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Autor(en): **Paca, Roman**

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Roman Paşca*

“Volume on Shintō as Private Law”

Andō Shōeki on Shintō – Fragments from *Shihō shinsho no maki*

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Abstract: This article is a translation of the first part of the *Shihō shinsho no maki* 私法神書卷 (“Volume on Shintō as Private Law”) from Andō Shōeki’s *Shizen shin’eidō* (“The True Way of the Functioning of Nature”). The fragments selected here contain a critique of three texts that Shōeki sees as fundamental in the shaping of Shintō as an ideology: *Kujiki*, *Kojiki*, and *Nihongi*. Shōeki criticizes Shintō alongside Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism as a preamble to proposing his own vision of the universe, a “World of Nature” unmarred by social hierarchies. His tenet is that any kind of ideology is part of the “Law” as a self-serving contraption created to alienate human society from the true way of Nature.

In my notes preceding the translation, I make a brief overview of Shōeki’s philosophical ideas, emphasizing his understanding of the notion of *kami*, and I discuss the way in which he constructs and develops his argument. I also point to some of the discrepancies and contradictions that are found in his text.

Keywords: Japanese philosophy, Edo period, Andō Shōeki, *Shizen shin’eidō*, Shintō

1 Translator’s notes

Andō Shōeki 安藤昌益 (1703–1762) is undoubtedly one of the most puzzling names in the intellectual landscape of Tokugawa Japan. Very little is known about his life, and most of his texts remained completely unknown until the Meiji period, when they were (re)discovered by chance by Kanō Kōkichi 狩野亨吉. Spending his final years as a physician in the remote fief of Hachinohe in northern Japan, Shōeki only started writing after witnessing and experiencing

Originaltitel: *Shihō shinsho no maki* 私法神書卷, von Andō Shōeki 安藤昌益

*Corresponding author: Roman Paşca, Research Institute for Japanese Studies, Kanda University of International Studies, 1-4-1 Wakaba, Mihama-ku, Chiba 261-0014, Japan.
E-mail: pasca-r@kanda.kuis.ac.jp

firsthand the harsh life of the farmers in the countryside, deprived of the fruit of their labor by the severe climate and burdened by the taxes imposed by the shogunate. He never saw himself as a “thinker” or “philosopher”, and was never part of any of the major schools or currents of thought; as a matter of fact, he criticized them all, from Confucianism to Daoism, and from Buddhism to Shintoism, exposing them as mere “fabrications” devised in order to create a narrative of authority as the means to regulate and control human society, thus isolating it from the realm of Nature.

He was also an extremely frank and sometimes abrupt social critic, repeatedly voicing his discontent with the shogunate and the general state of things in Tokugawa Japan. He was particularly dissatisfied with the destitution of the farmers and with the hierarchical class system, and he put forth an image of the world in which all creatures and things – from humans to animals to plants – are equal, bound together by a constant flow of energies governed by principles and notions such as reciprocity and respect of *chokkō* 直耕 (“straight cultivation”), i. e. observance of the “True Way of Nature”. Thus, in *Shizen shin’eidō* 自然真営道¹ (“The True Way of the Functioning of Nature”²), his major work, he described a vision of the universe in which Nature (*shizen* 自然) is an entity sufficient in itself, complete in its isness, all-encompassing and inclusive, in which no hierarchies of any kind whatsoever can exist. For Shōeki, *shizen no yo* 自然の世 (“the World of Nature”) is the unspoiled, primordial realm where all manifestations of life coexist in a pristine, quintessential state. Opposed to this realm is the *shihōsei* 私法世 (“the World of the Private Law”), which represents human society, warped by an antagonism with the “True Way” because of the existence of self-serving, man-made laws.

In *Shizen shin’eidō*, before outlining his own vision of the World and his understanding of Nature, Shōeki starts with a critique of the ideologies and religions that had shaped Japanese thought until the Tokugawa period. Thus, he

¹ The compound 自然 was usually read *jinen* in classical Japanese, but in a text titled *Kakuryū sensei inkeisho* 確龍先生韻經 (“Master Kakuryū’s Classic”), included in ASZ vol. 16 as part of the *Hachinohe shiryō* 八戸資料 (“Hachinohe documents”), Shōeki states that it should be read *shizen*: 「父字ノ『シ』ト、母字ノ『ゼン』」 (ASZ 16: 302). “The first ideograph is [read] *shi*, the second *zen*”. (Kakuryūdō Ryōchū 確龍堂良中 was one of the pseudonyms Shōeki used.) For a more detailed discussion of *jinen* / *shizen*, cf. also Yasunaga 1992: 350–352; Joly 1996: 77–156.

² The title *Shizen shin’eidō* 自然真営道 has been translated in various ways: “The Way of the Operation of the Self-acting Truth” (Yasunaga 1992), “Grand Traité du Shizenshinei’dō” (Joly 1996), “The Way of Natural Spontaneity and Living Truth” (Heisig 2011), “The Way of the Five Processes and Unitary Generative Force Advancing and Retreating” (Tucker 2013) etc. For the sake of clarity and brevity, I will translate *shizen* as “Nature” as I feel it is more faithful to Shōeki’s holistic vision in which Nature as a whole represents an object of *theoria*.

dedicates several sections to criticizing Confucianism (volumes 4–6, *Jusho no maki* 儒書卷), Buddhism (volume 7, *Bussho no maki* 仏書卷), and Shintō (volume 9, *Shihō shinsho no maki* 私法神書卷). This critical démarche is necessary for Shōeki to contextualize his own philosophical ideas within the wider context of Japanese thought, and to emphasize their originality.

Following is a translation of the first part of *Shihō shinsho no maki*, in which Shōeki discusses the three texts he considers to be fundamental for Shintō: *Kujiki* 旧事紀, *Kojiki* 古事記, and *Nihongi* 日本書紀, preceded by a brief commentary on Shōeki's understanding of the notion of *kami* 神 and on the way in which he constructs his whole argument. Even though some of Shōeki's works have already been translated into English (especially in Yasunaga 1992), the focus has been on his later texts, particularly the ones dealing with concepts such as *chokkō* 直耕 (“straight cultivation”), *gosei* 互性 (“mutual natures”), or *danjo / hito* 男女 (“human being”). However, I feel it is important to translate and examine the earlier writings as well, as they can contribute to a better understanding of Shōeki's philosophy and, at the same time, shed new light on the way Shintō was understood and interpreted at the time. This is part of a larger project attempting to redefine Shōeki's place within the socio-cultural and historical contexts of the Tokugawa period, and within the broader frame of the intellectual history of Japan.

2 Shōeki's critique of Shintō

As Itō shows, Shintō is by no means a unitary, coherent narrative, and it only acquired its religious dimension in the premodern period, after a long existence as a “subordinate entity” (「従属的存在」) to Buddhism³; in the beginning, the term itself was not used to designate a system of beliefs, but rather to refer to the conditions and attributes of the various gods:

神道史は仏教史のように叙述することはできない。なぜなら、「神道」なる語を以て、仏教渡来以前から現代に至る、日本の<カミ>に関する信仰と言説、儀礼、習俗の総称とすることはできないからである。「神道」は、古代より使用されているが、現在のよ
うな民族宗教という意味を持つのは当初からのものではない。⁴

One can not narrate the history of Shintō the same way one would the history of Buddhism. One can not use the word “Shintō” as a generic term to refer to all the beliefs, discourses, ceremonies and customs related to “kami” from before the introduction of

³ Itō 2012: 300.

⁴ Itō 2012: 299.

Buddhism until the present day. “Shintō” was indeed used from the ancient times, but originally it did not have the meaning of ethnic religion, as it does now.

Inoue, too, states that Shintō is not a uniform, unvarying system of thought⁵: it is influenced by changes in society, by the advent of new religions (e. g. Christianity), by political and administrative decisions, or by cohabitation with other ideologies. In the Tokugawa period alone, for example, one can speak of a Confucianist view of Shintō (as put forth by Hayashi Razan 林羅山 or Yamazaki Ansai 山崎闇齋), and of a *kokugaku* view of Shintō (as proposed by Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長).

But what does Shintō 神道 represent for Shōeki? To quote him, it is “the epitome of stupidity and delusion” (*guwaku no itari* 愚惑ノ至⁶). As Terao points out in his commentaries to *Shizen shin’eidō*,⁷ Shōeki does not pay any attention whatsoever to the various factions or denominations that had marked the evolution of Shintō until the 18th century. Instead, he criticizes it “fundamentally and extensively” (「根源的かつ全面的に批判した」⁸), as a whole, without differentiating between the possible understandings of the term.⁹ For him, there is in fact no such thing as Shintō (as a “Way of the Gods”) since the only Way is that of Nature:

多くのばあい昌益は、“神道”のことを「神法」と呼ぶ。彼の用語法では、「法」は「道」に対立するもので、「自然ノ道」に反する作為的な「^{こしらえごと}制」であり、支配者・権力者の私利・私欲によってでっちあげられた「私法」である。¹⁰

In most cases, Shōeki refers to “Shintō” by using the term *shinpō* (the “law of the gods”). In his usage of the terms, the “law” is in opposition to the “way” as it represents a deliberate “fabrication” that goes against “the Way of Nature,” a “private law” contrived by the personal greed and for the personal benefit of the rulers and authorities.

Why, and how, does Shōeki criticize Shintō? To answer these questions, we first have to compare what the notion of *kami* 神 means in Shintō and what it means for Shōeki, and to see in what respect and to what extent these interpretations of the concept are different.

⁵ Inoue 2011.

⁶ ASZ 5: 373.

⁷ Included in ASZ 5: Terao 1997: 204–209.

⁸ Terao 1997: 207.

⁹ Elsewhere, Terao goes so far as to say that Shōeki exposed the whole Shintō discourse as “superstition” (迷信) and “delusion” (*meimō* 迷妄): 「昌益は、神道のあらゆる神話・伝説を迷信としてしりぞけ、その迷妄をひきはがし」 (Terao 1978: 154).

¹⁰ Terao 1997: 204.

Given the fact that “Shintō” itself is not unitary and uniform, the understanding of the concept of *kami* is not linear, either, as it shifts, for example, from an image of the *kami* as a supra-human form of existence to be feared and appeased through prayers and offerings (in the ancient times), to an understanding of the gods as immanent to the human mind and soul (in the middle ages), and then to an all-encompassing, rather flexible view that includes everything from the gods in Heaven to the spirits of the dead.¹¹

As it moves in time over all these interpretations, the *kami* is at the same time elusive, as it cannot be known directly, and omnipresent, as it permeates all other forms of existence. At times, it is an entity in opposition with the human being; at other times, a godly presence to be respected, revered, celebrated and feared. It does have some anthropomorphic features, but remains basically an intangible and impalpable presence which is external to the human realm. The world of gods up in Heaven described in *Kojiki* and other chronicles, and the world of human beings down on Earth exist on almost completely different levels; the ties and communication conduits between them are extremely fragile and, most of the time, unidirectional. Human beings invoke, pray to, or try to appease the gods, who may or may not answer. In some cases, the *kami* are endowed with supra-human and supra-natural powers that allow them to have control over things and phenomena such as the sun, rain, crops, or life and death. Since there are myriads of gods, some of them are more affable and amiable, while others are more

¹¹ In his analysis of the concept of *kami* included in ASZ, Terao also cites the following fragment from Motoori Norinaga’s *Kojikiden* 古事記伝 (“Commentaries on the *Kojiki*”), in an attempt to clarify what the concept had come to mean around the time Shōeki wrote *Shizen Shin’eidō*:

「凡て迦微とは、^{イニシエノミフミ}古御典等に見えたる天地の^{モロモロ}諸の神たちを始めて、^{ミコト}其を祀れる社に^{ミタマ}坐御霊をも申し、又人はさらにも云ず、^{トリノモノ}鳥獸^{キクサ}木草のたぐひ^{ウミヤマ}海山など、^{ソノホカ}其余何にまれ、^{ソノツネ}尋常ならずすぐれたる^{トク}徳のありて、^{オソシ}可畏き物を^{カミ}迦微とは云なり」

Subete kami to wa, inishie no mifumi domo ni mietaru tenchi no moromoro no kamitachi wo hajimete, so wo matsureru yashiro ni imasu mitama wo mo mōshi, mata hito wa saranimo iwazu, torikemono kikusa no tagui umiyama nado, sono hoka nani ni mare, yonotsune narazu suguretaru koto no arite, kashikoki mono wo kami to wa iu nari. (ASZ 5: 211)

Generally speaking, ‘kami’ denotes, in the first place, the deities of heaven and earth that appear in the ancient texts and also the spirits enshrined in the shrines; furthermore, among all kinds of beings – including not only human beings but also such objects as birds, beasts, trees, grass, seas, mountains, and so forth – any being whatsoever which possesses some eminent quality out of the ordinary, and is awe-inspiring, is called *kami*. (Motoori Norinaga, *Kojikiden*, English translation from Matsumoto 1970: 84–85).

hostile and intimidating, but they all have in common the fact that they are untouchable, ethereal entities, discarnate and abstract.

For Shōeki, on the other hand, the notion of *kami* is fundamentally different, in that he denies the very existence of any god-like, supra-natural, inaccessible entity. In his vision of the universe, there can exist nothing *external* to the plane in which human beings coexist with all other things and creatures: the whole world is a dynamic continuum in which Heaven and Earth do exist separately, but as the two sides of the same coin, as Heaven-and-Earth combined together in a totality created and governed by a perpetual flow of energies that circulate constantly, uninterrupted and eternal. This, for him, is the realm of Nature, and all forms of existence can only be immanent to this realm, deeply embedded within it. Therefore, the notion of *kami* as a presence that hovers above and controls human beings is nonsensical and illogical, a mere fabrication contrived by the so-called “sages of old” in order to impose their own view of the world and to create the “Law” that governs human society. Since Nature is beginningless and endless, with all existence intrinsic to it – as Shōeki repeatedly states throughout his texts – notions such as time or transcendence are completely irrelevant, as nothing can exist outside Nature, only within it.¹²

However, even though he refutes the existence of god-like creatures, Shōeki does use the word *kami* in his works, but he gives it a completely new intension. For him, *kami* is not an entity opposed to the human being, who should be feared and honored, or a supra-natural presence such as the spirit of the dead; *kami* represents instead a dynamic force that acts within Nature, symbolizing its creative, productive powers. *Kami* also symbolizes the spiritual power of the

¹² Shōeki’s understanding of the concept of time is closely related to his vision of Nature. As Joly points out, “Nous avons vu Shōeki, grâce à la référence à l’idée de *shizen*, nier l’histoire et cela de façon si radicale qu’il alla jusqu’à en nier la possibilité même” (Joly 1996: 399–400). Moreover, “ce monde de *shizen* que Shōeki nous invite à regagner, présente ce point commun avec l’idéologie communiste d’offrir l’image d’une totalité où l’histoire se trouve annihilée” (Joly 1996: 451). This “annihilation of history” seems to be in contradiction with his vision of a realm where dynamic energies constantly move about, but, as if in a one-dimensional chart, the movements of the energies are influenced solely by the vector of direction, not by the vector of time. In order to explain how human beings and all other components of Nature come into being, Shōeki forges another new concept: the three energies *tsūki* 通気 (descending *ki*), *ōki* 横気 (lateral *ki*), and *gyakki* 逆気 (ascending *ki*), which flow in Nature and beget all forms of existence according to the direction of their flow. For example, ascending-energy cereals support the existence of lateral-energy creatures, which in turn support the existence of descending-energy human beings, who eventually return to the ground and become nutrients for ascending-energy cereals.

human being, although not as an abstract force that manifests itself in the afterlife,¹³ but as a concrete form of vitality and vigor that sustains life. It is a dynamic power, integral to the realm of Nature, that suffuses all creatures and things with ontological zest; in this sense, *kami* is an essential component of the fabric of existence as it embodies the energy that gives it substantiality and physicality.

Here is the definition of *kami* as it appears in two different fragments from *Shizen shin'eidō*:

是レ神トハ、自然真ノ自感・進退スル伸発ノ気ノ名ナリ。¹⁴

*Kore kami*¹⁵ *to wa, shizen shin no jikan*¹⁶ /*shintai suru shinpatsu no ki no na nari.*

Kami is the name of the all-pervasive energy created through the true spontaneous action of Nature, which advances and retreats.

神ハ、無始無終・無死無生ニシテ、唯常中、自リ然ル真ノ自感ニシテ、進伸・退止ノ一気ナリ。¹⁷

Kami wa, mushi mushū /mushi musei ni shite, tada jōchū, hitori suru shin no jikan ni shite, shinshin /taishi no ikki nari.

Kami is beginningless and endless, it is not born nor does it die; it is constantly created by itself through spontaneous action as the single true energy that advances and spreads, then retreats and stops.

From these fragments, it is clear that for Shōeki *kami* is not an entity that exists outside Nature. In fact, just like *shizen*, *kami* is “beginningless and endless”; therefore, texts such as *Kujiki*, *Kojiki*, and *Nihongi*, which talk extensively about the birth of the various gods, are mere fabrications meant to justify and legitimize political power by inventing an external force that can govern the existence of human beings. For Shōeki, in fact, the “Age of Gods” described in

13 Since Nature is beginningless and endless, the only afterlife possible is a return to the same realm of Nature through the three energies (descending, lateral, and ascending).

14 ASZ 5: 260–261.

15 When he tries to clarify what he sees as a misunderstanding of the meaning of 神, Shōeki uses the reading *kami* for the ideograph. In fact, he equates it with the reading *shin* at times, in an attempt to render his vision that *kami* is both the creative power of Nature, and also the supreme one:

神ハ敬敬ニシテ自徳ヲ見ハス上無キノ上ナリ。故ニ神ト呼ブ。

Shin wa keikei ni shite jitoku o arawasu kami naki no kami nari. Yue ni kami to yobu.

“*Kami*” is something that should be respected, something supremely noble that shows its virtue by itself. That is why it is called “*kami*” [superior]. ASZ 5: 316.

16 For the ideograph 感, Shōeki proposes the reading *hataraki* and the meaning “action”. Thus, *jikan* 自感 means “spontaneous action” and is used to suggest the fundamental attribute of Nature. In this fragment, as Terao suggests in his translation into modern Japanese (Terao 1997: 260), *shizen* is the subject of *ki*.

17 ASZ 5: 285.

these writings is not a *kamiyo* 神代, but a *kamiyo* 神世, a “world of *kami*” in which human beings still live in harmony with the energies of Nature because they understand and respect its spirit (i. e., *kami*):

神代ハ即チ人ノ世ナリ、人ノ世ハ神ノ世ニシテ、神ト人ト、本一神一ノ進退・一氣ナル故ナリ。

Kamiyo wa sunawachi hito no yo nari, hito no yo wa kami no yo ni shite, kami to hito to, moto isshin noshintai /ikki naru yue nari.

The “Age of Gods” is in fact the world of human beings, and the world of human beings is the world of gods; originally, gods and human beings are [manifestations of] one single energy, one single spirit that advances and retreats.¹⁸

Moreover, since the ideograph for *kami* can also be read *shin*, Shōeki often associates it with notions such as *shin* 真 (“true”, or “truth”), *shin* 心 (“heart” and “mind”), and *shin* 伸 (“spreading”), thus emphasizing its spiritual side and its connectedness with Nature.

In his discussion of Shintō and of *kami*, Shōeki develops his argument by bringing everything closer to him, down on a human plane. He refutes mythization and tries to demonstrate how all the episodes chronicled in the three texts are erroneous because they are uncoupled from the harmonic realm of Nature, as they are not based on an unmediated observation of the world and, therefore, marred by ideological biases. Furthermore, precisely because he is trying to refute mythization, he uses many different sources and expands his critique of Shintō by making numerous references to Buddhist, Confucianist or Daoist texts, concepts and terms. He does this in order to prove his point that basically all ideologies are the same in that they are all part of the *shihō* 私法, the “private law” invented by the so-called “sages of old” (*seijin* 聖人) to serve their own interest.¹⁹ As such, all these ideologies are incorrect, false, foolish and ridiculous. In other words, in order to criticize Shintō, Shōeki *has to* criticize Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism as well.

In his analysis, Shōeki tries to be extremely thorough and methodical, and that is why he sometimes takes the fragments sentence by sentence in an attempt to rebuff and repudiate them one by one. However, there still remain a lot of inconsistencies and dissonances in his argument. For example, the quotes from the three Shintō texts or from the *Classic of Changes* (*I Ching* 易經) are not entirely accurate, as he

¹⁸ ASZ 5: 337.

¹⁹ Shōeki uses the term *gakumon* 学問 (“discipline”) to refer collectively to Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintō etc., but for him these “disciplines” do not serve the purpose of knowing Nature, as they represent nothing but deviations from its true Way. Hence, I feel that “ideologies” – modern as the term should be – is the most adequate translation.

sometimes omits certain passages or misspells certain words; his understanding of Buddhist or Confucianist concepts is not entirely accurate; and last but not least, there are some incongruities between what he states in *Shihō shinsho no maki* and what he claims elsewhere in his works (e. g., the way in which the energies advance and retreat in the world of Nature). Nevertheless, this critique is crucial in understanding his stance toward Shintō in particular and toward ideologies in general, and it can provide us with some helpful hints, instrumental in assessing the role and place of Shintō within the context of the philosophical landscape of Tokugawa Japan.

3 Translation²⁰

(About *Kujiki*, *Kojiki*, *Nihongi*)

1 Shintō as fabrication

This is what is written in the three sacred texts.

First, the *Kujiki* says as follows:

“In the ancient times, when Heaven and Earth were not yet separated, it was chaos like (inside) the egg of a bird. In that murkiness, there appeared signs of what was to come. The clear energies (*ki* 氣) ascended gradually, lingering in a thin layer above; they became Heaven and remained floating. The turbid ones sank down heavily, accumulated one upon another and became Earth. This is how Heaven and Earth were separated and how the land emerged. Heaven was formed first, and then Earth took shape after that. Later on, gods were born in Takama-no-hara, and they were named Ame-no-yuzurihi, Ame-no-sagiri, Kuni-no-yuzuritsuki, Kuni-no-sagiri-no-mikoto. After that, besides these gods who were born spontaneously, there appeared the second generation, of gods who were born in pairs, and so on for another five generations. These are the so-called Seven Generations of the Age of Gods (*ame no kami nanayo* 天の神七代).²¹”

This is written in the first chapter of *Kujiki*.

Kujiki was composed by Prince Shōtoku in the 29th year of the reign of the 34th monarch, Empress Suiko.²² It comprises five volumes in total, three volumes

²⁰ In the translation that follows, terms in square brackets represent comments inserted by Shōeki in the original text, while terms in parenthesis are my insertions (including romanizations).

²¹ Shōeki’s quotes from the three Shintō texts are not entirely reliable, as he omits or truncates certain passages.

²² Like many of his contemporaries, Shōeki seems convinced that *Kujiki* was authored by Prince Shōtoku. For a critical discussion of the text’s veracity, see Teeuwen 2007.

about the Age of Gods, and two volumes about the monarchs from Emperor Jimmu to Empress Suiko.

Next, the *Kojiki* says as follows:

“The names of the gods who were born in Takama-no-hara when Heaven and Earth appeared were Ame-no-mi-naka-nushi-no-kami, next Taka-mi-musu-bi-no-kami, and Kami-musu-bi-no-kami. These three gods were all born spontaneously, and hid themselves. [The names of these three gods correspond to the first generation of heavenly gods in *Kujiki*.] The name of the next god, who was born from a thing that sprung up like the shoots of a reed, when the earth was still young and floated about medusa-like as oil floats on water, was Umashi-ashi-kabi-hiko-ji-no-kami. [This corresponds to the second generation in *Kujiki*.] Next, Ame-no-toko-tachi-no-kami was born. [This god is separate from, but forms a pair with Hiko-ji-no-kami.] These five gods are the separate heavenly gods.

The names of the gods who were born next were Kuni-no-toko-tachi-no-kami and Toyo-kumo-no-no-kami. These gods were also born spontaneously and hid their person. [They also correspond to the second generation in *Kujiki*.] Next were U-hiji-ni-no-kami, Imo-su-hiji-ni-no-kami, Tsuno-gui-no-kami, Imo-iku-gui-no-kami [the third generation in *Kujiki*], Oho-to-no-ji-no-kami, Imo-aya-kashiko-ne-no-kami, then Izana-gi-no-kami and Izana-mi-no-kami. These are the Seven Generations of the Age of Gods.”

This is written in the *Kojiki*.

Kojiki comprises three volumes in total, one volume about the Age of Gods, and two volumes about the 34 monarchs from Emperor Jimmu to Empress Suiko. It was composed by Abe no Yasumaro from the Oharida Palace²³ in the Wadō era (708–715) during the reign of Empress Genmei, the 43rd monarch.

Lastly, the *Nihongi* says as follows:

“In the ancient times, Heaven and Earth were not yet separated, the Yin and the Yang not divided, and it was chaos like (inside) the egg of a bird, but in that murkiness appeared signs of what was to come. The purer, clearer parts drifted upwards in a thin layer and became Heaven. The turbid, heavy parts settled down and formed Earth. The finer parts combined and started floating easily, but the turbid, heavy parts hardened and consolidated with difficulty. Therefore, Heaven appeared first, and Earth was formed thereafter. Later on, gods were born between them (Heaven and Earth). Thus, it is said that in the beginning, when the world began (*kaibyaku* 開闢), the land remained buoyant in a manner

²³ Shōeki wrongly attributes *Kojiki* to Abe no Yasumaro instead of Ō no Yasumaro. The confusion is further deepened by the fact that he links Yasumaro to the Oharida Palace, which was the official residence of Empress Suiko.

that might be compared to the way in which a fish floats on the surface of water. At that time, one thing was born between Heaven and Earth, and its form was like that of a reed shoot. This became a god, and its name was Kuni-no-tokotachi-no-mikoto. Next, Kuni-no-satsuchi-no-mikoto, Toyo-kumu-nu-no-mikoto, U-hiji-ni-no-mikoto, Su-hiji-ni-no-mikoto, Ōto-no-ji-no-mikoto, Ō-toma-be-no-mikoto, Omo-daru-no-mikoto, Kashiko-ne-no-mikoto, Izana-gi-no-mikoto, and Izana-mi-no-mikoto were born. These are called the Seven Generations of Gods.”

This is written in the *Nihongi*.

Nihongi comprises fifteen volumes in total, two volumes about the Age of Gods, and thirteen volumes about the monarchs. It was composed in the Reiki era (715–717) during the reign of Emperor Genshō, the 44th monarch. It contains records from the time of Emperor Jimmu to the time of Emperor Genshō, and it was composed by Prince Toneri.²⁴

Kujiki, *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* – the texts I mentioned above – are called the three sacred texts about gods.²⁵ Even though there are some differences in phrasing, the content is the same in all three. Both *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* are based on the gist of *Kujiki*, which was written by Prince Shōtoku. Even though they use slightly different words, all three texts have in common the fact that they start with records of the Seven Generations of Gods. They are influenced by Prince Shōtoku’s belief in the fabrications²⁶ of Buddhism. Gautama called India the land of Buddhism, claimed that the Seven Buddhas of Antiquity²⁷ had lived there, and declared that the Law was created by Gautama after passing through the five stages.²⁸ Prince Shōtoku imitated Gautama and called Japan the land of gods, claimed that the country appeared during the Seven Generations of Gods from Heaven, and declared that the Law was created by the Five Generations of Gods from Earth.

²⁴ Here, Shōeki probably refers only to the volumes that he had actually read, not to the whole text, which consists of thirty volumes. Also, he confuses Emperors Jitō (whose reign is the last chronicled in *Nihongi*) and Genshō (in whose time the chronicle was finished).

²⁵ The term Shōeki uses here is *sanbu no shinmyōkyō* (三部の神妙経).

²⁶ *Shisei* 私制, “invented for private use,” is used throughout *Shizen shin’eidō* to refer to anything associated with what Shōeki calls the “Law”. As I have noted above, the “Law” (*hō* 法) is a concept used to refer to anything that is man-made, i. e. non-natural. It does not designate the Buddhist Law exclusively, as it is often used to refer to Confucianism or Daoism as well.

²⁷ Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa, and Gautama.

²⁸ *Goji no nyorai* 五時の如来. The five stages are *kegon* 華嚴, *rokuon* 鹿苑, *hōdō* 方等, *han’nya* 般若, and *hokke nehan* 法華涅槃. During these stages, five different sutras were written, respectively.

The number 7 of the Seven Buddhas is the number of (the energy of) fire. Fire is both the mind and the heart (*kokoro* 心). The universal mind (*isshin* 一心) of the Buddha was given different names according to the three stages – the previous life, the present life, the afterlife. The number 5 in the five stages of Gautama comes from the five limbs that constitute the body and it is the number of (the energy of) earth. Prince Shōtoku was influenced by these. (There are Seven Generations of Gods from Heaven because) 7 is the number of fire and fire is controlled by the Sun, and the seven constellations from each of the four directions of the Sun protect the Sun over seven different periods of time, thus creating all things. The number 5 of the Five Generations of Gods from Earth is the number of (the energy of) earth, and earth represents the country itself. This is the reason why Prince Shōtoku, inspired by how countries were created starting from the earth in the middle, said that there are five generations (of Gods from Earth). At first glance, his vision seems to be extraordinary, but it is in fact immature. Fire represents the Sun in Heaven and the spirit (*shinshin* 心神) inside the human being, and it does indeed have some control over Heaven-and-Earth (*tenchi* 転定) and the body, but (the energy of) fire alone cannot control them fully. It can only command over them because fire contains within it all the five types of energies.²⁹ Prince Shōtoku’s vision is erroneous because it fails to make this differentiation. Therefore, if one talks about Nature, one should know that both the Sun and the spirit inside the human being are in fact the manifestation of all the five generations and all the five energies, fused together as only one god and spirit (*isshin* 一神). Thus, there is no such thing in the past as five generations of gods from Earth, and that one god becomes unified and constantly harmonized due to the actions of the spirit during each and every day (*mainichi maishin* 毎日每心, *ichi nichi isshin* 一日一心). Those who read my texts should keep this in mind.

All three texts begin by stating that “Heaven and Earth were not yet separated and it was chaos like (inside) the egg of a bird,” and this is in fact an analogy with how the human being is born. Gautama says that “long before the kalpa of nothingness, the universe was nothing but water”.³⁰ The same thing is written in texts like *Huainanzi* (淮南子) and *Liezi* (列子). Prince Shōtoku reproduced the same ideas (in *Kujiki*), and then Yasumaro copied them and wrote the same thing (in *Kojiki*). They are all just regurgitating (*tsuba kasu nari* 唾粕なり) what their predecessors said. Gautama and the *Huainanzi*, and then

²⁹ Shōeki “borrows” the term *gogyō* 五行 (“the five phases”), but he uses it to refer to the “energies” (*ki* 氣) of the elements.

³⁰ Incidentally, it might be interesting to note that Shōeki makes a spelling mistake here by using a different ideograph for the Japanese word for kalpa (*kūgō*): 空功 instead of 空劫.

the *Liezi*, Prince Shōtoku, Yasumaro and Prince Toneri - not one of them understands that Nature and Heaven-and-Earth are beginningless and endless. That is why they all falsely claim that something existed before Heaven-and Earth, and that is why they all say “in ancient times, Heaven and Earth were not separated and it was chaotic and murky”. Murky refers to the fact that everything was congested and unclear, like a turbid, muddy water in which nothing is distinguishable. That is why they compare the situation before Heaven-and-Earth existed to muddy water. They do this precisely because they fail to understand that Heaven-and-Earth is beginningless and endless.

And then, making an analogy between Heaven-and-Earth and the human being, they only look at what happens when the fluids from the father and the mother have just merged and the fetus is not differentiated yet as man or woman, and claim that, similarly, Heaven and Earth were not separated, just like the inside of an egg. They make a comparison with an egg inside which there is no differentiation yet into male or female. It might indeed be somewhat similar, but that view is in fact an immense mistake. And here is the reason why. Gautama, the sages of old, the wise men,³¹ and Prince Shōtoku - they all have in common the idea that the universe originated from water, that the human being originated from the fluids of the father and the mother, that all the birds, beasts, fishes and crawling creatures also originated from the fluids of their progenitors, that all the grasses and all the trees only bloom and bear fruit when there is water; in other words, the idea that Heaven-and-Earth and human beings and all the things in the universe originated from water. That is why the sages of old times in China even said that *taiitsu* is an honorary name for water.³² Confused by this, the *Huainanzi*, Prince Shōtoku and other wise men all say the same thing, and that means that not one of them understands the true Way of Nature (*shizen no michi* 自然の道). In the section titled “The origins of the Buddhist Law”,³³ I wrote extensively about the fact that there exists nothing before or after Heaven-and-Earth, as it is beginningless and endless. If I am to talk about water, then I must say that if it advances a little through the true spontaneous

31 *Seijin* 聖人 (“sages of old”) and *kenjin* 賢人 (“wise men”) are the terms used to refer to all the figures Shōeki holds responsible for the establishment of the “Law”: Confucius, Prince Shōtoku, Buddhist monks and commentators etc.

32 *Taiitsu* 太一 (*taiyī* in Chinese) is a concept that refers to the origin of the universe. It is mentioned both in the *Huainanzi* and in the *I Ching* (“The Classic of Changes”).

33 *Buppō shoritsu / hattachi* 仏法初立. Shōeki refers here to the first section of his *Shizen shin'eidō*, known under the title *Gakumon tōkatsu* 学問統括 (“The unification of disciplines”), which represents an attempt to systematically and methodically analyze and criticize all ideologies.

action of Nature,³⁴ it becomes (the energy of) wood, if it advances a lot it becomes (the energy of) fire, if it reduces its advancement and only retreats a little it becomes (the energy of) metal, if it advances a lot it becomes (the energy of) water, and if it does not advance or retreat then it becomes the (energy of) the earth in the middle. Such is the subtle action of Nature. When (the energy of) water retreats a lot, it seals and conceals, cools and withers all things and therefore cannot produce anything. When the true essence (*shin* 真) in the middle spontaneously advances a little, it becomes the breeding energy of wood, when it advances a lot it becomes the flourishing energy of fire, when it retreats a little it becomes the bountiful energy of metal, and when it retreats a lot it becomes the harsh energy of water. Therefore, everybody should know that the energy of water, which is responsible for the dry and harsh winter season, cannot produce anything. When a man and a woman feel the urge to copulate, it's because of the action of the liver's wood energy; when they try to copulate, it's because of the action of the heart's fire essence (*kami* 神); when they are aware of having copulated, it's because of the action of the lungs' metal spirit (*haku* 魄); it is only after copulation has occurred due to these energies that (fluids and) water start flowing for the first time. As a consequence, before the energy of water even manifests itself, the breeding energy of wood advances, then it advances to the limit, then it retreats a little until finally it retreats a lot; only then is water eventually produced and copulation achieved. When the fluids from the man and the woman have merged and the fetus is created, the breeding energy of wood; the flourishing energy of fire; the energy of metal, which hardens the bones; and the energy of water, which forms its final shape – they are all activated, and this is the subtle mechanism of Nature's spontaneous action. To fail to understand this and to claim that Heaven-and-Earth, the human being and all things originated from water is a foolish act and it creates a lot of confusion.

Furthermore, the texts say that “one single energy (*ikki* 一氣) was incorporated in the water drop that resembled a bird's egg, and that energy was differentiated in clear and turbid parts. The purer, clearer parts lingered above in a thin layer and became Heaven. The turbid, heavy parts settled down and formed Earth. It was like a fish that floats on the surface of water. Therefore, Heaven appeared first, and Earth was formed thereafter.” This is an analogy between a bird's egg and the chaotic state in which Heaven and Earth are not yet divided, and a parallel between the water drop and the merged fluids of the father and the mother. The limpid white inside the egg represents the pure, Yang Heaven, while the murky yolk represents

³⁴ This is another instance where Shōeki uses the ideographs *jikan* 自感.

the heavy and murky, Yin Earth.³⁵ Starting from the image of the Earth in the middle resembling a fish floating on water, (the texts) maintain that the ascending energy became Heaven and the descending one became Earth, and claim that “Heaven appeared first, and Earth was formed thereafter.” They also maintain that “in human beings, the head representing the positive energy appeared first, and the body representing the earth was formed thereafter.”³⁶ This is modeled after a sentence in the *Classic of Changes* that says “when the single energy of the Supreme Ultimate moves, the Yang element becomes Heaven, when it stands still, the Yin element becomes Earth.”³⁷ Again, this vision might seem extraordinary, but it is in fact contrary to Nature and an unpardonable mistake. And the reason is that a bird’s egg does indeed have a clear liquid inside the hard shell that covers it on the outside, and a yolk in the middle, but it contains nothing that might represent the sea. This means that the analogy with Heaven-and-Earth and the parallel between the water drop and the merged fluids are impossible. Such a vision is mistaken.

Next, (the texts say that) “one single energy was incorporated,” but it is unclear whence that energy originated, so this is yet another mistake. Next, “the purer, clearer parts lingered above in a thin layer” – another mistake. They should say that the dynamic energies³⁸ set into motion, advanced and started going up. “The turbid, heavy parts settled down” – another mistake. They should say that the still energies³⁹ retreated and started going down. When they say about Earth that “it was like a fish that floats on the surface of water,” this is another mistake. They should say that Earth represents the energy of earth and is positioned in between Heaven and the sea,⁴⁰ and the combined

35 Shōeki does use the terms Yin and Yang (*in'yō* 陰陽 in Japanese) here, but he rather means “negative” and “positive,” respectively. As Terao (1978) points out, the terms only appear in Shōeki’s early works, as they are gradually replaced by the notion of *shintai* 進退, the advancing and retreating movements of all elements.

36 There is no such quote in any of the three texts Shōeki discusses in this book. He either makes another confusion here, or deliberately misquotes in order to conveniently link Shintō and Daoism for the sake of his own argument.

37 Even though this sentence is relatively faithful to the gist of the *Classic of Changes*, it does not exist as such in the original. The “Supreme Ultimate” is *taiji* 太極 (cf. Zhang/Ryden 2002).

38 *Hatsudō no ki* 発動の気. The “dynamic energies” are the energies of wood and fire, which Shōeki sees as “advancing” energies.

39 *Shūsei no ki* 収静の気. They are the energies of metal and water, seen as “retreating” energies.

40 In this fragment, for the first occurrence of “Earth” Shōeki uses *chi* 地, the term that also appears in the texts he discusses. The “energy of earth” is *doki* 土氣, and it is seen as the energy that gives substantiality to matter. Here and elsewhere, “Heaven-and-Earth” is written as *tenchi* 転定. This is a key concept for Shōeki’s philosophy, who chooses these ideographs over 天地 in

energies of Heaven-and-Earth acting together create human beings and all things in the universe. Next, they say that “Heaven appeared first, and Earth was formed thereafter,” but this is another big mistake. Since Heaven-and-Earth is beginningless and endless, there can be no “before” or “after”. Nature advances and retreats: since retreating energies are embedded within the advancing ones, and advancing energies are embedded within the retreating ones, they all combine together to form Heaven-and-Earth. Failing to understand this is a big mistake. There can be no such thing as the human being born out of a water drop, or the head appearing first and the body forming afterward. The advancing (energies) and the retreating (energies) are actually just one single energy, and through the action of that single energy the head appears at the same time as the body is formed. This is the Way (*michi* 道) in which the bodies of all (human beings) are created. Not knowing this is yet another mistake. The sentence in the *Classic of Changes* that says “the single energy is the Supreme Ultimate” is also a mistake, because the virtue of the Supreme Ultimate lies within the essence in the middle (of Heaven). The single energy represents the action of the essence in the middle. The *Classic of Changes* is wrong for failing to make this clear. Moreover, the *Classic of Changes* says things such as “when the single energy of the Supreme Ultimate moves, the positive element becomes Heaven, when it stands still, the negative element becomes Earth,” and later on some egotistic (people) used it as an authoritative source to create the Private Law and to produce fabrications (such as the *Kujiki*).

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order to better render the dynamic character of the relationship established between the different parts of Nature. *Ten* 転 is dominated by the “advancing” energies (wood and fire), whereas *chi* 定 is dominated by the “retreating” ones (metal and water). Hence, *chi* can also refer to the sea.

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