally shared by a well-known Japanese journalist Akiyoshi Komaki, who twice headed the representative office of the Asahi newspaper in Moscow. In his book devoted to a detailed analysis of the negotiations between Prime Minister Abe and President Putin on the issue of peace treaty, he critically assesses Abe's policy towards Russia. According to Komaki, it did not lead to any agreements, and, moreover, for quite a long time its contents were not explained to the Japanese public [Komaki 2020, p. 354].

Responding to criticism, Abe said in an interview at the end of 2021: "If the course is changed, then Japanese-Russian relations will roll back 100 percent... Everything will return to the previous Japanese position. And if this is done harshly, then no changes should be expected. This will be a big mistake."<sup>19</sup>

It was as if he had foreseen the further development of the events. Japan fully supported the anti-Russian position of the U.S. and the European countries towards Russia's Special Military Operation in Ukraine, imposed a huge number of sanctions against the Russian leadership, and almost completely curtailed bilateral trade and economic relations. In this regard, the Russian side added Japan to the list of "unfriendly countries" and stated that it was pointless to negotiate a peace treaty in such an environment. Bilateral relations between Moscow and Tokyo have reached the lowest point in history since the normalization of relations in 1956.

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<sup>19</sup> *Hokkaido Shimibun* 26.12.2021.

Many details of the Russian-Japanese negotiations on a peace treaty and territorial issue from February 2019 to March 2022 remain undisclosed at this stage. However, their outcome is known. Prime Minister Abe's "grand project" for radical restructuring of Japanese-Russian relations ended in failure.

### **The Foreign Policy Legacy of Abe**

As the head of the Japanese government, Abe expended much effort to increase the importance and influence of Japan in world politics. To this end, he sought to prove to the US that Tokyo's greater independence within the framework of the Japan-US military-political alliance not only does not contradict American interests, but, on the contrary, complements and strengthens Washington's position in the Indo-Pacific region.

An attempt was made to find a mutually acceptable formula for building relations with China. However, he failed to ensure their proper balance – the negative perception of Beijing's foreign policy in military and political terms prompted Japan to look for the methods of containing it, by participating in China's "encirclement belt," which also implied improving relations with India.

Abe also failed to radically change the nature of Japanese-Russian relations and conclude a peace treaty based on the settlement of the territorial problem. What Abe was worried about, namely, the Russian-Chinese rapprochement and partnership, including the military one directed against Japan, began to be actively implemented. Joint exercises of the Russian and Chinese navies near the Japanese borders, as well as air patrols over the waters of the Japan and East China Seas by air groups of strategic bombers of the Russian Aerospace Forces and the PLA Air Force, have begun to be held regularly.

Tokyo's relations with Seoul developed problematically during Abe's premiership. Only after Abe's resignation and the election of Yun Seok-yol as President of the Republic of Korea, who made serious concessions to the Japanese side on one of the issues of the historical past in bilateral

relations, was the door opened to removing obstacles to practical issues of bilateral relations, including the cooperation in the fields of confidence building and security.

In response to the missile threat from Pyongyang, Abe spoke in favor of creating the potential to launch missile strikes on bases from which an attack on Japanese territory is planned. This idea was specifically embodied in the National Security Strategy adopted by the Japanese Government on December 16, 2022. The task was set to ensure the possibility of delivering a “counterstrike to prevent further attacks on Japanese territory,” which in itself, as the authors of the document believe, would deter the intention to commit an armed attack on Japan. Obviously, it was about not only North Korean, but also Chinese missiles.

Abe has done a lot to improve the Japan Self-Defense Forces and to formalize their use in law. During his premiership, an increase in defense funding in annual budget expenditures began, albeit within 1 percent of GDP. This policy was continued: the National Security Strategy 2022 set out a provision to increase the defense budget to 2 percent of Japan's GDP by 2027, which would mean doubling military spending.

It can be said that a comprehensive study of Prime Minister Abe's foreign and domestic policy by both Japanese and foreign political scientists is only at a starting point now. Among such studies is a monograph by an American political scientist Michael Green, who focused on Abe's strategy towards China, in which competition was combined with an attempt not to lose the benefits of economic cooperation, as well as on his desire to turn Japan into an influential state on the world stage, and above all in the Asia-Pacific region, by conducting an assertive military policy [Green 2022].

A group of Japanese scientists from leading Japanese universities, members of the Asia-Pacific Initiative think tank, conducted a comprehensive study of Prime Minister Abe's domestic and foreign policy. It was recognized that, despite the contradictory attitude towards his activities in Japanese public opinion, Abe's foreign policy course received many positive assessments at a time when the international situation around Japan sharply worsened. The high assessment concerns

the following achievements of Abe's policy: strengthening the Japan-U.S. alliance, passing laws on collective self-defense, promoting the concept of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", strengthening the activity of the Quad – the United States, Japan, India, Australia, stabilizing relations with China, establishing relations of trust with ASEAN countries, launching the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership consisting of 11 countries [Kensho 2022, p. 4–5].

As shown in this article, not all of these estimates can be agreed with. At the same time, it is obvious that, compared to many of his predecessors, Abe, as head of the Japanese government, showed himself to be a more active, strategically minded politician who achieved a number of notable results in the sphere of diplomacy.

The international situation, which radically changed as a result of confrontation between the collective West, led by the United States, and Russia, prompted Japan to abandon Abe's policy of aspiring more independence in choosing partners. Showing full solidarity with the policy of the collective West, Japan is doing everything possible to strengthen allied relations with the United States, align itself with the policies of NATO and the European Union towards Russia and China, and intensify ties with NATO structures. As a result, Tokyo is becoming increasingly involved in the global and regional strategy of the collective West, in fact contributing to the split of the Asia-Pacific region into opposing military and political blocs. It is obvious that this course is not capable of achieving the goals set by Abe to ensure Tokyo's independent, influential positions in world and regional affairs.

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## **Japanese *Konbini* Minimarkets: Unique and Universal Character, Regional Characteristics**

**I. S. Tikhotskaya,  
M. A. Petropavlovskaya, S. Kato**

### ***Abstract***

Based on the analysis of statistical and information sources, academic publications, and the authors' personal experience, the article analyzes the peculiarities of Japanese minimarkets that rank among amazing Japanese inventions, creations, and practices and have become an integral part of the Japanese way of life and a trademark of the country. In the academic literature, there have been no comprehensive works focused on this phenomenon so far, and their regional peculiarities, especially the geography of stores operated by different chains, are almost completely neglected. The purpose of this article is to highlight the key academic discourse, to characterize the unique character and universality, which, in fact, constitute the phenomenon of *konbini*, as well as to identify their regional features.

The study clearly shows that these stores, which came to Japan from the United States in 1973, have been completely transformed and are constantly evolving, changing the store concept and presenting a globally unique phenomenon. It describes the characteristics of the leading chains of these stores in their endeavor to gain even greater popularity among consumers and the innovations that have emerged in recent years, including those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Studying the phenomenon of *konbini*, the authors, on the one hand, note their transformation into an important element of social infrastructure, that meets the needs of modern society and is especially

necessary in the context of rapidly progressing aging of the population, and, on the other hand, their certain negative impact, especially on the younger generation.

The paper features an analysis of the regional characteristics of these stores and the cartographic material illustrating them. It is revealed that, within prefectures, the location of *konbini* correlates with the number of inhabitants (the number of stores is proportional to the population of municipalities), and each of the 20 *konbini* chains operating in Japan is located in its own specific area. The authors conclude that *konbini* facilitate the development of the country's regions as a whole, and their role in Japanese society cannot be overemphasized. The Japanese experience can be relevant to other countries, including Russian chain stores.

**Keywords:** Japan, *konbini* minimarkets, social infrastructure, way of life of the Japanese.

## Introduction

For a long time, Japan has been shrouded in an aura of mystery and uniqueness. It is well known that, throughout its history, this country has absorbed all things new, interesting, and advanced, obtaining something unique as a result. The whole world knows Japanese rock gardens and ikebana; the tea ceremony is also associated with Japan, as well as some other cultural phenomena, although their prototypes originated in the neighboring countries. This is probably due to the synthetic nature of Japanese culture (formed under the spiritual and aesthetic influence of different religions [Sarkisov (ed.) 1996, p. 157]), and the ability to bring everything to perfection.

Similarly, the numerous amazing Japanese inventions, creations, and practices include undoubtedly unique chain minimarkets – *konbini*, which are one of the most highly-demanded retail niches in Japan. The concept of such a store was developed in the USA, but it was Japan that created its unique model. This is a 24-hour store, transformed beyond

recognition to make it convenient for people and constantly changing to meet new needs of Japanese society. This is a phenomenon that has no analogues in the world.

*Konbini* are of interest as a unique type of stores, which, in Japan, have in fact turned into basic social infrastructure, activity centers for local communities, and even an element of pop culture. These franchised stores have changed the way of life of the Japanese, making their lives more comfortable, and also influencing food culture and service provision. Having become one of the country's hallmarks, Japanese *konbini* operate in Hawaii, Taiwan, Hong Kong, mainland China, South Korea, and other Asian countries. The analysis of the phenomenon and regional features of *konbini*, that have become a customary part of Japanese life, can undoubtedly be of interest to Russian chain stores, that increasingly position themselves as stores within walking distance.

The Japanese *konbini* progress, transforming to meet the changing needs of both people and businesses and responding to the needs of individuals with increasingly diverse lifestyles, which, in fact, explains their viability. This gives rise to a new discourse in the analysis of the phenomenon and influence of *konbini* in society. The extent of their influence is shown, for example, by the fact that the coach of the Japan national football team found the reason for the poor performance of his players in their devotion to *o-bento*<sup>1</sup> from *konbini*. In 2021, the rapper *Miyagi*, who claims that, in the atmosphere of *konbini*, “you become consanguineous with what is going on,”<sup>2</sup> created a “Konbini Confessions” YouTube channel. A popular Japanese writer *Takahashi* Gen'ichiro pointed out that *konbini* are, in fact, *konbiniensu kyōkai*, i.e., “convenient churches,” emphasizing that it is “convenience” that is the religion of Japanese society. In this regard, it should be noted that, back in the second half of the 1980s, there was a popular expression in Japan – “*sabisu no kajo kuni*” (“country of excessive service”). Indeed,

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<sup>1</sup> Food packed in a box.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Konbini Confessions’ captures the late-night antics of city dwellers. *Japan Times*. September 17. 2022.



it is hard to find another country with such easily available amenities. Washizu Ryoku, an expert in marketing and freelance writer, citing Max Weber's *The City* (in Japanese, "*Toshi-no Ronri*", or Logic of the City), writes: it is really interesting to note that, in urban life, when human relations are scarce, people go to *konbini* in search of "healing" as the lost place of communication, which is close to the role played by church in Western societies [Washizu 2008, p. 156]. Of interest are studies that contain criticism of *konbini*. According to a number of Japanese researchers, *konbini* in Japan act as substitutes for mother and family: available 24 hours a day, including a variety of food offers, they have become "more convenient than a mother" and can raise children [Miura 2005, p. 112], undermining the traditional foundation of the family. It is also emphasized that, when people can get what they want at any time, they become eager to get everything they want immediately. Associate Professor Tanaka Daisuke of the Japanese Women's University says that *konbini* not only create lonely and isolated individuals, but also require a new kind of relationship, different from the group affiliation typical of the Japanese [Tanaka 2015]. *Konbini* are also criticized for being a strong "stimulant" for young people, promoting "all-nighters." One study has even identified a connection between the bright lighting characteristic of *konbini* and their signage and pupils' poor academic performance at school [Ayukawa 2003].

Western researchers are also studying *konbini*. We cannot but agree with Gavin H. Whitelaw that *konbini* are not only a business format, but also a social and cultural one – "an everyday zone of social activity, economic transactions and cultural translation" [Whitelaw 2008]. He also clearly proves that customers of *konbini* appreciate and increasingly rely on the convenience of the services offered there, citing the results of a survey in which 70 percent of the respondents say that, without *konbini*, their life would be uncomfortable [Whitelaw 2018].

## What Are *Konbini* Minimarkets

*Konbini* offer everything one needs in everyday life around the clock: from a variety of products and ready-to-eat meals, various drinks (including beer and alcohol), cosmetics and hygiene products up to socks and ties, batteries and umbrellas, magazines and books, etc. – everything and anything one can imagine. In addition, thanks to the advancement of information technology, they provide a variety of services: paying bills, booking and purchasing tickets (for transport and for various events), photocopying, scanning, printing, servicing bank cards, receiving parcels and sending letters, etc. They also have free Wi-Fi and bathrooms.

In other words, such stores are about meeting the new lifestyles and expectations of everyone, striving to meet the growing needs of customers and companies. They perfectly match their name (derived from the English word *convenience*) – these are really convenient stores that constantly offer not only new products, but also new services that can help out in any situation at any time. Without exaggeration, a *konbini* minimarket is more than just a store: it is a small world that provides modern people with everything they need. Moreover, the world is rapidly changing, meeting ever new needs and aspirations of all potential customers. Depending on the time of year, they offer interesting specialties according to the season and the main holidays. When summer comes, a lot of confectioneries containing fresh fruit, as well as the traditional *matcha* green tea appear on store shelves. Even foreigners who have visited Japan recall the *konbini* with a nostalgic feeling: the *onigiri*<sup>3</sup>, the *meronpan*,<sup>4</sup> etc. And, for example, the famous Japanese football player Nakata Hidetoshi, who also played in foreign clubs, admitted in an interview that one of the greatest difficulties for him during a long stay abroad was the absence of *konbini* there, and

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<sup>3</sup> *Onigiri* – a small round or triangular rice bun with a filling wrapped in dried seaweed.

<sup>4</sup> *Meronpan* – “melon bread” – a sweet melon-flavored bun, in the making of which melon is not used.

the media once mentioned that, immediately after landing at the Narita airport, he hurried to a *konbini*. [Nishimura 2004, p. 46–48].

Japan, that was significantly inferior to the other G7 countries in terms of the number of foreign tourists, has increasingly been striving to make their stay in the country more comfortable since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And the number of *konbini* participating in the tax-free program has been increasing, as well as the number of ATMs that also service foreign credit cards. During the most disastrous earthquake in Japan's history, which occurred in the northeast of the country in 2011, *konbini* played a major role in supporting life in the affected areas, providing drinking water, food, and toilets to those who could not return home [Tsuchiya 2016].

In the rapidly aging Japanese society, *konbini* are increasingly in demand as convenience stores and as home delivery services (orders are taken by phone, which is convenient for working people who pick up their order on their way home after work). This trend was further intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, when the reduction of human contact and visits to public places became a significant factor, and the demand for contactless delivery increased dramatically. In recent years, at an increasing number of *konbini*, people have been able to sit down at a table to immediately eat the ready-made dishes they bought. Thus, *konbini* intensify competition in the restaurant industry, as coffee shops and eateries are losing their customers, who are tempted by the taste of coffee for 100 yen, which is quite good for the average consumer. And, as D. Tanaka aptly put it, they have created “a 24-hour space in which people can lead an individualized social life. This is a place where you can go in and out without buying anything, without worrying about other people's eyes.” [Tanaka 2015].

In 2016, Murata Sayaka wrote the novel *Convenience Store Woman*, which became an international bestseller; the book has also been translated into Russian. The author shows that these shops make it possible to lead a comfortable life for those people whose ideas about it differ from what is recognized as “normal” in society. The heroine opposes the unspoken social norms existing in society – she has been

working at a *konbini* store for 18 years and is not going to get married and have children or change her job and her lifestyle. The following phrase clearly illustrates her way of thinking: “This is the beginning of a new day, the time when the world wakes up and the gears of society begin to move. I’m one of those gears spinning in a circle. I’ve become an active part of the world, rotating in the time of day called morning.”

According to Prof. Ronald Saladin, *konbini* are a reflection of Japanese society. These stores show how social life works in terms of interpersonal relationships, habits, norms, values, etc. However, what happens when someone doesn’t fit in the Japanese notions of common sense? S. Murata not only shows and reveals the deep structures of Japanese society and generally accepted norms, but also speaks about the life of people who do not meet generally accepted expectations. This novel is “a call for creating a more ‘human’ society, allowing those who do not fit into it to find their niche in it.”<sup>5</sup>

In the second half of the 1990s, *konbini* turned into vital infrastructure (*seikatsu infura*), which can be compared to water, gas, and electricity supply. Later they began to be called social infrastructure (*shakaiteki infura*) – along with banks, hospitals, and post offices. *Konbinis’* high adaptability and ability to “be all in one” for many people contributed to this status – they perform not only the functions of a traditional supermarket, but also provide information, entertainment, and public services in one place. While initially *konbini* were frequented by young people, later they gradually became more and more popular with more mature people. With the “silver tsunami” rapidly gaining momentum in all regions of Japan, *konbini* are increasingly taking into account the needs of older people which are the fastest growing segment of the consumer market. They offer food that is more suitable for older people, arrange the goods they need on the lower shelves, set up tables so that they can

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<sup>5</sup> Murata Sayaka’s Convenience Store Woman. Discussing Gender Identity and Society in Contemporary Japanese Literature <https://www.dijtokyo.org/event/murata-sayakas-convenience-store-woman-discussing-gender-identity-and-society-in-contemporary-japanese-literature/>

immediately sit down to have a snack or relax, and deliver goods to their homes. For example, back in 2005, the 7-Eleven chain noted a trend for the growing number of customers over the age of 50, and, according to the data provided by Takemoto,<sup>6</sup> the number of such *konbini* visitors increased 16-fold in 1989–2013, reaching 5 million per day.

### **The Rise of *Konbini* in Japan**

In the commercial statistics of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan, *konbini* as a business category are defined as self-service shops that sell food and drinks, have a sales area of 30 m<sup>2</sup> to 250 m<sup>2</sup> and work 14 or more hours a day. There are currently 18 *konbini* chains operating in Japan. Their history dates back to the mid-1970s. Fifty years ago, in 1973, the U.S. 7-Eleven chain opened its first store in Japan, and in 1981–1991, their number doubled, amounting to about 40 thousand. In the early 1990s, it was already a full-fledged industry with new technologies, an ever-expanding assortment and recognizable symbols. Thus, *konbini*, which emerged as convenience stores, turned into a retail business with a huge sales volume: in 2020, their trade turnover (\$93 billion) approached that of supermarkets (\$118 billion).

In 2014, *konbini* domestic market exceeded 10 trillion yen (\$83 billion) for the first time, with 3 companies accounting for about 80 percent of the market: 7-Eleven, FamilyMart and Lawson.<sup>7</sup> In 2022, *konbini* nationwide sales reached a record level of 12.2 trillion yen, although their total number decreased from 58.4 thousand in 2020 to 56.2 thousand. In 2021–2022, the number of customers

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<sup>6</sup> Takemoto, Ryota. Japan as a Society Dependent on Convenience Stores. Is Survival without Convenience Stores Impossible in the Era of Super-Aging? <http://www.japanpolicyforum.jp/archives/society/pt20160318011754.html>

<sup>7</sup> *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*. July 22, 2015.

increased by 0.6 percent (but, compared to 2020, it is slightly less) and amounted to 15.7 billion. Obviously, this is largely due to the dramatically decreased number of foreign tourists because of the pandemic.<sup>8</sup> The average cost of purchases per customer increased by 2.8 percent, reaching 715 yen.<sup>9</sup> As of late March 2023, the most of the outlets (in thousands) are owned by 7-Eleven (21.3), FamilyMart (16.5), and Lawson (14.6), i.e., more than 90 percent. Over 1 thousand stores belong to three more chains: the fast-growing Minishop (1.9), DailyYamazaki (1.3), and Seicomart (1.2).<sup>10</sup> The *konbini* that are present in the Japanese market differ in their business approach and have striking distinctive features, including their effort to contribute to solving social and environmental problems and their adherence to the concept of sustainable development. Of course, all the stores are interested in attracting customers, and, to this end, each chain uses innovations in gastronomy and in service provision. For instance, Lawson intends to be a store that is “adored by all shoppers from children to adults” and strives to offer the highest quality products as well as entertainment content. One of the flagship products in the MiniStop range is a successful soft ice cream made from milk from Hokkaido. Seicomart, whose first store opened two years earlier than 7-Eleven, is less known, because, besides Hokkaido, it operates only in two more prefectures: Ibaraki (82 outlets) and Saitama (10 stores),

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<sup>8</sup> The first half of 2023 saw a trend towards the restoration of the tourism industry in Japan: over 10.7 million foreign tourists visited the country in 6 months.

<sup>9</sup> Japan Convenience Store Sales Hit Record High in 2022. *Yomiuri shimbun*. January 21, 2023.

<sup>10</sup> [2023-Nenban] konbiniensusutoa no tenpo-sū rankingu [Convenience Stores: Ranking by Number of Stores (2023 Edition)]. <https://www.nipponsoft.co.jp/blog/analysis/chain-conveniencestore2023/> Keizai sangyōshō shōgyō dōtai tōkei chōsa [Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry Commercial Statistics Survey]. <https://www.meti.go.jp/statistics/tyo/syoudou/result-2/index.html>

but, in recent years, it has been in the lead in terms of customer satisfaction.<sup>11</sup> A distinctive feature of the stores of this chain is the manufacture of more than 1 thousand products under its own Secoma brand, and they notify in large letters about the use of local ingredients from the island of Hokkaido. They offer a wide selection of wines, and one can even buy a whole bag of local rice.

Faced with an oversupply of the market, increasing global competition, and a shortage of labor, the largest *konbini* try to introduce other innovations in order to remain competitive. For instance, back in 2015, Lawson implemented a system in which artificial intelligence in the head office advises store managers and experienced employees on product management issues in all stores, and now intends to serve customers using remotely controlled avatars – placing monitors at self-service cash desks and in the aisles. This makes it possible to employ people with disabilities who can work from home.

### **The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on *Konbini***

The COVID-19 pandemic became a major factor in global development, affecting most countries of the world and having a serious impact on both people's lives and businesses. The Japanese strategy of combating the new infection, which proceeded from the peculiarities of the geographical location, national character, mentality, as well as the established rules of conduct, has shown its viability. Although, back in the spring of 2020, during the first introduction of emergency situation in Japan, because of the absence of prohibitive measures, fines, and punishments, the Western press called that strategy the most “toothless” in the world, its effectiveness is beyond doubt [Belov, Tikhotskaya 2020], since the situation in Japan in 2021 was much more satisfactory than in many other countries.

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<sup>11</sup> Here's Why Seico Mart Was Crowned the #1 Convenience Store in Japan. <https://www.tsunagujapan.com/seico-mart-crowned-number-one-convenience-store/>

At the same time, the government's constant appeal to citizens to exercise self-control and not leave home without urgent and pressing needs led to a reduction in the opening hours of various stores and to a lag in the level of monthly sales from supermarkets, which continued to work in the previous mode, as well as to the closure of 376 minimarkets of all the chains in the country as a whole. Lawson suffered the greatest losses – 238 stores, as well as MiniStop – 193. At the same time, the two other major chains opened new stores: FamilyMart – 177 and 7-Eleven – 25. With rising sales in supermarkets (and with a sharp drop in department stores), *konbini* experienced a recession for the first time. The reason for the drop in sales at *konbini* was that, for cooking at home (especially when people were urged to go shopping only once in three days), it is much more convenient to purchase goods in supermarkets or small wholesale stores, where the choice is much larger and prices are lower. In addition, when switching to an online mode of operation, people began to spend more time at home and order groceries with home delivery from nearby stores, and the largest decline in the number of stores was seen in those chains where home delivery was less developed or absent. And, in general, *konbini*, whose sales were mainly related to the convenience of purchasing various ready-to-eat dishes on the way to work, lost their competitiveness. Their response was, first of all, the expansion of the product range in residential areas through the supply of fresh vegetables and frozen products that had not previously been sold there, as well as traditional Japanese dishes *natto*<sup>12</sup> and *tofu*.<sup>13</sup> For example, at Lawson, sales increased by 52 percent in April – December 2020. But, in the context of the pandemic, *konbini* mainly saw an increase in sales of sweets and alcoholic beverages, and, in response to the change in demand, they abandoned the universal arrangement of goods on the

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<sup>12</sup> *Natto* – a dish made from fermented soybeans, sticky and viscous, very healthy due to the content of useful minerals and vitamins, but with a peculiar taste and unusual smell.

<sup>13</sup> *Tofu* – a soy product with a high content of high-quality protein and essential amino acids.



shelves and began to take into account the location of the store (among residential buildings or along roads). For example, 7-Eleven installed additional dessert shelves in stores located among residential buildings. To stimulate sales of drinks, they began to be experimentally placed not behind glass as usual, but on open access shelves, and many stores started to place snacks that go with drinks next to them. The stores that thus changed the arrangement of goods increased their sales, and not only through sweets and alcohol.

*Konbini*'s response to the desire of people to leave their houses less often was also a change in the system of home delivery of goods ordered via the Internet. For example, Lawson uses Uber Eats and other delivery systems in 1,500 stores across the country.<sup>14</sup> Of course, goods become more expensive in this case than when buying in a store, but, in the context of the pandemic, the number of users of such services, nevertheless, increased dramatically.

Another consequence of the pandemic was the fact that, as part of the efforts to reduce waste and losses, the trend of selling products with a short shelf life at discounted prices became popular, which was previously typical only for supermarkets. While previously complex procedures were necessary to discount goods in the *konbini* chains (for example, filling out invoices by hand for each such product), in the new conditions, the chains simplified the process. For instance, FamilyMart sticks only a barcode, and Lawson, with the consent of the customer, analyzes the history of their purchases and, at about the time when this customer usually arrives, transmits information about discounts on goods to their smartphone. In 2021, in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the FamilyMart and Lawson minimarkets began using operator-controlled robots created by a small startup company to place goods on store shelves. The advantage of using them is that one operator can simultaneously do this in several stores [Tikhotskaya, Omata 2022]. In February 2021, the Lawson chain announced its

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<sup>14</sup> A U.S. company that provides food delivery services ordered over the Internet. It originated in 2014 and has been operating in Japan since 2016.

intention to sell medicines as well. And, in July 2022, it was reported that, in some *konbini*, Japanese residents who received at least two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine could print out their vaccination passports.<sup>15</sup>

### **Features of *Konbini* Location**

*Konbini* can be found across Japan – from the cape of Soya, the northernmost tip of Japan (Seicomart store in Wakkanai), to the southernmost one on Ishigaki Island (in the eponymous city), which is located about 400 km southwest of Okinawa Island (FamilyMart). Each of the *konbini* chains has its own niche and occupies a certain area in Japan. Standing out among all the chains are three: 7-Eleven, FamilyMart, and Lawson, the largest both by the number of stores in Japan and in terms of revenues. *Konbini* of these chains are distributed throughout Japan.

All three leading chains are present in all 47 prefectures, although 7-Eleven, the leader in the number of stores, achieved this more slowly than the others, opening its first store in Okinawa Prefecture only in 2019. (Lawson in 1997, and FamilyMart in 2006). Seicomart, the sixth largest in terms of the number of stores, is almost exclusively a local chain with more than 1,000 outlets in Hokkaido and 92 more in two other prefectures.

An analysis of statistics reflecting the distribution of the leading chains by the number of stores across the country shows that there are clearly three groups of regions. The first group includes the regions where only one *konbini* chain prevails (Hokkaido, Kanto, Shikoku, and Okinawa). The second group comprises the regions where there are two leaders (Tohoku, Chubu, Kinki, and Chugoku). The third group is characterized by the fact that one or another of the three leading chains

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<sup>15</sup> COVID vaccine passports to soon be printable at Japan convenience stores. *Japan Times*. July 22, 2022.

(Hokuriku, Kyushu) dominates in different prefectures. While 7-Eleven holds the lead in most Kyushu prefectures, FamilyMart stores prevail in Kagoshima Prefecture (the number of 7-Eleven and Lawson stores is almost identical, and there are no other chains at all); Lawson is the leader in Oita. And in the Hokuriku region, three of its four constituent prefectures have different leaders (*Fig. 2*).

Within the prefectures, the location of *konbini* is fully correlated with the number of residents: the number of stores is proportional to the population of municipalities. Each of the chains constantly monitors the movement of the population, and also takes into account the changing tastes and needs in individual localities. The density of *konbini* (the number of stores per 10 thousand people) gives an idea of which of the regions of Japan has an excess of stores and which has a shortage of them (*Fig. 3.*), although, in general, the differences are small: from 3.4 to 5.59. First of all, the highest density is seen in the northernmost and southernmost regions, Hokkaido and Okinawa, respectively. A higher density of *konbini* is observed in Eastern Japan, particularly in the prefectures of Yamanashi and Tokyo. On the other hand, in Western Japan, the Kinki region has the lowest density, primarily the prefectures of Nara, Shiga, and Hyogo. In the Kyushu region, Nagasaki Prefecture has an equally low density. The conducted analysis of statistical data<sup>16</sup> shows that the number of *konbini* has increased mainly in Okinawa (by 30 stores), as well as in Western Japan (and mainly in the prefectures of Hiroshima (19) and Osaka (15); and more than 5 stores – in Oita, Saga, Okayama).

In Eastern Japan, there was a decrease in the number of *konbini* in all prefectures, with the exception of Tochigi and Iwate, where there appeared two and three new stores, respectively. The largest reduction affected the prefectures included in the Metropolitan Region (Kanagawa) or adjacent (Shizuoka and Ibaraki) to it, as well as Aichi Prefecture. The only prefecture in which the number of *konbini* remained unchanged was Tottori, known for their high density.

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<sup>16</sup> Todofuken deta rankingu. [https://uub.jp/pdr/m/c\\_12b.html#2](https://uub.jp/pdr/m/c_12b.html#2)

The minimum distance from one *konbini* store to another in Japan as a whole is 528 meters.<sup>17</sup> In urban areas, the distance between them varies from 50 m to 200 m, and the concatenation of them forms certain infrastructure – both commercial and social, where customers can use the services of any of the chains.

### **Regional Product Diversity**

Japan is famous for its national cuisine, and, in 2013, its traditional cuisine was included in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Japanese cuisine, which is known all over the world, is a collective image of dishes from different prefectures. Each includes ingredients specific to a particular area and is proud of its special dish or product. The main factors determining the formation of local cuisine are geographical location and natural resources (since freshness and seasonality of the products consumed are of paramount importance in Japanese cuisine), as well as specific historical factors and processes that took place in the region. And it is the geographical location of the region that is the most important factor determining the originality of the national cuisine in different parts of the country. *Konbini* seek to respect the culinary preferences of the people in the part of the country in which they are located and use ingredients typical of the territory. Therefore, in *konbini* located in different prefectures, one can find unique products and ready-made lunches that are not sold anywhere else. The main product of Japanese cuisine is certainly rice. Rice cultivation is widespread throughout the country, and self-sufficiency is 98–100 percent (the leading prefectures are Niigata and Hokkaido). Wheat is also found in the dishes of almost all prefectures, but its self-

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<sup>17</sup> Takemoto Ryota. Japan as a Society Dependent on Convenience Stores. Is Survival without Convenience Stores Impossible in the Era of Super-Aging? <http://www.japanpolicyforum.jp/archives/society/pt20160318011754.html>

sufficiency, on the contrary, is extremely low (less than 20percent). Hokkaido is also the leader in wheat harvesting. There is a wide variety of different types of noodles: *udon*,<sup>18</sup> *ramen*,<sup>19</sup> and *soba*<sup>20</sup> are also among the main dishes of Japanese cuisine and are especially popular in the regions of Hokkaido, Tohoku, and Hokuriku, which traditionally grow wheat and buckwheat. Due to the different geographical location of the prefectures in these regions, the complementary ingredients are different. For instance, the further a territory is from the seacoast, the more often one can find noodles with the addition of vegetables or meat.

*Konbini* in different prefectures offer ready-made lunches based on noodles and imported raw food, but, at the same time, they take into account the preferences of residents of these territories. For example, in *konbini* in the prefectures of Niigata, Nagano, and Hokkaido, buckwheat noodles are sold without additional ingredients (except for sauce and spring onions), which is not found in other prefectures. And, in Fukui Prefecture, a piece of fish or tuna chips are added to it.

*Onigiri* is the most famous component of Japanese fast food, sold in all prefectures, but each has its own variations. The most typical ingredients for all *onigiri* that are sold in Japanese *konbini* are *natto*, tuna, roe, salmon, shrimp, and plums. In Hokkaido, the *onigiri* range is wider: with several types of salmon and roe, as well as a mixture of rice, sesame, and *wakame*.<sup>21</sup> A specific feature of *onigiri* in Hokkaido is also their size: like *sushi*, they are twice as big as regular *onigiri*. In the Chugoku, Kanto, and Shikoku regions, *onigiri* are made with the addition of Japanese seasoning *shiso* or pieces of *tofu*, pickled plums, and chicken. The Kanto region has the largest diversity of *onigiri* compared to the rest of Japan. The range is especially wide in Tokyo

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<sup>18</sup> Wide wheat noodles.

<sup>19</sup> Thin wheat noodles.

<sup>20</sup> Buckwheat noodles.

<sup>21</sup> Brown algae widely used in Japanese cuisine.

Prefecture. All the *konbini* chains send small lots of their products from different prefectures to Tokyo, where any regional products are in particular demand among tourists.

The distinctive feature of almost all Okinawan dishes is pork. The preference for this type of meat among the inhabitants of Okinawa was formed during the existence of the Ryukyu state, which actively traded with China and Korea for many years and adopted the culinary preferences of continental Asia. From China also came sweet potatoes which are less fastidious to growing conditions and more resistant than rice to the effects of typhoons that constantly hit Okinawa, which became a real salvation for the residents of the region. After the Second World War and until 1972, Okinawa was under the control of the United States, and, under the influence of the U.S. military, dishes different from Asian cuisine appeared in the prefecture.

On the Ryukyu Islands, with their nearly tropical climate, which is not typical for the main territory of Japan, there grow pineapples, mangoes, papaya, and guava, from which desserts and sauces are prepared, and they are also added to rice. The exotic pumpkin-related goya fruit, sometimes called bitter melon, is very popular. As a result, *konbini* in Okinawa offer a wide range of dishes with both pork and pineapple and mango desserts throughout the year. And, in general, ready-made lunches, drinks, sweets, and fruit sold in Okinawan *konbini* are not found anywhere else in the country.

A wide variety of crops are grown in Japan throughout the year, and every month different types of fruit or vegetables are sold in the stores, as well as dishes made from seasonal fruits.

The most popular and often bought berry in Japan is strawberries; their season falls on January – May,<sup>22</sup> and, during this period, they grow almost everywhere in Japan, as they are cultivated in greenhouses. Some *konbini* chains, such as 7-Eleven, Lawson, FamilyMart, and Seicomart have their own farms, which grow strawberries, among other things. The rest of the companies buy them from local farmers

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<sup>22</sup> The Japanese word for strawberries is *ichigo* (*ichi* – one (or first), *go* – five).

or import them from China. In Japan, the leaders in strawberry production are Ibaraki and Shizuoka Prefectures.

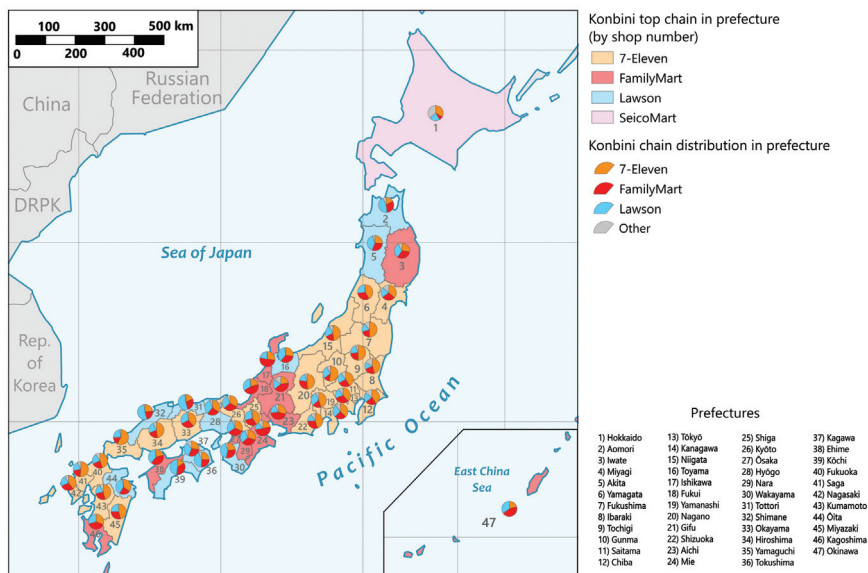
Sakura is a famous symbol of Japan, and with its blossoming comes the season of collecting its petals. From March to May, all stores begin selling products containing sakura petal juice, including sakura tea, which has a very short shelf life and an original taste that not everyone can appreciate. Particularly popular are desserts and drinks. During the sakura blossom season, a large number of tourists come to Japan from around the world, for whom everything related to sakura is a souvenir. Therefore, there is a great demand for products with this taste in stores. Sakura blossoming begins in the southern territories and moves to the north of the country, and, by early May, sakura begins to bloom in Hokkaido. Until the end of the sakura blossom season, *konbini* sell a large number of desserts with its addition. Some of the chains also produce sakura ice cream. The most popular dessert during this period is the sakura cake that consists of a biscuit base and a layer of jelly on top with the addition of the juice of petals and sakura flower. They are extremely tasty, although they look very much like a simple lump of dough. Melon, unlike strawberries and sakura, is a regional product, so its products are more common in just a few prefectures. It can be called one of the symbols of Hokkaido, the largest producer of melons in Japan. From June to August, there is a huge variety of melon desserts in all the *konbini* in the region. Melon-flavored ice cream is especially popular, as well as soda and KitKat branded sweets, which can be found not only in the company's branded stores in Hokkaido, but also in *konbini* located near the main attractions of the cities in the region. Ibaraki Prefecture is also one of the leaders in melon cultivation, but there, unlike Hokkaido, the melon brand is not developed.<sup>23</sup> One of the most famous melon-flavored products is the above-mentioned *meronpan*. Some Hokkaido *konbini* make special melon buns that cannot be found anywhere else.

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<sup>23</sup> Gilbreath, Aaron. The thing about Japanese convenience stores is that they're awesome. <https://thesmartset.com/conbini-life-kyoto-japan/>

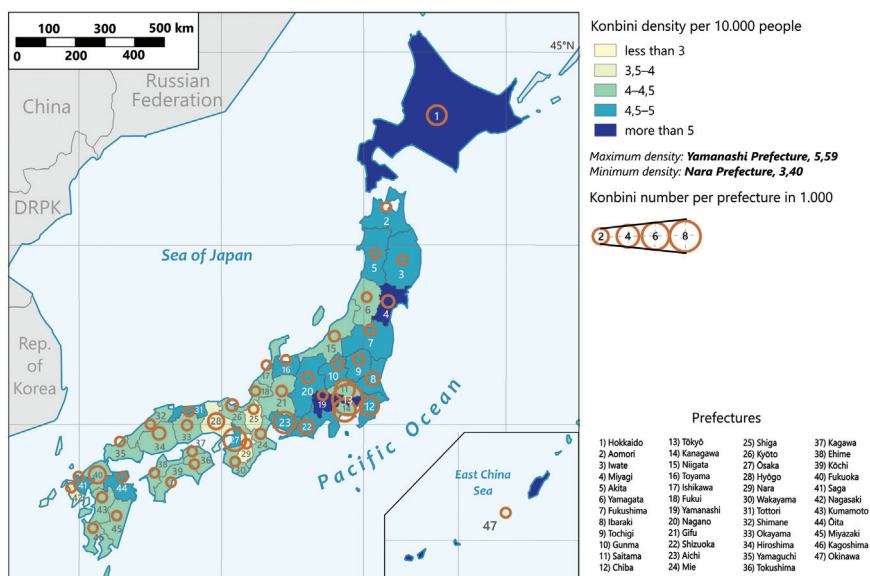


*Fig. 1. Lawson in the town of Kawagoe (view from outside and inside).*  
*Sources: Photos by T. Omata (left) and I. S. Tikhotskaya*



*Fig. 2. The leading chains by the number of stores and the share of the three largest chains in Japan's prefectures*  
*Source: Compiled based on the data of the Japanese Bureau of Statistics, the Mapfan Internet resource, and calculations by M. A. Petropavlovskaya*





*Fig. 3. Density of konbini by Japanese prefectures*

*Source: Compiled based on the data of the Japanese Bureau of Statistics, the Mapfan Internet resource, and calculations by M. A. Petropavlovskaya*

## Conclusion

*Konbini*, which the Japanese borrowed, like many other things throughout their history, turned into unique stores that have become an integral part of the Japanese way of life. The large number and high density make them different from all other stores. The services provided at *konbini* are becoming ever more diverse and greatly facilitate the daily life of the Japanese. According to Nihon Keizai Shinbun, the parent company of 7-Eleven Japan, Seven & i Holdings, by public recognition, took the first place in the ranking in 2015, surpassing the popular giants such as Ajinomoto, Toray, or Toyota. The possibility of purchasing ready-made dishes that you can take with you or immediately reheat has also changed the Japanese food culture.

The Japanese *konbini* can be called another Japanese phenomenon, since they could only have emerged in a country like Japan, where careful attention is given to creating amenities in everyday life, providing a variety of services that ensure household needs “outside home.” At the same time, they change both eating habits and social values of the Japanese. Having become an indispensable element of infrastructure in Japan, they evoke nostalgia not only among the Japanese who live abroad, but also among foreigners who have visited Japan. *Konbini* are not just a successful commercial retail format, but, according to Peng Wang’s apt expression, it is a social microcosm and something that ensures a connection with Japan and nostalgia for it [Wang 2019].

*Konbini* use skillful placement strategies. Within prefectures, their number correlates with the number of inhabitants: it is proportional to the population of the municipalities. New stores appear, first of all, in cities with the highest population density, and are located within walking distance from the place of residence or work of as many potential customers as possible. Each of the 18 *konbini* chains occupies a specific area within which their stores are developing. They are compact and provide the opportunity to buy everything that can be needed in everyday life in a short time, and, unlike supermarkets, they are not associated with moving around a large space or standing in line at the

checkout for a long while. The number of these convenience stores is increasing every year, and this is due to the fact that the need for them is growing. In today's Japan, the aging of the population is progressing rapidly: the proportion of people over the age of 65, for whom it is vital to have this kind of social infrastructure nearby, has approached 30 percent. In this regard, *konbini* is increasingly positioned as “walking distance” stores, and the question is already being raised about the need to open more stores, especially in those areas where the proportion of the elderly already exceeds 30–35 percent of the population. It can be said that *konbini* as a retail format capable of responding quickly to the changes taking place in modern Japan, represent a reflection of the problems of modern Japanese society and, at the same time, their solution, significantly facilitating the lives of all Japanese: older people, single people, working women, housewives, as well as the increasing number of *kaimono nammin* (“shopping refugees”).

The last group is defined by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan as people for whom making everyday purchases is difficult due to the lack of nearby shops and transport networks, that is, they include all those people “experiencing inconvenience due to the lack of shops within walking distance” [Takemoto 2016, p. 8]. It is obvious that depopulation, which has already pervaded all the prefectures of Japan, will further increase the number of *kaimono nammin*, and, accordingly, the role of *konbini*. Unlike other publicly accessible types of social infrastructure, such as medical facilities or gas stations where people with certain needs are served, *konbini* are visited by everyone, regardless of age, gender, profession, or nationality. *Konbinis'* help to women in performing their traditional role of *ryōsaikembo* (good wives and wise mothers) in modern Japanese society is also indispensable (although housewives who use *konbini* services are often criticized). And as the 2011 catastrophic earthquake showed, the highly commendable provision of necessary services by these stores during natural disasters is extremely in demand, and their role is irreplaceable.

*Konbini* are not only constantly expanding the range of services they provide, but also have a noticeable impact on Japanese society: they

change the rituals of nutrition, contribute to a wider spread of a new lifestyle called *ohitorisama* (people living alone and relying only on their own resources, as opposed to the mutual assistance that is traditional for Japanese society, which often occurs for reasons independent of a person, including in old age), to the transformation of social values, and to the emergence of new concepts, such as *gaishoku* (eating out), *nakashoku* (ready-made food purchased at a store), and *naishoku* (food prepared at home). Another noticeable phenomenon in Japanese society, not least in connection with *konbini*, is *koshoku* – family members eating separately for various reasons.

*Konbini* take into account the preferences of prefectural residents and produce dishes that match the cuisine of a particular region, trying to create products that would be unique and sold only in one place. The companies developing them focus on agriculture in a certain area, producing limited products and purchasing raw materials mainly from local farmers; there are also chains that grow the necessary products on several farms in different parts of the country. The ready-made lunches that are sold in Okinawa or Hokkaido are different from those sold in other prefectures. Almost every prefecture has a product that is associated with their territory and has its own brand – *meibutsu*, a good example of which is, for instance, the above-mentioned Hokkaido melon. Cuisine, agriculture and trade are closely linked, forming a chain of several components in which one helps the other to develop. Obviously, *konbini* meet the interests of the regions' development on the whole. In other words, the role of *konbini* in Japanese society cannot be overestimated.

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## **The Documents of the Shōsōin Treasury and the History of Their Study**

**O. K. Matveeva**

### ***Abstract***

One of the most important features of the documents from the Shōsōin treasury is the opportunity for researchers not only to study the events, institutions, and sources of the Nara era, but also to see the Japanese 8<sup>th</sup> century “with a human face.” Among the documents, there is a lot of material that talks about the everyday life and service of the sovereign’s subjects. This is of special interest for the author of the article, who aims to see a person who lived in ancient Japan. To create a basis for future research, the author conducts a source study of the Shōsōin documents as a preparatory stage for their study.

The objectives of the article are to discuss where and why the Shōsōin documents were created; find out how they were placed into the treasury and how they were stored in it; give their classification, describe the types of documents; find out what happened to them after the conservation of the Shōsōin at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, how the documents were rediscovered in the Edo period, how and why they were studied in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; talk about the scholars who were involved in their research, and about the modern study of the Shōsōin documents.

**Keywords:** Japanese history, Nara period, Buddhism, Shōsōin documents, classification, features.

## Introduction

Every fall for two weeks the Nara National Museum hosts an event that attracts a variety of visitors. Antiquity enthusiasts come to the museum to see an exhibition on the world-famous Shōsōin (正倉院) treasury, which houses treasures from the Nara period (710–794). Each year, about 60 items are selected for the exhibition. In 2023, it will be held for the 75<sup>th</sup> time.

In addition to articles of clothing, Buddhist ritual utensils, musical instruments, etc., the treasury also contains the so-called Shōsōin documents (*Shōsōin monjo* 正倉院文書). They are of particular interest to researchers around the world. There are about 10 thousand documents, which date back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century and represent a unique material for research. It is difficult to give them a generalized characteristic. V. Farris, one of the few European researchers of Shōsōin documents, characterized them as follows: “This is a real mishmash of documents, which, however, on its scale and complexity has no analogues in the world” [Farris 2007, p. 398].

The treasury is located in Nara, the first permanent capital of Japan, in the territory of the Tōdaiji temple complex. Like the temple and many other Buddhist buildings of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the treasury is associated with the activities of sovereign Shōmu (701–756, r. 724–758) and his family: sovereign consort Kōmyō (701–760) and his daughter, Princess Abe (718–770), who ruled as Kōken in 749–758 and as Shōtoku in 764–770.

The order to build the Tōdaiji temple and Buddhist complex was issued by Emperor Shōmu in 743. The idea to build the temple was connected, as we think, with the emperor’s worldview. During his reign there were many misfortunes: the death of his firstborn son, a terrible epidemic of smallpox. The chronicle *Shoku Nihongi* (797) and the Shōsōin documents themselves show that Shōmu viewed these misfortunes largely through the prism of Buddhist texts: the ruler is constantly threatened by demons, he is constantly watched by the Four Heavenly Sovereigns.<sup>1</sup> Familiarity with the

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<sup>1</sup> *Shitennō* 四天王, guardian gods of the four sides of the world. According to the texts of sutras, for example, the Sutra of Golden Splendor, it is evident



sutras influenced the perception of the real world and structured the picture of the world in accordance with Buddhist values. The edicts of Shōmu included in *Shoku Nihongi* (e.g., from 741, Tempyō: 13-3-24) recognize the ruler's responsibility for everything that happens in the country, the need to lead a virtuous life and to create additional means of protection. One such means was to be a network of *kokubunji* 国分寺 (one male and one female Buddhist monastery in each province), and the system was to be headed by a capital temple of unprecedented size, the Tōdaiji. In this temple, in 745, the sovereign ordered a huge statue of the Great Buddha to be erected. If we trust the legends about monk Gyōki (668–749), who collected donations for the temple and the statue, we can say that this was not just a state endeavor, although the initiative came from the sovereign, but the work of all those people of ancient Japan who believed that they lived in the age of the five pollutions<sup>2</sup> and wished to protect themselves.

Tōdaiji absorbed all the power of the country and became its sacral center. According to *Shoku Nihongi*, it can be assumed that Shōmu even valued the temple more than the sovereign's palace – he spent almost all his time in Tōdaiji and provided it with huge resources.

Apparently, even during the lifetime of sovereign Shōmu (it is not known exactly when), a treasury appeared in the territory of the temple complex. It was first mentioned in 756, when Empress Kōmyō presented precious things of the deceased sovereign to the Great Buddha statue on the occasion of mourning for the deceased in the same year. The history of the treasury, as well as the history of the treasures and some of the Shōsōin documents, begins with this year.

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that, in addition to protection, the functions of the Four Heavenly Sovereigns included supervision and punishment for misbehavior. The Four Heavenly Sovereigns were especially strict in their supervision of a ruler in whose country the Buddhist Law, the Dharma, was prevalent.

<sup>2</sup> A view influenced by the Sutra of Protection of Body and Life (救護身命經). In it, the Buddha on his deathbed describes a picture of a bleak future – the “evil age of the five pollutions,” *gojoku akuse* 五濁惡世, when the world is full of demons, vices, sorcery, and chaos flourishes.

The word *shōsō* 正倉 refers to a vault affiliated to a temple or a shrine. Originally there were many such vaults, but, over time, it was the Tōdaiji temple treasury that this term began to refer to.

Shōsōin is a wooden building in the *azekura-zukuri* 校倉造 style. The first buildings of this style appeared in the 4<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B. C. at the beginning of the Yayoi period and had the form of piled log structures designed to house the head of the chiefdom and to store supplies. The Ise shrine complex was built in the *azekura* style. Later, this style was also used in Buddhist architecture, and it was buildings of this type where the *shōsō* storages were arranged, while the function remained the same – preservation. The Shōsōin building is 33 meters long, 9.4 meters wide and 14 meters high. It was built of triangular logs; like other *azekura* buildings, it was constructed without nails or other metal parts. Forty wooden piles support the floor, but not the roof; this structure protects against earthquakes by preventing the transmission of tremors to the upper part of the treasury. The wood used for such structures, both in ancient times and today, is Japanese cypress, the odor of which repels pests and makes the structure suitable for storing objects made of both organic and inorganic materials. The treasury has three floors; the first and second floors are divided into three compartments: north, south, and middle; the third, upper floor is arranged as a single space without dividing walls. For a long time, there was an opinion among researchers that the northern and southern compartments were originally erected, connected by a single roof, and, in place of the central compartment, there was a void (this type of construction is called *narabigura* 双倉). However, the latest research on the building structure using the dendrochronological dating method has shown that the middle compartment was in Shōsōin originally.

The Shōsōin building has been well preserved because, firstly, access to it has been extremely limited and, secondly, it has been regularly renovated. Since 1997, the treasury building has been registered as a national heritage site, and, since 1998, as a UNESCO Cultural Heritage Site.

In total, there are about 9,000 antiquities in Shōsōin. In 756, sovereign consort Kōmyō presented approximately 650 items to Tōdaiji (and then made four other offerings). Among them we can find items from Tang China, India, Persia, Greece, and Egypt that came to Japan along the Silk Road, and items produced in Japan during the Tempyō years (729–748). But there are also later items in Shōsōin, though a minority of the whole collection. The earliest dated item was produced in 707, and the latest dated in 1693; it was placed in the treasury during one of its openings in the Edo period (1603–1868). All these treasures were kept in the northern compartment, which was closed with the sovereign's seal *chokufū* 勅封, and was supposed to be accessible only with the sovereign's permission and after appropriate ceremonies. In addition to the sovereign's offerings, Shōsōin treasures include the cult utensils of Tōdaiji temple, which were used in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

Many of the treasures have been very well preserved. This was due to both the construction of the building and the *karabitsu* 唐櫃 crates, in which the items were placed. The shape and ornamentation of the crates were borrowed from Tang China. They were made of cedar, which prevented moisture and insects from entering.

The closing of Shōsōin and the preservation of the treasures occurred in 787. When the sovereign's court left Nara, the abandoned capital gradually became empty. The documents in the northern section of the treasury (discussed below) show that, in 787–856, the treasures were regularly monitored and cared for. Later, there was no surveillance, and the treasury was frequently opened, including at the behest of very noble persons. It is known that the treasury was opened at the request of Fujiwara-no Michinaga (966–1028), the abdicated sovereigns Toba-in (1103–1156) and Goshirakawa-in (1127–1192), Kamakura-era regents Kujō Michiyo (1193–1252), Konoe Kanetsune (1210–1259), shoguns Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1358–1408), Yoshimasa (1436–1490), as well as Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616). All of them had no trouble obtaining permission to open the sovereign seals and “borrow” treasures. For

example, during the Ashikaga period (1333–1572), there was a belief in high circles that possession of the fragrant *ranjatai* 蘭奢待 tree (the documents of the northern compartment of the treasury use the listed name *Ōjukukō* 黄熟香) helped those aspiring to power to realize their ambitions. Therefore, many nobles tried to get a piece of this tree.

A new period in the history of Shōsōin began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the treasury attracted Tokugawa scholars and antiquities enthusiasts. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century alone, the bakufu authorities opened the treasury four times (1602–1603, 1612, 1666, 1693) to repair the building, inspect, enumerate, and classify the treasures. Since that time, it has been customary to use the following conventional classification of artifacts stored in Shōsōin [Maruyama 1999, p. 40–57]: Buddhist utensils (仏具); clothing and jewelry (服飾); furniture (調度品); games (遊戯具); musical instruments (樂器); weapons (武事).

The scientific interest in the treasury items is very important in the context of our work. The fact is that with the beginning of the study and description of the treasures, Tokugawa scholars also paid attention to the Shōsōin documents.

## Shōsōin documents

The documents we are interested in date from 720 to 780 and represent the richest, most diverse, and heterogeneous source on 8<sup>th</sup> century Japan. If we try to classify this, as Farris put it, “mishmash,” the documents belong to the clerical type of historical sources: their main task was “to document decisions and tasks on various issues and the execution of these decisions” [Golikov, Kruglova 2014, p. 62].

Paper in the 8<sup>th</sup> century was expensive. As Minami Hirakawa writes, the average price of paper in the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century was two *mon* 文, and one *mon* was equal to six *shō* of rice (1 *shō* = 600 g), about 0.5 *mon* was the daily subsistence minimum, and the salary of scribes was 10 *mon* [Meshcheryakov, Grachev 2010, pp. 299–300;

Hirakawa 1994, p. 145]. Paper was saved, people tried to use both the front and the back side. A part of Shōsōin documents is written on the reverse side of paper already used by other departments, the so-called “discarded paper” *hogo bako* 反古箱, containing discarded official documents *kumon* 公文, sent most often from higher departments for repeated use. These include account and tax books, ward registers, registers of incoming and outgoing documents, etc. The reverse side of the discarded paper was used for unofficial, internal documentation, a very important category of treasury documents.

The discarded paper was not individual sheets of paper. They were scrolls into which documents were bound. When they arrived at Shōsōin, the integrity of the scrolls was of no value to the clerks: they were cut and glued together in random order.

The classification of documents is based on the works of Sakaehara Towao and Yoshida Takashi [Sakaehara 2011, p. 22; Yoshida 1983, pp. 298–299]:

Table 1

Classification of documents

Front side	Back side
I. Documents related to the Shōsōin treasures and stored in the sealed room of the <b>northern</b> compartment of the treasury. Property of the Ministry of the Court 宮内省.	
A. Records of what items came into the treasury ( <i>senyū</i> 施入), when and by whom treasures were borrowed and returned ( <i>suitō</i> 出納), how and when treasures were cleaned, aired, and inspected ( <i>bakuryō</i> 曝泳). 17 scrolls	Back side is empty
B. Documents accompanying storage units (tags, wrappers, etc.)	– Records of the Tōdaiji Shrine Construction Office that have been retired from the records of other agencies – Old records of other agencies
II. Records of the Sutra Correspondence Office of the Scriptorium Office at Tōdaiji 写経所, stored in the <b>middle</b> compartment. 667 scrolls and 5 volumes	

A. Documents of the Scriptorium	
1. Documents created in the scriptorium: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Internal (service) documents of the scriptorium</li> <li>– Interdepartmental correspondence</li> <li>– Copies of documents sent from the scriptorium</li> <li>– Documents created in the scriptorium, sent and later returned</li> <li>– Draft documents</li> <li>– Others</li> </ul>	Scriptorium documents that have become unneeded: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Documents with blank reverse side</li> <li>– Drafts of the monthly financial reports of the Tōdaiji Shrine General Construction Office</li> <li>– Records of the Tōdaiji Shrine Construction Office that have been removed from the records</li> <li>– Deleted documents of the Kōmyō Consort Court Administration Office</li> <li>– Records of central government offices (tax and financial reports, household registers, house books, etc.) removed from the records of the central government offices</li> </ul>
2. Incoming documents from higher authorities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Documents from the Tōdaiji General Construction Office</li> <li>– Records from the Kōmyō Consort Court Office</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Records of the Tōdaiji Shrine Construction Administration which have been withdrawn from the case file</li> <li>– Records relating to the management of the court of Lady Consort Kōmyō withdrawn from the records</li> </ul>
B. Documents related to the construction of Ishiyamadera Temple	

According to Sakaehara Towao, documents I (A) are the most appropriate to be called “Shōsōin documents” [Sakaehara 2011, p. 23]; more often researchers call them “documents from the northern compartment of Shōsōin”, *hokusō monjo* 北倉文書. They date from 756 to 856, that is, they belong to a time when treasures were regularly accounted for and controlled.

They have the following structure:

1) Records of Empress Kōmyō’s offerings to the Great Buddha statue (5 scrolls):

- Records of the offerings of sovereign treasures 国家珍宝帳 – Tempyō Shōhō 8-6-21 (756)

- Records of offerings of various potions and medicines – Tempyō Shōhō 8-6-21 (756)
- Records of the offering of folding screens *byōbu* 風花氈等帳 favored by Sovereign Shōmu – Tempyō Shōhō 8-7-21(756)
- Records of an offering of calligraphy to Wang Xizhi and his son (大小王真跡帳) – Tempyō Hōji 2-6-1 (758)
- Records of Sovereign Kōmyō's offering of the screens belonging to her late father Fujiwara-no Fuhito 藤原公真跡屏風帳 – Tempyō Hōji 2-10-1 (758)

2) Documents on the care of treasures after the conservation of Shōsōin in 787 (5 scrolls). Dated 787–856.

3) Documents on the recovery and return of treasures (7 scrolls).

These documents are one of the most important sources on the history of the treasury, but not only that. For example, one might wonder what such rich gifts from sovereign Kōmyō mean and what the perceptions behind them are.

Documents I (B) are related to the functioning of the treasury. They are tags attached to treasures and containing information about them, or wrappers of sutra scrolls.

The tags contain, for example, information about the weight of cinnabar pieces (this mineral was attributed magical properties). The tag of the six-paneled screen door *Beauties Under the Tree* (*Torige ritsujō byōbu* 鳥毛立女屏風) includes a letter dated 752 from Japanese nobles to Korean ambassadors arriving from Silla to Japan in 751 with a list of goods they wished to buy from the embassy.

Documents II (A) are of most interest to researchers. They were created in the Sutra Copying Bureau, *Shakyōjo* 写経所, which was engaged in copying Buddhist texts – we will call this bureau a scriptorium. As G. Schopen points out, Buddhist culture is a culture of the book [Schopen 2010, p. 39]. This is especially true for Japan, as the main channel for the spread of Buddhism here was the text. Buddhist texts as a part of ritual for thousands of years formed the picture of the world, structured society, and human identity. Ritual, as K. Bell writes, is not just a symbolic practice, but a pragmatic action pursuing specific

goals [Bell 1992, p. 74]. Copying sutras, as part of Buddhist ritual in a broad sense, made people, as they themselves believed, more pious and righteous.

The genre of sutras is one of the most important genres of Buddhist literature. These texts represent the sermons of the Buddha. In a ritual sense, the sutra is equivalent to the body of the Buddha – the texts are placed in pagodas together with the remains of the Buddha. Here is what, for example, the Lotus Sutra (translated by A. N. Ignatovich) says about the veneration of the sutra text: “...if [any] person will perceive and keep at least one gatha of the Dharma Flower Sutra, will recite, explain, copy [it] and look at the scrolls of this Sutra with the same reverence as the Buddha, make [them] various offerings – flowers, incense, garlands, fragrant powder, fragrant rubbings, incense, silk canopies, banners, flags, robes, music and to give [them] honors by joining palms, then, the King of Healing, [you] truly should know that this person has already made offerings to ten thousand koti buddhas, has fulfilled, being near buddhas, [his] great vow and out of compassion for living beings [is] born again in the form of a human being” [Sutra... 2007, p. 83].

The regular copying of Buddhist texts began in Japan after the 7<sup>th</sup> century. One of the first records of a state order to copy sutras can be found in *Nihon Shoki* under the year of 673. Thereafter, records of sutra copying became more and more numerous. The *Shoku Nihongi* is replete with them. Very often prayers and rewriting of sutras were turned to in difficult times for the state: during epidemics, natural disasters, crop failures [Meshcheryakov 2010].

B. Lowe in his work on Buddhist texts of the Nara period argues that the world of ancient Japan was permeated with ritual rewriting of sutras [Lowe 2017, p. 65]. For this purpose, he conducts a study based on a microhistorical approach. Just from the Shakyōjo documents, he studies the lives of the rulers (sovereign Shōmu, sovereign consort Kōmyō, and princess Abe) and the ordinary sutra scribe Karakuni-no-Muraji Hitonari 韓(辛)國連人成 (721–?). Based on such seemingly heterogeneous anthropological material, Lowe concludes that the very proximity to a ritual text forms a special world around the individual. Copying sutras



is not just a religious event; it encompasses other facets of human life as well. Through this practice, various strata of the population of ancient Japan – high dignitaries, ordinary people, and monks, often not noble at all – were united into communities the purpose of which was to copy sutras and accumulate merit. (The famous Dōkyō 道鏡 (700-772), who almost became Japanese sovereign because of his friendship with Lady Kōken, came from a provincial family).

The rulers, by turning to Buddhist texts, to the practice of reproducing them, protected themselves and the state. The sutras encouraged people in 8<sup>th</sup> century Japan to fear evil demons, to believe that the coming age is the age of the five pollutions, and the time of the end of the Law, *mappō* 末法, would soon come, so one should lead a pious life, observe purity of body and mind, and also take protective measures: to copy sutras or, more often, to order their copying; in the understanding of the Japanese of that time, the one ordering a sutra received more merit than the copyist, who was just a “tool” to achieve a good result by the customer. This is what scriptoria were created for in Nara Japan: private (examples are the scriptoria of Prince Nagaya 長屋王 (684–729) or Fujiwara-no Fusasaki 藤原房前 (681–737)) and public ones. The scriptorium the documents of which we are examining was a state scriptorium, the main and largest in the country. Its history is closely linked to sovereign consort Kōmyō and her family: her daughter Princess Abe (the future sovereign Kōken/Shōtoku) and her husband, Emperor Shōmu.

Empress Kōmyō came from the Fujiwara family, her father was the most influential early 8<sup>th</sup>-century courtier Fujiwara-no Fuhito 藤原不比等 (659–720), and her grandfather was the founder of the clan, Fujiwara-no Kamatari 藤原鎌足 (614–669). Both of these “titans” of the Fujiwara clan integrated Buddhism into the system of state administration, relegating it to performative instrumental functions. As Mikoshiba Daisuke, who studies Kōmyō and her connection with Buddhism, writes, Kōmyō’s mother, Agatainukai no Michiyo 県犬養三千代 (655?–733), was a devout Buddhist [Mikoshiba 2002, p. 27]. It can be assumed that Kōmyō’s worldview was largely shaped by Buddhism and its texts. Kōmyō believed that ritual reproduction of sutras would bring her merit

and protection, so she created her own (still private) scriptorium. The first mention of the scriptorium dates to the third moon of 727. At that time, Kōmyō was carrying her first son, the future heir to the throne. She commissioned the scriptorium to copy the Maha-Prajñāparamita Sutra. Both the scriptorium and the copying of the sutra were to be a guarantee of the birth of a healthy baby, which was significant for both sovereign Shōmu and the Fujiwara clan [Sakaehara 2011, p. 15].

In 729, Kōmyō was appointed sovereign consort, *kōgō* 皇后. Most likely, from that year, the scriptorium acquired official status and became part of the palace administration of the empress consort, and its capabilities increased [Sagimori 1996, p. 8–11]: the staff of scribes and funding rose, and the scriptorium itself moved to the territory of the Sumidera 角寺 Temple, which was patronized by Kōmyō. In 730, the scriptorium began transcribing the complete Buddhist canon of 6,500 scrolls. The work lasted 24 years, a project of such magnitude that speaks to the power of the scriptorium.

According to Shōsōin documents, in the late 730s another patron and frequent customer of the scriptorium was Princess Abe, who became the first hereditary princess in Japanese history in 738 (due to the death or undesirability of other possible heirs). To protect and support Abe, the scriptorium was transformed that same year into the state Sutra Copying Office, Shakyōshi 写経司. In 742, the scriptorium moved to the grounds of the Tōin 東院 Temple (later to be renamed Fukujuji 福寿寺, then Konkōmyōji 金光明寺), and then to Tōdaiji. Finally, in 747, the scriptorium was named 東大寺写経所, Tōdaiji-shakyōjo, and continued copying the complete Buddhist canon.

Shakyōjo was subordinate to the Tōdaiji Construction Bureau (造東大寺司) and had an extensive structure. Yamashita, studying Shōsōin documents, describes it as follows [Yamashita 2006, pp. 15–19]. It was surrounded by a wicker fence (柴垣) and consisted of several buildings: a sutra copying hall (經堂, *kyōdō*), an office (曹司, *zōshi*), paper storage (紙屋, *kamiya*), dormitories for scribes (宿所, *shukusho*), kitchen (料理供養所, *ryōri kuyōjo*), baths (湯屋, *yuya*), and archive (檜皮葺殿, *hiwadafuki den*).

It is the documentation of this department and the institutions under it for the years 720–780 that is commonly referred to as the Shakyōjo documents or simply the Shōsōin documents. The internal documentation is based on texts from which we can learn about the lives of officials, sutra scribes, aristocrats, and even sovereigns: what sutras were ordered, who ordered them, for what purpose, how much material resources were spent on it; what sutra scribes ate, where they slept, bathed, how they observed ritual purity, what they wore, how, when, and why they took time off, etc.

The scriptorium at Tōdaiji Temple produced texts for the protection and support of the princess, who became sovereign Kōken in 748, and her family, as well as for the protection of the state. These functions were unified because the sovereign was thought of as identical with the state: many of the sutras transcribed for the protection of the state include prayers for the health of Kōmyō's parents (she was still the principal patroness of the scriptorium), for the protection of her daughter, and Kōmyō's vow to enter the bodhisattva path.

Tōdaiji shakyōjo existed until 776, and, in 784, the court moved to Nagaoka from Nara, and the system of the “law-based state,” *ritsuryō kōkka*, which the court at Nara embodied, gradually began to decline. How and when Shakyōjo's bureaucratic documents found their way into Shōsōin's treasury is unclear. What is known is that they were originally kept in a special archive at Tōdaiji, but, at the very end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, they were moved to the middle section of the treasury. They have no relation to the Shōsōin treasures.

The process of creating documents, according to Sakaehara Towao's reconstruction, went like this. The paper preparer (*anzu* 案主) and his assistants (*toneri* 舍人 and *zassho* 雑掌) were responsible for preparing paper and creating documents. They compiled paper register-scrolls (*tōbo* 帳簿), the form in which all of Shakyōjo's records were kept.

For this purpose, they took unneeded discarded documents sent from other departments (household lists, tax books, old financial statements, etc.). Before they were handled by the scriptoria's superintendent, these documents looked as shown in *Fig. 1*.

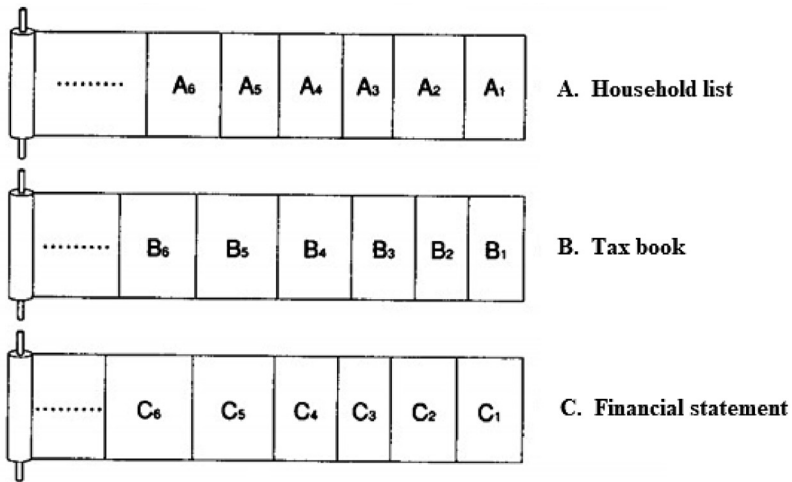


Fig. 1. Discarded documents 公文 before arriving at Shakyōjo

The back side of the scrolls, which was what the Shakyōjo clerk needed, was blank or partially blank. The clerk would take a scroll of written documents, examine the blank back side, and cut out the blank pieces to the size (*dankan* 断簡) he wanted. He was not interested in the integrity of the original document, so, when compiling a new paper register, he simply glued together a scroll from scattered fragments of written documents, which were mixed randomly – after all, the main task at this stage was to provide the scriptorium with scrolls suitable for writing. The reverse side of the scrolls (which did not interest Shakyōjo staff) looked as shown in Fig. 2.

Thus, the front side of the discarded documents became the back side, and the blank back side became the front side. It was on this side that Shakyōjo employees kept the internal records of the department, which we now call Shōsōin records.

**The documents related to the construction of the Ishiyamadera Temple**, which began in 747 in Ōmi province, are not directly related to the Shōsōin treasury. Ato-no Orari 安都雄足 (life years unknown), the head of the Ishiyamadera construction department, was simultaneously the head of the scriptorium. In 762, the scriptorium even temporarily moved

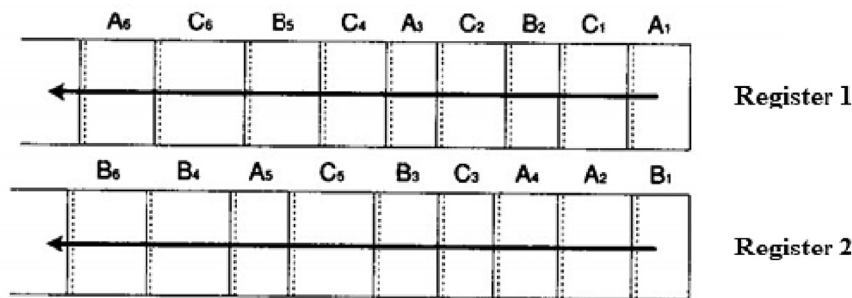


Fig. 2. Chaotically scattered official documents 公文  
ou thereverse side of the Shakyōjo registers

to Ishiyamadera to copy the Maha-Prajñāparamita Sutra for this temple. When construction was completed in 762 and the sutra was finished, Ato-no Orai moved the documents on Ishiyamadera’s construction to the Shakyōjo archives at Tōdaiji. Later, together with the Shakyōjo documents, these documents were transferred to Shōsōin.

**The Fate of the Shōsōin Documents  
After the 8<sup>th</sup> Century**

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Shakyōjo documents underwent the standard archiving procedure and were placed in a special vault. Later, probably at the very end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, they were moved to the mothballed Shōsōin treasury. If the treasury was opened, it was only for the sake of the treasure; no one was interested in the documents, and they were forgotten for almost eight centuries.

In the Edo period, peace prevailed in the country, Buddhist religious escapism gradually receded into the background, and Neo-Confucianism, which emphasized pragmatism and rationality, prevailed. The school of “native sciences,” *kokugaku* 国学, gradually developed the construct of Shinto, and, in the isolation of the country, the thinkers of this school began to regard foreign countries as an area of misrule. The Japanese came to love their country, which they had previously perceived

as remote from civilization (China and India), small and poor. Japan was elevated to the status of a divine country, *shinkoku* 神国, and, against this background, the craving for antiquity increased. Scholars began to search for a “golden age” – something lost but felt by the Japanese on an intuitive level, in their hearts.

Therefore, when Shōsōin began to be opened little by little for treasure research (classification, reorganization, restoration, etc.) from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onward, it attracted many scholars. Most were interested in the treasures, but there was one among them who noticed the documents stored in dusty, long unopened boxes in the middle compartment of the treasury. That was Hoida Tadatōmu 穂井田忠友 (1791–1847), a scholar of the Kokugaku school, a student of one of its key members, Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843). Hoida rediscovered the Shōsōin documents to the world, but also radically changed their appearance.

In the tenth moon of 1833, the treasury was opened to scholars for three years. It was then that Hoida appeared there and gained access to the documents. It is believed that his close friendship with the Shogun governor (奉行, bugyō) of Nara Kajino Yoshiki 梶野良材 (1773–1853), whose younger wife was Hoida’s daughter, helped him [Farris 2007, p. 407].

Hoida began his research. But it was not the scriptorium’s documents that interested him, but the back of the scriptorium, which contained scattered documents from other departments, scattered in chaotic order. As Sakaehara Towao writes, based on the works of Minagawa Kan’ichi, about whom we will tell later, the main goal of Hoida was to create an exemplary collection of ancient official documents, the internal structure of which would correspond to the hierarchy of departments and ranks provided by the *ritsuryō* system [Sakaehara 2011, p. 37]. Such a focus of interest can be explained by the cool, almost dismissive attitude towards Buddhism, which is characteristic of both Edo-era Neo-Confucianism in general and *kokugaku* attitudes. Hoida also intended to create an album of the seals used by the various departments of the Nara period. He was particularly interested in the

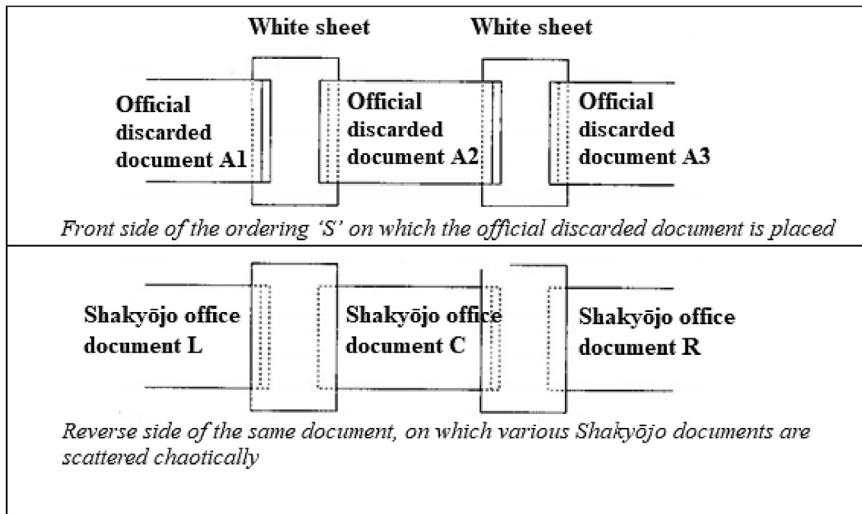


Fig. 3. The condition of documents after Hoida Tadatomi's work on them

seals of Yamato Province, where Nara was located; they were extremely valuable to antiquarians of the time. Minagawa writes that Hoida was even more interested in the aesthetic value of the documents than in their historical significance [Minagawa 1972, p. 530].

To do this, the researcher conducted a “document arrangement”, *seiri* 整理. He cut out the “fragments” (*dankan* 断簡) of official documents he was interested in from the back side of the Shakyōjo documents and glued them together according to his understanding of the hierarchy of the Nara period. He was not interested in the front side, i.e., the Shakyōjo documents; in other words, he treated the back side as the front side (see Fig. 3).

He acted in this way for several months and processed 25 percent of all the documents. By the third moon of 1836, by the time Shōsōin closed, he had compiled a collection of official documents and seals, which was originally called Documents Gathered into Scrolls (*Seikan Monjo* 成巻文書) but was renamed True Collection (*Seishū* 正集, hereafter S) during the Meiji period. The arranged S consisted of 45 scrolls (*maki* 巻).

Although Hoida “opened” Shōsōin’s documents, he did great damage to them. First of all, he compromised their integrity and appearance. By cutting out the fragments he was interested in, he completely disregarded the Shōsōin documents and the order in which they were in. In addition, he laid down a trend for more than 100 years in which scholars were only interested in discarded documents. Hoida’s followers also cut out the discarded documents for their compilations, compromising the integrity of the Shakyōjo documents. Attitudes towards the study of Shōsōin-monjo did not change until the 1960s.

The technique of Hoida’s work is as follows. He cut the paper seams (*shichigume* 紙継目) of the Nara era that were used to bind documents together and glued the pieces he needed into scrolls, not directly seam to seam, but by inserting thin white sheets of paper (*shiroi-kami* 白い紙) between them. He pasted the sheet of paper on the side containing Shakyōjo’s documents, that is, the side he considered the reverse side. The white sheet covered the edges of the sheets containing the text. This makes it difficult for modern scholars to reconstruct the original order of the Shakyōjo documents. That said, white sheets of paper are not such a bad solution. If Hoida had joined the sheets directly, then what was written on the edges would most likely have been lost to us, since it is impossible to see anything under a thick sheet of 8<sup>th</sup>-century paper, but, under Hoida’s white loose sheet, it is possible. As V. Farris writes, modern researchers of Shōsōin documents should still be grateful to Hoida [Farris 2007, p. 407]. In the Edo period, scholars did not preserve the original manuscripts: it was customary to completely cover the weathered back side with a white sheet of paper, as well as to cut the source and insert comments. Hoida did neither of these things. He used a thin white sheet only to join the edges of the fragments, leaving most of the backside visible.

Hoida also did much to popularize the Shōsōin documents, or, rather, what interested him in them. When he was in the process of compiling the S collection, he talked a lot in correspondence with scholar friends about how his work was going. He also secretly made copies (*shohon* 書本) of documents he found particularly noteworthy and sent them



to his friends. Several copies were presented to Emperor Ninkō (r. 1817–1846) during the sealing ceremony of the treasury in 1836. Hoida's copies were made very accurately and were used by scholars of the Meiji period [Ibid., p. 408].

After Hoida finished his work, the treasury was not opened again in the Edo period. The S collection was deposited at the Iwashimizu Hachimangū shrine 石清水八幡宮 in Kyoto. Minagawa points out that someone added to S some documents that once belonged to the Ministry of People's Affairs 民部省 [Minagawa 1972, p. 583].

Everything changed with the advent of the Meiji period (1868–1912), following the fundamental changes in Japanese reality. In 1873, the Shōsōin Treasury was reopened, with the main purpose of auditing the treasures. The commission was headed by Ninagawa Noritane 蜷川式胤 (1835–1882), an official of the Ministry of Education 文部省, established in 1871. The documents were not dealt with in 1873. Then the treasury was opened in 1875, at which time serious study of all items, including documents, began. The management of Shōsōin was transferred from Tōdaiji to the Ministry of the Interior 内務省, and then to the Ministry of the Court 宮内省, under whose auspices the treasury still stands today. Since then, it has been continuously open to researchers.

The documents were shown at an exhibition at the Great Buddha Hall in Tōdaiji in 1875. They attracted the attention of scholars, so it was decided to make copies (*tōshahon* 謄写本) and study them. In the same year, the documents were sent to the Asakusa Science Book Foundation (*Asakusa Bunko* 浅早文庫) in Tokyo, where employees of the newly formed Historical Documents Research Bureau 修史局 (run by the Ministry of the Interior) began to study them.

At first, mere copies of documents were made in Asakusa. These copies are commonly named after the people who made them: Ōhashi 大橋 (after Ōhashi Nagayoshi 大橋長喜, an official from Nara) and Kosugi 小杉 (after Kosugi Sugimura 小杉相邨, an official from the Ministry of Education). Ōhashi and Kosugi included documents from Hoida's S collection and many other tax records, house books, etc. that he had not researched.

Later, the same scholars began a new arrangement of the remaining documents (also called *seiri* 整理). They worked, like Hoida, with the originals. Each new “ordering” came out as a continuation of the S collection. In total, in Asakusa, there were three of them between 1875 and 1882: *Continuation of the True Collection* (*Seishū zokushū* 正集続修, or, for short *Zokushū* 続修, 50 scrolls, hereafter Z), *Further Continuation of the True Collection* (*Zokushū kōshū* 続修後集, 43 scrolls, hereafter ZK) and *Supplement to the Continuation of the True Collection* (*Zokushū betsushū* 続修別集, 50 scrolls, hereafter ZB).

Collection Z included tax account books and house registers unrecorded by Hoida, as well as some Shakyōjo documents that, although included in the collection, were ignored by scholars at the time. The ZK collection focused on the documents of Shakyōjo and the Ishiyamadera Temple construction bureau. The ZB collection again contained mostly documents of Shakyōjo and the Ishiyamadera Temple construction bureau. However, the latter two collections did not attract the interest of scholars of the time. At the beginning of the Meiji period, scholars were interested in account and tax books, household registers, and the contents of written records because it was thought that the information contained in them could help draw parallels between Japanese antiquity and European antiquity. It was seen as a way of proving that the Japanese were not different from Europeans. For intellectuals in the early Meiji era, who suffered from a pervasive complex of inferiority to Europeans in all areas of life, this was extremely important. The Buddhist reality depicted in the Shakyōjo documents showed otherwise, so they were neglected.

The methods of the Meiji scholars were the same as those of Hoida: they cut out the fragments that interested them, literally tearing them out of the scriptorium documents, and put them together in a convenient order according to their goals and objectives.

A little later, in honor of the Meiji Emperor's visit to Nara in 1877, another arrangement of the remaining documents was carried out, which, however, differed from the previous three. It was conducted not at Asakusa, but at the library department of the Ministry of the Interior 内務省図書局. It was called the Damaged Documents (*Jinkai* 塵芥, literally

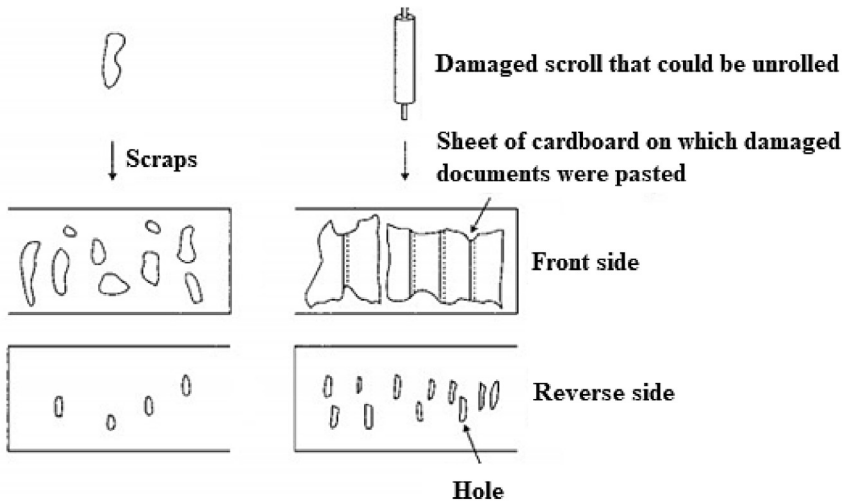


Fig. 4. Damaged documents from the J collection

“trash,” 39 scrolls and three volumes, hereafter J). The J collection consisted of indecipherable fragments cut out and compiled into an arbitrary compilation – there is no connection between the fragments. The worst preserved documents in Collection J are those that contain the names of the monks who attended the opening ceremony of the Great Buddha’s eyes at Tōdaiji in 752 (東大寺盧舎那仏開眼供養供奉僧名帳).

The damaged parts of the scrolls were cut out and pasted on thick sheets of cardboard, the front side being the one containing the discarded documents. To view the back side, holes, “windows,” or *mado* 窓, were cut in the cardboard (see Fig. 4).

If a document was so damaged that only small scraps *haken* 破片 were left, they were glued to thick white sheets of cardboard with holes cut in the back to give them some shape. The scraps are smaller, collected in three separate volumes.

It is impossible to read the Shakyōjo documents hidden beneath the thick sheets of cardboard, even through the holes. Today, researchers are treating the cardboard with a special solution and cutting large pieces out of it.

Among the “damaged documents” there is a separate type of documents that are not placed either in the 39 scrolls or in the three book volumes. These are the so-called “candle documents” (*rōsoku bunsho* 蠟燭文書), and there are 24 of them. These scrolls, which resemble the shape of candles, are so hardened by moisture that it is impossible to unroll them. Only recently has it been possible to study their contents using infrared light: most of them, like the excerpts in the three book volumes, contain the names of the monks who attended the Great Buddha’s eye-opening ceremony.

The last ordering of the Shōsōin monjo, made before the important 1901 document history, was done in 1892 by the Shōsōin Treasures Ordering and Classification Office 正倉院御物整理掛. Its outcome was *Further Continuation* (*Zokuzokush* 続々修, 440 scrolls and two volumes, hereafter ZZ). The ZZ collection differs from the earlier ones: Hoida and scholars after him, in excising the official documents they needed, did not take care to preserve the order of the Shakyōjo documents, and consequently fragments of these documents ended up scattered in a chaotic order. The method used by the compilers of the ZZ was to organize the fragments of the Shakyōjo documents into groups according to their contents. Each fragment was labeled with a tag (*fusen* 付箋, 5 cm long and 1 cm wide) indicating the subject group of the document and the place of extraction. These tags make it possible to understand the original location of each fragment. In addition, fragments or groups of fragments were labeled with red tags with the sequential number of the group. This approach to ordering undoubtedly makes the documents comprising the ZZ more suitable for scholarly study. Table 2 summarizes all the orderings.

The publications and research to be discussed next are very different from those described above. It is no longer just organizing documents but creating research-friendly publications. The publications after 1901 through 1965 were far from perfect, but they allowed scholars to at least pay attention to a part of the Shōsōin documents that had previously been ignored.

Table 2

Orderings (整理) of the Shōsōin documents

Title	Number of scrolls	Abbreviation	Person or institution who conducted ordering	Volume in <i>Shōsōin Documents Register</i> 正 倉院文書 目録	Volumes in <i>Shōsōin Documents Photo Catalogue</i> 正 倉院古文書影 印集
<i>True Collection</i> 正集, <i>Seishū</i> (previously 成 卷文書)	45	S	Hoida Tadatomi	1	1–4
<i>Continuation of the True Collection</i> 続 修, <i>Zokushū</i>	50	Z	Asakusa bunko	2	5–8
<i>Further Continuation of the True Collection,</i> 続修後集, <i>Zokushū kōshū</i>	43	ZK	Asakusa bunko	3	9–11
<i>Supplement to the Continuation of the True Collection</i> 続修 別集, <i>Zokushū betsushū</i>	50	ZB	Asakusa bunko	4	12–14
<i>Damaged documents</i> 塵芥, <i>Jinkai</i>	39 + 3 volumes	J	Library department of the Ministry of the Interior	5	15–17
<i>Further Continuation</i> 続々修, <i>Zokuzokushū</i>	440 + 2 volumes	ZZ	Shōsōin Treasures Ordering and Classification Office	6 Publication continues	Publication continues

*The Old Documents of Great Japan in Chronological Order* (*Dainihon komonjo (hennen)* 大日本古文書 (編年), hereafter DNK), is a transcribed printed publication of Nara documents in chronological order; 90 percent of the documents here are precisely Shōsōin monjo. One might even say that this is a new ordering, the purpose of which was to restore the chronological sequence of the documents. The compilers of the DNK studied documents from collections of ordered and copied documents. The DNK consists of 25 volumes and is considered one of the most important editions of the Shōsōin documents. Its volumes can be found in numerous libraries and now in partially digitized form on the website of the National Diet Library 国立国会図書館<sup>3</sup> or on the website of the Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo 東京大学史料編纂所.<sup>4</sup> Shōsōin papers published in DNK are available to anyone interested. This was an undoubted breakthrough – after all, before this publication, only a select few could work with them.

Publication began in 1901 and took almost forty years, with the last volume published in 1940. The Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo was responsible for the publication.

The DNK can be divided into three parts according to the time of appearance of the volumes; let us call them parts A, B, C (Table 3).

Table 3

Parts of DNK documents

	Scrolls	Start of publication	End of publication
A	1–6	1901	1904
B	7–23	1907	1937
C	23–25	1937	1940

<sup>3</sup> Kokuritsu kokkai toshokan. <https://ndl.go.jp/>

<sup>4</sup> Tōkyō daigaku shiryō hensanjo. <https://www.hi.u-tokyo.ac.jp/>

These three groups consist of chronologically arranged documents. Many documents from one group repeat documents from another.

Group A includes the documents that Meiji scholars considered most important: household registers, tax records, and tax reports taken from discarded official documents. The documents in Group A have a significant drawback: the fact is that, just at the time of their study and publication, scholars from the same Department of Humanities, Institute of Historiography at the University of Tokyo, were engaged in making copies of the original documents by the method of tracing and carefully checking them against the originals (“shadow copying,” *kageutsushi* 影写). The method consisted of placing a sheet of thin Japanese paper on the original and using a brush and ink to exactly copy what was written. Therefore, during the period of work on the documents of Group A, the originals were not available, and the scholars had to use the copies of Ōhashi and Kosugi, which were outdated by that time. As a result, the fragments were incomplete and contained errors.

The researchers from the Historiographical Institute tried to correct many errors by publishing the next group of documents: group B. Group B documents were published for a much longer period of time, from 1907 to 1937, but already during their publication it became clear to the researchers that they also contained many inaccuracies and omissions. Therefore, it was decided to make an additional publication of documents (group C), which would correct at least some of the inaccuracies in publications A and B.

In DNK, passages are often not connected correctly. Sakaehara Towao gives as an example a long scriptorium document *Records of Lining Paper Issuance* (間紙充帳) [Sakaehara 2011, p. 56]. There were a variety of official documents on the back of this document, so this report was cut into several fragments during the previous collections. The DNK compilers were unable to restore the document in its original integrity, and the fragments ended up in different volumes under different titles. Since the document is very voluminous, in Table 4 we present the fate of only six of its fragments (without translation of the title).

Table 4

Fragments of the report  
*Records of Lining Paper Issuance* (間紙充帳)

Fragment title in DNK	Volume and page in DNK	Scroll with the fragment in collection	Original dating of 8 <sup>th</sup> century	Document on the back side
写経疏集間紙 充帳	8, p. 560	S 20	Tempyō 17-5-25 (745)	Household register of Oshima Village in Katsushika County, Shimosa Province 下総国葛飾郡大嶋郷 戸籍
経師充紙帳	8, p. 573	S 25	Tempyō 17-9-8 (745)	Household register of Miita Village in Yamakata County, Mino Province 御野国山方郡三井田里 戸籍
写疏紙経師 充帳	24, p. 352	ZB 46	Tempyō 18-3-7 (746)	none
写疏紙経師 充帳	24, p. 353	ZZ 37	Tempyō 18-8-14 (746)	none
六卷鈔充紙帳	9, p. 332	S 21	Tempyō 19-2-2 (747)	Household register of Ofu Village in Kurama County, Shimosa Province 下総国倉麻郡意布郷 戸籍
六卷鈔充紙帳	9, p. 335	S 21	Tempyō 18-2-6 (746)	Household register of Ofu Village in Kurama County, Shimosa Province 下総国倉麻郡意布郷 戸籍



DNK is an undoubted breakthrough for its time in the study of the Shōsōin documents. To this day, this publication is still useful for researchers, although working with it requires some skill. The text contains many inaccuracies, and they should be taken into account.

Microfilming of documents was conducted by the Department of Archives and Tombs of the Imperial Court Administration (宮内庁書陵部) from 1954 to 1965. The scrolls were unrolled on black cloth and negatives of the front and back sides were made. They could be viewed through a microreader in research libraries. A little later, printed paper copies of the negatives began to appear. All of this led to more opportunities to study documents and more people wanting to study them. And this way of publishing documents has its pros and cons.

The most important thing to keep in mind when working with microfilms and photocopies is that we see the fragments in the order they were arranged: this is not a reconstruction of the original appearance of the documents, but a reflection of their actual state. Some of the text in the photographs is hidden by the white sheets of paper that were used to join the fragments during the arrangement. Seams, glue marks, scuffs, etc. are not visible. Also poorly visible are places written in red ink or just written faintly or illegibly. But in DNK, with all the errors, one can see everything, and often there are notes on what color the text is written in.

Microfilms and film photographs from the 1950s and 1960s are only suitable for confirming text from DNK. It is impossible to make connections between documents. However, they were valuable for their time – researchers were finally able to see the documents in the original and make at least some comparisons.

The turn from the study of transcribed official documents to the study of scriptorium documents and the restoration of their original appearance (*fukugen* 復原) was made by Minagawa Kan'ichi 皆完一 (1928–2011). A graduate of the Department of History at the University of Tokyo, he worked at the Historiographical Institute at the same university from 1956. The time of his early scholarly career was during the easier access to Shōsōin documents associated with the release of DNK, the advent of microfilm, and the publication of the first film photographs. Whereas

DNK and microfilm documents simply stated the fact that Shakyōjo documents existed, Minagawa set about studying them and developing a methodology for doing so. In 1962, his first work related to the study of Shakyōjo documents, *On the Copying of the Complete Buddhist Canon Under Sovereign Consort Kōmyō (Kōmyōkōgō gankyō gogatsu tsuitachi kyō no shosha ni tsuite* 光明皇后願經五月一日經の書写について), was published. The study focuses on the sutra copying process reconstructed from scriptorium documents. In a sense, it is one of the first anthropological studies of Shōsōin documents, as the process of copying sutras reveals many of the personal motivations and traits of both customers and scribes. With this work, Minagawa laid the foundation for further research and reconstruction of the scriptorium documents. The process of reconstruction is the joining of disparate fragments together, *setsuzoku* 接続. Minagawa pieced together disparate fragments, studied the edges of fragments (*tambu* 端部), paper seams, etc. Many of the terms we have used in this paper were introduced by him.

One of Minagawa's most important accomplishments was the document study seminars he conducted from 1983 to 1988. These seminars attracted new people to the study of Shōsōin monjo, who later continued Minagawa's work, turning the study of Shōsōin documents into a separate field of study of ancient Japan. One of Minagawa's famous students and a participant in his seminars is Sakaehara Towao 栄原永遠男 (b. 1946), whose work we have cited many times.

At the seminars, Minagawa-sensei and his students studied the connections between the fragments of Shakyōjo documents that had been scattered after ordering and developed methods for restoring their original appearance and order. They derived an axiom of the whole process of studying documents: the connection between fragments can be confirmed only by comparing the state of the edges and the texts written on them. This work is quite laborious, since only a few researchers have physical access to the documents, and many of the edges of the fragments of the Shakyōjo documents are hidden by white paper, which was used in the ordering process. Little by little, however, Minagawa and his students were able to restore the original order of

some fragments and compile catalogs that included information about the connections and condition of the edges (*setsuzoku jōhō* 接続情報). Because of this, further study of the Shakyōjo documents became possible. With this information, it is easy to reconstruct the original Nara order of the documents and begin to study the texts. Therefore, it can be confidently said that Minagawa radically changed the way researchers view the Shōsōin documents.

Even during the seminars, based on the work of Minagawa and his students, the Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo began to publish a register of information on the recovery of documents and other “technical” information, the *Shōsōin Document Register* (*Shōsōin monjo mokuroku* 正倉院文書目録). It began publication in 1987 and continues to be supplemented to this day. To date, it has six volumes, with each volume devoted to one of the six orderings (S to ZZ). The register serves as a key to the study of documents. The texts of the fragments are not presented in it (only the initial and final phrases), but there is a reference to DNK and all the technical information: how many fragments the document consists of and which number the fragment has, the title of the document, the date, which parts are missing (previous, subsequent, or both); the presence of a seal, type and quality of paper, data on how the fragment was cut, the condition of the edges, traces of glue, etc. are indicated. Both sides of the fragment are placed on one spread of the register: on the first page is the document that was on the reverse side in Nara times, i.e., the discarded document; on the second page is the Shakyōjo document.

At the end of each volume of the register there is a *Catalog of DNK Comparisons* (*Dainihon komonjo taishō mokuroku* 大日本古文書対照目録). It provides information about the Shōsōin documents collected in the pages of the DNK: specifying the number of each fragment, the name of the document to which it refers, and giving the volume and pages on which it is located in the register. This makes it easier to read the texts of the documents. At the very end of the catalog is a list of documents that are in the original orderings but, for some reason, are missing from the DNK (*mishū* 未収).

Another important catalog is the *Shōsōin Photographic Document Collection* (*Shōsōin monjo eiinshū* 正倉院古文書影印集). It has been published from 1988 to the present. There are now 17 volumes issued, organized according to six ordering collections.

Already in the 1980s, it was clear at the Minagawa seminars that the microfilm and first film photographs of the 1960s were a great achievement for their time, but that they were of little use to the modern researcher seeking to restore the original order of documents. Therefore, with the end of the seminars, some scholars have taken to creating new digital copies from the original documents. These photographs are very clear, the inscriptions in red ink and the paper seams are clearly visible. One can also make out inscriptions hidden under the white paper on the edges. There are also notes where to look for a fragment in the DNK. If some fragment is not in the DNK, the photo catalog indicates that as well. Each volume has detailed explanations describing the fragments and their physical condition, which can sometimes be difficult to assess from a photograph. Recently, some of the volumes have been posted on the official Shōsōin website.<sup>5</sup>

Many dictionaries, indexes, and databases, including electronic ones, are now being published to help to work with the Shōsōin documents and reveal their contents: *Index of Commentaries on the Buddhist Texts of the Nara Documents* (奈良朝典籍所載仏書解説索引), compiled by Kimoto Yoshinobu 木本好信, *Index of Things and Objects Referred to in the Shōsōin Documents According to the DNK Text* (正倉院文書事項索引), compiled by Sekine Senryu 関根真隆, *Index of Government Departments, Government Posts, Toponyms, and Temples and Shrines Mentioned in the Shōsōin Documents According to the DNK Text* (正倉院文書索引：官司・官職・地名・寺社編), compiled by Naoki Kajiro 直木孝次郎, *Dictionary of Names and Biographies of Personalities Mentioned in the Shōsōin Documents* (日本古代人名辭典), compiled by Takeuchi Rizō 竹内理三 and his assistants, *Catalog of Sutras*,

<sup>5</sup> Shōsōin. <https://shosoin.kunaicho.go.jp>.

*Transcribed in Ancient Japan* (日本古寫經現存目錄) by Tanaka Koida 田中塊堂, an electronic database of documents on the Treasury website or on the website of the Historiographical Institute of the University of Tokyo. Collections of studies of Shōsōin documents are also published.

Thus, we see that Minagawa Ken'ichi's seminars changed the perception of Shōsōin documents: Shakyōjo documents became a serious object of study for scholars and opened up a whole new world on the way to the study of people and their life in the Nara period. Of course, no one diminishes the importance of the written documents, but they have already been studied, which is not the case with the scriptorium documents. After the seminars, scholars focused on restoring the original appearance of the Shōsōin documents, the information about which was collected in catalogs. Using this information, if one uses it correctly, the documents can easily be reconstructed and read. Thus, a lot of information about the life and worldview of people of the 8<sup>th</sup> century is revealed to us.

## Conclusion

The documents of the Shōsōin Treasury are the most important source for the study of the Nara period and its people who lived in Buddhist reality. The purpose of our article was to lay the groundwork for future work with this complex set of documents, to create an understanding of what this source is and how to deal with it.

The Shōsōin documents were originally kept in the archives at Tōdaiji temple and were only transferred to the treasury at the very end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. They are official records of the Shakyōjo scriptorium at Tōdaiji temple, for which the reverse sides of official documents from other departments were used. When a scholar of the kokugaku school, Hōida Tadatōmu, discovered and studied them in the 1830s, he was interested not in the scriptorium documents, but in the documents on the back of the scriptorium documents, which provided information about the *ritsuryō* system. He decided to make a collection of documents, and,

for this purpose, he cut out the fragments of the documents from the scrolls of the Shakyōjo documentation. In other words, the back and front sides of the scrolls were reversed again. Scholars of the early Meiji period followed Hoida's example and made five more collections. In this way, the Shakyōjo documents became fragmented. It was not until the 1960s that attitudes towards them began to change. Minagawa Kan'ichi made the turn from the study of written records to the study of Shakyōjo documents. He and his students developed a methodology for studying documents and began to compile the first registers with the technical information needed to restore the original appearance and order of Shakyōjo documents. Now their methods have been refined, the registers are constantly updated, and the study of Shakyōjo documents has become a separate field of Japanese historical research.

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## **Dragon Images in Japanese Culture: Genesis and Semantics**

**N. N. Izotova**

### ***Abstract***

The article deals with the genesis, semantics, and functions of the dragon image in Japanese culture. The relevance of the study is due to the increased attention of researchers to the basic values of local cultures, issues of symbolism, inextricably linked to the problems of national self-identification. The methodological basis of the study is the structural-semiotic approach, which was used to analyze the value content of the dragon image, the descriptive-analytical method, and the method of cognitive interpretation of the semantics of linguistic means verbalizing the dragon image in the Japanese language. In contrast to the Western tradition, in the culture of the peoples of East Asia, a dragon is a revered and significant symbol of power, strength, and authority.

Stories about dragons are found in ancient texts of both Hinduism and Buddhism. It is established that the formation and evolution of the dragon cult in Japan was influenced by the mythical Chinese dragons, Indian Naga snakes, and the belief in dragons as deities of the water element. The author examines the genesis and evolution of the dragon image in different historical epochs, the influence of cultural-historical, natural, and religious factors on its transformation. It is shown that, in medieval Japan, the dragon was considered the protector of Buddhism, personifying strength, wisdom, prosperity, good luck, and images of these mythical creatures became an organic element of Buddhist culture. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of the image of the dragon as a sign of the Chinese zodiacal calendar, the representations of dragons in Japanese mythology, fairy tales and legends, in *Hitachi Fudoki*, *Kojiki*, *Nihon*

*Shoki*. In the mythological picture of the world of the Japanese, the dragon is ambivalent and has both positive and negative features.

It is revealed that the image of the dragon occupies an important place in Japanese traditional culture, painting, architecture, arts and crafts, calendar holidays, is widely represented in proverbs and sayings, set phrases and idioms. The reference to Japanese phraseology allowed to expand the base of the study and to reveal the totality of ideas about the dragon in the worldview of native speakers of the Japanese language. The author concludes that, nowadays, the image of the dragon in Japan has lost its sacral significance and is mainly used as tribute to tradition.

**Keywords:** Japan, culture, semantics, dragon image, legends, myths, zodiac, water deities.

## Introduction

Dragons are mentioned in legends, myths, and folklore of all ages and peoples. “The dragon image is characteristic for a relatively late stage of development of mythology: it is present mainly in the mythologies of early states (Sumer, Egypt, Ugarit, India, Greece, China, Japan, Mexico), in most of which economy was based on artificial irrigation... It is believed that the dragon image combines the images of animals which initially embodied the two worlds which were opposite to each other and distinct from the earthly one – the upper world (birds) and the nether world (snakes and other reptiles)” [Tokarev 1994, p. 394]. In the creation myths, the cruel and mighty dragons are defeated by gods. A popular mythological plot is a battle with a snake-like monster: the battle of Jason with a dragon in the tale of the Argonauts, the victory of Heracles over the Lernaean Hydra, the freeing of Andromeda, who was sacrificed to a sea monster, by Perseus, the killing of dragon Fáfnir by Sigurd, the victory of Saint George over the dragon and his saving the king’s daughter. In the Christian symbolism, a dragon is associated with the devil. The Book of Revelation tells about an omen which appeared

in the sky: “[...] behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads” (Rev. 12:3). Archangel Michael fights the dragon and defeats him: “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Rev. 12:9).

As Hans Biedermann says, “dragons are often associated with the element of fire and are depicted as breathing fire, are perceived as products of primal chaos, which can only be defeated with force” [Biedermann 1996, p. 76]. Slaying the dragon symbolizes the inevitable victory of good over evil, light over darkness, virtue over vice. In the Russian Orthodox culture, the dragon image is also an embodiment of evil and evil spirits. In the Russian folklore, the fire breathing “vicious” and “mean” Zmei Gorynich, the kidnapper of beautiful maidens, is always defeated by bogatyrs.

Unlike the Western tradition, in the culture of the peoples of East Asia, a dragon is a revered symbol of might, force, and power. “In the Ancient Chinese worldview, it symbolizes the primal element of *yang*, i.e., personifies procreation, fertility, and activity, and, due to this, often becomes an element of decor with the function of protection from demons. In many legends and fairy tales, dragons play the dominant role, and in the arts and crafts, they become the dominant theme” [Biedermann 1996, p. 76].

The goal of this article is to study the dragon image in the Japanese culture. To reach this goal, we intend to define the role of dragons in the culture of the peoples of East Asia, to determine the origins of the Japanese dragon and to define its distinctive features, to analyze the peculiarities of the dragon as a sign of the Chinese zodiac calendar, to study its image in ancient chronicles and the *fudoki* texts, folklore, myths, to describe its role in art, calendar festivals, and daily life.

## **Dragons in Asian Cultures. Characteristics of the Japanese Dragon**

Chinese researchers claim that the dragon image, with all its functions, existed as early as 8 thousand years ago in the territory of the present-day province of Liaoning, from where it spread into the central part of present-day China. After that, as the ethnic groups (numbering more than 40) which had dragon as their totem united and unified its image, having removed differences about its appearance, an “export-ready” dragon went to Japan and the countries of Southeast Asia [Somkina 2010, p. 30–31].

Many of the legends and myths connected to dragons are universal for various regions. This is caused by common laws in the development of traditional ways of life of ancient people and the influence of their natural environment. “Not a single one of the mythical creatures is as common for the Far Eastern art and literature as the dragon. Interestingly, in Japan, three different types of dragons, of the Indian, Chinese, and Japanese origin, can be found alongside each other. For a superficial observer, all of them belong to the same class of deities sending rain, thunder, and storm, but a careful study shows that they differ from each other” [Visser 1913, p. 2].

The genesis and evolution of the dragon cult in Japan was influenced by the beliefs in the mythical Chinese dragons and the Indian Naga snakes. The Chinese dragon has “... the head of a camel, the horns of a deer, the eyes of a hare, the scales of a carp, the paws of a tiger, and the talons of an eagle. Besides, it has moustache, a brightly shining gem under its chin, and a crest on the top of its head, which allows it to soar to Heaven when it wants to” [Visser 1913, p. 200]. Dragons can be of feminine and masculine gender: “The horns of a male dragon are wavy, concave, steep; they are thick at the top but become very thin down below. A female dragon has a straight nose, a round mane, thin scales, and a strong tail” [Visser 1913, p. 39].

Some researchers [Davis 2008; Gould 2002] tried to distinguish Japanese dragons from the Chinese ones by the number of taloned fingers

on their paws. Charles Gould wrote that, in Japan, a dragon is invariably depicted with three fingers, whereas, in China, it always has four or five, depending on whether it is a common or an imperial dragon. In Japan, it is believed that the three-fingered Japanese dragon was growing talons as it was becoming further removed from Japan: after coming to Korea, it got four talons, and as it arrived in China, it received five. However, three-taloned dragons also come from China: their depictions decorated Tang (618–907) era garments. The dragon was established as a symbol of Chinese imperial power in the Song (960–1279) era; eventually, five-fingered dragons came to be depicted on clothing and daily items belonging to the emperor, and four-fingered ones – belonging to high-ranking officials.<sup>1</sup>

In Shinto, the dragon (龍 *ryū* or 竜 *tatsu*) is associated with rain, bodies of water, the sea. In agricultural cults, dragons played an important role. It was believed that bodies of water were inhabited by water spirits Mizuchi (蛟 or 虯), which could cause plentiful rain. The etymology of the word can be traced back to the ancient word みつち *mitsuchi* (み *mi* – water, つ *tsu* – indicator of the genitive case, ち *chi* – snake). Usually, the Mizuchi is described as a snake-like creature which lives in the water, has horns and extremities, and hurts people by spewing poison. The Mizuchi can reach 24 meters in size.<sup>2</sup>

It is believed that dragons can cause storms and typhoons, deluges, tornado. The word “water whirlwind” 竜巻 *tatsumaki* literally means “dragon’s scroll.” To avoid drought or to stop torrential rain, rituals to pacify the ruler deities of the water element were conducted, and in fishing villages, near the bodies of water, where, as it was believed, the dragon god lived, prayers for bountiful catch were performed. “Ancient Japanese chronicles often speak about killing droughts which brought the country to famine and impoverishment. They were believed to be

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<sup>1</sup> Dragons in Japanese Culture – Kaito Japan Design: <https://kaitojapandesign.com/blogs/japanese-dragon/dragon-in-japanese-culture>

<sup>2</sup> Mizuchi to wa? Imi to tsuikata [What is Mizuchi? Meaning and use of the word]: <https://kotobank.jp/word/蛟-637987>

divine punishment or, at any rate, a calamity that could only be stopped with sincere prayers and offerings to the same deities. In particular, from ancient times, the old dragon-shaped river gods (the “river uncles,” 河伯 *kawa-no kami*) were believed to bring rain, and they were begged not to take away their blessings from the drying and suffering land” [Visser 1913, p. 84]. “[...] [T]here existed sixteen Shinto shrines the deities of which were worshipped to cause or stop rain” [Visser 1913, p. 86]. To this day, a specific set of archaic beliefs called the “Dragon God Faith” (龍神信仰 *ryūjin shinkō*) has persisted. As a rule, its followers practice prayers for rain or for stopping torrents, for calm sea, and plentiful catch.<sup>3</sup>

Historian Kuroda Hideo notes that the image of a dragon is an unalienable part of Japan’s medieval history. In the Heian era, this image was interpreted according to the “Teaching of Yin and Yang” (陰陽道 *onmyōdō*) and was, once again, connected to the water element and the rites to cause or stop rain. According to beliefs, dragons could also cause earthquakes. Besides, dragon gods were thought to be protectors of the Japanese. In times of crisis, for example, during Kublai Khan’s attempted invasion of Japan in 1274, it was believed that dragon gods were fighting a bloody battle to protect Japanese land [Kuroda 2003, p. 134].

In the Muromachi era, the dragon symbol gained particular popularity, especially in Buddhist art and architecture. Dragons as protectors of Buddhism personified power, wisdom, prosperity, and good luck. Dragons can be seen on the ceilings of Buddhist temples, they appear as decorative elements in the places of hand ablution, as carved or painted images meant to protect buildings from fire. In the Edo era, Buddhism gave way to newly resurgent Shintoism and Neo-Confucianism [Goreglyad 2006, p. 30–31]. In the Meiji era (1868–1912), under the influence of the policy of separation of Buddhism and Shintoism

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<sup>3</sup> Mukaeru 2024 nen wa tatsu (ryū) nen. Ryūjin-sama o matsuru Nihon no ryūjin shinkō, ryū jinja to wa? [2024 is the Year of the Dragon. What are the “faith of the dragon god,” “temples of dragon”?] : <https://prtimes.jp/main/html/rd/p/000000010.000116710.html#>

(神仏分離 *shinbutsu bunri*), the dragon image, which was closely connected to Buddhism, virtually disappears from Shinto shrines. Even though images of dragons could be found on coins, they were no longer used as symbols of the emperor's power. Professor Arakawa Hiroshi claims that a five-fingered dragon has never been a symbol of the emperor's power in Japan, and the reason for this was not only the unwillingness to imitate China, but also the intention to state the Japanese emperor's uniqueness to China [Arakawa 2021, p. 188–189].

### **Dragon as a Zodiac Sign**

The author of a fundamental work *Chronology of the Countries of East and Central Asia* L. R. Kontsevich writes: “The sixty-year cycle is the basis of the Far Eastern calendar. It is the most ancient and widespread system of counting time in all countries of the “Chinese character” area in East Asia. This cycle is used to count years, lunar months, days and hours, as well as cardinal directions, angles (in degrees), etc. The cycle was based on the natural philosophical teaching about *yin-yang* and the “five primal elements” (陰陽五行説) [Kontsevich 2010, p. 31].

According to chronicles, in Japan, the zodiac calendar based on Chinese astronomy, cosmology, and philosophy was adopted as early as in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Chinese legends and myths tell about the origin of the zodiac signs. “In ancient times, the Yellow Ancestor... decided to pick twelve guards from the animals known to him. He organized a competition among animals to select his guards, who became the twelve Zodiac signs after that, one after another... All animals strove to win, and there were many unexpected situations in which the animals revealed themselves in some way. Eventually, twelve winners were determined. These were, in turn, rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog, pig” [Jia Huimin 2016, p. 196]. Dragon, despite being good at flying and swimming, ended up only in fifth place, even though everybody had believed that he would defeat his opponents. According to legend, dragon told the Jade Emperor that he had to stop a couple of times to help village

residents and cause rain. And, on his way to the finish line, he saw a small rabbit on a log and decided to cause some wind to help it reach the shore.<sup>4</sup>

In 1872, Japan abandoned the lunar calendar in favor of the Gregorian one, but, to this day, many temples use the lunar calendar during the key festivals and celebrations, and they also sell amulets and figures of zodiac deities [Izotova 2018, p. 106]. The zodiac animal figures become particularly popular during the New Year festivities. They are depicted on New Year postcards, calendars, souvenirs, and used as talismans.

## Dragon in Japanese Mythology and Literature

The first dragon-related artifacts in Japan date back to the Yayoi era. A jar with a depiction of a snake-like body with triangle fins, which was identified as a “dragon motif,” was found during excavations in the city of Izumi and dated 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. All over Japan, more than 30 such artifacts were found. As professor of Tenri University Kuwabara Hisao notes, there is a theory according to which the depictions of dragons on Yayoi ceramics can be traced back to images on bronze mirrors of the Late Han dynasty [Kuwabara 2020, p. 6].

In Chinese and Japanese mythology, the dragon is one of the four mythical creatures guarding the four cardinal directions: the Vermilion Bird Suzaku (朱雀) guards the South, the Azure Dragon Seiryū (青龍) – the East, the Black Tortoise Genbu (玄武) protects the North, and the White Tiger Byakko (白虎) – the West. These four creatures, known as the Four Heavenly Emblems, appeared in China during the Warring States Period (476–221 BCE), and they were often depicted on the walls of Chinese and Korean tombs. The dragon is the guardian of the East, it is associated with the season of spring, green/blue color, the element of wood (sometimes also water), virtue, justice, male energy *yang*; it supports and protects the country (controls rain, symbolizes the power of the emperor). It is

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<sup>4</sup> Chinese Zodiac | Mythology : <https://depts.washington.edu/triolive/quest/2007/TTQ07030/mythology.html>



worth noting the dual interpretation of the relationship between dragons and birds. The Vermilion Bird, the guardian of the South, is sometimes identified with the phoenix (鳳凰 *hōō*). Dragons and phoenixes are often depicted together and symbolize the unity of the opposites of *yin* and *yang*.<sup>5</sup> In the Buddhist legends, the *Garuda* bird people (迦楼羅 *karura*) are depicted as enemies of the *Naga* dragons (那伽 *naga* or 龍 *ryū*),<sup>6</sup> even though both of them can serve as temple guardians.

In Japan, the Azure Dragon is believed to be the guardian of the ancient capital city of Kyoto, corresponds to the Kamo River, and protects the city from various misfortunes and natural disasters coming from the eastern side. According to a legend, every night, the dragon drinks water from the spring of the Clean Water Temple, Kiyomizudera (清水寺).<sup>7</sup> As long as the water in the spring remains clean, the guardian will protect the city. Twice a year, in autumn and in spring, as gratitude to the heavenly patron, believed to be the embodiment of Bodhisattva Kannon, the temple holds the Azure Dragon Festival (青龍会 *seiryē*).<sup>8</sup> The 18-meter dragon figure is carried around the nearby streets of Kyoto, and the residents of the city greet their protector. As another legend says, the white dragon Ogoncho (おごんちょ) lives in the vicinity of Kyoto. Once every 50 years it turns into a golden bird, which announces famine, bad harvest, and natural calamities with its shriek, which sounds like wolf's howl [Reese 2023].

There are numerous mentions of dragons in ancient Japanese literature. Let us consider the most important of them. The early 8<sup>th</sup> century historic and geographical chronicle *Hitachi Fudoki*, in the

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<sup>5</sup> Shijin (Shishin) – Four legendary Chinese creatures protecting the four compass directions: <https://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/ssu-ling.shtml>

<sup>6</sup> Naga – a Sanskrit term uniting all types of snake-like creatures, including snakes and dragons.

<sup>7</sup> In 1994, the temple was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

<sup>8</sup> 青龍会 [Azure Dragon Festival] : [https://www.kiyomizudera.or.jp/event/seiryu\\_e.php](https://www.kiyomizudera.or.jp/event/seiryu_e.php)

description of Namekata District, tells about the struggle of a hero named Matachi with an evil deity Yatsu no Kami:

[T]here was a person called Yahazu no Uji no Matachi who cultivated new rice-fields by reclaiming and opening up swamp land in a valley west of the District Office. At this time Yatsu no Kami would gather together and come to obstruct and hinder things in one way or another, not allowing the fields to be cultivated.

(The local people say that these are snakes called Yatsu no Kami. They have bodies of snakes and horns on their heads. If anyone should look at them when escaping to avoid disaster, his household will be ruined and he will have no heirs. There are many of them in the fields around the District Office). And so Matachi became greatly enraged and put on armor, took his halberd, and killed them or drove them away.<sup>9</sup>

The description of Naka District tells about Nukabime from the village of Ubaraki, who gave birth to a flying snake son from an unknown man. The mother and the uncle believed the snake child to be a son of a god: “During daytime, he said nothing, and when it was dark, he talked to his mother” [Konrad 1969, p. 53]. The snake child grew fast, stopped fitting in the vessel in which Nukabime put him, and it was decided to send him to his father. “When the time to part came, from its great anger the snake child killed [his] uncle with a lightning strike and intended to ascend to the sky, but, at this time, his mother, frightened, took a *hiraka* vessel, threw it [at her son], hit him, and he, [having lost his divine strength], could not ascend to the sky. So, he stayed on the same hill of Kurefushi” [Ibid., p. 54].

The “Records of Ancient Matters” (古事記 *Kojiki*, 712) and the “Chronicles of Japan” (日本書紀 *Nihon Shoki*, 720) describe the victory

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<sup>9</sup> The English-language version is taken from [Funke 1994, pp. 16–17]. Note that the Russian-language version used by the author of the original publication mentions the Yatsu no Kami in the singular [Konrad 1969, p. 41].

of the brother of the sun goddess Amaterasu, the god of wind Susanoo no Mikoto, over the eight-headed snake Yama no Orochi (八岐の大蛇). The earth god Ashinazuchi and his wife Tenazuchi had to sacrifice one of their eight daughters to the “frightful snake, the eight-tailed, eight-headed snake from Koshi” every year. The last daughter, Kushinada Hime, was saved by god Susanoo, who killed the beast. This is how *Kojiki* describes the giant snake: “Its eyes are like red *kagachi* [fruit], and out of his body come eight heads and eight tails. And on his body grow moss, cypresses, and cryptomerias. And it is as long as eight valleys, and as tall as eight mountains. And if you look at its belly, all of it is oozing with blood.” [Grishchenkov 2000, p. 99]. Susanoo no Mikoto ordered: “Boil the eight-times-purified sake, and build a fence in a circle, and open eight gates in this fence, and build a platform near each gate, and place a sake barrel on that platform, and pour plenty of eight-times-purified sake in that barrel, and wait.” The snake drank the sake and fell asleep, and Susanoo cut it into small pieces. As Susanoo cut the middle tail, he found the Kusanagi no Tsurugi (草薙剣) sword. Earlier, the name of the sword was interpreted as the “Grass-Cutting Sword,” but, recently, the translation “Snake [Hitting] Sword” has been adopted, where *nagi* is understood as an ancient Japanese word meaning “snake” [*Bogi, svyatilishcha...* 2010, p. 91]. The Kusanagi no Tsurugi sword is a symbol of the emperor’s power and one of the three imperial regalia.<sup>10</sup>

*Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* tell about Wata Tsumi no Kami – the Sea Spirit God, who lived in an underwater palace built like “fish scales” [Grishchenkov 2000, p. 167]. His daughter, Toyotama Bime no Mikoto, the Maiden of Plentiful Pearls, became the wife of Hoori no Mikoto, who lived in the underwater palace for three years and returned to land on the neck of a “one-*hiro*-sized crocodile”.<sup>11</sup> When it was time for

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<sup>10</sup> The three attributes of imperial power – the Three Sacred Treasures (三種の神器 *sanshu no jingi*): the bronze mirror Yata no Kagami (八咫鏡), the jade jewel Yasakani no Magatama (八尺瓊勾玉), and the Kusanagi no Tsurugi sword.

<sup>11</sup> *Hiro* – 1.81 m.

Toyotama Bime no Mikoto to give birth, her husband built a hut on the seashore. “And when she was about to give birth, [she] told her husband: “Everywhere in foreign countries, people, when it is time for them to give birth, give birth taking on the appearance of their [native] country. So, I am now about to give birth in [my] former appearance. I ask of you: do not look at me” – so she said. Then, considering her words strange, [he] secretly looked when she was about to give birth, and [she], having turned into a giant crocodile, was slithering and wringing” [Grishchenkov 2000, p. 175]. *Nihon Shoki* says that “when it was time to give birth, Toyo Tama Pime turned into a dragon” [Ermakova & Meshcheryakov 1997, p. 165]. M.W. de Visser believes that this legend contains many Chinese features as well as Indian ideas about *Naga* dragons as rulers of the sea; the crocodile (鰐 *wani*) “is an old Japanese sea deity in the image of a dragon, or a snake, and the legend is an ancient Japanese tale clothed in Indian garments by later generations” [Visser 1913, p. 77]. It is worth noting that, in the Nagasaki Prefecture, there is one of the most ancient shrines, Watatsumi Jinja (海神神社), which is included in the national list of Shinto shrines. The shrine is dedicated to sea deity Watatsumi and goddess Toyotama Hime [*Bogi, svyatilishcha...* 2010, p. 170].

According to *Kojiki*, the child of Toyotama Bime no Mikoto and Hoori no Mikoto, Amatsuhiko Hikonagisatake Ugayafukiaezu no Mikoto, married his aunt, goddess Tamayori Bime no Mikoto and produced four sons, one of whom was Wakami Kenu no Mikoto, or God-Ruler of Sacred Young Food. Another name is Toyomikenu no Mikoto, God-Ruler of Plentiful Sacred Food. Another name is Kamuyamato Iware Biko no Mikoto, Young God Iware from Divine Yamato [Grishchenkov 2000, p. 178]. *Nihon Shoki* provides one more name of God Iware from Divine Yamato – Sano no Mikoto. “He was given the name Sano when he was still young of age. And then he pacified the All-Under-Heaven and ruled the Eight Island Lands” [Ermakova & Meshcheryakov 1997, p. 167]. God Iware no Mikoto is known as the first emperor and the founder of Japan – Jimmu. Therefore, according to chronicles, the first legendary emperor of Japan, Jimmu Tennō, was a great grandson of both Ninigi, the grandson of the sun goddess Amaterasu, and Wata Tsumi no Kami,

the God Spirit of the Sea, the ruler of the Sea Kingdom. So, dragon god Ryūjin (龍神) is one of the ancestors of the Japanese emperors, and the emperor's name of the "dragon-faced one" (竜顔 *ryūgan*) is justified in the myth. The phrase 龍顔を拝する (*ryūgan o haisuru*, lit. "to bow before the dragon's face") means "to receive an audience with the emperor." This phrase combines the awe before the mighty ruler and the honor of meeting him [Ikegami 2003, pp. 12–13].

A popular plot of many Japanese fairy tales and legends is a travel to the underwater kingdom and a meeting with the ruler of seas and oceans, the dragon god. Such are the tales "Urashima Taro," "Jellyfish and Ape," etc.

The dragon image is associated with the only goddess in the pantheon of the "Seven Gods of Happiness" – the patron of eloquence, music, and other arts Benzaiten (弁才天), the prototype of which is the Indian water goddess Saraswati. "Like Saraswati, the Japanese goddess of happiness Benten is considered the patron of water, as she was born out of the legends about the Dragon and is his wife. This is why she is often depicted sitting on the ground or on a dragon with a traditional Japanese string musical instrument *biwa* in her hands" [Sadokova 2020, p. 72].

Let us now turn to one of the legends about Benzaiten and the Dragon. In 1047, a monk of the Tendai school Kokei (977–1049) wrote the text "On the Origin of Enoshima Island" (江ノ島縁起 *Enoshima Engi*), in which goddess Benzaiten is presented as a savior of the island's residents. The residents of local villages had for a thousand years been terrorized by a five-headed dragon Gozūryū (五頭龍). He was even offered human sacrifices, but everything was in vain. Learning about the plight of the people, Benzaiten descended from heaven, raised Enoshima Island from the bottom of the sea and settled there. The dragon fell in love with the goddess and offered to make her his wife. Benzaiten rejected his proposal but, using her gift of eloquence, persuaded the dragon to leave the people alone. The pacified dragon rushed to the south of the island and turned into a hill, which was named "Dragon's Maw" (龍の口 *tatsu no kuchi*) [Hein 2014, pp. 4–5].

## **The Semantics and Functions of the Dragon Image in the Daily Life of the Japanese**

The archetypical dragon image goes back to totem images and mythological ideas. It has a complex multidimensional structure, which is explained by its millennia-long history. According to C.G. Jung, the dragon symbol is an embodiment of the deep unconscious: “This is the place of primordial unconsciousness and at the same time the place of healing and redemption, because it contains the jewel of wholeness. It is the cave where the dragon of chaos lives and it is also the indestructible city, the magic circle or *temenos*, the sacred precinct where all the split-off parts of the personality are united” [Jung 1994, p. 26].

The dragon image in the daily life of the Japanese is represented in the festivities, folk beliefs, in literature and poetry, in decorative art, mass culture, and Japanese set phrases.

Chinese culture exerted a strong influence upon the Japanese rites and festivals. Borrowed from China by Japanese aristocracy, the festivals were organically incorporated in the Japanese daily life and are now perceived as Japanese. Ancient Chinese characters, lions and dragons, act in some of the Japanese festival performances.

For example, one of the notable events of Japan’s cultural life is the “Golden Dragon Dance” (金竜の舞 *kinryū no mai*), which can be seen on March 18 and October 18 in the Asakusa district of Tokyo at the Sensōji Temple (浅草寺), also known as the “Temple of Young Grass on the Mountain of the Golden Dragon” (金龍山浅草寺 *Kinryūzan Sensōji*). According to legend, on the 18<sup>th</sup> day since the founding of the temple, a thousand pine trees grew on this mountain in one night, and, after three days, a 100 *shaku* (ca. 30 m) long dragon with golden scales descended from heaven to the pine grove. It has never been seen since then. For the first time, the dance was performed on October 18, 1958, during the ceremony of opening the new temple hall. The 70 young men and girls who were performing the dance were volunteers from local youth clubs and not professional dancers.

It is believed that the Golden Dragon Dance helps to attract good luck and prosperity.<sup>12</sup>

On October 7–9, in Nagasaki, at Suwa Shinto shrine (諏訪神社), the autumn festival of Kunchi takes place, during which the Dragon, or Snake Dance (龍(蛇)踊り *ryū (ja) odori*) is performed. The festival is also called the Harvest Festival, as it coincides with the end of the harvest season. Initially, the dance was performed during New Year festivities by the Chinese who settled in Nagasaki in the Edo era. The festival has been held since 1634, and in 1970, the Dragon Dance received the status of “significant intangible cultural heritage of the people”.<sup>13</sup>

In the rich fishing areas in Japan, in the beginning of summer, races are held on rowing boats built in the shape of dragons, which are called *hārī* (ハーリー). Such competitions are particularly popular on the island of Okinawa. This water festival is an expression of a plea for rich catch and safety on sea.<sup>14</sup>

On May 5, Children’s Day (子どもの日 *kodomo no hi*), a traditional holiday, is celebrated in Japan. Once it was called the Festival of the First Day of the Horse (端午の節句 *tango no sekku*). On this day, the Japanese hang images of carps made from fabric or paper, 鯉幟 *koinobori* (鯉 *koi* “carp,” 幟 *nobori* “flag”), on poles near their houses. A carp is considered a symbol of success and courage due to the ancient Chinese legend about a steadfast and resolute carp who turned into a dragon after swimming up the current of the Yellow River. According to the legend, in the upper reaches of the Yellow River, there is a waterfall called “Dragon Gates” (龍門 *ryūmon*). A carp who manages to climb the waterfall becomes a dragon. The phrase “ascending the Dragon Gates” (登龍門 *tōryūmon*)

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<sup>12</sup> Kinryū-no mai | Asakusa ōhyakka [Golden Dragon Dance. Great Encyclopedia of Asakusa]: <https://asakusa.gr.jp/jp/?p=156>

<sup>13</sup> Nagasaki kunchi to wa [Nagasaki Kunchi Festival]. URL: <https://nagasaki-kunchi.com/about/>

<sup>14</sup> Hārī no kisetsu tōrai! (Okinawa no dentō gyōji) [The season of races on hārī rowing boats has come! (Traditional event on Okinawa Island)]. URL: <https://www.okinawastory.jp/news/notice/1678>

symbolizes courage and perseverance in overcoming obstacles on the way towards success.

The dragon image is represented in Japanese set phrases: in proverbs, fixed expressions, and four-character idioms 四字熟語 *yojijukugo*, which are “aphoristic sayings built according to the rules of *wenyan*, the old literary Chinese language, which date back either to a saying of a particular historical character, or to an ancient tale or legend” [Gurevich 2011, p. 3].

The idiom “dragon’s head, snake’s tail” (竜頭蛇尾 *ryūtō dabi*) means a situation when something started well, but then came to naught – “loud beginning, infamous end,” “start with a bang and end with a fizzle”.

The four-character phrase “battle of a dragon with a tiger” (竜虎相搏 *ryūko sōhaku*) is a fierce battle of two opponents of equal strength.

“The art of killing dragons” (屠竜の技 *toryō no gi*) means a skill which can be obtained but has no practical application. This is a reference to a Chinese parable about a man who trained for a long time and learnt to kill a dragon, but this ability turned out useless, as he did not find a single dragon.

The proverb “to paint a pupil in a dragon’s eye” (画竜点睛を欠く *garyō tensei o kaku*) goes back to the ancient legend about a Chinese artist who was painting the walls of a temple with images of dragons. When he painted the pupils of two dragons, they became alive and flew away. This is spoken about an unfinished business, about the necessity to add the final, decisive touch.

The fixed phrase “to pet a dragon’s moustache” (龍のひげをなでる *ryū no hige o naderu*) is a metaphor of reckless and rash action. It is often mentioned in combination with the expression “to step on a tiger’s tail” (虎の尾を踏む *tora no o o fumu*).

The proverb “to draw a dragon like a dog” (竜を画いて狗に類す *ryū o eigaite inu ni ruisu*) is used when one speaks of an overly ambitious and self-confident person who tries to do something which is obviously beyond their ability. A similar proverb “an ant aims for the dragon’s beard” (竜の鬚をアリが狙う *ryū no hige o ari ga nerau*) is a metaphor of grandiose plans which are not meant to be fulfilled.



“To escape a tiger’s den and enter a dragon’s cave” (虎口を逃れて竜穴に入る *kokō o nogarete ryūketsu ni iru*) means to fall from one trouble into another, even greater one, “to go from bad to worse.”

The expression 竜馬の躓き *ryūme no tsumazuki* – “even a wonder horse which flies like a dragon stumbles” is used when one says that even an experienced person can be mistaken – “anyone can make a mistake,” “happens to the best of us.”

The proverb “a dragon is ready to soar to the sky even if it is one *sun*<sup>15</sup> long” (竜は一寸にして昇天の気あり *ryū wa issun ni shite shōten no ki ari*) is spoken about a person who shows outstanding talent since childhood.

The phrase “a dragon flies up from under one’s feet” (足元から竜が上がる *ashimoto kara tatsu ga agaru*) means a sudden change, the appearance of an unexpected factor which can change the course of events.

The proverb “when a fitting moment comes, even earthworms become dragons” (時至れば蚯蚓 (ミミズ) も竜になる *toki itareba mimizu mo ryū ni naru*) means that, under fortunate circumstances, even without natural talent one can achieve success.

The meaning of the proverb “a cloud follows the dragon, and wind follows the tiger” (雲は竜に従い風は虎に従う *kumo wa ryū ni shitagai, kaze wa tora ni shitagau*), which originates from China, is that dragons and tigers gain strength where there are wind and clouds. Strength attracts strength.

The phrase “wings to the dragon” (竜に翼 *ryū ni tsubasa*) means “double profit.”

The dragon image is widely used in modern mass culture, in anime and manga (the *Dragon Ball* (ドラゴンボール *doragon bōru*) manga and its numerous screen adaptations; the white dragon Haku in Miyazaki Hayao’s film *Spirited Away*; the steel dragon in the *Ultraman* series, etc.), in video games. The dragon image can be seen in the patterns of traditional male and female kimonos. A dragon is also a popular motif in the art of Japanese tattoos [Meshcheryakov 2008, p. 487].

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<sup>15</sup> *Sun* – 3.03 cm.

At the same time, according to Professor Miura Masayuki, at present, many young Japanese do not like the depiction of a dragon, as they consider it old-fashioned. The dragon is not a symbol of Japanese identity, so the younger generation do not wish to bring its image to the future. In visual arts, the Japanese prefer other images, such as the phoenix, unicorn, lion, crane, and the depiction of the dragon is considered cumbersome and difficult. Besides, during many historical periods, the dragon was closely connected to Chinese culture, and, in the process of formation of the modern Japanese culture, its image was relatively little used [Nguyen 2015, p. 45].

## **Conclusion**

The dragon image occupies an important place in the traditional Japanese culture, literature, visual arts, architecture, decorative arts, legends and myths, calendar festivals. The history of its appearance and evolution illustrates the process of formation and transformation of mythological thinking and symbolic means of its actualization. Even though the dragon image was borrowed from China, the cult of this mythical creature formed over a long time, obtaining distinctive features and national cultural semantics.

In the mythological worldview of the Japanese, the dragon is ambivalent and has both positive and negative features. In ancient literature, one can find images of scary bloodthirsty dragons; at the same time, it speaks about the dragon god, the ruler of seas and oceans, one of the mythical ancestors of the Japanese emperors. The Japanese dragon is related to the water element, it was imbued with functions of patron and protector from natural calamities: droughts, torrential rain, typhoons.

The multifaceted nature and the rich connotative contents of the dragon image testify to its high associative and metaphorical potential. In our days, unlike China, where the dragon image is a symbol of collective identity and national unity, in Japan, it has lost its sacred significance and is largely used as tribute to tradition, for the purpose of commercial multiplication of images traditional for the East Asian culture.

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## ***A Collection of Tales About the Awakening of the Heart (Hosshinshū) in the Setsuwa Tradition***

**N. N. Trubnikova**

### ***Abstract***

The hermit poet Kamo-no Chōmei compiled a collection of tales about the awakening of the heart (*Hosshinshū*, c. 1216), continuing and updating the tradition of *setsuwa* collections of didactic tales. The peculiarities of the collection can be explained on the basis of the changes in the life of the Japanese Buddhist community that took place at the turn of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The main characters of the tales are hermits, “escapees from the world,” and different aspects of their lives are discussed in the thematic sections of the collection. In addition to the tales, the book contains discussions of difficult questions of Buddhist preaching: how to treat death and love, one’s own body, the poetic word, and what a person can rely on if he or she wants to try to follow the Buddha’s path in the “evil age”. In addition to the *Lotus Sutra*, which gave the book its title and one of its narrative forms, the sources of the *Hosshinshū* include the sutras about the Pure Land and Genshin’s *Ōjōyōshū*, as well as several other sutras and treatises that were common property of various schools in Japan. Chōmei includes both good and bad examples from the life of the Japanese Buddhist community in his book, with only occasional reference to India and China, and confines himself mainly to events recent and contemporary.

**Keywords:** Japanese Buddhism, Amidaism, Lotus Sutra, Kamo-no Chōmei, *Hosshinshū*, hermitry.

I thank Lyubov Borisovna Karelova for the rare gift of an edition of *Hosshinshū* which became the basis for this study.

Kamo-no Chōmei 鴨長明 (1153/1155–1216) is famous above all as a poet and a connoisseur of verse. For many centuries, from his *Untitled Notes*<sup>1</sup>, readers of Japanese poetry learned to understand the *waka* “native songs”. His *Account of the Ten Foot Square Hut*<sup>2</sup> paints a picture of the disasters of the “last age” and the joys of the lonely life of a hermit. Another of his books, *Hosshinshū* 発心集, is not so well known, and I would like to introduce it to readers.

It is believed that Chōmei worked on it in the last years of his life, in the mid-1210s. He must have collected the tales before; in several places, he admits that he “heard but forgot” the names and other details and could not ask the tale-tellers again (tales 5-2, 8-6,<sup>3</sup> etc.). However, we may consider that here we are facing a convention of genre: the book needs to be connected with the tradition of didactic tales 説話, *setsuwa*, transmitted by word of mouth. At the same time, the narrative in *Hosshinshū* is closer to book narrative: compared to, for example, the *Tales of Times Now Past*,<sup>4</sup> it is much more concise, without repetition and other features of oral tale-telling.

The collection contains 102 short tales, a preface and an afterword. If one divides the *setsuwa* tradition into “Buddhist” and “secular” branches, *Hosshinshū* is undoubtedly a Buddhist collection. Its main theme is set by a quotation from the *Sutra on Nirvana* in the first lines

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<sup>1</sup> 無名抄, *Mumyōshō*, for the Russian translation by M.V. Toropygina, see: [Kamo no Chōmei 2015].

<sup>2</sup> 方丈記, *Hōjōki*, for the Russian translation by N.I. Konrad, see: [Kamo no Chōmei 1988].

<sup>3</sup> Here and hereafter, in references to *setsuwa* collections, the first digit is the number of the section or scroll, while the second is the number of the story within it.

<sup>4</sup> 今昔物語集, *Konjaku monogatari shū*, early 12<sup>th</sup> century.

of the preface: “Become a teacher to your heart, but do not let your heart become your teacher.”<sup>5</sup> Then Chōmei writes that he will rely mainly on his own experience, both lived and literary: “Whenever I looked at the wise, I tried to make a connection with them, even though it was difficult to compare with them; when I looked at the foolish, I wanted to correct myself by their examples.” From these good and bad examples, he compiles a book: he retells in a new way cases from the lives of famous monks and laypeople of the past centuries and adds to them tales about his contemporaries.

The starting point of Chōmei’s reasoning is this: honoring the Buddha, his teachings, and community, following the accepted rites, and even becoming a monk and going through the stages of a monastic career do not mean entering the Buddha’s Path. One must “awaken with the heart” 発心, *hosshin*, to have the experience of going beyond the ordinary way of thinking. Such an experience may not contain anything miraculous (encounters with buddhas, etc.): one simply feels disgusted with the usual life in the world, decides to flee from it, but, at the same time, sympathizes with and helps fellow sufferers – other inhabitants of a world full of suffering.

The collection survives in several closely related manuscripts and old printed editions, such as [Kamo-no Chōmei 1651]. References to the *Hosshinshū* can be found already in monuments of the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, in the *Collection of Stone and Sand* in particular.<sup>6</sup> The collection was also known outside the *setsuwa* tradition, primarily as the work of a famous poet. Since Japan began to publish scholarly editions of the national classics in the modern sense, *Hosshinshū* has been published several times, together with other *setsuwa* collections [SHH 1913] or with other works by Chōmei [Shōchū... 1952; Kamo-no Chōmei 1956]. Yanase Kazuo translated *Hosshinshū* into modern Japanese [Kamo-no Chōmei 1975], and other translations, complete or selective, were published. A new collection of Chōmei’s works was prepared by Ōsone

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<sup>5</sup> 涅槃經, *Nehangyō*, TSD 12, № 374, 534a.

<sup>6</sup> 沙石集, *Shasekishū*, story VII–2.



Shōsuke and Kubota Jun [Kamo-no Chōmei 2000]. Miki Sumito then published the *Hōjōki* and *Hosshinshū* in a separate edition with two levels of commentary: detailed page-by-page notes and brief explanations between the lines with variant readings of difficult passages [Kamo-no Chōmei 2016]; I use this edition. A detailed overview of the “world” of the collection and commentary is given in [Yamamoto 2018].

*Hosshinshū* was introduced to Western readers by Marian Bloom Ury, who translated the first section of the collection into English [Ury 1972]. I am not aware of a complete English translation. Individual tales were published as part of research papers; there is also a French translation by Jacqueline Pigeot [Pigeot 2014]. In Russian, brief references to *Hosshinshū* are included in review studies [Sviridov 1981; Goregryad 1997] and in publications on other works by Chōmei, but no more than that.

Historians of Japanese Buddhism note an important shift that occurred at the turn of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries: the main role in the Buddhist community began to be played not by serving monks 官僧, *kansō*, as before, but by hermits 聖, *hijiri*, anchorites, and wanderers, “escapees from the world” 遁世, *tonsei* [Matsuo 1997; Matsuo 2010].<sup>7</sup> *Hosshinshū* elaborates on what the path of hermitage is, and the book is generally interesting as a reflection of the events of the early Kamakura era. If one looks for signs of a Buddhist “reformation” (somewhat similar to the later Christian reformation) in Japanese thought at that time, one will find many in *Hosshinshū*. Chōmei is not an innovator or a rebel, but, for him, faith is more important than the performance of rituals, and even more important is the determination to put faith into practice; a sacred text should not just be honored, but understood and followed, etc. However, in *Hosshinshū*, as well as in other collections of *setsuwa*, one can find arguments in favor of any of the points of view on the so-called “Kamakura question”: whether in the 12<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries all the

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<sup>7</sup> The word *hijiri* occurs 159 times in the text of *Hosshinshū* (total number of characters is just under 131,000), *tonsei* in the titles of six stories, and five more times as *yo-o nogaru*, “to flee from the world.”

former traditions of Japanese Buddhism came to a complete decline and whether it was radically renewed by the forces of new movements – “exceptional” Amidism, Zen, Hokke – or whether the old traditions remained viable, and new movements took the place of marginal ones, or whether the decline took place, but the old schools themselves, as well as rebels, tried to overcome it in various ways; see: [Trubnikova, Babkova 2014].

The task of building a complete picture of the worldview of the author of *Hosshinshū* is set by Thomas Hare, who comes to the conclusion that there is no “positive program” in the book, but only “a great variety of religious and quasi-religious experiences, some of them contradicting others” [Hare 1989, p. 211]. Still, the general theme in the collection is traceable: what the human consciousness and one’s thinking “heart” is focused on, and what consequences this has in terms of getting rid of illusions or sinking even deeper into them. It is as if there is no single Buddha’s Path here – in each case, the path depends on the disposition of a person’s “heart.” Those Japanese scholars who correlate the worldview of the narrator of *Hosshinshū* with influential traditions of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the doctrine of “native enlightenment” of the Tendai school [Tsujiimoto 2019] or the unity of “the Buddha’s Law and the sovereign law” [Tanaka 2006] would disagree with Hare.

In Rajyashree Pandey book [Pandey 1998], the tales from *Hosshinshū* are placed in the same lineage as the tales about poets from *Mumyōshō* and are explored in the context of the medieval book tradition. Of particular importance to Pandey is the image of a *sukimono*, a person far removed from ordinary human concerns, who despises social conventions but who can subtly sense the beauty in everyday life and respond to it with poetry or music without seeking fame or worldly success. The “disinterested responsiveness” to everything that a *sukimono* observes around them is thought not only as a condition for creativity, but also as the basis of asceticism, aimed at liberation – of the person themselves and their neighbors.

In recent years, more and more Japanese works have been published that use the *Hosshinshū* as a source to explore some concept in Japanese

thought or some phenomenon in the life of the Buddhist community, such as the study [Munechika 2020] of the “wise friends” 善知識, *zenchishiki*, or people who help each other to follow the Buddha’s path and face the hour of death with right thoughts. There are also published analyses of individual tales in the context of the tradition to which they refer; for example, an article [Tabata 2021] on tale 7-12 in relation to the Buddhist view of voluntary passing away.

I translate the title of the book as *A Collection of Tales About the Awakening of the Heart* (Сборник рассказов о пробуждении сердца).<sup>8</sup> The concept of 発心, *hosshin*, serves as shorthand for 発菩提心, *hotsu bodaishin*, Sanskrit *bodhichitta-utpada*, “awakening thoughts of enlightenment”: it is not yet *bodhi* enlightenment itself, but the first decisive step towards it. Short *hosshin* – “awakening of thoughts” (which were not there before) or “awakening of the heart,” the transition of the thinking heart from the slumber of ignorance to wakefulness, the readiness to begin to think for real. The concept of *hosshin* is frequently encountered in the Buddhist canon,<sup>9</sup> but it becomes especially important in the Lotus Sutra<sup>10</sup> [Digital Dictionary...]. In it, three main contexts for *hosshin* can be distinguished.

1. The Bodhisattva, the merciful ascetic, not only saves sentient beings from harm, but also in various ways “awakens in them

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<sup>8</sup> Other translations of the title are *Collection on Spiritual Insight* (Собрание о духовном прозрении) [Sviridov 1981, p. 34], *Collection of Stories About Spiritual Awakening* (Собрание рассказов о духовном пробуждении) [Goreglyad 1997, p. 269]. In English – *Tales of Awakening* (in Wiki), *A Collection to Rouse the Mind* [Hare 1989, p. 206], etc.; the most successful one seems to me to be the *Tales of Pious Resolution* in Robert Morrell’s book, which raised the “Kamakura question” anew in Western Japanology and initiated the study of old traditions of that time [Morrell 1987, p. 137].

<sup>9</sup> 18836 times in the electronic edition of the TSD.

<sup>10</sup> Also referred to as the *Sutra on the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma*, Chinese *Miaofa lianhua-jing*, Japanese *Myōhō rengekyō*, Sanskrit *Saddharma-pundarika-sutra*, 妙法蓮華經, TSD 9, no. 262.

thoughts of enlightenment”<sup>11</sup> (chapter *Calm and Joyful Acts*, TSD 9, no. 262, 38a). Here, we see *hosshin* in connection with the concept of *hōben*, “tricks,” “skillful ways;” one can understand this place to mean that it is the “power of the Other” that can or should awaken a person’s heart. Chōmei, however, writes in the preface to *Hosshinshū*: “The Buddha understands how diverse the hearts of living beings are, and guides and instructs us with tales and parables... If we cannot receive wisdom from the heart of another, we understand only the basics that have come to us, and no tricks can enlighten the foolish.” This point of view – that man cannot be awakened and liberated apart from his will, that whatever benefits the sutra promises, its help must be accepted by one’s own willful effort – is very characteristic of the *Hosshinshū*.

2. In order to say who the bodhisattvas are, it is necessary to find out: “Who preached the Dharma to them, || Taught them, converted them, and led them to perfection? || Who, following whom, first awakened in themselves || Thoughts of enlightenment? || What teachings of the Buddha do they praise? || What sutras do they keep? || What path of the Buddha do they follow?” (chapter *Emerging from the Underworld*, *ibid.*, 40c). In the sutra, these questions are not rhetorical: they are about ancient ascetics whom the Buddha’s listeners are seeing for the first time. The Buddha answers twice, in prose and in verse, in order: I preached to them, I taught and converted them, they followed me – etc. (41b, 42a). This list of questions can be thought of as a rough outline that Chōmei follows in his tales: discipleship, awakening of the heart, turning to the Lotus Sutra or other books, the choice of the Path and its outcome. In this way, the sutra sets the form for the description of new heroes – hermits whose destinies do not fit into the framework of a monastic biography, chronicle or school biography<sup>12</sup>, whose path is not easy to describe,

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<sup>11</sup> Hereinafter, the sutra is quoted in A.N. Ignatovich’s translation from the edition [Sutra..., 1998].

<sup>12</sup> On the biographies of monks in Japanese chronicles see: [Rodin 2014]; on school biographies [Kochetova 2010; Trubnikova, Gunskey 2019].

since these people themselves did everything to hide from the world [Hare 1989, p. 211].

3. In the sutra, the awakening of the heart means the beginning of an active life, of difficult asceticism, of self-sacrifice (chapter *The Former Acts of the Bodhisattva Named King of Healing*, 54a), a place that Chōmei cites in the tale 3-7 when he speaks of people who chose the most radical way of leaving the world, a suicide.

The Buddhist canon contains several texts with 発心 in the title, including *A Collection of Examples for Awakening the Enlightened Heart*.<sup>13</sup> It includes excerpts from sutras and treatises useful for those preparing to take the first step on the Buddha's Path. In Japan of the 12<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, this work was relied upon by monks of the old schools who believed that even in the “last century” asceticism according to the precepts of the Buddha was possible [Trubnikova, Babkova 2014, p. 55]. The title *Hosshinshū* can also be understood in the sense that it is a collection of tales not about *hosshin*, but **for** *hosshin*, a collection of examples that can awaken the reader's heart [Hare 1989, 207].

The concept of *bodaishin* at the turn of the Heian and Kamakura eras is found in the controversy surrounding “exceptional” Amidism. Hōnen 法然 (1133–1212) seemed to believe that people of the “last age” no longer had and could not have “thoughts of enlightenment,” and that therefore no instruction and no means of asceticism would work, only prayer<sup>14</sup> and hope in the “power of the Other” – Buddha Amida. Meanwhile, if it were impossible to awaken people's hearts, both prayer to Amida and hope for rebirth in the Pure Land would be meaningless. Myōe 明恵 (1173–1232) argued<sup>15</sup> that it was wrong to reject the heritage of the old schools, all their rituals and theoretical

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<sup>13</sup> 勸発菩提心集, Chinese *Quan fa putuxin-ji*, TSD 45, no. 1862, compiled by Hui Zhao 慧沼 (648–714).

<sup>14</sup> “To remember Amida Buddha” 念仏, *nembutsu*, that is, to recite the words 南無阿弥陀仏, *Namu Amida-butsu*, “Glory to Amida Buddha.” These words are called “prayer” later in the article.

<sup>15</sup> In the work *The Wheel of Refuting False Views* 摧邪輪, *Zaijarin*, 1212.

works. Later Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263) objected<sup>16</sup>: the Amidists do not deny “thoughts of enlightenment” at all, they just do not consider them “their own,” for the human heart is the heart of Amida Buddha, and, through *bodaishin*, the saving “power of the Other” works from within the imperfect human heart [Trubnikova, Babkova 2014, pp. 84, 137–138]. Chōmei encountered similar arguments, and echoes of them can be found in *Hosshinshū* [Morrell 1987, p. 137]; see tale 7-4.

Chōmei himself, judging from his *Account of the Ten Foot Square Hut*, is an adherent of the old schools, and, like many of his hermit contemporaries, he does not choose the one and only tradition, but takes from each what he considers appropriate for himself. Like Myōe, he is an Amidist, but by no means “exceptional.” He combines prayer and belief in the Pure Land with other rites and teachings, with the conviction that revival is not just a matter of revival (“the Pure Land is the long way off,” as Margarita Bushueva aptly put it in one of the discussions at the conference “History and Culture of Japan” in Moscow, in 2022): even in this world, in the “evil age,” one can do much for oneself and for one’s neighbors.

At the same time, for the compiler of the *Untitled Notes*, belonging to another tradition is important – if Chōmei was inclined to a certain path as “exclusive” for himself, it was the “path of native songs,” thought as a kind of Buddhist asceticism. There was already a work in Japanese diction with a title very similar to the *Hosshinshū*, *The Collected Songs on the Awakening of the Heart* (発心和歌集, *Hosshin Wakashū*, 1012), a cycle of *waka* songs on the Lotus Sutra and other sutras especially revered in Japan. The songs were composed by Princess Senshi 選子内親王 (964–1035), aka Grand Priestess of Kamo Shrine; they were rediscovered in the early Kamakura era – and some of them are included in the *New Collection of Old and New Songs*<sup>17</sup>; see: [Trubnikova 2021]. Chōmei came from Kamo’s priestly lineage, although he did not receive

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<sup>16</sup> In the treatise “Teaching, Asceticism, Faith, and Testimony” 教行信証, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, TSD 83, no. 2646, section “Faith,” part 1.

<sup>17</sup> 新古今集, *Shinkokinshū*, 1200s.

a priestly position himself; he was close to the circle of compilers of the *New Collection*, and, in the collection of tales, he discusses themes that were already heard in the songs of the Great Priestess. For example, the question of whether one has companions on the Buddha's Path, or whether it is essentially a path traveled alone.

In the afterword, Chōmei speaks of his “residual attachment from the past” 昔の余執, *mukashi-no yoshū*,<sup>18</sup> explaining why the book has accumulated quite a few tales about the *kami* gods, even though, at first, he intended to tell only about the affairs of men. These words, it seems to me, summarize *Hosshinshū* as a text that is Buddhist in its effect: not merely entertaining and instructive, but producing a kind of change in man. By collecting the tales, organizing and arranging them, Chōmei rethought his experience and selected his own path from the variety of paths, the path that suited him. The book promises the same to its readers, whose paths will probably be different, but just as *tanomoshi*, or giving hope.

The **composition** of the book, unlike many other *setsuwa* collections, varies relatively little from manuscript to manuscript. The 102 tales are organized into eight sections. The sections do not have thematic headings; often the first tale of the next section continues the idea from the final tale of the previous one. Nevertheless, the themes of the sections can be formulated.

1. What does it mean to be a hermit: to “flee from the world,” to cut ties with everything one was previously attached to, to hide under a beggar's cloak. However, sometimes hermits, for the sake of their neighbors, reveal their scholarship and deep understanding of the Law.

2. How do hermits live: not only meditating in solitude, but also talking with fellow hermits, tending to the needs of the community, composing poetry. Some people need nothing but prayer to be reborn

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<sup>18</sup> In *Untitled Notes*, Chōmei says: the fact that the “New Collection of Old and New Songs” included my poem “makes me so happy that it seems to be enough for the next life” (this joy will create a “residual attachment” for the future) [Kamo-no Chōmei 2015, 66], translated by M.V. Toropygina.

in the Pure Land, but a life of constant prayer is also active in its own way.

3. What is the purpose of hermits: they are concerned “for the future age,” for a better posthumous share. To be reborn in the Pure Land one needs neither great intelligence nor knowledge, the path is available to a warrior, a woman, a child – only the attitude of the heart is important. Sometimes people tried to voluntarily leave life while the attitude is right, but their attempts not always lead to success.

4. The hermits are helped by the deities, the guardians of the Buddha’s Law, but the demons also pursue them, leading them astray by various intrigues. Nearby people can also create obstacles to asceticism, but can, on the contrary, help them as well.

5. Worldly ties (with relatives, lovers, lords) cause suffering and thus lead to the realization of the insignificance of earthly happiness and to the awakening of the heart. It is difficult to break these ties, because they originate in previous lives.

6. When a person realizes the insignificance of their share, they are able to sacrifice it – to die for the sake of their loved ones, or to give up ordinary worldly goods for the sake of music or poetry (such are the “people of fine taste,” *sukimono*), or something else.

7. Encounters with wise guides, revelations of the gods, and books of the Law can awaken one’s heart and become one’s support in asceticism. None other than oneself, one’s own “body” 身, *shin/mi*, can and should be one of the main supports for everyone.

8. It is up to each individual to choose which of their inclinations and how exactly they will follow; success depends on determination, but failures are also possible on the chosen path.

Usually, *Chōmei* includes one tale with one main character. There is no uniformity here: there are detailed biographies, close to the genre of “legends about worthy monks” 高僧伝, *kōsōden* (tales 1-5, 1-6, 2-2, 2-3, 7-12, etc.), and there are brief episodes – meetings that changed people’s fates, each of which could well have been performed as a play on the stage of the *Noh* theater (3-12, 7-2, etc.). There are also exceptions: tales composed of several tales with different characters (1-10, 6-9, 7-4, etc.).



About a third of the tales (33) end with the hero's demise. Devotees die sitting upright, facing the west, palms joined; in prophetic dreams or by some signs (scarlet clouds, fragrance, sounds of music) people learn that the deceased has been reborn in the Pure Land. This brings *Hosshinshū* closer to collections of "revival lore" 往生伝, *ōjōden*. The book is partly similar to such collections – first, the tales about famous monks, then, about obscure ones, about nuns, then, about laymen, and, finally, about laywomen; or the tales of nuns and laywomen are placed at the end; see [Petrova 2022; Trubnikova, Gorenko 2021]. It is true that the first step in this series – tales about bodhisattvas and/or rulers – has no correspondences in the *Hosshinshū*. Chōmei follows the scheme of *ōjōden* not strictly and not throughout the whole book but starts anew in each section.

In several tales, in addition to the tales themselves, we find discourses similar to sermons in the genre of 仮名法語, *kana-hōgo*. Such are tales 3-7 and 3-8 (about suicide); 4-6 (about the uncleanness of the human body); 4-8 (about preparation for the death hour); 4-9 (about calamities for which one cannot prepare); 5-2 (about love as a hindrance and as a support); 5-4 (on "determination" 志, *kokorozashi*, readiness to carry out one's thoughts in practice); 5-6 (on not understanding the causes created in past lives and determining the present life); 5-13 (on the futility of all worldly desires and worries); 6-2 (on gratitude for mercy); 6-9 (on the usefulness of poetry for purifying the heart and on "fine taste"); 6-13 (on the various paths of asceticism and especially the Pure Land path); 7-3 (on the Buddha and the Lotus Sutra); 7-4 (again on the legacy of former lives and how the path that suits one person is not always suitable for another); 7-12 (on determination to follow the Law and one's attachment to one's own body); 8-1 (on demons and gods in the "last age"); 8-7 (again on "determination" – futile or fruitful). These passages allow us to consider *Hosshinshū* as an intermediate link between *setsuwa* collections of the Heian era, where the narrator's conclusions are absent or very brief (such are the *Ancient Tales*), and collections of the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, where there are discourses in the volume of a small treatise (as in the *Collection of Sand and Stones*).

A notable feature of *Hosshinshū* is that, along with the narrator's musings, there are several large monologues of the protagonists, and, in them, the characters do not so much retell some events as present their understanding of life. Chōmei gives the floor not only to hermits (as in tale 3-1), but also to women, noble and common (1-11, 6-2, 6-13, 8-9), an official ignorant of the Buddha's Law (2-10), a woodcutter (3-9), and others. One of the distinctive features of Kamakura Buddhism – the dramatic expansion of the circle of people whose views come within the purview of Buddhist verse – is expressed here particularly clearly.

It is natural to expect a book by a poetry connoisseur like Chōmei to contain poems. And they are to be found here, albeit in small numbers. The 15 Japanese five-line *waka* poems almost all belong to the tradition of “songs about the teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha” 釈教歌, *shakkyōka*, as do the songs of the Great Priestess from the *Hosshin wakashū*. In addition, there are two *kanshi* poems, both by Ōe-no Sadamoto 大江定基 (d. 1034), a poet who took up monasticism and died while wandering in China. There are references to other famous *waka* and *kanshi* in the text of the *Hosshinshū*. Perhaps it is these places that most clearly show to whom the book is addressed: to a person who has read and heard a lot, not necessarily a fine connoisseur, but who is ready to think again about what well-known lines mean, what their “essence” 心, *kokoro*, is.

**Sources.** As is usually the case with monuments of the *setsuwa* tradition, it is only possible to indicate the source of each of the tales only approximately: it is not clear whether the compiler referred to an earlier collection known today, or to another that contained the same or similar tale but has not been preserved. However, it is possible to indicate the sources of the quite numerous quotations from the texts of the Buddhist canon and some other monuments.

In the preface, Chōmei writes: “In this book I do not include tales that have come down from India and China, for they are distant from us. The tales of buddhas and bodhisattvas are inexhaustible, and I also leave them aside. I record only tales about the people of our country, especially recent ones.” Thus he intends to avoid tales in the genre of 靈驗記, *reigenki*, “notes on miracles”, although, in fact, the book does contain

such tales – about the miracles of the Lotus Sutra (4-1, etc.), the Buddha Amida (2-13), the Luminous Sovereign Fudō-myōō (6-1, 8-6), and others. Chōmei could not do without foreign lore either: the book contains two Indian tales (2-12, 7-12) and six Chinese tales (2-13, 6-4, 7-3, 7-4, 8-3, 8-5). At the same time, in the afterword, Chōmei bitterly admits that Buddhism no longer exists in India<sup>19</sup>: “Where in ancient times there was Gridhdakuta, the Holy Eagle Mountain, it is now a haven for tigers and wolves, where in the old days there was Jetavana, the abode of the Garden of Earth Gods, now there are only ruins. China and the three states of Korea – Silla, Goguryeo, and Baekjae – had once provided models for the Japanese community. But now, in the “evil age,” only in Japan – in the “marginal confines” of the Buddhist world 辺鄙, *hembī*<sup>20</sup>, – do the Buddhas and bodhisattvas still keep the Law, “for the sake of the ruler appear as supreme great gods, for the sake of the people become humble roadside deities,” and, under their protection, the Buddha’s teachings are alive. Therefore, we can and should discuss the examples of Japanese righteous and sinners.

Another peculiarity of *Hosshinshū* is that, here, not one time of action is given (“now is the olden time” 今昔, *ima wa mukashi*, as in *Olden Tales*), but three: “in olden times” 昔, *mukashi* (16 times), “in recent times” 中ごろ, *nakagoro* (25 times), and “in modern times” 近ごろ, *chikagoro* (13 times); the other tales do not begin by stating the time, but the name of the hero or the name of the place of action. By “recent times” is meant the interval from the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the time of sovereign Shirakawa and his successors;

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<sup>19</sup> Here Chōmei disagrees with Myōe, who hoped to visit the Buddha’s homeland and join the undistorted Law there, though he did not fulfill this intention.

<sup>20</sup> The designation of Japan as a “small country in the outskirts” 小国辺鄙, *shōkoku hembī*, also occurs in stories 5-12, where a monk compares the high rank available to him in the Buddhist community of such a country to the greatness of the gods in heaven. On *hembī* and related concepts see: [Meshcheryakov 2012].

everything before that is antiquity, everything later is modernity. If all the tales are categorized by time, based on the time, dates of characters' lives or events mentioned, the picture is as follows: "old times" – 28, "recent times" – 39, "modern times" – 27, time unknown – 8.

The sources are also categorized by time. For the "olden days" they are the most numerous: sutras, treatises, chronicles, and collections of tales.

Of the books of the Buddhist canon, the Lotus Sutra takes precedence. It is quoted eight times and mentioned even more often: it is read by the heroes of tales 1-12, 3-12, 5-2, 6-12, 7-4, 8-1; its characters act in tales 4-1 and 7-2. In tale 5-14, the origin of the ritual of "friendly octave readings" 同法八講, *Dōbō hakkō*, one of the ways of reading the Lotus Sutra, is mentioned, and tale 7-3 describes the memorization of the sutra "from the voice", *kuchimane* (the hero of the tale teaches his children, who cannot yet read, in this way). In at least three tales (7-2, 3-11, 5-2), what the sutra predicts to its "guardians" 持經者, *jikyōsha*, comes true in the characters' lives. Here, however, there is no deliberate effort to prove that one fulfills the words of the sutra with one's entire life; later, such an attitude would be followed by Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282).

Other sutras in *Hosshinshū* are the *Sutra on Nirvana*, usually studied in tandem with the *Lotus Sutra* (it is quoted by Chōmei in the preface and honored by the heroine of tale 7-4); the three sutras on the Pure Land<sup>21</sup> (their teachings are briefly summarized in tale 6-13); *The Sutra on Vimalakīrti*<sup>22</sup> (its title character appears in Japan in tale 1-6), *The Sutra on Human-Loving Sovereigns*<sup>23</sup> (quoted in tale 7-12), and *The Prajñā-Paramita Heart Sutra*<sup>24</sup> (discussed in tale 8-14). All of them

<sup>21</sup> *Sutra on Amitabha* 阿彌陀經, *Amidakyō*, TSD 12, no. 366; *Sutra on a Buddha Named Immeasurable Longevity* 無量壽經, *Muryō Jukyō*, TSD 12, no. 360; *Sutra on Contemplating the Buddha Named Immeasurable Longevity* 觀無量壽經, *Kan Muryōjukyō*, TSD 12, no. 365.

<sup>22</sup> 摩訶經, *Yuimagyō*, TSD 14, no. 474–475.

<sup>23</sup> 仁王經, *Ninnōkyō*, TSD 8, no. 245–246.

<sup>24</sup> 般若波羅蜜多心經, *Hannya-haramitta-shingyō*, TSD 8, no. 251.

constituted the common heritage of different traditions in Japan. There are references to other sutras as well, but, in their case, it is difficult to tell whether the passages discussed are taken directly from the sutras or from some selection of quotations. Also mentioned are the *Treatise-Vibhasha on the Ten Levels*<sup>25</sup> (6-13) and the *Mahayana Treatise on Cessation of Ignorance and Realization of the Essence*<sup>26</sup> (in tale 2-3, the hero tries to study it, but tears get in the way – so touching to the heart is the reading of this book, which seems to be addressed not to the senses at all, but to the reader's mind). “Spells” 真言, *shingon*, learned in the “mysteries” – one of the most influential of the old traditions – are mentioned in tales 1-7, 2-1, 6-9, 8-6, but, once again, not as being available only to dedicated experts, but as being widely used in the Buddhist community.<sup>27</sup>

The source to which Chōmei refers as often as to the Lotus Sutra (eight citations and several other references) is the *Collection of the Principal Information on Rebirth*, compiled in Japan in 985. In the *Hōjōki*, Chōmei mentions it as one of the few books he keeps in his cell. In *Hosshinshū* in tale 7-1, the *Collection of the Principal Information...* is mentioned as the most important book for all those who hope for rebirth, for in it “abhorrence of filthy lands and striving for the Pure Land are put in the first place.” The compiler of the book, the monk Genshin 源信 (942–1017), one of the founders of the Japanese Pure Land tradition, honored also in the new Amidist movements of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, acts as a character in the same tale. It is noteworthy that Chōmei names as Genshin's teacher, whose precepts are also reflected in the *Collection of the Principal Information...*, a hermit named Kūya 也 (903–972), who carried the message of Buddha Amida's saving vow to all people, from the noble to the most ordinary. “From the years of Tenjō [938–947]

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<sup>25</sup> 十住毗婆娑論, *Jūjū bibasharon*, attributed to Nagarjuna, TSD 26, no. 1521.

<sup>26</sup> 摩訶止觀, *Maka shikan*, Chinese *Mohe zhiguan*, by Zhi-yi 智顗 (538–597), TSD 46, no. 1911.

<sup>27</sup> Among the texts conventionally considered “secret,” the “Section on the Basic Essence” 理趣分, *Rishubu*, from the *Great Sutra of Prajñā-paramita* (TSD 7, no. 220, 986a sll.) is also mentioned in story 7-10.

in Japan, where few people prayed in remembrance of the Buddha, people, following the prompting of this hermit, everybody to the last one of them began to say the prayer. Kūya himself was always wandering about, invoking the name of Amida, and so people in that age nicknamed him “the Amida hermit.” At times, he lived in the marketplace and encouraged people to do all kinds of buddhahood, and for this he became known as the “bazaar hermit.” He also built bridges where there had been no bridges, dug wells in counties with little water where there had been no wells.” This view of the origins of Amidism distinguishes *Hosshinshū* from many *setsuwa* collections, including the *Ancient Tales*, where the ancient prince Shōtoku-taishi is credited as the first Japanese worshipper of Amida. The example of the “Amida hermit” shows that the all-embracing pursuit of the Pure Land does not at all require confining oneself to prayer.

The sources of the *Hosshinshū* in the *setsuwa* tradition should be discussed with great caution. It is known that not all collections of cautionary tales have survived, and none in a completely unchanged form, so the presence of common tales in different collections does not mean that the later one borrowed the tale from the earlier one. If a tale appears in our collection for the first time (or only in it), it does not mean that it was first recorded for it; it is quite likely that it had a written source that did not survive. Yet, to some extent, the number of such previously unknown tales speaks to the degree of originality of the collection. According to Mika Sumito’s commentary, there are 38 of them in *Hosshinshū* (the number is not final; it may decrease as we study the Buddhist literature of Japan). Almost all of these tales Chōmei refers to “our days,” although some of them are quite imaginable in any country at any time (for example, tale 3-9, where the woodcutter argues about the likeness of people to tree leaves).

Eleven tales the collection has in common with the *Collected Old Narratives*. Here we can add about a dozen more brief references to the tales that are included in the *Tales of Times Now Past*; Chōmei mentions them as widely known. It is true that this huge collection itself (over 1,000 tales) includes, in whole or almost in whole, several earlier corpora.

Of these, the best known are *Japanese Legends of Miracles*, *Japanese Notes on Rebirth in the Land of Supreme Joy*, and *Notes on the Power of the Lotus Sutra in the Great Land of Japan*. Whether Chōmei relied on these compilations themselves or on the *Ancient Tales* is debatable [Yanase 1958].

Among the collections of the “recent times,” of special importance for *Hosshinshū* are the *Continuation of Our Country’s Revival Traditions* (five shared tales), *Selected Revival Traditions* (seven shared tales), and *Continuation of Selected Traditions...* (two shared tales). These or similar texts are referred to by Chōmei when he concludes his tale with the words: the rest of the details can be “seen in the tradition” (five such references in all). Chōmei’s abbreviations are precisely what the *ōjōdan* emphasize: the signs of rebirth in the Pure Land. For the *Hosshinshū*, it is the life of the ascetic, not the miracles at his demise, that is more important.

Other collections include *The Collection of Jewels and Conversations on the Affairs of Antiquity* (14 and 13 shared tales, respectively), but they appeared almost simultaneously with *Hosshinshū* and here we can rather speak of common sources than of the influence of one collection on the other.

For both the *Hosshinshū* and the *setsuwa* collections in general, oral tradition is considered to be the basis: in one way or another, all tales go back to it, whether they are taken from earlier books or directly from the tale-tellers. In our case, the “oral transmission” 口伝, *kuden*, is especially significant, since Chōmei retells tales from recent times. As with other monuments, it is difficult to say for *Hosshinshū* what this tradition represented. The interlocutors from whom he heard this or that tale are almost never named, but sometimes he indicates that, at a certain temple (or in a certain area), it is still easy to find eyewitnesses of the event under discussion or people who knew the hero personally (7-13, etc.).

Kamo-no Chōmei’s *Collection of Tales about the Awakening of the Heart* can serve as a source for a wide variety of studies: on the history of Buddhist thought, Buddhist preaching, the mores and life of the

Buddhist community, and others. In the tradition of *setsuwa* collections, the book by Chōmei is something between comprehensive collections of tales about everything in the world (*Tales of Times Now Past*) and thematic collections of legends about rebirth in the Pure Land, the miracles of the Lotus Sutra, and the like. At the same time, *Hosshinshū* also provides something new in comparison with them. Only what the fugitive hermits leave themselves from the large and variegated world is left here, and their choice is not so easy to describe as in the case of ascetics who have chosen one path once and for all. The life of a hermit turns out to be very diverse in its own way, success on this path is not guaranteed, and the greatest attention is focused precisely on what kind of tasks one sets oneself, how one deals with other people, with buddhas and gods, and how one deals with the fruits of one's decisions.

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**Organization of the Defense  
of the Ezo Republic by French Officer Jules Brunet  
During the *Boshin* Civil War  
(1868–1869)**

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***Abstract***

During the Bakumatsu period (1853–1867), under pressure from Western countries, the Tokugawa shogunate was forced to end Japan's policy of self-isolation and conclude unequal treaties with a number of Western powers. This caused deep discontent in the country, affecting various segments of the population. In the context of the political crisis, the shogunate launched a series of reforms aimed at strengthening its power, including military power.

Great Britain secretly supported the opposition forces in the south of the country, and France made a bet on the shogunate, expressing its readiness to support its reforms. As a result, in January 1867, a French military mission consisting of 15 people arrived in the Japanese port of Yokohama, commanded by Captain Charles Chanoine, who had previously led French troops in China during the Second Opium War (1856–1860). The purpose of the mission was to modernize the obsolete military system of the Tokugawa shogunate.

However, the recommendations of the French military advisers were not fully realized, because, after the outbreak of the civil war in January 1868 and the defeat of the supporters of the shogun, Emperor Meiji ordered the mission to leave Japan in October. A number of members of the mission, who did not obey this order, led by Jules Brunet, along with supporters of the shogunate, took part in the creation of the Republic of Ezo (1868–1869) on the island of Hokkaido.

**Keywords:** Jules Brunet, “the last samurai”, Boshin War, Ezo Republic, French military mission, Bakumatsu.

During the Bakumatsu period (1853–1867), under pressure from Western countries, the Tokugawa shogunate was forced to end Japan’s policy of self-isolation and conclude unequal treaties with a number of Western powers. This caused deep discontent in the country, affecting various segments of the population. The anti-shogun opposition started to form, uniting around the Imperial court and supporting the restoration of the emperor’s power and the abolishment of the shogunate. The Western powers maneuvered, trying to strengthen their influence upon Japan: Great Britain secretly supported the opposition forces – the Satsuma and Chōshū domains in the south of the country, while France made a bet on the shogunate, expressing its readiness to support its reforms [Ootsuka 1952, p. 352].

As a result, in January 1867, a French military mission consisting of 15 people arrived in the Japanese port of Yokohama, commanded by Captain Charles Chanoine, who had previously led French troops in China during the Second Opium War (1856–1860) [Chanoine 1907, p. 5–6]. After several months of becoming familiarized with Japanese troops in the military training facility near the village of Otamura (not far from the contemporary Harbor View Park), where the members of the mission lived alongside Japanese servicemen, the French developed a concept of reforming the military system of the shogunate. The recommendations and suggestions were presented to Shogun Yoshinobu in spring of 1867 and to the nation’s military minister Matsudaira Norikata in June same year in the form of the so-called *White Book* by Charles Chanoine, compiled with participation of Jules Brunet [Takahashi 1968, p. 156].

The shogunate did not manage to fully realize its plans in accordance with the recommendations of the French military advisers: in January 1868, a civil war began, where the supporters of the shogunate were defeated, and Emperor Meiji ordered the mission to leave Japan in October. Therefore, the French officers spent around a year and a half

in the country, of which they spent around a year solving the tasks they were faced with [Polak 2001, p. 81].

Despite the short stay of the military mission in Japan, it did leave a trace. For example, the French officers managed to create the elite “Training Battalion” (*Denshūtai*) numbering 800 men, with the student of Brunet, Ootori Keisuke, assigned its commander. They managed to develop a plan to establish the Ministry of Defense of Japan, as well as to lay the groundwork of a contemporary system of physical training of Japanese troops and, more broadly, of physical education in general [Okubo 2009, p. 4].

Captain Chanoine reported to the French military minister about the departure of all members of the mission in two groups on October 15 and 28, 1868. However, in reality, the second group of eight officers, led by Jules Brunet, stayed in Japan. On October 4, they left their place of residence in Yokohama under the pretext of visiting an arsenal in Yokosuka, but went to Shinagawa instead, where the fleet under the command of Admiral Enomoto Takeaki, who intended to continue fighting the emperor’s regime, was stationed [Sawa 1987, p. 265].

So as not to be considered a deserter, on the same day, Brunet submitted a resignation request to Captain Chanoine. He sent another letter to Emperor Napoleon III, in which he explained the reasons for his decision to join the resistance: the samurai left in the north invited him to become a commander of their troops, and their potential victory in the war would meet France’s national interests, allowing it to gain a foothold in the region.<sup>1</sup>

In early December, the fleet of Enomoto reached the island of Hokkaido, then known as Ezo. On their way to the north, the resistance army was joined by Ootori Keisuke, whose battalion (*Denshūtai*) became the strike force during the capture of the port of Hakodate. After capturing the entire island by the end of the year, Enomoto made the last attempt to

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of Jules Brunet to Emperor Napoleon III, October 4, 1868: [https://web.archive.org/web/20181106160122/http://www.geocities.jp/r12\\_44104\\_b/letter/brunet.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20181106160122/http://www.geocities.jp/r12_44104_b/letter/brunet.htm)

submit a petition to the emperor to allow him to develop Hokkaido and support the traditions of the samurai there, but his request was rejected [Black 1881, pp. 240–241].

After that, Hakodate was turned into the capital and the key defensive point of the first democratic republic in Asia, established on January 27, 1869, and named after its location – the Ezo Republic [Hoshi 2011, pp. 145–146].

The structure of the state was modelled after that of the United States, but only the samurai were granted the right to vote. As a result of the first election to take place in the territory of Japan, Enomoto Takeaki became president. The position of the defense minister was given to Ootori Keisuke, Hijikata Toshizo, former deputy commander of Shinsengumi, became his vice minister, and Jules Brunet was appointed military expert and minister of foreign affairs [Ootori 1998, p. 71].

In reality, the powers of the French officer were much broader than the official ones. He not only led negotiations with foreign powers aimed at the international recognition of the newly established state but was also building a multi-layered system of defense of the city centered around the five-cornered fortress Goryokaku, built several years before these events to defend the Tsugaru Strait from Russians. The work to fortify Goryokaku under the guidance of Brunet was not limited to digging moats around the fortress. Great effort was paid to place artillery batteries, build numerous ramparts outside the fortress and protect all approaches to it. As Ootori Keisuke noted, the work had completely been finished by early April 1869 [Ibid., pp. 78–80].

On March 28, 1869, Brunet composed a letter to his former commander, Captain Chanoine, in which he gave a detailed account of the current state of affairs in the republic and its defensive capabilities. Brunet reported that the republican government, headed by Enomoto, did everything possible to settle the conflict peacefully, but the emperor ignored all requests for direct negotiations, setting forth unrealistic preconditions of complete capitulation of the republic and giving up all weapons within one month, or, otherwise, a military operation would be unavoidable. Such conditions were defined by Iwakura Tomomi,



but Brunet believed that they had been suggested by the British ambassador, Harry Parkes, whose main goal was to weaken French positions in Japan.<sup>2</sup>

Brunet wrote about plans to create defensive positions on six fortifications held by the Ezo Republic. Even if the emperor's government decides to send its army to attack, then, according to the French officer's opinion, more than 6,000 soldiers would be required, but, in Aomori, no such number of government troops was observed. Ezo had 3,000 soldiers to defend the republic, while its territory was 90 by 50 *ri* (ca. 360 by 200 km).

Brunet notes that the supporters of the republic serve in the administration of Hakodate and maintain law and order in the city. Out of these 3,000 soldiers, about a half had been trained by the French military mission, but another part was recruited from among the volunteers of the former shogunate army, and they were studying western battle tactics under the guidance of former students of the French military officers. Most of all, Brunet insisted on the necessity to maintain strict military discipline.

The training was done using the translations of French military manuals, as well as French regulations and codices of military organization, military court, and the military ministry. That is, the training copied the program aimed at the shogunate forces and conducted by the French mission before the beginning of the civil war. Besides, each of the eight 400-strong battalions was given excerpts of the most important points from the military instructions and proposals introduced by the mission's officers.

Under the guidance of Brunet, four French officers served, each of them commanding a brigade of 800 men: Cazeneuve, Marlin, Fortant, and Bouffier. The latter also commanded the other eight French officers who had decided to join the republic. In order to duly improve the

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<sup>2</sup> Letter of Jules Brunet to Captain Charles Chanoine, March 28, 1869: [https://web.archive.org/web/20181106160122/http://www.geocities.jp/r12\\_44104\\_b/letter/brunet.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20181106160122/http://www.geocities.jp/r12_44104_b/letter/brunet.htm)

military command and the quality of performing tasks by the entire army, operational headquarters were established in the middle of the Goryokaku fortress, where stands were erected to display the training manuals and the defensive plans.

In the same letter, Brunet writes about his order to deploy the 3,000-strong army if the emperor's forces are dispatched to one or several places simultaneously. He lists more than 20 place names with clear instructions stating which battalion and under whose command is to move out in the case of a military threat. Meanwhile, Brunet believes it necessary to leave no more than 200 soldiers in the very center of the republic, the Goryokaku fortress, as, according to his words, it looks very reliable, partly due to the conducted renovation. At the very end, Brunet reiterates his firm intention to defend Ezo, as this territory is not merely a temporary defensive base, but the foundation for a future northern republic.

One of the French military officers described Brunet's actions as follows: "... the border, the political leadership, the fortifications, the army – nothing happens without his consent. The Japanese are puppets whom he manipulates with great skill... He conducted something of the 1789 revolution in this valiant new Japan; by choosing the leaders and the officials of the republic by their merit, and not by their family background – these are unthinkable things for such country!" [Sims 1998, p. 122].

Meanwhile, the emperor's troops were strengthening their positions in the Japanese "mainland," and in April 1869, naval and ground forces were sent to Hokkaido. The battle of Hakodate, taking place in June, became the last battle for the supporters of the shogunate. The republican forces were defeated by the 7,000-strong government army. The Goryokaku fortress was surrounded, and Enomoto signed the instrument of surrender on June 26, 1869 [Héon 2010, pp. 88–89].

Brunet and other officers managed to evacuate from Hokkaido in early June on a small ship and headed to the French embassy in Yokohama, from which they were extradited to France in September the same year. The new Japanese government demanded a severe punishment for

Brunet for his participation in the Boshin War, but his actions became widely known and supported by the French. Due to this, according to the decision of a military court, Brunet was only suspended from military service for five months, joined the army again in February 1870, and participated in the Franco-Prussian War the same year [Polak 2001, p. 88].

Brunet's friendly relations with the mission's captain, Charles Chanoine, with whom he was corresponding for half a year since his resignation and to whom he reported about the state of affairs in the Ezo Republic, only strengthened after Brunet's return to France. A few months later, Charles was the best man at Brunet's wedding, and, in 1898, when, during the Dreyfus affair, Chanoine was appointed French military minister, he picked his former subordinate officer as his deputy and head of the General Staff, which became the peak of their joint military career [Héon 2010, pp. 104–105].

Several years after the events in Hokkaido, his former ally, Admiral Enomoto, became the Japanese Imperial Navy minister and, later, the foreign minister. Using his influence in the government, he attained not only amnesty for Brunet in Japan, but even two awards for him – the orders of the Rising Sun and the Sacred Treasure [Shinohara 1983, p. 281].

After the end of the Boshin War, the new Japanese government continued to reform the military in accordance with the plans proposed by the French specialists, due to which, in 1872, it asked France to dispatch a second military mission to Japan, which worked in the country in 1872–1880.

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