

The Palace Murder of Soga no Iruka and the Taika Reform ¹⁾

Reinier H. Hesselink

“To explore what is complex,
search out what is hidden,
to hook up what lies deep,
and reach to what is distant...” ²⁾

1. Earth: Before Sunrise

It was still dark when Soga no Iruka 蘇我入鹿 rose on the 12th day of the 6th month, in the 4th year of the reign of the Empress Toyotakara 豊財天皇.³⁾ Today was the day of the Monkey, the minister knew, or rather: *tsuchi-no-e saru no hi* 戊申の日, the 45th day in the 60-day cycle of the Chinese calendar which had recently come to be known in Japan.⁴⁾ This day was said to be governed by the element Earth (*tsuchi* 土) under its yang aspect (*e* 兄).⁵⁾ When this sign (Chin. *Wu* 戊) is combined with the zodiac sign for the Monkey (Chin. *Shen* 申),⁶⁾ which, in its turn, is associated with the element Metal 金, it forms a combination known as “Earth of the Great Crossroads” 大馭土.⁷⁾ Because Earth 土 engenders Metal 金, the day is conventionally considered to be a lucky day to visit one’s parents and friends, or for setting out on a journey.⁸⁾

The journey the minister was preparing for on this day was not going to take him very far. All he needed to do was to arrive before sunrise in front of the south gate of the Itabuki Palace 板蓋宮, about half an hour’s walk from his hillside mansion. Amakashi Hill 甘藷岡 had not been settled before Iruka had built, just seven months earlier, two mansions on its northern slope for his father and himself. The hill may have been dedicated to the Snake God Miwa 三輪大神 in ancient times,⁹⁾ and it is known to have been used for divine judgments requiring the accused to submerge his arm in a cauldron with boiling water or poisonous snakes, which were said to only spare the innocent.¹⁰⁾

During the day, one had, from the top of the hill, a magnificent view of the surrounding plains in all four directions. To the west, one could see Toyura 豊浦, as far as Tsurugi no ike 劍池 or Sword Lake, and to the north one had a view of Mukōhara 向原 and the Owarida palace 小墾田宮.¹¹⁾ These were areas long owned by the Soga family.¹²⁾ To the east, the hill overlooked the bend in the Asuka river 飛鳥川, and beyond one had a fine view inside the Asuka temple compound 飛鳥寺. Every movement inside the temple could be observed from Amakashi Hill. To the southeast, it looked over the whole Asuka plain as far as the great Itabuki Palace, completed two years earlier. The recent Soga occupation of Amakashi Hill, then, had elements in it of the bold, the blasphemous, and the brute.

The minister dressed in court dress. In his hair he wore a golden ornament. On top of his head, he placed the purple cap, or *toku no kabane* 徳姓 (Cap of Virtue), which he had been given by his father, the Ō-omi 大臣 or Great Minister, to signify he could represent him at court.¹³⁾ This action had caused much talk about how the elder Soga, by conferring on his son the highest court rank reserved for princes and chief ministers, was arrogating to himself rights that properly only belonged to the Ōkimi 大君. Matching his cap, the minister's clothing was all of purple brocade, embroidered with gold.¹⁴⁾ One of our sources for this day, the Fujiwara family history or *Kaden* 家伝, has: "A messenger was sent to call Iruka in a hurry. When Iruka got up, he wanted to put on his shoes. Three times the shoes turned around by themselves and he could not put them on. Iruka feared this in his heart, and walked around aimlessly, intending to stay home. But the messenger called him frequently."¹⁵⁾ Next, the minister hung his sword on his side, for he was not taking any chances. It was double-edged, long and straight, encased in an elaborately worked leather sheath, which may have been made by some master craftsman of the *kuratsukuribe* 鞍作部, or saddlers' corporation. It is said that the minister himself had been nursed in his infancy by a wet nurse from this clan of Chinese immigrants, hence his nickname Kuratsukuri.¹⁶⁾

The minister certainly did not go alone to the palace through the dark. His mansion on Amakashi Hill was surrounded by a wooden palisade, as was that of his father a little further up the hill. Near the gate stood an armory and a water tank with several tens of wooden hooks hanging on its wall, easily grabbed in case of fire. Strong men from the east, called the Shitobe 僮従者¹⁷⁾ guarded the gates and palisades, day and night, with weapons in their hands.¹⁸⁾ Accompanied, then, by his usual body guards, the minister went through the gate, down the hill, and turned right towards the Asuka river. Over the bridge, he turned right to follow the road leading past the great *tsuki* 槻 tree which stood just outside the Western Gate of the Great Hōkōji 大法興寺 temple compound.¹⁹⁾

The tree had been sacred since time immemorial.²⁰⁾ Construction of the temple next to it had started in 588, in fulfillment of a vow made by Iruka's grandfather, Soga no Umako 馬子, on the eve of his final confrontation with the Mononobe 物部 clan in the previous year.²¹⁾ The conservative Mononobe clan had been responsible for the burning of two other Buddhist temples previously constructed by the Soga family.²²⁾ The confrontation of 587 had been decisive, however, for Umako had managed to obtain the support of most of the other clans which made up the nobility of the Yamato Court. The location which Umako chose for his new temple shows how complete his victory over the Mononobe had been. Not only was it bound to provide a Buddhist counterweight to the pagan worship on Amakashi Hill, with only the narrow Asuka River separating the two rival religious systems, but soon after construction had started it must have become clear that the new temple, by its sheer size, would also dwarf the sacred *tsuki* tree.²³⁾

The building of the Asukadera, as the temple came to be known, had taken eight years. This was Japan's first grand Buddhist structure, established on grounds 44,000 meters square and containing an enclosed compound of almost 10,000 m square.²⁴⁾ The five-storied pagoda in its center was, at the time of its construction, the highest building in the country. Flanked by two main halls, each on double platforms, it

represented the trend of the times. No longer was power to be symbolized in Japan by throwing up a pile of dirt on top of a burial chamber made out of rock or brick. When the construction of pagoda's started, the *kofun* 古墳 (or "old graves" as they are known today) became outdated: during the seventh century, Buddhist architecture would replace these dolmens as objects of conspicuous consumption for the ruling class.

The Asukadera thus started out as a symbol of the Soga clan's newly won supremacy over the other clans, and, with time, it eventually became the center of a temple system that by 624 already included 46 temples in and around the Nara basin.²⁵⁾ Making manifest superior knowledge of building and metallurgical techniques, the temple represented a new concept of state power. Its sweeping tiled²⁶⁾ roofs with their long overhanging eaves were carried by intricate rafter work. Its enormous bronze statue of the Buddha, standing sixteen feet tall, dwarfed all visitors, and its majestic bronze bell resounded at sunrise and sunset far beyond the visual reach of the temple. Its priests brought over from the mainland not only the Buddhist scriptures in Chinese translations, but also all other branches of Chinese learning. In 645, the Soga family, specializing in administration and tax collection, had been the sponsors of Buddhism for over a century,²⁷⁾ and this family temple was the center from which the brilliance of Asuka culture emanated throughout Japan.

Reaching a T-crossing, the minister turned left, passed in front of the temple's main entrance gate and turned right again into the road along the eastside of the Itabuki palace. That morning many other people were moving towards the palace as well. Possibly, Soga no Ishikawamaro 石川麻呂 had been waiting for the minister, his cousin, in front of the main entrance of the Asukadera, so that both Sogas might make their way to the palace together, showing a might of men unequalled by any of the other clans of the realm. Ishikawamaro's name ("Strong Man from Ishikawa") indicated that the minister's cousin had been brought up in the heartland of the Soga family, Ishikawa in Kawachi, on the other side of the mountain range separating the Nara valley from the plain bordering on the Inland Sea. According to the *Sonpi bunmyaku* 尊卑分脈, a court genealogy compiled in the fourteenth century, he was the son of an older brother of Iruka's father.²⁸⁾ Ishikawamaro was nicknamed Kurayamada 蔵山田, for he was in charge of the storage facilities (*kura*) at Yamada, not far northwest of the Asukadera.

When the Soga men arrived before the great southern gate of the Itabuki palace, two rows of officials had already formed there. Seeing the Soga procession approach, everyone must have made way for them to take their places at the head of the two lines. Iruka is likely to have occupied the first place on the eastern side of the gate, and Kurayamada that on the western side.²⁹⁾ By now the eastern sky had lit up, and it would not be long before the first rays of the sun would have shined on the Itabuki palace. But it seems that the day of the Monkey was cloudy, and it is doubtful whether the exact moment that the sun rose on the eastern horizon could have been observed at all.

2. Metal: Signs and Portents

Our main source for these events, the *Nihongi* 『日本紀』 (720), reports an unusual number of signs and portents during the reign of the Empress Toyotakara. It started

immediately in her first year (642) with erratic rain patterns. On the third day of the third month, rain fell from a cloudless sky. The rest of the month and most of the fourth month it rained continuously so that many of the young seedlings drowned.³⁰⁾ Then, the rain stopped and a drought set in, lasting all through the fifth month. On the twenty-third day of that month, the first ripe rice was already seen. Except for a few drops on the sixteenth day, no rain fell during the sixth month at all.³¹⁾ On the twenty-fifth day, the Great Minister, Iruka's father Emishi, proposed a chanting of extracts of the Mahayana sutra with a general profession of repentance for all sins committed, so that the whole court might humbly ask the Buddha for rain.³²⁾

Two days later such a ceremony was organized at the Kudaradera 百濟寺, a temple complex further north which had been built by order of Emperor Jomei 舒明天皇 in 639. Its pagoda had nine stories and so out-storied all other pagodas built before.³³⁾ The Great Minister Emishi himself officiated, praying and burning incense. Although a slight rain fell on the next day, the twenty-eighth, the prayers were considered to have been ineffective, and the sutra reading was discontinued on the twenty-ninth. Nothing is reported for the seventh month, but on the first day of the eighth month the empress herself went on a pilgrimage to the source of the Minabuchi river 南淵河, where she is said to have prayed towards the four directions and worshipped Heaven in the Chinese style. Immediately great thunder claps are reported to have fallen and a downpour started which lasted for five days. At court, this was seen as proof of the empress' virtue. By implication, also, the Great Minister had lost the divine duel for rain.³⁴⁾ Soon enough, though, there were other signs of Heaven's displeasure. Earthquakes shook the country three times during the tenth month. Thunder claps from the northwest, north, and east were reported eighteen times between the tenth and the twelfth months.³⁵⁾

The strangest portents during the empress' reign, however, have to do with the Monkey, whose element, as we have seen, is metal. The first one of these is recorded immediately after the *Nihongi* states in an entry for the twelfth day of the tenth month, that Iruka *hitori hakarite* 獨謀, plotting all by himself, wanted to do away with the Kamutsumiya princes 上宮王等 and make Prince Furuhiito 古人大兄 emperor.³⁶⁾ Furuhiito was the minister's nephew, son of his sister, who had been a concubine of the late Emperor Jomei. It is unlikely, of course, that Iruka plotted the deaths of the descendants of the great statesman Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 (a son of Emperor Yōmei 用明天皇) "all by himself," and other sources report the participation of other branches of the imperial family in the plot.³⁷⁾ But before telling the story of the deaths of the Kamutsumiya princes and their immediate dependants, the *Nihongi* includes a children's song about a naughty monkey having cooked stolen rice "by a cliff."³⁸⁾ Then, after describing how Iruka drove the imperial princes and their consorts to suicide, it is explained that the "naughty monkey" in the song stands for the minister, "the cliff" for Kamutsumiya (High Shrine), and "cooking the rice" for burning the Ikaruga Palace 斑鳩宮, where the princes had been living.³⁹⁾

The closer we get to the events of the day of the Monkey, the more frequent the omens become in the text of the *Nihongi*. On the third day of the sixth month of the following year (644), a day of the Snake, a message was brought in from the Upper Shiki district 志紀上郡: "a man on Mt. Miwa had spotted a monkey taking its midday

nap.” The man had crept up to it and caught it by the arm, but the monkey had not wanted to escape. Keeping its eyes closed, it had sung a song about a friend taking it by the hand. Again the strange story is connected, (but not in a very convincing manner), by the editors of the *Nihongi* with the death of the Kamutsumiya princes.⁴⁰ Addressing the problem of the identity of the man on Mt. Miwa, we remark that he was someone deemed worthy of inclusion in the National History. The most likely solution is, of course, that he was an incarnation of the god of Mt. Miwa himself. This god is called Ōmononushi 大物主, and is well known to have been able to perform transformations between a snake and a human form, and his element, again, is metal.⁴¹ The hidden point of this story, then, seems this ominous connection between a Snake and a Monkey, both associated with the element metal.⁴² Iruka and Miwa? An unnatural alliance! Soga mansions on Amakashi Hill? Freaks portending danger!

Then, three days later, on the sixth day of the same month, it was also the day of the Monkey, exactly one year before the day we are considering here. On that day, a lotus was found in the Tsurugi pond of the Soga family on the other side of Amakashi Hill. It had two flowers on one stem. “Without sufficient reason,” the Great Minister Soga no Emishi is said to have rejoiced in the find, which he interpreted as predicting the future prosperity of the Soga clan. Was his family not, at this very moment, headed by himself and his son Iruka, two flowers on one stem, the first family in all the land? Sick though he may have been, the minister drew a picture of the flower with golden ink and presented it to the sixteen-feet high Buddha in the Asukadera, for safekeeping.⁴³ More is related about this month, exactly one year before the Day of the Monkey. How the witches and wizards of the whole country waited until the Ō-omi crossed a bridge. And, while he was thus suspended between one world and another, they had hastened to approach him with decorated branches of leaves in their hands, communicating their divine trance. As there were so many of them, what subtle prophecies they exactly told him could not be heard. But the old people were convinced that “great changes” lay ahead.⁴⁴

The next month, in the East near Mt. Fuji, a man had stood up who urged his fellow-villagers to worship an insect, saying: “This is the God of the World Yonder. Whoever worships him, will have riches and long life!” The witches and wizards agreed with him, and prophesized in a trance: “Whoever believes in the God of the World Yonder, will, if poor, become rich, and, if old, become young again.” And they urged the people to put their belongings along the roadside, so that they might become poor. Then they made them cry out: “The new riches have come!” The belief spread like wildfire, and even people near the Itabuki Palace took the insect of the World Yonder and placed it on their altars. They threw away their treasures, sang and danced together in order to attract the good fortune promised them. The loss and waste were so extreme that only the execution of the Azuma prophet, who had started it all, put an end to it.⁴⁵ The whole country, then, seemed to be restless. Did the people feel that the rivalries among the noble families of the Kinai were coming to a head? The news that the Kamutsumiya princes had been driven to suicide certainly must account for much of the unrest. But threatening news from overseas may also have had its impact. The reunified Tang empire was ready to invade Korea again. Both Koguryō and Paekche had recently experienced violent overthrows of their ruling dynasties.⁴⁶ All

three states on the peninsula felt jittery about the awesome Chinese military might which seemed determined to continue the conquests the Sui dynasty (589–618) had left unfinished. And clearly the awareness had spread in Japan that the country did not have much time left to organize its defenses.

With the beginning of the 4th year of the empress' reign, Heaven sent its clearest warning: "On mountain peaks, by river-sides, or among shrines and temples, there was something visible afar, and there was heard *a humming of monkeys*, as it were ten or sometimes twenty together. But when one approached to see what it might be, nothing was visible. There was still heard the sound of crying and screaming, but no one was able to distinguish any bodily form. ... The men of that day said: "These are the messengers of the Great Deity of Ise."⁴⁷⁾

3. Water: Students Abroad

If this was the atmosphere of the time, it should not surprise us that the upper class was, just like the common people, also busy guessing the future. Happily, they did not need to rely on such doubtful methods as divine trance and the prophecies of witches, for they had access to more scientific ways to reach into the Unknown. In 602, during the reign of Empress Suiko 推古天皇, a Korean monk from Paekche had come to Japan and had presented the court, by way of tribute, with books on calendar-making, astrology, geomancy, and the arts of invisibility and magic. At the time three pupils were chosen to study these arts with the Korean.⁴⁸⁾

Six years later, in 608, we hear of a group of eight students, all from families of Chinese descent and four of them aspiring to be Buddhist priests, sent by the Court to what was then still Sui 隋 China.⁴⁹⁾ Three of them may have died in China or along the way,⁵⁰⁾ but five came back to Japan after long years of study. They seem to have done their best to cover all the main branches of contemporary Chinese learning among themselves, for we find they all specialized in something different. One concentrated on the microcosm of the human body, whereas another studied the macrocosm of the universe. The third studied Tang law and government, whereas the fourth specialized in the Chinese Classics, and the fifth took responsibility for studying the sutras. There must have been several others as well, but we have no record of their departure from Japan.⁵¹⁾

The first of the eight to return to Japan after fourteen years abroad, was the leader of the group of 608, the physician Fukuin, a member of the Yamato no Aya no Atae 倭漢直福因, the clan charged with the supervision over all Chinese immigrants in Japan.⁵²⁾ He reported that his companions had all finished their courses, and ought to be sent for.⁵³⁾ Fukuin had returned to Japan in the company of an ambassador from Silla, and so must have found a ship to take him from China to Korea. He probably left the Sui capital at Luoyang 洛陽 in 620, well before the city was besieged by the Tang army from the second month of 621. After the battle of Si Sui 汜水, Luoyang fell to the Tang in the fifth month of 621, and Fukuin may have been worried about the fate of his fellow students. The last Sui emperor, Yang Di 煬帝, however, had already abandoned his capital in 616 and the city was treated leniently by its conqueror, Li Shimin 李世民.⁵⁴⁾ The civil war in China, meanwhile, moved further east, making the return to Japan of the other students impossible. It is likely that they decided to move to the new

Tang capital at Chang An, sometime after the road between the two cities was reopened. Over the next two centuries, the Japanese were to try and imitate this city in a series of Japanese palace-capitals built on an increasingly larger scale. The Japanese students who first set foot in Chang An in the 620's, therefore, were an avant-garde in more ways than one.

Among them was Kuromaro, Takamuko no Ayahito 高向漢人玄理, a descendant from a Chinese immigrant family which had settled in the village of Takamuko in Kawachi 河内. He studied Tang law and government and did not return to Japan until 640, having been abroad for thirty-two years.⁵⁵⁾ The other three were all priests. There was Shōan, Minabuchi no Ayahito 南淵漢人請安, like the others a member from a Chinese immigrant family which had settled in the village of Minabuchi in the Takechi district 武市郡 of Yamato. Shōan's specialty was the Chinese Classics: the writings of the Duke of Zhou and Confucius.⁵⁶⁾ He returned to Japan together with Kuromaro in 640. Then there was Eon, Shiga no Ayahito 志賀漢人慧隱, a descendant from Chinese immigrants settled in Ōmi 近江, northeast of Yamato, who seems to have concentrated in China on study of the sutras. He also came back to Japan with a Sillan envoy, in 639, and on the fifth day of the fifth month of 640 we find him expounding on the Muryōju sutra 無量壽經 in the palace of Umayazaka 廐坂宮.⁵⁷⁾ The last of the first four Japanese students to study in Chang An 長安 was Hifumi 日文, a member of the Imaki ("recently arrived"⁵⁸⁾ no Ayahito family of Chinese immigrants. He was trained as a Buddhist priest and studied astronomy and astrology, as well as the connected arts of the calendar and divination. While in China, he probably learned about the author of the *Wuxing Dayi* 五行大義 [Compendium of the Five Elements], Xiao Ji 蕭吉, who died in his eighties in 614.⁵⁹⁾ It is not likely, however, that he met the great diviner and numerologist in person, for the latter was known to be haughty, arrogant, and excessively proud of his aristocratic background, and had made his career in the Bureau of Rites.⁶⁰⁾ We may assume, though, that Hifumi was able to get copies of his works, and we know that the *Compendium of the Five Elements* (which was lost in China but preserved in Japan) became one of the most influential sources for Yin-yang speculation during the Heian period.⁶¹⁾

Other astrologers Hifumi may have actually met in China were Li Chunfeng 李淳風 (602–670) and Yuan Tiangang 袁天罡 (d. 627) to whom is ascribed the *Tuibeitu* 推背圖 [Chart of Extrapolation from the Back].⁶²⁾ This latter work has, in its present form, been considered a secret weapon of the Chinese since at least the Ming period, for it helps the diviner to relate the results of his divination to the days of the Chinese calendar.⁶³⁾ In other words, this is a most important work for the determination of the proper days for action or non-action as ordered by the divinatory process. During his twenty-four years in China, Hifumi also became an expert on the *Zhou-Yi* 周易, better known as the *I Ching* 易經 or "Book of Changes," China's oldest and best known manual for calculating the future.⁶⁴⁾ After his return to Japan in 632 in the train of the Tang ambassador Gao Biaoren 高表仁,⁶⁵⁾ Hifumi took the name of Sō Min 僧旻 (Priest Min) and started to teach the *I Ching* to a select number of students of noble background. He seems to have chosen to live in the Kudaradera, which, as we have seen, was connected with the imperial family and not in the Asukadera, the temple of the Soga clan.⁶⁶⁾ There, he was often consulted about celestial phenomena, such as

falling stars, and their significance.⁶⁷⁾ Clearly, he was the closest equivalent Japan had produced so far of those men who are known in Chinese history as the *fang-shi* 方士 or diviners.⁶⁸⁾

Among his students of the *I Ching* were Soga no Iruka and Nakatomi no Kamako 中臣鎌子. The *Kaden* reports that the former always showed the greatest respect to the latter. There is no reason to doubt this assertion. Once, for example, when Kamako arrived late for one of Priest Min's lectures on the *I Ching*, Iruka stood up and made room for him. Having reported this, however, the Fujiwara family chronicle seems to shade into hagiography: "After the lecture was finished and everybody was ready to disperse, Priest Min held [Kamako] back by the look in his eyes and whispered these words to him: 'Among those who frequent my hall, there is no one like the elder Soga boy. But truly, judging both from what you know about the intentions of the gods as well as from your physiognomy, you are superior to him. I seriously want you to take good care of yourself.'" ⁶⁹⁾ Hagiography aside, these words can also be interpreted as: "I have divined your plans and I am with you all the way."

4. Wood: the Oracle

The *Nihongi* is quite explicit about the reasons why a conspiracy to kill Iruka was hatched at court. First there was, of course, Iruka's guilt in the death of the Kamutsumiya princes. Then, as we have seen, the editors of the *Nihongi* hinted at the inappropriate behavior of the Soga, father and son, in occupying Amakashi Hill, arrogating the right to confer court ranks, and competing with the first family of the Ōkimi in many other ways. Naturally, the text is less straightforward about the conspirators, and how they went about organizing themselves.

According to the *Nihongi* version of the events, the main conspirators were an obscure member of the Nakatomi family and the eldest son of the Empress Toyotakara herself, Prince Katsuragi 葛城皇子.⁷⁰⁾ The latter had good reasons to conspire, of course, since it was clear that the Soga's favored the prince's older half-brother Furuhito to be next in line for the imperial succession. Furuhito, being born of a Soga concubine, did not by himself have the valid claim to the throne that Katsuragi, as the eldest son of Jomei's empress, the present Empress Toyotakara, could present. The Soga backing of Furuhito combined with the death of the Kamutsumiya princes, were enough to show that, if anyone else was going to be killed, Prince Katsuragi was next in line.

The motives of the prince's mentor, Nakatomi no Kamako, must have sprung from a desire to take revenge. The Nakatomi were a family of Shintō ritualists, "the vassals in the middle," who may originally have functioned as interpreters of the divine pronouncements by the shamans of early Japanese society. They appear to have come from the province of Hitachi 常陸 in Eastern Japan.⁷¹⁾ Although the family had shared in the defeat of the Mononobe in 587,⁷²⁾ by 629 Nakatomi no Muraji Mike 中臣連彌氣, Kamako's father, was one of four ministers siding with Soga no Emishi on the matter of the succession after the death of Empress Suiko.⁷³⁾ Kamako must have been disgusted with his father's obsequious attitude towards the Soga, who had been responsible for his family's downfall. On the other hand, it may have been precisely Mike's obsequiousness which gave Kamako a chance to plot the restoration of his family's

fortunes on a grander scale than ever before. For as a son of the meek follower of Soga no Emishi, who refused appointments and preferred to live far from the capital in the countryside,⁷⁴⁾ he was not likely to arouse the suspicions even of the suspicious Iruka.

The story, as told in the *Nihongi* starts as follows: *Nakatomi no Kamako no Muraji was a man of an upright and loyal character and of a reforming disposition. He was indignant with Soga no Iruka for breaking down the order of Prince and Vassal, of Senior and Junior, and cherishing veiled designs upon the State.*⁷⁵⁾ Leaving aside the matter of Kamako's "uprightness," this reference to his "reforming disposition" has been the cause of an all-pervasive misunderstanding of the plot to kill the Soga minister. The *Nihongi* depiction of the Soga clan as villains has further served to confirm the impression that the conspiracy against Iruka, apart from being foreshadowed by signs and portents, and so being fore-ordained, was one of reformers against reactionaries. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth.

For more than a hundred years the Soga had been the reformers of the Japanese state, first as sponsors of the immigrants, then as the importers of bookkeeping systems and experimenters with Chinese ways of government. In fact, since the early seventh century, there had existed a consensus at the Yamato court about the necessity to strengthen the central government. The true opponents of the reforms were to be found outside the Nara basin, among the ancient local nobility, the *kuni no miyatsuko*, who stood to lose most in a centralized state.⁷⁶⁾ The Chinese style reforms adopted by the Yamato polity during the seventh century, therefore, had very little to do with the power struggle at court. At Asuka, the issue of the struggle was really about who was going to dominate the new Chinese style state.⁷⁷⁾

The *Nihongi* account details how Kamako, correctly reading the signs and portents of the time and analyzing the configurations at court, first approached the brother of Empress Toyotakara, Prince Karu, to see whether he would be a suitable man to lead a conspiracy against the Soga. Not satisfied, the text suggests, he later met with all the other princes until he came upon Prince Katsuragi, the oldest son of the Empress Toyotakara and the late emperor Jomei, who was eighteen years old at the time. The story of their meeting under the great tsuki tree, west of the Asukadera, has been famous throughout Japanese history. It relates how the prince lost one of his shoes playing kickball,⁷⁸⁾ and how it was retrieved by Kamako, who humbly offered it to him. "From this time they became mutual friends and told each other all their thoughts. There was no longer any concealment between them."⁷⁹⁾ We may be sure, however, that the story is complete fiction, the more so because, as usual in such cases, a clear prototype for this story can be found in a Chinese source, in this case the *Shiji* 『史記』 by Sima Qian 司馬篇遷:

Zhang Liang 張良 *was once strolling along an embankment in Xiapei* 下邳 *when an old man wearing a coarse gown appeared. Reaching the place where Zhang Liang was, he deliberately dropped his shoe down the embankment and, turning to Zhang Liang, said, "Fetch me my shoe, young man!" Zhang Liang, completely taken aback, was about to hit him, but because the man was old he swallowed his resentment and climbed down and got the shoe. "Put it on for me!" ordered the old man, and Zhang Liang, since he had already gone to the trouble of fetching it, knelt respectfully and prepared to put on the shoe. The old man held out his foot and, when the shoe was on, laughed and went on his way. Zhang Liang, more startled than ever, stood looking*

after him. When the old man had gone some distance, he turned and came back. "You could be taught, young man," he said. "Meet me here at dawn five days from now!" Zhang Liang, thinking this all very strange, knelt and replied, "I will do as you say."

At dawn five days later he went to the place, but found the old man already there. "When you have an appointment with an old man, how is it that you come late?" he asked angrily. "Go away, and meet me at dawn five days from now, only come earlier!" Five days later Zhang Liang got up at the crow of the cock and went to the place, but once more the old man had gotten there before him. "Why are you late again?" the old man asked in anger. "Go away, and five days from now come earlier!" Five days later Zhang Liang went to the place before half the night was through. After a while the old man came along. "This is the way it should be!" he said. Then, producing a book, he said, "If you read this you may become the teacher of kings. Ten years from now your fortune will rise. Thirteen years from now you will see me again. A yellow stone at the foot of Mount Gucheng 穀城山 in northern Ji 濟 that will be I." Without another word he left and Zhang Liang never saw him again. When dawn came Zhang Liang examined the book which the old man had given him and found it to be *The Grand Duke's Art of War* 『太公兵法』. He set great store by it and was found to be constantly pouring over it.⁸⁰⁾

This story provides us with several clues on Kamako and the redaction of the *Nihongi*. First of all, Zhang Liang who retrieves the shoe and gets *The Grand Duke's Art of War* in return, goes on to become a minister of the first Han emperor.⁸¹⁾ The parallel with Kamako, who retrieves a shoe for the prince and goes on to become his most trusted minister, is only too obvious.⁸²⁾ What is not obvious from the *Nihongi*, however, is that, according to the *Kaden*, Kamako's favorite reading was precisely this same manual of military strategy, to which Zhang Liang owed his rise to power, and which Kamako is said to have known by heart.⁸³⁾

Fearing that their frequent meetings might arouse suspicions, the *Nihongi* continues, the prince and the plotter agreed to study the Chinese classics together with "the learned teacher of Minabuchi," i.e. the same Shōan who had returned from China in 640. "Thus they at length, while on their way there and back, walking shoulder to shoulder, secretly prepared their plans."⁸⁴⁾ In this way, again, the *Nihongi* reinforces the impression that the conspiracy is about Chinese style reform, firmly grounded in serious study. The first thing Kamako proposed to the prince, however, is that he should conclude an alliance with Iruka's cousin, Soga no Ishikawamaro, through a marriage to one of his daughters, for, counseled the plotter wisely, "For him who cherishes great projects, nothing is so essential as support."⁸⁵⁾ What Kamako had seen very well, of course, was the resentment the ambitious Ishikawamaro must have felt that he, the representative of the main Soga line descended from Umako, had to play second fiddle to Iruka.⁸⁶⁾ What is more, the *Liu tao*, in its first section, warns the ruler over and over to be careful not to estrange his own relatives. It is possible, therefore, that Kamako was able to identify this weakness of the Soga's through his study of this Chinese Classic.⁸⁷⁾

Naturally, Ishikawamaro was glad to ally himself with Prince Katsuragi, but on the night before the wedding he was informed that the daughter he had destined for the prince had eloped with his younger brother Musashi 身刺 (the girl's uncle). Another daughter then offered herself.⁸⁸⁾ Next, Kamako recommended to the prince Saeki no Muraji Komaro 佐伯連子麻呂 and Katsuragi Waku Inukai no Muraji Amida 葛城稚犬

養連網田, both gate guards of the palace, described in the *Kaden* as martial, brave, determined, and of an exceptionally powerful build.⁸⁹⁾ After this entry, we hear nothing more of the conspiracy until, four days before the attack is planned, Ishikawamaro is said to have been informed by his new son in law of the plan to kill Iruka. Prince Katsuragi tells him that the attack will take place on the day that the three Korean kingdoms present their tribute. “Maro no Omi respectfully assented.”⁹⁰⁾

Although this is to anticipate, if we look ahead at the results of the conspiracy, we see that the primary beneficiaries were neither Prince Katsuragi nor Nakatomi no Kamako, but the brother of Empress Toyotakara, Prince Karu, who ascended the throne vacated by his sister. Abe no Uchimarō 阿倍内麻呂 became Minister of the Left 左大臣 and Iruka’s cousin Ishikawamaro became Minister of the Right 右大臣. Prince Katsuragi became crown prince, and is from then on known as Naka no Ōe, while Kamako became Naishin 内臣, or Minister of the Interior. Two others benefited, the Buddhist priest Min and Kuromaro Takamuko no Fubito, who had both gone to China together in 608. They received the title *kuni no hakase* 國博士 (national doctors).⁹¹⁾ Conspicuously absent from those receiving rewards is the priest Shōan, even if he had played such an important role in providing a cover for Kamako and Prince Katsuragi. It is possible, therefore, that he may have tried to discourage the conspirators at an early stage, or that he was closer to the discredited branch of the Soga family, or, again, that the whole story about the study of the Chinese Classics is made up.⁹²⁾ In any case, after the conspiracy, entries about Shōan cease to appear in the *Nihongi*.

If we were to include some of the above five people in the conspiracy, its success would become a little more comprehensible, a little less the Machiavellian feat of the master conspirator Kamako and his teenage imperial co-conspirator. We may surmise, for example, that the roles of Prince Karu, jealous of his sister occupying the throne, and Ishikawamaro, jealous of his cousin Iruka’s position as minister are bound to have been more important than the *Nihongi* is willing to admit.⁹³⁾ Then, there is the relationship of Prince Katsuragi with Ishikawamaro. Their connection must go back much earlier than the year 644, given in the *Nihongi*, for the prince took no less than three daughters of Ishikawamaro as his concubines.⁹⁴⁾ From the fact that the later Empress Jitō 持統天皇 was born in 645 from Ochi no Iratsume, the second daughter of Ishikawamaro to become a concubine of the prince, it is likely that his association with the first daughter at least predated Kamako’s advice on the first day of the first month of 644.⁹⁵⁾

Next, it is unlikely that an outsider such as Kamako could have recommended trustworthy gate guards to the prince. To choose such men, who were supposed to do the dirty work of killing the minister, someone with more influence than our master plotter was required. It is more likely that, in fact, Ishikawamaro, who was in charge of the imperial storehouses, had far closer relationships with the hereditary families of storehouse guards, such as the Saekibe and Inukaibe, than Kamako could have had.⁹⁶⁾ These clans not only guarded the storehouses, but also each had responsibility for guarding a gate of the palace. And, as the name of the latter indicates, they were breeders of guard dogs.⁹⁷⁾ The closer we look, the clearer it becomes that Ishikawamaro’s involvement in the conspiracy is very unlikely to date from four days

before the attack, for he seems far too important a figure in its organization. It is more probable, then, that Ishikawamaro was part of the conspiracy from its very inception, even though the *Nihongi* does not give him credit for it.

Furthermore, even a driven man like Nakatomi no Kamako would not dream of planning such an enormous undertaking as the killing of Soga no Iruka, the single most powerful man in the Yamato state, without consulting an oracle. It is strange (but it seems to be true) that no Japanese scholar in the past 1350 years has pointed to this rather obvious fact. Still, the *Nihongi*, as we have seen, is very clear in its suggestion that Powers Seen and Unseen, the portents and the signs of nature were all in agreement that something awesome was about to happen. It is unimportant whether all the signs recounted above really did happen at the time they are reported to have happened. It is immaterial, also, if they were all made up afterwards. Essential is only the realization that, seventy-five years after the murder, at the time the *Nihongi* was given its final shape, everyone concerned was still convinced that Heaven had been in alignment with what had happened on Earth, and that the appropriate day had been chosen for the action planned.

For assiduous students of Chinese learning, as we have seen Prince Katsuragi and Kamako were (or at least pretended to be), the oracle to be consulted would undoubtedly have been the *I Ching*. Most likely this was also the reason for the reward given to Priest Min, for he was the only expert, available at the time, who could have supervised such a momentous use of the oracle. We have, of course, no sources for these top secret manipulations of the future. All we have, is the fact of the conspiracy and the day of the attack made upon the minister. Theoretically, therefore, it should still be possible to retrieve some of the manipulations that led to the decision to choose the day of the Monkey for the attack. For not only do we know the exact day, we can also consult the *Tupei tu*, the *Chart of Extrapolation from the Back*, and do a little extrapolating ourselves. The hexagram given in the chart for the days characterized by the combination of Earth-Yang with the zodiac sign of the Monkey, is called *Meng* 蒙.⁹⁸⁾ Looking up this hexagram in the *I Ching*, we find that it stands for “Youthful Folly.”⁹⁹⁾

The hexagram *Meng* is made up of the two trigrams *ken* 艮 (‘the mountain,’ on top) ☶, and *kan* 坎 (‘water,’ below) ☵. “A spring at the foot of the mountain,” explain the commentary texts of the *I Ching*, “is the image of inexperienced youth.” ‘Keeping still’ is the attribute of the mountain, which in and of itself does not move. The attribute of water is said to be ‘the abyss’ or ‘danger.’ The hexagram, therefore, sounds a warning. “Stopping in perplexity,” it says, “on the brink of the abyss is a symbol of the folly of youth.” Moreover, the lower trigram *ken* (water) is connected with the “second son” in the family, while the upper trigram *kan* (mountain) is associated with the “third son.”¹⁰⁰⁾ As the lines of the hexagram are built from the bottom up, it is not surprising to see the second son here carrying, as it were, the third son.

We may remember how Prince Katsuragi was, indeed, the second son of the Emperor Jomei, and that the emperor had a third son as well, Prince Ōama 大海皇子, who was a full brother of Prince Katsuragi.¹⁰¹⁾ Again anticipating on what was still the future in 645, we note that Ōama was the victor of the civil war of 672 and became Emperor Temmu 天武天皇, after his older brother, the former Prince Katsuragi, had died as Emperor Tenji in the year before. The second brother had, thus, eventually

carried the third brother to the throne, just as the hexagram belonging to the day of the Monkey seems to have predicted.

There is more, of course. Keeping in mind the extreme youth of Prince Katsuragi (he was born in 626), by taking on Iruka he was embarking on a plan of great danger, and the hexagram is well aware of that. Most important is, however, that it does not discourage the prince from proceeding. The Judgement on the hexagram has: *Youthfull Folly has success. It is not I who seek the young fool. The young fool seeks me. At the first oracle I inform him. If he asks two or three times, it is importunity. If he importunes, I give him no information. Perseverance furthers.*¹⁰²⁾

It is as if, over the gaping abyss of time, we hear the voice of the Priest Min himself. The *I Ching* explains: *In the time of youth, folly is not an evil. One may succeed in spite of it, provided one finds an experienced teacher and has the right attitude toward him. This means, first of all, that the youth himself must be conscious of his lack of experience and must seek out the teacher.*¹⁰³⁾ And further on: *The ruler of the hexagram is the strong second line. It is in the middle of the lower trigram, therefore in a central position. Since the line is strong and central, it meets with success by acting at the right time. It represents a sage in a lowly position, qualified to counsel wisely a youthful and inexperienced ruler.*¹⁰⁴⁾ The image of the hexagram is further elaborated with the explanation that the Superior Man derives his inspiration from the images of the two trigrams, Mountain and Water. He strives to “be thoroughgoing, and clear as a mountain spring. Hence he achieves calmness in the face of danger that emulates the great calmness of a mountain on the edge of an abyss.”¹⁰⁵⁾

All this is dazzling in its appropriateness. It is important to remember, however, that we are “Extrapolating from the Back” here, and really should be going “Back to the Future.”¹⁰⁶⁾ In other words: we found the hexagram because of the date, whereas the plotters in the Asuka period found the date because of the hexagram. Prince Katsuragi, therefore, is likely to have shuffled the milfoil stalks under the supervision of Priest Min,¹⁰⁷⁾ possibly in the presence of Nakatomi no Kamako, and obtained the hexagram *Meng* as a result. After consulting the position of the stars, the weather, or the cry of birds,¹⁰⁸⁾ Priest Min may have consulted the *Tuibeit tu* to determine the appropriate date corresponding with the result of the oracle obtained by the prince, and found *tsuchinoe saru*, or the date that was our starting point.

The section for that binomial in the *Tuibeit tu* gives an additional oracle, which also throws light on the conspiracy: *Some guests come from the West / When they reach the East, they halt / Wood, Fire, Metal, Water / They will wash away this Great Shame.*¹⁰⁹⁾ The oracle predicts, therefore, that it will not be any *tsuchinoe saru* day, but one on which visitors may be expected, coming from the West, who will be staying for a while. Thus, it is fair to assume that they have come a long way. Here we see why the attack was planned on a day of the Monkey when the memorials of the Korean envoys would be read. Wood, Fire, Metal or Water, furthermore, will “wash away a Great Shame.” In other words a calamity is predicted which will cleanse through Burning, Cutting or Flooding. There is nothing here, then, to discourage someone from pursuing his youthful folly. On the contrary, the prince could not have wished for a clearer oracle to proceed.

5. Fire: Murder

Just after sunrise the palace gates were opened. Iruka was the first to cross the threshold into the court and go on his knees to make his obeisance with his hands onto the ground.¹¹⁰ His escort must have stayed outside. While he was crossing the courtyard of the Morning Hall towards the gate of the Inner palace or *dairi* 内裏,¹¹¹ the minister was suddenly met and surrounded by the jesters of the Court, or *wazaogi* 俳優. These, the *Nihongi* reports, had received instructions from Nakatomi no Kamako on how to trick and disarm Iruka, but the text does not provide the details of how this was done. It simply states that Iruka laughed when he took off his sword.¹¹² Then, he continued towards the gate at the opposite end of the courtyard.

The gate guards there ushered him into the courtyard of the inner palace. When everyone had taken their places, the empress appeared under the eaves of the Shōden 正殿 at the far end of the courtyard.¹¹³ She was flanked by the imperial prince Furuhito, a position which indicated that, even though he may not have been officially nominated as Crown Prince he was at least expected to be the next in line for the imperial succession.¹¹⁴ The empress' brother, Prince Karu, and her sons also were in attendance somewhere behind her. At both sides of the courtyard the ministers and all officials of the fifth rank and above were in attendance. At a signal Ishikawamarō, who was charged with the reading of the memorials of the Korean envoys, stepped forward, and started to read. While his voice droned the formulas of congratulation, the gate guards softly closed the palace gates. The trap had been set, and the monkey was caught.

Again, the *Nihongi* has a fancy story about everyone but Prince Katsuragi and Kamako taking fright at the last moment. The guards charged with the murder cannot hold down their breakfast and procrastinate. Ishikawamaro, who is reading the memorials, wonders why they are taking so long, and, fearing the conspiracy has been discovered, he breaks into a sweat and his voice falters. Iruka is supposed to have asked him why his hands are shaking so much, and his cousin is said to have answered that he was too affected by the divine presence of the empress. Nothing could be fancier and farther from the truth, and again we can find proof in Chinese sources that this whole scene must have been made up. Chapter 86 of the *Shiji* is dedicated to the biographies of the assassin-retainers, an appropriate place, of course, to look for prototypes of details of the story in the *Nihongi*. Among these is the story of Jing Ke 荆軻, who is out to kill the King of Qin 秦. He has managed to convey to the king that he has brought him the head of the king's enemy Fan Yuqi 樊於期 and a strategic map of the Dukang 督亢 region in Yen 燕. Qin Wuyang 秦舞陽 is his companion:

When the king of Qin heard this, he was delighted and, donning his court robes and ordering a full dress reception, he received the envoys of Yen in the Hsien-yang Palace 咸陽宮. Jing Ke bore the box with Fan Yuqi's head, while Qin Wuyang carried the map case; step by step they advanced through the throne room until they reached the steps of the throne, where Qin Wuyang suddenly turned pale and began to quake with fear. The courtiers eyed him suspiciously. Jing Ke turned around, laughed at Qin Wuyang, and then stepped forward to apologize: "This man is a simple rustic from the barbarous region of the northern border, and he has never seen the Son of Heaven. That is why he shakes with fright. I beg Your Majesty to pardon him for the moment and permit me to complete my mission before you."¹¹⁵

Jing Ke has managed to bring a knife to kill the king in the box he carries. His attack fails, but the fear of his companion has been used by the compilers of the *Nihongi*, either wittingly or, more likely, because they based themselves on an account of the day of the Monkey (since lost) in which this feature had already been incorporated.¹¹⁶⁾ The similarities with the *Nihongi* account are once more obvious: the murder has been planned to occur in front of all the courtiers. A co-conspirator almost gives the game away by his nervousness, and most important: the excuse for his nervousness is said to be the presence of the Son of Heaven. All this, naturally, is reason enough to reject the historicity of the story of Ishikawamaro's nervousness. This negative portrayal, therefore, as well as the previous refusal, on the part of the editors of the *Nihongi*, to recognize his importance for the success of the conspiracy must be ascribed to his later fall from power. Ishikawamaro, then, was probably reading the memorials without an interruption by Iruka, when suddenly there was a commotion.

“Yaah!” yelled Prince Katsuragi and stormed with unsheathed sword at the minister standing in the courtyard.¹¹⁷⁾ His sword cut the man through the back of his head and into his shoulder. Stumbling under the attack, the minister regained his posture, only to be cut in the thigh by one of the two attendants of the prince who had come running out after him.¹¹⁸⁾ Falling down and bleeding profusely, the minister pulled himself forward with his good arm and leg until he reached the steps where the Ōkimi stood under the eaves in ceremonial dress.¹¹⁹⁾ “What have I done?” he cried, “What is my crime? At least allow an investigation to be made!”¹²⁰⁾ But the Ōkimi was too shocked to speak. All she could do was turn around and flee into the inner palace hall. The prince's attendants finished killing the minister on the spot. Then, it started to rain without stopping, and water covered the whole courtyard. Blood could be seen in an ever widening circle around the body. Someone put a straw mat over the minister's corpse.

Prince Katsuragi did not waste any time. In the rain, he left the Itabuki palace through its southern gate, turned left, and gained the road leading to the Asukadera compound. He was surrounded by the *yugei no tsukasa* 衛門府, or palace guards,¹²¹⁾ and a number of followers of Nakatomi no Kamako, armed with bows and arrows. Apart from Prince Furuhito, all the princes of the royal blood, the ministers, and the other officials who had been present at the murder, were also following him.¹²²⁾ Reaching the paved ground in front of the temple, they walked towards its front gate over a carefully rock-paved road two meters wide. Upon going through the front gate, the men immediately came upon a second gate, twice its size. The edges of the overhanging roofs between the two gates were only five meters apart. The second gate was carried by sixteen enormous wooden pillars and was set into the corridor which enclosed the whole temple. The road continued in a straight line towards the center of the compound with its five storied pagoda.¹²³⁾

From the steps of the pagoda the prince may have addressed the crowd which had collected on the temple grounds.¹²⁴⁾ Seeing that most of the court nobility had followed him, the opportunity seems to have presented itself to explain what had been done and what needed to be done next. First of all, the prince must have stressed the fact that the Ōkimi, his mother, was descended from the Sun Goddess herself. Next, he explained that the minister had wanted to destroy the Royal House and subvert the

Heavenly Dignity. “Was I going to let Kuratsukuri supplant the descendants of the royal family?” the prince asked rhetorically.¹²⁵⁾ That was indeed (and had been for a long time) the crux of the matter. In fact, ever since the Yamato polity had emerged as the dominant power on the islands off Korea, the great families of the Nara valley, where the empire had started, had competed for the spoils. By the beginning of the seventh century, only two major clans were left in the running for supreme power: first, of course, there was the family of the Ōkimi, the priest officials of the cult of the Sun Goddess. And then there were the Soga. The other families ranked as *maetsugimi* 公卿, or “first of the land,” were all linked in one way or another with these great clans in an ever-changing network of intermarriage and vassalage.¹²⁶⁾ These smaller families could effectively tip the balance of power in favor of any of the bigger, and so, in large measure, the political success of the powerful clans was defined in terms of the collective support of the smaller clans.

In the political terms of the early Japan, the Ōkimi was “assisted” in his task of *matsurigoto* 政 (rites and government) by the Ō-omi, the Great Minister. For the sake of convenience, everyone seems to have agreed that the Ōkimi’s authority was “sacred,” for his(/her) pedigree went back to the gods, but so did those of many other clans. There was, as yet, nothing to assure the Ōkimi of a monopoly on divine uniqueness nor of absolute power. In other words, in the early seventh century it may still have seemed possible, if difficult, to replace the Ōkimi with another ruler, a Chinese style emperor with a mandate from Heaven, for example. Or else a ruler deriving his authority from the new mainland religion of Buddhism. Here, then, lay the significance of Prince Katsuragi entering and occupying the Soga clan temple immediately after the murder.

Orders were given to barricade the temple and to deliver the body of Iruka to his father Emishi on Amakashi Hill.¹²⁷⁾ Hearing of the murder, the Aya no Atae summoned the men of their clan to Emishi’s mansion.¹²⁸⁾ They came clad in armor to defend the head of the Soga clan, whose vassals they had been for over two centuries.¹²⁹⁾ In the afternoon, the Prince Katsuragi sent Kose no Tokuda 巨勢徳陀 to Amakashi Hill. The latter had been the leader of the gang ordered by Iruka to eliminate the descendants of Shōtoku Taishi, the Kamutsumiya princes and their spouses, in late 643. At that time, Iruka may have decided on choosing him because of his close association with a rival branch of the imperial family, the descendants of Emperor Bidatsu 敏達天皇 headed by Prince Ōmata 大派王.¹³⁰⁾ In any case, his previous association with and the services rendered by him to the Soga clan must have made him the most appropriate negotiator at this juncture. The gang of 643 may have consisted of mounted warriors of the Aya clan, and it was to dissuade these soldiers from resisting that Kose was sent.

On Amakashi Hill Kose found another follower of Emishi, Kunioishi Takamuko no Omi 高向臣國押, who had refused to participate in the murders of 643.¹³¹⁾ The *Nihongi* asserts that it was Kunioishi who spoke to the Aya and convinced them to lay down their arms. Again, we do not know what happened exactly, but the Aya are likely to have had their own reasons for refusing to back Soga no Emishi. After the Aya warriors had dispersed, the prince’s party down at the Asukadera surrounded Amakashi Hill. Finding himself surrounded by imperial troops the next morning,

Emishi forced all the members of his family to commit suicide and set the fire to his hillside mansion in which he also perished himself. It is said that he took with him the *Sumera mikoto no mifumi* (or *Tennōki* 『天皇記』, i.e. Honorable Writings about the Emperors) as well as the *Kunitsufumi* 『國記』 (or *Kokki*, i.e. The Writings of the Country), books his father Umako had compiled together with Shōtoku taishi. Esaka Funa no Fubito 船史惠尺, a scribe in charge of the naval records, managed to pull the latter manuscript from the fire and offered it to Prince Katsuragi.¹³²⁾

6. The Great Transformation

As we have seen, in 645 Prince Katsuragi (later Crown Prince Naka no Ōe and Emperor Tenji) murdered his way to power by the killing of the representative of the main sponsors of Buddhism in Japan, Soga no Iruka.¹³³⁾ With that he managed to free, for the first time in sixty years (i.e. since the reign of the Emperor Bidatsu, 570–585), the imperial family from the all-pervasive dominance of the Soga clan. After the conspirators had been rewarded on the day of Emishi's suicide, one of the first measures taken was the adoption of the Tang custom to give the new era an auspicious name. The period was called *Taika* 大化, i.e. “Great Change” or “Great Transformation.”¹³⁴⁾ At the time, this “great change” can only have referred to the situation which had prevailed before the murders, that is the dominance of the court by the Soga family. The new era, then, was one in which the imperial family was free from the Soga. As happened so often with era names, however, the wish was the father of the thought.

Was the power of the Soga family really broken with the deaths of Iruka and Emishi, as is so often asserted on the basis of this era name? The *Nihongi* makes quite clear that this was not at all the case. Even though Emishi's line had been destroyed, the main Soga line was continued by Ishikawamaro. Furthermore, the Soga holdings throughout Japan were so extensive that the family could not fail to continue to be prominent. We have already seen how Emishi and Iruka were replaced in the Yamato polity by Abe no Uchimarō and Soga no Ishikawamaro. The two men were closely allied, it seems, for every time they appear in the *Nihongi* until the death of Uchimarō in 649, they do so together.¹³⁵⁾ The new era name Taika, then, promised more than it delivered. In order to accomplish the Great Change, it was necessary to continue the work begun with the deaths of Iruka and his father.

The next person to be targeted was Prince Furuhito, Prince Katsuragi's older half brother, who was assassinated late in 645. After him, it was Ishikawamaro's turn, but the Great Minister was at first too well connected through his alliance with Abe no Uchimarō. It is probable that the initial opportunity for another attack on the continued Soga dominance of the state, and this time on the main line itself, was provided by Uchimarō's death. One week later, interfamily jealousy served once more to topple a Soga from power.¹³⁶⁾ It was Ishikawamaro's younger brother by a different mother, Musashi, who was used as the instrument to effect the minister's downfall. Again, from the ambivalent way in which the *Nihongi* presents evidence of Ishikawamaro's guilt and later appears to retract it all, it seems reasonable to assume that the charges were trumped up, and that Nakatomi no Kamako was behind the accusations leveled against him. Ishikawamaro was forced to commit suicide together

with his three sons and the one daughter who was not yet married.¹³⁷⁾

Not surprisingly, the *Nihongi* absolves Naka no Ōe (formerly Prince Katsuragi) from all blame, but that all was not well in the prince's household is clear from the notice that Ishikawamaro's daughter Miyatsuko hime (who had been the first to wed the prince) is said to have died of a "broken heart" over the affair.¹³⁸⁾ This probably means that she also committed suicide. She was succeeded in her position as the prince's consort by Princess Yamato-hime 倭姫, a daughter of Prince Furuhi, who had been murdered by henchmen of his half-brother in October of 645.¹³⁹⁾ This princess did not bear the crown prince any children, so she, too, may have refused to sleep with the murderer of her father and great-uncle.¹⁴⁰⁾ After this second round of killing, the era name was changed to Hakuchi 白雉 (White Pheasant). Again, Priest Min figured prominently in the selection of this era name, for such a choice was a most significant manipulation of time.

Thus, the four and a half years spanned by the Taika period began and ended with the death of a prominent member of the Soga clan. In the contemporary world of 645–649, Great Change must have meant the end of the domination of the Yamato court by the Soga family. The *Nihongi*, on the other hand, identifies the growth of the Chinese-style state structure in Japan with the Great Transformation of the Taika period. This interpretation is reinforced, in large part, by its inclusion of the Great Reform Edict, said to have been promulgated on the first day of 646.¹⁴¹⁾ The text justifies Iruka's murder as a conflict between usurpers and reformers, and, as we have seen, Nakatomi no Kamako is portrayed as one of the principal reformers and a serious scholar of Chinese knowledge.

There is no proof, in fact, that Kamako was any more of a reformer than the man he helped assassinate. The Soga family, too, were leaders of Chinese-style reform, which, according to recent consensus was a gradual process starting at the beginning of the seventh century with the introduction of the court ranks and lasted well into the eighth, when the definitive law codes were promulgated. Moreover, apart from the famous edict, no major reforms are reported during the Hakuchi period (650–655) after the imperial family had consolidated its grip on power. What is more, Japanese scholars have long noted anachronistic elements in the edict of 646.¹⁴²⁾ Thus, there is no proof that the reform edict was actually issued during the Taika period, and its 646 listing may just be a subterfuge suggesting that the Great Change referred to reform and not to murder.

This is not to say that there was no Taika Reform.¹⁴³⁾ Introduction of era names was in itself a Chinese-style innovation accompanied by the adoption of Chinese divinatory practices. The character *ka* 化 (change) of Taika suggests the changes of the *Yijing* discourse, in which "change" refers to the transformation of the five elements, which according to the Chinese interpretation ceaselessly succeed (change into) one another. Divination and government were inseparable in the Chinese system and the adoption of these divinatory practices was part of the on-going process of adopting Chinese ways of government.

Even after 649, the power of the Soga was not completely broken, for in 658 we find another Soga minister, Ishikawamaro's younger brother Akae 赤兄,¹⁴⁴⁾ plotting to overthrow Empress Toyotakara, who had reascended the throne after the death of her

brother Emperor Kōtoku. Akae betrayed the plot of the imperial prince Arima 有間皇子, a son of Kōtoku, who was then executed by orders of Naka no Ōe.¹⁴⁵⁾ In 668, furthermore, a daughter of the same Akae is mentioned as one of Emperor Tenji's concubines.¹⁴⁶⁾ Next, after Kamako's death in 669, Tenji seems to have decided to try and restore his ties with the remaining Sogas even further,¹⁴⁷⁾ for only with their help could he have hoped to change the appointment as Crown Prince from his younger brother Ōama to his son Ōtomo 大友皇子.¹⁴⁸⁾ Tenji's subsequent death became the occasion for the last stand of the Soga family, who supported Ōtomo against Ōama in the *Jinshin no ran* 壬申の乱, or Jinshin Disturbance.¹⁴⁹⁾

After Ōama's victory over his nephew Ōtomo and the Soga at the battle of the Seta 瀬田 bridge,¹⁵⁰⁾ we can say at last that the power of the Soga family was broken for good.¹⁵¹⁾ And it is from this time on that the imperial family had no more serious rivals among the aristocracy of the Nara valley.¹⁵²⁾ The *Isshi no hen*, as the murder of Soga no Iruka is known in Japan, and the *Jinshin no ran*, therefore, are linked in more ways than just the derivation of their labels from the sexagenary cycle of the Chinese calendar. Both events saw members of the imperial family locked in a power struggle with the Soga clan. In 645, the Soga were challenged by Prince Katsuragi (the later Crown-prince Naka no Ōe and Emperor Tenji), who did so again in 649 when he disposed of Ishikawamaro, his own father-in-law. His younger brother Ōama fought, after Tenji's death, the Soga one last time during the Jinshin Disturbance.¹⁵³⁾

In this connection it is important to remember that our source, the *Nihongi*, is mainly a product of the Ōama (Temmu) line. The Jinshin Disturbance, therefore, looms large over this text, and we may expect to learn from it that the right side won.¹⁵⁴⁾ But the *Nihongi* transcends its partisanship of the Temmu line in the treatment of the Soga family, who had been the enemy of both Tenji and Temmu. According to the *Nihongi*, the Soga are a family of scoundrels: Soga no Umako had Emperor Sushun murdered, and Soga no Iruka drove the Kamutsumiya princes to suicide.¹⁵⁵⁾ This anti-Soga bias is logical, of course, for one of the aims of the book was to justify the palace murder of Iruka just as much as it was written to justify the rebellion of Prince Ōama.

The Taika period followed the reign of the Empress Toyotakara, later known by her Sino-Japanese name Kōgyoku. As we have seen, the *Nihongi* description of this reign can only be truly understood with reference to Chinese sources on the structure of the cosmos and divination. The compilers of the *Nihongi* were, of course, very much aware of this. It is our rational age that has lost sight of this irrational layer of Asuka culture. The later name by which this empress came to be known, Kōgyoku, provides another example.¹⁵⁶⁾ The term refers to one of the oldest Chinese treatises on government, a Zhou dynasty text, the *Hong Fan* 洪範, translated by Legge as "The Great Plan."¹⁵⁷⁾ The Great Plan [of Correct Government] is said to have been given by Ji 箕, a retainer of the last Shang monarch, to Wu 武王, the first king of the Zhou dynasty, and is therefore ranked under the Books of Zhou (*Zhou Shū* 周書). Parts of the text, however, are much older, dating back (it is said) to Yu the Great 大禹, the legendary founder of the Xia 夏 dynasty. Tradition has it that *The Great Plan* was given to Yu by the Great Tortoise rising from the waters of the Lo 洛 river. On its back the tortoise bore the nine numbers of the plan in the special arrangement by which they are known today.

From its inception, therefore, the Plan was based on tortoise shell divination. The text is divided into nine chapters, of which the fifth and central one bears the name *huang ji* 皇極 (Jpn. *kōgyoku*), or “royal perfection,” which enumerates the prerequisites for the monarch. It is in the next section on the Three Virtues, however, that we find the key passage for the reign of the Empress Toyotakara: *It belongs only to the prince to confer favors, to display the terrors of majesty, and to receive the revenues of the empire. There should be no such thing as a minister conferring favors, displaying the terrors of justice, or receiving the revenues of the country. Such a thing is injurious to the families, and fatal to the States of the empire; — small officers become one-sided and perverse, and the people commit assumptions and excesses.*¹⁵⁸⁾

So the Empress Kōgyoku must have lost her “royal perfection” when she let her ministers Soga no Emishi and Soga no Iruka “confer favors, display the terrors of majesty, and receive the revenues of the empire.” Happily, her son rectified this abominable situation, so that small officers in Japan would never be “one-sided and perverse” and the people would not “commit assumptions and excesses.”

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Notes

- 1) The author is Associate Professor of History at the University of Northern Iowa. A short version of this article was published in *The Historian* vol. 59, 1 (1996), 19–37. He wishes to thank Charles E. Holcombe of the University of Northern Iowa for his helpful comments.
- 2) Attributed to Confucius, translated by James Legge, third appendix to the *Yih-king*, “The Texts of Confucianism” Part II, *The Sacred Books of the East* vol. 16 (London: Clarendon Press, 1899), 373.
- 3) 10 July 645. Cf. Hiraoka Takeo 平岡武夫, *Tōdai no koyomi* 『唐代の暦』 (Kyoto: Kyoto Daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 1954), 34.
- 4) This cycle is based on the combination of two other cycles: one of ten symbols, (the “denary” cycle) made up of the five elements of Wood 木, Fire 火, Earth 土, Metal 金, and Water 水, each either *yin* 陰 or *yang* 陽, and the other of twelve symbols (the “duodenary” cycle), made up of the twelve animal signs of the Chinese zodiac. Both cycles being even-numbered (10 and 12) and starting simultaneously, it follows that the odd-numbered symbols of the first cycle are exclusively associated with the odd-numbered symbols of the second cycle. The symbols of the denary cycle are repeated six times, before they start recombining with the same symbols of the duodenary cycle, which are repeated five times. The combined cycles form so-called binomials, two character compounds which combine the characteristics of the signs of which they are composed. Cf. Jean-Michel Huon de Kermadec, *The Way to Chinese Astrology: The Four Pillars of Destiny*, Translated by N. Derek Poulsen (London: Unwin, 1983), 74–81.
- 5) Denary sign no. 5
- 6) Duodenary sign no. 9.
- 7) *Tayitu*.
- 8) Henry Doré S. J., *Researches into Chinese Superstitions: Translated from the French with notes, historical and explanatory by M. Kennelly* vol. 5 (Shanghai: T'uswei Printing Press, 1918), 590.
- 9) Naoki Kōjirō 直木孝次郎, *Asuka: sono hikari to kage* 『飛鳥 その光と影』 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1990), 107–114.
- 10) Ingyō 允恭 4/09/28 in Sakamoto Tarō 坂本太郎, Ienaga Saburō 家永三郎, Inoue Mitsusada 井上光貞, and Ōno Susumu 大野晋 [eds.], *Nihon shoki* 『日本書紀』 in NKBT 日本古典文学大系 67 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1967), 438–9. Kurano Kenji 倉野憲司 and Takeda Yūichi 武田祐吉 [eds.], *Kojiki*

- 『古事記』, NKBT 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1958), 292–3.
- 11) This is Suiko 推古's palace. It may be remembered that this empress was a daughter of Kimmei 欽明天皇 and a Soga concubine, Kitashi hime 堅鹽姫, daughter of Soga Iname 蘇我稻目. For the move to Owarida, see: Suiko 11/10/04: NKBT 68, 180–1.
 - 12) Iruka's great-grandfather Soga no Iname had built Japan's first Buddhist temple in 552 at Mukōhara. Kimmei 13/10: NKBT 68, 102–3.
 - 13) Kōgyoku 皇極 2/10/06: NKBT 68, 248–9.
 - 14) For court dress see: Suiko 16/08/12: NKBT 68, 192–3.
 - 15) Although we have no way to check on the historical value of this entry, it is hard to resist its suggestion that Kuratsukuri had a premonition. Takeuchi Rizō 竹内理三 [ed.], *Nara ibun* 『寧樂遺文』 vol. 2 (Tokyo: Tōkyōdō shuppan, 1965), 876.
 - 16) Seki Akira 関晃, *Kikajin* 『帰化人』 (Tokyo: Shibundō, 1956), 126.
 - 17) Takeuchi Rizō, in *Kodai kokka no han'ei* 『古代国家の繁栄』, Zusetsu Nihon no rekishi 図説日本の歴史 vol. 3 (Tokyo: Shū'eisha, 1974), 147 adds other evidence of the influence of the Soga reaching into eastern Honshū. In the Shōsōin 正倉院 a tax document, dating from 738, is preserved in which the name “Sogabe” 曾我部 frequently occurs. This name is also found in documents of Mino 美濃 and Shinano 信濃 (present-day Gifu and Nagano prefectures). Further, there were “Sogashō,” 蘇我莊 or taxfree estates, in the Sano 佐野 district of Tōtōmi 遠江 and in the Ashigara 足柄 district of Sagami 相模. In a list of shrines a shrine dedicated to “Soga hime” is mentioned in the Chiba 千葉 district in Shimōsa 下総. Also, of course, there is Kuratsukuri's father's name Emishi, 蝦夷 a term used for the “barbarians” of Eastern Japan.
 - 18) Kōgyoku 3/11: NKBT 68, 260–1.
 - 19) For a reconstruction of the area including the Itabuki palace and the Asukadera see a maquette at the Asuka Shiryōkan 飛鳥資料館. Also: Yoshimura Takehiko 吉村武彦, *Kodai ōken no tenkai* 『古代王権の展開』, Nihon no rekishi 日本の歴史 vol. 3 (Tokyo: Shū'eisha, 1991), 158.
 - 20) On this tree and other sacred trees see: Imaizumi Takao 今泉隆雄, “Asuka no Shumisen to saiki” 「飛鳥の須彌山と斎槻」 in: *Kodai kyūto no kenkyū* 『古代宮都の研究』 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1993), 2–63, esp. 31–49.
 - 21) Sushun 崇峻 1/07: NKBT 68, 164–5.
 - 22) The first temple, constructed at Mukuhara, was sponsored by Soga Iname in 552 (cf. NKBT 68, 102–3); the second temple was built by Soga Umako at Ishikawa 石川 in 584, and a third at Ono 大野 the following year (cf. NKBT 68, 148–9), was burned by the Mononobe in the same year (cf. NKBT 68, 150–1).
 - 23) According to Tamura Enchō 田村圓澄 the area was previously settled by an immigrant clan, the Kinunui 絹縫. Tamura Enchō, “Hōkōji (Asukadera) no gekitekina shutsugen” 「法興寺 (飛鳥寺) の劇的な出現」 in: *Tsukushi to Asuka* 『筑紫と飛鳥』 (Tokyo: Rokkō shuppan, 1990), 195. The *tsuki* tree did not survive. Today a small stone (Buddhist) monument marks the spot where it stood.
 - 24) Nara kokuritsu bunkazai kenkyūjo 奈良国立文化財研究所, *Asukadera hakkutsu chōsa hōkokusho* 『飛鳥寺発掘調査報告書』 no. 5 (Nara: Nara kokuritsu bunkazai kenkyūjo, 1958).
 - 25) Sonoda Kōyū, “Early Buddha worship,” transl. by Delmer M. Brown in *The Cambridge History of Japan* vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 380.
 - 26) After the temple burned down in 1196, many of its characteristic “lipless,” cone-shaped tiles were reused on the roof of the main hall of the Gangōji 元興寺 (1244), where they still lie today. Cf. Mary Neighbour Parent, *The Roof in Japanese Architecture* (New York/Tokyo: Weatherhill/Kajima, 1983), 66–7.
 - 27) G. Renondeau, “La date de l'introduction du bouddhisme au Japon” in *T'oung Pao* vol. 47 (1959), 16–29.
 - 28) Yoshimura, *op. cit.* (1991), 66.
 - 29) For the formalization of court ceremony before the southern gate, see: Kōtoku 孝徳 3/04/29: NKBT 68, 302–3.
 - 30) Kōgyoku 1/03/03,15,04/10: NKBT 68, 238–9.
 - 31) The *Nihongi* reports at this point how, by the medicine men of the villages, animal sacrifices were made to the river gods, as well as the observance of other Chinese customs connected with

- rainmaking. These are nothing but phrases taken from the Chinese classics to conform to the Chinese canon for history writing.
- 32) Kōgyoku 1/06/25: NKBT 68, 240–1.
 - 33) Jomei 11/12: NKBT 68, 234–5.
 - 34) Kōgyoku 1/08/01: NKBT 68, 241.
 - 35) Kōgyoku 1/10–12: NKBT 68, 242–244.
 - 36) Kōgyoku 2/10/12: NKBT 68, 249.
 - 37) The *Kaden* says that Kuratsukuri planned the attack “together with the other princes,” while the *Shōtoku taishiden hoketsuki* 『聖徳太子伝補闕記』 and the *Shōtoku taishi denreki* 『正徳太子伝暦』 both implicate by name the empress’ younger brother Prince Karu 軽皇子, later Emperor Kōtoku 孝徳天皇, in the affair. Cf. Naoki Kōjirō, *Kodai kokka no seiritsu* 『古代国家の成立』, Nihon no rekishi vol. 2 (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1965), 163.
 - 38) Kōgyoku 2/10/12: NKBT 68, 249.
 - 39) *Ibid.* 252–3.
 - 40) Kōgyoku 3/06/03: NKBT 68, 256–7.
 - 41) Cf. Sujin 崇神10/09/27: NKBT 67, 246–7; Yūryaku 雄略 7/07/03: NKBT 67, 472–3.
 - 42) In Chinese astrology the Snake and the Monkey are said to be incompatible.
 - 43) Kōgyoku 3/06/06: NKBT 68, 257.
 - 44) Kōgyoku 3/06: NKBT 68, 258–9.
 - 45) Kōgyoku 3/07: NKBT 68, 258–9. Similar outbreaks of popular dancing frenzies are reported for the 1560’s and 1860’s, both periods of great upheavals and perceived threats from outside Japan.
 - 46) Paekche in 641, and Koguryō in 642, see: Yoshimura, *op. cit.* (1991), 151–2.
 - 47) Kōgyoku 4/01: NKBT 68, 260–1. Translation by Aston, vol. II, 190.
 - 48) Suiko 10/10: NKBT 68, 178.
 - 49) Suiko 16/09/11: NKBT 68, 192–3.
 - 50) There is no record of the return of Nara no Osa Emyō 奈羅譯語恵明, Imaki no Ayahito Ōkuni 新漢人大國, and Imaki no Ayahito Kōsai 廣濟.
 - 51) Suiko 31/07: NKBT 68, 205. Cf. Seki, *op. cit.*, 126–7.
 - 52) Cf. Bruno Lewin, *Aya und Hata: Bevölkerungsgruppen Altjapans kontinentaler Herkunft* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1962), 150.
 - 53) Suiko 30/07: NKBT 68, 205–07.
 - 54) C. P. Fitzgerald, *Son of Heaven: A Biography of Li Shih-Min, founder of the T’ang Dynasty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 88–89.
 - 55) Jomei 12/10/11: NKBT 68, 234–5. In 646, Takamuko led a diplomatic mission to Silla, and in 654 he was sent once more to the Chinese capital, this time as the highest ranking envoy of a large embassy. By that time, he must have been more than seventy years old, having spent a little less than half his life outside Japan. He did not survive the hardships of the trip, and died in China (Kōtoku/Hakuchi 5/01/01: NKBT 68, 322–3).
 - 56) Kōgyoku 3/01: NKBT 68, 254–5.
 - 57) Jomei 12/05/05: NKBT 68, 234–5. This he did again on the fifteenth day of the fourth month of 652, but now bearing the honorific title of *shamon* 沙門, or ascetic priest, Kōtoku/Hakuchi 3/04/15: NKBT 68, 318–9.
 - 58) I.e. probably sometime during the sixth century.
 - 59) Marc Kalinowski, *Cosmologie et divination dans la Chine ancienne: Le compendium des cinq agents* (Paris: École Française d’Extrême Orient, 1991), 16.
 - 60) Kalinowski (1991), 17.
 - 61) Cf. Bernard Frank, “Kata-imi et kata-tagae: Étude sur les Interdits de direction à l’époque Heian,” *Bulletin de la Maison Franco-Japonaise, Nouvelle Série* tome V, no. 2–4 (Tokyo: Maison Franco-Japonaise, 1958), 28–29.
 - 62) Richard J. Smith, *Fortune-tellers and Philosophers: Divination in Traditional Chinese Society* (Boulder/San Francisco/Oxford: Westview Press, 1991), 217.
 - 63) The chart is said to have been established at the beginning of the Zhenguan 貞觀 period (627–649). As Yuan Tiangang died in 627, the chart must have been made just before his death. It is not

- mentioned among Li Chungfeng's works in his biography in the *Jiu Tang Shu* 『旧唐史』, ch. 79. The first reference to the chart is found in the *Song Shi* 『宗史』. I have used the edition of Zhao Jiqing 趙李青, *Tuibeitu* (Taizhong [Taiwan]: Yougou chubanshe, 1981).
- 64) In English: Richard Wilhelm, *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, Bollingen series no. 19 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1950).
 - 65) Jomei 4/10/04: NKBT 68, 229. Cf. also *Xin Tang Shu* 『新唐史』 220, translated in: Ryūsaku Tsunoda and L. Carrington Goodrich, *Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories* (South Pasadena: Perkins, 1951), 39.
 - 66) Kōtoku/Taika 1/08/08: NKBT 68, 276–7.
 - 67) Jomei 9/02/23: NKBT 68, 231; and Jomei 11/01/25: NKBT 68, 233.
 - 68) On the *fang shi* see: Kenneth J. DeWoskin, *Doctors, Diviners, and Magicians of Ancient China: Biographies of Fang-shih* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
 - 69) Cf. *Kaden*, *op. cit.*, 875.
 - 70) Better known by his post-645 title Naka no Ōe 中大兄. The “Kaden” version does not greatly differ from that of the *Nihongi*, although there are some interesting differences of detail. See: Yokota Ken'ichi 横田健一, “Daishikikanden to Nihonshoki” 「大織冠伝と日本書紀」 in: *Hakuhō Tenpyō no sekai* 『白鳳天平の世界』 (Ōsaka: Sōgensha, 1973), 129–164.
 - 71) For the possible origins of the Nakatomi family see: Nakamura Hideshige 中村英重, “Nakatomi uji no shutsuji to keisei” 「中臣氏の出自と形成」 in: Saeki Arikiyo 佐伯有清 [ed.], *Nihon kodai chūseishi ronkō* 『日本古代中世史論考』 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1987), 45–107. The Nakatomi branch Kamako belonged to may have been a side branch, which gained in importance after the main branch had been exterminated in 587.
 - 72) Yōmei 2/04/02: NKBT 68, 158–9.
 - 73) Jomei pre-accession: NKBT 68, 218–9.
 - 74) Kōgyoku 3/01/01: NKBT 68, 253.
 - 75) *Ibid.*, 254–5: 「中臣鎌子連、為人忠正、有匡濟心。及憤蘇我臣入鹿、失君臣長幼之序、挾社稷之權」。 Translation by Aston, vol. II, 184.
 - 76) On this problem, see Bruce L. Batten, “Foreign Threat and Domestic Reform: The Emergence of the Ritsuryō State,” *Monumenta Nipponica* vol. 41, 2 (1986), 199–219.
 - 77) An illuminating discussion of the nature of power at the Yamato court is given in Gary L. Ebersole, *Ritual Poetry and the Politics of Death in Early Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989). For our topic, see esp. chapter 5, 223–238.
 - 78) The *Nihongi* text has *mariku* 打毬, “hockey” or “polo,” the *Kaden* has *kemari* 蹴鞠, “kickball.” Many tomes have been filled with speculations on which game it was. Alas, all in vain! See: Yamada Hideo 山田英雄, “Nakatomi Kamatariden ni tsuite” 「中臣鎌足伝について」, *Nihon rekishi* 『日本歴史』 no. 58 (1953).
 - 79) Kōgyoku 3/01/01: NKBT 68, 254–5. Translation by Aston, vol. II, 185.
 - 80) Burton Watson, *Records of the Historian: Chapters from the Shih chi of Ssuma Ch'ien* (New York/London: Columbia University Press, 1969), Chapter 55: “The Hereditary House of the Marquis of Liu (Chang Liang),” 159. I have changed the Wade-Giles transcriptions to Pinyin.
 - 81) Sugiyama in: Umehara Takeshi 梅原猛, Sugiyama Jirō 杉山次郎, and Tanabe Shōzō 田辺昭三, *Fujiwara no Kamatari* 『藤原鎌足』 (Tokyo: Shisakusha, 1992), 98–9.
 - 82) Both stories, moreover, have a magical setting. In the Japanese case this is represented by the *tsuki* tree which in itself marks a sacred space. In the Chinese case the setting is one of borders: first, the embankment is the border between earth and water. Second, the shoe is the border between body and earth. Third, the dawn is the border between night and day, and fourth: the strange man is old, i.e. he is on the border between life and death. The *Kaden*, however, lacks the reference to the *tsuki* tree.
 - 83) *Kaden*, *ed. cit.*, 875. For the *Grand Duke's Art of War*, in Chinese: *Liu tao* 『六韜』, see: *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng* 『中国兵書集成』 vol. 1 (Beijing: Jiefangjun Chūbanshe, 1987), 417–512. The work was translated into English by Ralph D. Sawyer, *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China* (Boulder/San Francisco/Oxford: Westview Press, 1993), 40–105.
 - 84) Kōgyoku 3/01/01: NKBT 68, 254–5.
 - 85) *Ibid.* 「謀大事者、不如有輔」.

- 86) According to the *Sonpi bunmyaku* 『尊卑分脈』, Emishi had an older brother Omasa, who is probably identical with Soga no Kuramaro no Omi of Jomei preaccession: NKBT 68, 218–9.
- 87) Most probably on the advice of Kamako, Naka no Ōe later used the same startagem once more against the Soga family, when he moved, in 649, against Soga no Ishikawamaro through his younger brother Hyūga 日向. Cf. also: Umehara, Sugiyama, and Tanabe, *op. cit.*, 112, and below.
- 88) Kōgyoku 3/01/01: NKBT 68, 254–5. Yamada Hideo sees an another parallel to the *Nihongi* story in the *Samguk sagi* 『三國史記』 and *Samguk yusa* 『三國遺事』, which tell of the relationship between a seventh century Sillan king and his minister. When, on a New Year’s Day, the king and his minister were playing kickball in front of the minister’s residence, the latter intentionally stepped on and tore the king’s garment so that he would have an excuse to invite him into his home and introduce him to his sisters. The older one had just bought an auspicious dream from her younger sibling with a dress, and therefore was not able to show herself in front of the king. Thus, the younger sister came out to sew the hem of the king’s garment. She pleased him so much that he later “married” her. Yamada Hideo 山田英雄, “Nakatomi Kamatariden ni tsuite” 「中臣鎌足伝について」, *Nihon rekishi* 『日本歴史』 no. 58 (1953), 54–55.
- 89) *Kaden*, *ed. cit.*, 876: 「武勇強斷，膂力打鼎」.
- 90) Kōgyoku 4/06/08: NKBT 68, 261–3.
- 91) Kōtoku [645]/06/14: NKBT 68, 270–1.
- 92) The *Kaden* does not mention that Kamako and Prince Katsuragi studied with Shōan.
- 93) Shinokawa Ken 篠川賢, “Kōgyoku-Saimei tennō” 「皇極・斎明天皇」 in Takemitsu Makoto 武光誠, *Kodai jotei no subete* 『古代女帝のすべて』 (Tokyo: Shinjinbutsu Ōraisha, 1991), 107–112.
- 94) Prince Katsuragi’s preference for marital or concubinal relations with daughters of Ishikawamaro (Miyatsuko hime 美濃津子娘, Ochi no Iratsume 遠智娘, Mei no Iratsume 姪娘) and other Soga women (Hitachi no Iratsume 常陸娘) as well as a daughter of Abe Uchimarō (Tachibana no Iratsume 橘娘) may be reduced to his desire to add, after the elimination of the Emishi branch, the extensive landholdings of the Soga family to those of the imperial family. For the women in his life, see: Tenji 7/02/23: NKBT 68, 367–9.
- 95) Katō Kenkichi 加藤謙吉, *Soga uji to Yamato ōken* 『蘇我氏と大和王権』 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1983), 161–170. Cf. also Yamada Hideo, *op. cit.*, 55–56.
- 96) In later times, the Saekibe was in charge of guarding the western or Sōheki Gate 藻壁門. In the third month of 666, Emperor Tenji 天智天皇 (previously Prince Katsuragi) visited Komaro on his deathbed, so we see that the obligation incurred on the Day of the Monkey was not lightly forgotten. Cf. Tenji 5/03: NKBT 68, 364–5.
- 97) Inoue Kaoru 井上薫, “Kyūjō jūni mon no mongō to Isshi no hen” 「宮城十二門号と乙巳の変」 in *Shoku Nihongi Kenkyū* 『続日本紀研究』 1–7 (1954), 170–184. According to Inoue, the twelve gates of the Heian palace bore the names of the clans who had lent their assistance at the time of Iruka’s murder.
- 98) Zhào Jī-qing (ed. 1981), no. 45 (no page numbers).
- 99) Richard Wilhelm [tr.], *The I Ching* vol. 1, 20–24, vol. 2, 40–45. According to Iulian K. Shchutskii in *Researches on the I Ching* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 154, the original meaning of the hexagram is “Immaturity. Accomplishment.”
- 100) Wilhelm (1961), 1–li.
- 101) Jomei’s first son was Prince Furuhi, who, as we have seen, had been born from a Soga concubine.
- 102) Wilhelm (1961), 20–1.
- 103) *Ibid.*, 21.
- 104) *Ibid.*, 407.
- 105) *Ibid.*, 408.
- 106) Cf. Chin-Bing, Noreen Mei-lan, *Back to the future: Prophecy and the worlds of the T’ui-pei’t’u*, Doctoral dissertation (Harvard 1990). I am grateful to Prof. Edward Davis of the University of Hawaii for this reference.
- 107) For a description of the correct procedure, see: Wilhelm, vol. 1 (1950), 392–5.
- 108) A typical *fang shi* commentary runs like this: “... the people of the kingdom of Liang were rebelling and had driven out the grand warden, Yuan Yen. ... Yang said: “Those brigands rebelled on the fifty-

- eighth day of the cycle (*hsin-yu*), the twentieth day of the eighth month. The sun and the Chronographic Star [Mercury] are both in the ascendant. The powers of the heavenly stem wax in the southern quarter, while the powers of [the earthly branch] *yu* are waning. Now Liang is north of Ch'iao, so by taking advantage of the waxing to attack the waning you are sure to destroy the brigands. Also on the sixtieth day of the cycle (*shen-tzu*), two days after the brigands rebelled, winds arose in the east and thunder passed to the west. Since Ch'iao is in the southeast, thunder advanced before our troops, meaning that our troops will triumph. ..." DeWoskin, *op. cit.*, 159.
- 109) 「有客西来、至東而止、木火金水、洗此大恥」
- 110) On court ceremony see: Suiko 12/09: NKBT 68, 186–7.
- 111) The Itabuki Palace site is known, but has not been excavated for the same site was later used for another palace, most likely the one known as the Kiyomihara no miya 淨御原宮 (late 7th century), which was built right on top of the remains of the first. It is impossible, it seems, to excavate the layer underneath the later palace without destroying the archaeological remains of the upper layer. Consequently, we know very little precise details of the layout of the Itabuki palace (642). Its shape is likely to have been similar, however, to the first Naniwa palace (652) which has been extensively excavated. For plans and explanations of the palaces and early capitals of Japan, see: Imaizumi Takao, *op. cit.*; Kishi Toshio 岸俊男, *Nihon kodai kyūto no kenkyū* 『日本古代宮都の研究』 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1988), esp. 357; Machida Akira 町田章, “Kodai no kyūden to jūin” 「古代の宮殿と寺院」, *Kodaishi fukugen* 『古代史復元』 vol. 8 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1989), esp. 58–9.
- 112) NKBT 68, 262–3: “waraite tsurugi wo nuku” 「咲而解劍」.
- 113) The *Nihongi* calls the building the “Daigokuden” 大極殿, but as many Japanese scholars have pointed out this is likely to be an anachronism. Cf. Naoki Kōjirō, “Daigokuden no kigen ni tsuite no ichi kōsatsu: zenki Naniwa no miya o megutte” 「大極殿の起源についての一考察：前期難波宮をめぐって」 in *Asuka Nara jidai no kenkyū* 『飛鳥・奈良時代の研究』 (Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō, 1975), 69–119.
- 114) Naoki Kōjirō (1965), 173.
- 115) Burton Watson, *op. cit.*, 63. I have changed his Wade-Giles transcription into Pinyin to conform with the text.
- 116) After comparing the two accounts of the *Nihongi* and the *Kaden*, Yokota, *op. cit.* (1973), concludes that both seem to be reworkings of a third account. He gives the title “Iruka chūmetsu no Monogatari” 「入鹿誅滅物語」 to this lost manuscript. Judging from the adroit use of Chinese prototype stories and the clearly pro-Kamako bias of both versions we have left today, it is likely, even probable, that this original manuscript was written by Kamako himself or someone close to him.
- 117) NKBT 68, 262–3.
- 118) 112 years later this was still to be held against him. The *Shoku Nihongi* mentions that the merit earned by Saeki no Muraji Komaro at this time “cannot be called Big,” in which case the forty villages he received would have remained in his family “until eternity.” As it was, they were in the possession of Komaro’s descendants for only three generations. It was probably on the occasion of their return to the state that this remark entered the records of the National History office. Tenpyō Hōji 1 (757): *Shoku Nihongi* 3, SNKBT vol. 14 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1992), 241.
- 119) *Kaden*, *ed. cit.*, 876.
- 120) The *Kaden* renders Iruka’s words more succinctly than the *Nihongi*, which reports a fanciful introduction to this request by the minister. Takeuchi Rizō [ed.], *op. cit.*, 877.
- 121) Precursors of the *emonfu* of the *ritsuryo* 律令 codes. See: Karl Friday, *Hired Swords* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 27–30.
- 122) NKBT 68, 264–5.
- 123) *Asukadera hakkutsu chōsa hōkokusho* (1958), Plan 1 and 2.
- 124) Our main sources for these events, the *Nihongi* and the *Kaden*, report a speech of the prince immediately after the minister’s plea to the Ōkimi, as a response to an inquiry by the monarch. It is doubtful, however, if, at such a suspenseful moment, either the young prince or the Ōkimi would have had the presence of mind and breath to spare for a dialogue to illuminate posterity on the reasons for the murder. It is not unlikely, however, that the words reported to have been spoken by the prince for the benefit of all those present (as well as for us today) were actually said by him later after his arrival in the Asukadera.

- 125) NKBT 68, 262–3.
- 126) I.e. the Nakatomi, the Ōtomo 大伴, the Kose 巨勢, the Heguri 平群, the Abe 阿倍, the Saeki 佐伯, the Sakamoto 坂本, the Ki 紀伊, the Kawabe 河邊, the Owarida 小墾田, the Miwa 三輪, the Kashiwade 膳部, the Azumi 阿曇, the Hozumi 穗積, the Taguchi 田口, and the Hata 羽田. Cf. Seki Akira, “Taika no kaishin” 「大化改新」 in *Kodai* 『古代』 2, Iwanami kōza Nihon rekishi 岩波講座日本歴史 vol. 2 (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1962), 191.
- 127) Kōgyoku 4/06/12: NKBT 68, 264–5.
- 128) The Aya no Atae probably included Aratai no Hirafu 荒田井比羅夫, who, a month later, is sent away to Owari to “collect taxes” (Kōtoku/Taika 1/07/14: NKBT 68, 272–3). Later he performed services for the court as an engineer, digging a canal at Naniwa in 646 (Kōtoku/Taika 3: NKBT 68, 302–3), and setting boundary posts of the palace in 650 (Kōtoku/Hakuchi 1/10: NKBT 68, 316–7).
- 129) See my “The Introduction of the Art of Mounted Archery into Japan” in *TASJ* 4th series vol. 6, 1 (1992), 27–47.
- 130) Kose Tokuda no Omi is first mentioned in the *Nihongi* when he pronounces the funeral eulogy for the late Emperor Jomei on behalf of Prince Ōmata (Kōgyoku 1/12/13: NKBT 68, 244–5).
- 131) Kōgyoku 2/11/01: NKBT 68, 251.
- 132) Kōgyoku 4/06/13: NKBT 68, 264–5. Cf. also the Preface to “Shinsen shōjiroku” 「新選姓氏録」 in *Gunsho ruijū: Zatsubu* 『群書類從 雜部』 (vol. 25) (Tokyo: Gunsho ruijū kanseikai, 1933), 120.
- 133) It was only through murder (645, 649) and civil war (671) that the imperial family succeeded in dominating the Chinese style state which grew up in Japan during the seventh century. No wonder that Japanese historians do not like to describe the events of 645. Inoue Mitsusada, *Taika no kaishin* 『大化改新』, Yōsenso no. 63 (Tokyo: Yōshobō, 1954), 132/3 has 3 lines on Iruka’s murder. Seki Akira (1962), 20 has 5 lines on the day of the murder. Rikō Mitsuo 利光三津夫, *Nihon kodai seijishi* 『日本古代政治史』 (Tokyo: Keiō tsūshin, 1988), 40 has ten lines. Many others, among whom the great Sakamoto Tarō 坂本太郎, *Taika no kaishin* 『大化改新』 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1988), remain altogether silent. The best account can be found in: Naoki Kōjirō (1965), 145–179. A rather fanciful account is Kitayama Shigeo 北山茂夫, *Taika no kaishin* 『大化の改新』, Iwanami Shinsho no. 46 (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1961), 38–61.
- 134) Kōtoku 1/06/19: NKBT 68, 270–1.
- 135) Kōtoku 1/06/14,15; Kōtoku/Taika 1/07/02, 12, 13; 1/09/12; 3/10/11; 4/04/01.
- 136) Kōtoku/Taika 5/03/24: NKBT 68, 306–7.
- 137) Kōtoku/Taika 5/03/26: NKBT 68, 309.
- 138) Kōtoku/Taika 5/03/30: NKBT 68, 310–11.
- 139) Kōtoku/Taika 1/09/03: NKBT 68, 277–9. Among the murderers is the same Komaro Saeki no Muraji who had “assisted” Prince Katsuragi on the day of the monkey.
- 140) Tenji 7/02/23: NKBT 68, 367.
- 141) Taika 2/01/01: NKBT 68, 280–3.
- 142) Tsuda Sōkichi, *Nihon Jōdaishi no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1947), 195ff. Inoue Mitsusada, *Nihon kodai kokka no kenkyū* (Tokyo: 1965), 383ff.
- 143) In the second month of 649, Priest Min and Kuromaro Takamuko no Fubito were ordered “to establish Eight departments of State and one hundred bureaus” (Kōtoku/Taika 5/02: NKBT 68, 306–7).
- 144) According to the *Sonpi bunmyaku*, Yoshimura, *op. cit.*, 66.
- 145) Saimei 齋明 4/11/03: NKBT 68, 334–6.
- 146) Tenji 7/02/23: NKBT 68, 368–9.
- 147) Tenji 8/09/19: NKBT 68, 370–1.
- 148) Tenji 10/10/23: NKBT 68, 378–9.
- 149) Temmu 1/07/22: NKBT 68, 406–7.
- 150) The party included Soga no Akae, Sadaijin, and Soga no Hatayasu, the Dainagon. Cf. Temmu preaccession [671]/10/19: NKBT 68, 383.
- 151) Temmu 1/07/22: NKBT 68, 400–1.
- 152) After the *Jinshin no ran*, competition for power in the Nara valley changed. With the elimination of the last main contenders for absolute power, the power struggle continued inside the imperial family itself,

and for the next hundred years it would rage between the Tenji and Temmu lines. As with the competition between the Soga and the imperial family, this struggle produced more empresses, for the accession of an empress to the throne meant, in general, a compromise solution at a time when the accession of a male heir to the throne would give one of the contending parties more than their share of power. Suiko, Kōgyoku and Saimei all represent compromises between the Soga family and the imperial clan. Jitō was the first empress resulting from a compromise between the Tenji and Temmu lines.

- 153) After his victory, Temmu, who had already “married” two daughters of his older brother by Ochi no Iratsume, i.e. Princesses Ōta 大田皇女 and Uno 鵜鷗皇女 (later Empress Jitō), took two more of his nieces as his wives, the Princesses Ōe 大江皇女 and Nittabe 新田部皇女. He also had numerous concubines, among whom the following prominent ladies bore him children: two daughters of Nakatomi Kamako, who just before his death in 669 had received the new name of Fujiwara Kamatari; a daughter of Soga no Akae, who bore the murderer of her father three children. Temmu 2/02/27: NKBT 68, 410–1.
- 154) The best example of this is, of course, the lack of a separate chapter on the reign of Emperor Kōbun, Tenji’s son, who was ousted by Ōama.
- 155) Kadowaki Teiji sees in the names Emishi and Iruka evidence of prejudice on the part of the compilers of the *Nihongi*, but his explanations are too fanciful to accept. Also, he does not address the problem why Umako’s name should not have been changed to something more pejorative. Cf. Kadowaki Teiji 門脇禎二, “*Taika no kaishin*” ron 『大化改新論』 (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 1969), 193–206; and in: *Soga no Emishi, Iruka* 『蘇我蝦夷・入鹿』, Jinbutsu sōsho 177 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1977), 15–27; and once more in “*Taika no kaishin*” shiron 『大化改新史論』 (Tokyo: Shibunkaku shuppan, 1991), 185–198.
- 156) As is well known, these posthumous Chinese style names of the emperors were not part of the original text of the *Nihongi* of 720. The following argument, then, does not reflect the editorial sentiments of the first compilers of the *Nihongi*, but those of their successors in the mid- to later eighth century.
- 157) Legge, *The Chinese Classics* vol. 3, 320–344.
- 158) *Idem*, 334.