Klaus Antoni ▸▶

University of Tuebingen
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3600-1403

Julia Dolkovski ▸▶

University of Tuebingen
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3348-0886

Louise Neubronner ▸▶

University of Tuebingen
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0001-2401-3725

Introducing the Research Project "Sacred Narrative – The Political Dimension of Japanese Mythology"

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Abstract

The *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* have been integral to the formation of Japanese identity, especially since the 18th century. As such, they were constantly exposed to processes of sacralization and desacralization, i.e., the attribution and removal of authority. The research project "Sacred Narrative – The Political Dimension of Japanese Mythology" is concerned with how certain systems of thought or ideology used these texts in a way that raised them to an elevated position or deprived them of it. Organized in three focus areas, the project delves into the topic of the historical change the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* underwent in terms of interpretation and instrumentalization from the Edo period up to modern-day Japan. These investigations are integrated into the research group "De/Sacralization of Texts" at the University of Tübingen that started its work in

January 2022. In this interdisciplinary context, "Sacred narrative" seeks to promote the integration of East-Asian textuality into general theory formation.

Keywords: Japanese mythology, Kojiki, Nihon shoki, sacralization, political mythology, Jinmu-tennō, Motoori Norinaga, myth in popular culture

Представляем исследовательский проект «Сакральный нарратив – политическая Измерение японской мифологии»

Аннотация

Кодзики и Нихон сёки были неотъемлемой частью формирования японской идентичности, особенно с 18 века. Как таковые, они постоянно подвергались процессам сакрализации и десакрализации, т. е. присвоению и отстранению власти. Исследовательский проект «Священное повествование — политическое измерение японской мифологии» посвящен тому, как определенные системы мысли или идеологии использовали эти тексты таким образом, чтобы возвысить их или лишить их этого положения. Организованный по трем основным направлениям, проект исследует тему исторических изменений, которые претерпели Кодзики и Нихон сёки с точки зрения интерпретации и инструментализации от периода Эдо до современной Японии. Эти исследования включены в исследовательскую группу «Десакрализация текстов» в Тюбингенском университете, которая начала свою работу в январе 2022 года. В этом междисциплинарном контексте «Священное повествование» стремится способствовать интеграции восточноазиатской текстуальности в общую теорию. Образование.

Ключевые слова: японская мифология, Кодзики, Нихон сёки, сакрализация, политическая мифология, Дзинму Тэнно, Мотоори Норинага, миф в массовой культуре

Introduction

When searching for places to visit in Japan, one comes across a variety of tourist attractions, many of which are deeply connected to nature, myth, and religion. Mount Fuji is, of course, omnipresent, but shrines like the Ise jingū or the Izumo taisha are also often included and enjoy immense popularity as so-called power spots. Whenever possible, travel sites as well as official homepages mention connections to the myths recorded in two

ancient texts, the *Kojiki* 古事記 and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀.[1] In the case of the Izumo shrine's website, the section on the deity Ōkuninushi featured on the "About Izumo taisha" page, for example, starts with a description of Izumo as the country of *kami* and myths. The travel site *jaran* じゃらん similarly advertises the shrine as so ancient that its history is recorded in the *Kojiki* (Izumo ōyashiro, 2017; Jaran, 2020). Likewise, the Ise shrine's official website begins the introduction to the history of the inner shrine with a quote from the *Nihon shoki* (Ise jingū, n.d.). This quote originates in the mythological part of the work, yet the *Nihon shoki* is labeled the first official history of Japan. Another travel site also references the *Nihon shoki*, specifically the mythical episode of Amaterasu choosing Ise as the site for her shrine (4travel, 2022).

In a similar vein, the *Kojiki* is frequently included as the first volume in collections of classic Japanese literature and intellectual history such as *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 日本古典文學大系 (NKBT, 1958) and *Nihon shisō taikei* 日本思想大系 (NST, 1982).[2] It is often understood as the repository of ancient Japanese transmissions (Kōnoshi, 2000, pp. 65–66) and sometimes even described as the sacred book of Shintō (Keene, 1983, p. 99). The research project "Sacred Narrative – The Political Dimension of Japanese Mythology" at the University of Tübingen aims to understand past and present ways of interpreting the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* as well as their status within Japanese culture and society. This goal is embedded into a larger research group called "De/Sacralization of Texts" (FOR2828) located at the University of Tübingen.[3] After briefly introducing the goals and assumptions of the research group, this essay will present the state of research of the project "Sacred Narrative" and its three focus areas as of December 2022..

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[1] For the Japanese text of the *Kojiki*, see NKBT 1 (1958), SNKBZ 1 (1997/2007). For translations, see Chamberlain (1882/1982), Philippi (1968/2002), Antoni (2012). For the Japanese text of the *Nihon shoki*, see NKBT 67–68 (1965–1967), and SNKBZ 2–4 (1994–98). For translations, see Aston (1896/1973), and Florenz (1901).

[2] Notably, this is not the case for the *Nihon shoki*. The NKBT only includes the *Nihon shoki* in its 67th and 68th volume and the NST does not include it at all.

[3] Further information can be found on the research group's website: https://uni-tuebingen.de/en/research/core-research/dfg-research-units/desacralization-of-text/.

The General Project: "De/Sacralization of Texts"

The research group "De/Sacralization of Texts" assumes that in societies, we find texts which are imbued with a normative and identity-forming function in general or for certain groups, and to which a significant difference in authority and relevance is attributed. They are associated with cultural and religious practices of use, e.g., interpretation, enactment, and attribution, through which their specificity and claims to validity are generated and expressed. The project refers to these processes as sacralization. In contrast, the respective texts may lose all or part of their distinctiveness when the corresponding practices change or cease to be effective, for example when claims to authority are no longer recognized in the course of historical change. This is referred to as desacralization. The interdisciplinary and comparative analysis of the opposing dynamics of sacralization and desacralization in different social, cultural, and religious contexts stands at the center of the joint research project. As such, the group is not only interested in supposedly obvious examples of sacralized writing, i.e., the canonical books of religious communities, but also in similar processes in the fields of literature, law, and politics.

The research program aims to contribute to understanding sacredness not in the sense of a predefined quality but as something that can be described in the context of cultural practices. Therefore, the group prefers the terms sacrality or sacralization, while the term sacredness tends to belong to the realm of religious speech and is also closely associated with Rudolf Otto's concept of a phenomenology.[4] By reflecting on texts and critically analyzing the claims to authority that accompany them, our research seeks to add to current discourses of sacrality oriented towards cultural studies. This processuality of sacralization forms the basis for our research, but we emphasize the moment of the dynamic by opening the discourse up to the opposing tendencies of desacralization at the same time.

To address these issues, nine individual subprojects investigate the processes of sacralization and desacralization within their field of expertise.

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[4] Otto (1917/1926) discusses this concept of the sacred as an a-priori category in his monograph *Das Heilige*.

A large part of the projects analyzes texts with religious content, i.e., the Bible and the Quran, or, in the Japanese case, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*. The Bible will be examined in the following contexts: English literature and drama of the early modern period, sacralization of the New Testament at its time of writing, and Bible interpretation and text production in early American Protestantism. Encounters between Christianity and Islam are explored using the example of Bible exegesis in Muslim texts of the 16th and 17th century and the (de-)legitimation of political violence through the Bible and the Quran in African countries. The group's interest in texts that are not traditionally perceived as religious or sacred is exemplified by Latin and Greek classics and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Lastly, questions of life and death are investigated in an analysis of how intertextual references in eulogies can lead to both a sacralization and desacralization of texts.

This interdisciplinary character of the group makes a comparison of a plethora of research objects possible. In this way, the respective subprojects do not only function as specific case studies but also encourage the understanding of sacralization and desacralization as global phenomena. In this respect, the exchange of ideas on a methodological and theoretical level is one of the main goals of the research group. Analyzing the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* in this interdisciplinary context promotes the de-exoticization of East Asian textuality within the study of sacralization and desacralization of texts. Thus, the Japanese case can function as an example for how cultural diversity should be integral to general theory formation.

"Sacred Narrative – The Political Dimension of Japanese Mythology"

The project's research goal is to critically analyze the alternating historical processes of sacralization and desacralization of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. Especially concerning the political mythology of Japan, the practice-theoretical approach underlying the overall project proves to be particularly productive. Originally compiled as official writings to legitimize imperial authority in the early eighth century, the aforementioned sources underwent an intentional sacralization in early modern and modern Japan, followed by an apparent desacralization after the collapse of the associated political and

sacral concept of rule in 1945. Methodologically, the study is committed to a historical-hermeneutical approach.

A short introduction to the history of the Kojiki *and* Nihon shoki

The two texts of imperial mythology, the *Kojiki* from 712 CE and the *Nihon shoki*, also known as *Nihongi*, written only eight years later in 720 CE, are central to our research.[5] Both works were compiled at the imperial court of Heijōkyō (present-day Nara), following an original order of Tenmu-tennō (r. 672–686 CE) with the intention of determining the origin of the world, the Japanese islands, the state, and its imperial family in an authoritative form. The first part of both works tells of the creation of the world and the subsequent age of the gods (*jindai* or *kamiyo* 神代). Today, these sections are often referred to as Japanese mythology. The *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* are roughly the same in content: They both describe the events from the mythological time of the deities to the era of the human emperors. However, there are differences in the way that these events are told. The *Kojiki*, on the one hand, consists of one narrative that starts with the first deities who are born when heaven and earth separate and ends with the reign of Empress Suiko (r. 592–628 CE). It introduces the Japanese emperors as descendants of the sun deity Amaterasu and thus served to legitimate the position of Emperor Tenmu and his lineage.

The *Nihon shoki*, on the other hand, is considered to be the first official work of Japanese historiography and includes several variations of the events that it describes. It starts at an earlier point than the *Kojiki* at which nothing exists, when heaven and earth have yet to be created from chaos, and ends with the historical empress Jitō (r. 686–679 CE). While the *Kojiki* is written in a mix of Chinese and Japanese, in which the Chinese characters are sometimes used phonetically and at other times semantically, the *Nihon shoki* is written entirely in Chinese.

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[5] The history of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* is described in more detail in Antoni (2012, pp. 324–469), Kōnoshi (2000), Dettmer und Königsberg (2020), Dettmer (2020), NKBT 1 (1958, pp. 9–33), and NKBT 67 (1967, pp. 3–69).

The differences between the two works prove that the contents of the *Kojiki* are not to be understood as absolute. Instead, it must be recognized as one variant that was vital to the imperial family in their grasp for political power and thus has a private character, whereas the *Nihon shoki* was compiled for use in diplomatic contexts. The *Nihon shoki* was modeled after Chinese dynastic histories and met the standards of an official work of state history that could represent Japan as China's equal on an international stage. It has been used in this way since its compilation and was a popular topic of discussion at court, e.g., in the *Nihon shoki* lectures that led to the compilation of the *Shaku Nihongi* 釈日本紀 around 1274 by Urabe Kanekata卜部兼方 (dates unkown).

The *Kojiki*, however, was only important as a source for discussing the *Nihon shoki* and, after being indirectly mentioned in the *Manyōshū* 万葉集,[6] mostly disappears from history for more than 660 years. This changed when Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801) and his students put an emphasis on the *Kojiki* as a sacred work that connects the ancestral deity Amaterasu, the first emperor Jinmu, and the emperor of their time. The *Kojiki* thus cemented Japan's superior position within the world and especially in opposition to China. It was understood as a uniquely Japanese work, whereas the *Nihon shoki* was disregarded because of its 'Chinese' nature. Thus, the *Kojiki* was sacralized and later canonized instead of the *Nihon shoki.* Norinaga's works later served as the basis for Japanese nationalism which culminated in the events of World War II.

Central assumptions and goals of the research project

The history of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* as sacralized texts thus has to be understood not only in connection to their religious contents, but even more so in the context of their interpretation, reception, and instrumentalization. These aspects stand at the center of the research project "Sacred Narrative – The Political Dimension of Japanese Mythology." The aim of the project is

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6 SNKBZ 1 (1997/2007, p. 417) elaborates on the importance of the *Manyōshū* poem MY 90, see also NKBT 4 (1957, pp. 65–67). For other mentions of the *Kojiki*, see MY 813 (NKBT 5, 1959, pp. 70–73) and 3263 (NKBT 6, 1960, pp. 356–357).

a detailed critical analysis of the reciprocal historical processes of sacralization and desacralization of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. We seek to clarify why these two works and their mythology in particular have played such a fundamental role in shaping discourses about identity in early modern, modern, and contemporary Japan. As such, the ultimate goal is to contribute to the general theory of mythology, especially concerning sacred and political mythology in the narrower sense, by way of incorporating the Japanese case study into the overall discourse. In order to answer these overarching questions, the project was divided into three focus areas, each concentrating on a particular point in Japanese history.

While each focus area puts the emphasis on specific aspects regarding the sacralization and desacralization of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, there are certain issues that connect the three individual undertakings. Central to the project is the question of how the relationship between the sacralization and desacralization of texts and the socio-cultural history of Japan can be understood in the light of the attribution of meaning to the *Kojiki* and *Nikon shoki* or by association with them. The search for possible factors that may have led to these respective processes is of course connected to this issue. Of special interest in this context will be the rise of the *Kojiki* since the late 18th century and the accompanying loss of importance of the *Nihon shoki* at the same time. This issue can be extended to the mythologies incorporated into the texts and the conflicting unilineal tradition of the *Kojiki* and multilineal tradition of the *Nihon shoki* as well.

The starting point of our research can be found with Motoori Norinaga in the Edo period, as represented by focus area 1 "Motoori Norinaga and his Adversaries." Opposing approaches by his contemporaries and their role in relation to the sacralization intended by Norinaga's Kokugaku will likewise be of importance. Observing the respective takes on the authority of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* will illuminate the continuation of ideas into modern times as well as the rise of new interpretations. A related reoccurring issue will be the influence these key texts as well as the KiKi mythology[7] had on Japan's

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7 The term *kiki* 記紀 is a compound of the last characters of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. KiKi mythology (*kiki shinwa* 記紀神話) refers to the combined mythology included in the two works.

political discourses, especially when it comes to certain motifs such as the sacralization of the mythical/legendary first emperor Jinmu in the context of nation building in modern times. Focus area 2, "The Establishment of the Empire as Modern Japan's Political Mythology," will discuss this topic in detail. In contrast, factors that resulted in the opposite use of the texts as a form of folklore or popular culture can also be observed; this could be recognized as a desacralization of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* as well as their myths at first glance. Contemporary examples of this phenomenon will be analyzed in focus area 3 "Japanese Imperial Mythology in Contemporary Popular Media." In the following, the three focus areas as well as their current findings will be introduced in more detail.

Focus Area 1: Motoori Norinaga and his Adversaries – Contending Visions of Sacrality

Louise Neubronner

The Edo period (1603–1868) was a time of intellectual discourse and literary production, a development that was fueled by a growing distribution of printed texts. Among these were copies of the *Nihon shoki* and the *Kojiki* that became available to a much broader readership than before (Burns, 2003, pp. 40–41). This led to a multifaceted textual discourse on the two works, a watershed moment within this discourse being Motoori Norinaga's sacralization of the *Kojiki*. In his magnum opus *Kojikiden* 古事記伝 (1798) the Kokugaku[8] scholar constructed a Japanese reading for the *Kojiki* which was originally written exclusively in Chinese characters. This endeavor was heavily influenced by ideology and effectively led to the construction of a new version of the *Kojiki* (Burns, 2003, p. 80; Antoni, 2012, p. 414). Norinaga's *Naobi no mitama* 直毘霊, which is included in the preface to the *Kojikiden*, contains the fundamentals of this ideology: Because Japan is the origin of the sun

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[8] Kokugaku has often been described as nativism, see for example Harootunian (1988) and Nosco (1990). Marc McNally problematizes the use of this description in his monograph *Like no other* (2016). In the following, the term Kokugaku will be used instead of a translation, so as not to limit the definition to one specific part of Kokugaku scholarship.

deity Amaterasu, it is superior to all other countries (Motoori, 1968/1976d, p. 49).[9] Norinaga's claim to the ultimate authority of the myths as portrayed in the *Kojiki* and the superiority of the Japanese language, imperial system, and culture would later be instrumentalized for nationalistic purposes; the myths meant absolute truth. Scholars of the 20th century such as Tsuda Sōkichi 津田左右吉 (1873–1961) contended the historical veracity of the *kamiyo* myths and thus cast doubt on their meaning for the Japanese nation.[10] There were, however, already scholars during Norinaga's time that stood in conflict with Norinaga's concept of the sacrality of the Japanese myths and language. Three of these scholars will be the main research objects of this focus area: Tō Teikan 藤貞幹 (1732–1797),[11] Ueda Akinari 上田秋成 (1734–1809) and Yamagata Bantō 山片蟠桃 (1748–1821). This focus area aims to define where in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* Norinaga and his adversaries discover sacrality or an absence of it and how they express this in their own works. The spotlight will be on Teikan's *Shōkōhatsu* 衝口発 (1781), Norinaga's and Akinari's debate documented in the *Kagaika* 呵刈葭 (ca. 1790), and Bantō's *Yume no shiro* 夢の代 (1820). The goal is to work out a clear definition for Norinaga's concept of sacrality and how Teikan, Akinari and Bantō threaten and deconstruct this concept.

Mythical places and sacred language in Motoori Norinaga's thought

Many of Norinaga's disputes with his contemporaries were caused by his statements on the universal truth of the divine age myths. These statements

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[9] For an English translation of the *Naobi no mitama* and a detailed introduction to the text, see Nishimura (1991). For a translation of the *Kojikiden*'s preface which also includes the *Naobi no mitama*, see Wehmeyer (1997).

[10] See, for example, Tsuda (1963, pp. 279–280). Nelly Naumann (1996, pp. 18–19) emphasizes Tsuda Sōkichi's contribution to the rational-critical study of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* during a time in which objective research was made almost impossible. However, despite the progressiveness of some of Tsuda's ideas, he has a complicated legacy. John S. Brownlee (1997/1999, p. 192) even describes him as a nationalist with an "emotional attachment to the myths."

[11] Teikan is known under several names; in the version of the *Shōkōhatsu in the Nihon shisō tōjō shiryō* 日本思想闘諍史料 that was used for this article, he is listed as Fujii Teikan 藤井貞幹 (alternative reading: Fujii Sadamoto). For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Sakamoto.

are likely grounded in his belief that the events told in the *Kojiki* are reality. In the *Kojikiden*, for instance, he locates places from the myths on the map of Japan. Among these places is the bridge *ama no ukihashi* 天浮橋 on which Izanami and Izanagi create the first island *onogorojima* オノゴロ島. Norinaga believes this bridge to be at Ama no hashidate (Motoori, 1968/1976d, p. 161). Furthermore, in his travel diary *Sugagasa no nikki* 菅笠の日記 (1772), he tries to locate the tomb of the mythological emperor Jinmu at mount Unebi based on information from the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*, clearly showing how real these mythological figures and places where to him (Motoori, 1997, pp. 228–229).[12] The relevance of Jinmu's supposed tomb at mound Unebi is a recurring issue for our project and will be discussed in more detail in focus area 2.

Another subject that Norinaga especially favored is the divinity of the Japanese language. In his *Kanji sanon kō* 漢字三音考 (1785), he explains that the 50 sounds of the Japanese language are the right sounds between heaven and earth, and that Japanese is therefore pure and superior to all other languages (Motoori, 1970/1976b, pp. 381–382). The language's supposedly perfect grammatical structure also contributes to this superiority (Motoori, 1970/1976b, pp. 383). In contrast, foreign languages can at best be likened to, among others, animal sounds and the sounds of musical instruments (Motoori, 1970/1976b, p. 386). Notably, Norinaga's disdain was not only reserved to foreign languages. In the *Kagaika*, he states that the wrong language of the present is very different from the right pure language of the past (Motoori, 1972/1976a, pp. 378–379). This language of the past can, in his opinion, be accessed through the *Kojiki*.

In the preface to the *Kojikiden*, Norinaga continually emphasizes the oral nature of the *Kojiki*. Through Hieda no Are's recitation and the following memorization of the textual material that the *Kojiki* was based on, Tenmu-tennō meant to preserve the language of ancient Japan that was, at his time, still existent in oral narratives passed down by the people. Hieda no Are recited the texts in the style of these oral narratives, and since Ō no Yasumarō based his work on Hieda no Are's memorate, the *Kojiki* is inseparably linked

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[12] For an English translation of Norinaga's *Sugagasa no nikki*, see Marra (2007, pp. 33–95). For a translation of selected parts of the text, see also Plutschow (2006, pp. 57–68).

to the sacred language of ancient Japan untinged by Chinese influences (Motoori, 1968/1976d, p. 31). In a single sentence, he dismisses characters which are supposed to have originated in the age of the gods (*jindai moji* 神代文字) as a forgery from later times and then explains that in the ancient times, people handed matters down orally. Writing only came to Japan from foreign countries much later (Motoori, 1968/1976d, p. 17).[13] This moment of orality is central to Norinaga's system of thought, and the existence of *jindai moji* would shift the focus away from the oral element of the stories from the divine age. Furthermore, the existence of a script much older than the *Kojiki* poses an open threat to the authority of the text. Norinaga had to give as little room as possible to the *jindai moji* theory because his system of thought stands and falls on the *Kojiki* as the most ancient and most authoritative work.

How Tō Teikan incurred Norinaga's wrath

Tō Teikan, a scholar of Kokugaku, Confucianism, and archaeology, posed another serious threat to many of Norinaga's ideas. Interestingly, Teikan also connected the KiKi myths to reality, albeit in a very different way than Norinaga. In the *Shōkōhatsu*, Teikan emphasizes the great influence of the three Korean kingdoms and China on ancient Japan (Ichinohe, 2020, p. 91).He claims that Susanoo, for instance, ruled over the Korean kingdom of Silla,[14] and that Emperor Jinmu was a descendant of the Chinese ruler Wu Taibo (Fujii, 1970, pp. 228–230).[15] Interestingly, Teikan corroborates his claims on Jinmu's family history with a source simply listed as *aru ki*

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[13] Notably, Yamagata Bantō (1973, p. 272) also does not support theories about a native Japanese script, stating that written characters only came to Japan during Emperor Ōjin's reign. Despite all the differences between the discussed scholars, their at least partly aligning opinions on written and spoken language will be of interest for future research in this focus area.

[14] David Weiss (2022, pp. 148–149) also comments on this specific passage of *Shōkohatsu*. In the context of Susanoo's supposed origin in Korea, he explains that many neo-Confucian scholars understood the myths of the *Nihon shoki* as expressions of historical events (Weiss, 2022, p. 146).

[15] For a detailed overview over the issue of Wu Taibo as an ancestor of Japan's imperial family, see Ng, 2019, pp. 46–67.

或記 (Fujii, 1970, p. 229) which Norinaga identifies as made up by Teikan in his rebuttal to *Shōkōhatsu* called *Kenkyōjin* 鉗狂人 (1785) (Motoori, 1972/1976c, p. 282; Ichinohe, 2020, p. 92). In this context, Asukai Masamichi (1995, p. 42) points out that Teikan used forged documents to strengthen his line of argument and made mistakes in his work with existing sources. While it thus has to be noted that Teikan was prone to inconsistencies in his research, his ideas nevertheless provide an interesting contrast to Norinaga's concept of sacrality.

Another of Teikan's provocative claims was that Emperor Jinmu's line ends with Emperor Chūai, the 14th emperor according to *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* (Fujii, 1970, p. 229). If this were true, an unbroken line from Amaterasu to the emperors of the present time, one of Norinaga's main concerns, would be rendered impossible. Teikan casts doubt on the authority of the ancient sources when he points out that in the *Nihon shoki*, the timespan of the divine age is too long and the date of Jinmu's descent to the throne is incorrect as well (Fujii, 1970, pp. 228–229).

Many of Teikan's contemporaries were angered by the statements in *Shōkōhatsu* (Ichinohe, 2020, p. 94), the most prominent among them being Motoori Norinaga.[16] The existence of uniquely Japanese customs prior to any cultural contact with China and Korea, and the unbroken line from the sun deity Amaterasu to the emperor of the present day were key issues in Norinaga's writings, and Teikan's text was an attack on all of them. In his *Kenkyōjin*, Norinaga calls Teikan a madman and denounces his text as an insult to Japan's ancient period (Motoori, 1972/1976c, p. 273). In reference to this, Sakamoto Koremaru (2008) fittingly describes Teikan as "the man who angered Norinaga" (*Norinaga o okoraseta otoko* 宣長を怒らせた男)[17] in the subtitle of his essay "Kōko e no jōnetsu to itsudatsu" 好古への情熱と逸脱.

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[16] Interestingly, Wataru Ichinohe (2020, p. 93) notes that Teikan never meant to publish *Shōkōhatsu* in the unfinished state that is accessible to readers until this day.

[17] Translations without any further reference are the authors' own translations. Direct citations from published translations are listed as such.

Sacrality under attack: Ueda Akinari's critique of Norinaga

Ueda Akinari's response to *Kenkyōjin* started a prominent debate between the two scholars: the dispute on the sun deity (*hi no kami ronsō* 日の神論争) which is included in Norinaga's work *Kagaika*.[18] Akinari, an author of literary works and a Kokugaku scholar, is known as one of the fiercest critics of Norinaga's interpretation of the divine age myths. As Judit Árokay (2004, pp. 79–80) points out, Akinari understood Kokugaku studies as non-ideological. To him, the study of ancient texts was an endeavor related to history, philology, and literature. Consequentially, Akinari disagreed with Norinaga on many key points of his system of thought. In his travel diary *Akiyama no ki* 秋山記, for example, he contests the connection of Ama no hashidate to the age of the gods – in fact, it seems entirely manmade to him (Ueda, 1969/1983, pp. 58–59).[19] Norinaga's and Akinari's views on mythological places already tell of insurmountable differences between the two scholars. The *Kagaika*, which was written based on letters between Akinari and Norinaga, offers clear insight into the scholars' incompatible positions on the Japanese myths.

In the *Kagaika*, Norinaga and Akinari both agree that Teikan's way of looking at the ancient texts presented in his *Shōkōhatsu* is incorrect. To Akinari, Teikan's treatment of the dates and time periods given in the ancient sources makes no sense because large numbers in such texts are merely symbolic and should not be accepted as literal truth (Motoori, 1972/1976a, p. 401). Norinaga agrees with Akinari's general critique but, in contrast to Akinari, emphasizes that Teikan knows nothing about the ancient sources and has strayed from the ancient way in his arrogant Chinese thinking. The biggest difference between their lines of argument in this passage is, however, Norinaga pointing out that there is a definite truth to be found in the texts (Motoori, 1972/1976a, pp. 402–403).

This method of understanding the ancient texts, especially the *Kojiki,* literally is the starting point for Akinari's critique on Norinaga's work on

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[18] The *Kagaika* is split into two parts: the philological part of the debate and the dispute on the sun deity. For a translation of the first part, see Bentley (2017, pp. 285–308).

[19] *Akiyama no ki* is included in a collection of Akinari's works called *Tsuzurabumi* 藤簍冊子(1802). For a translation of selected passages of the *Akiyama no ki*, see Plutschow (2006, pp. 70–74).

the myths. Akinari never discredits the Japanese myths, but he makes it very clear that they are not unique. While Japan has its own myths which include stories about the sun deity, other countries have similar stories that are meaningful in their context. Arguing for a Japanese superiority based on the myths, therefore, makes no sense (Motoori, 1972/1976a, p. 403–404). In a similar manner, Akinari deeply disagrees with Norinaga's statement on the impurity of other languages. He emphasizes that every country has its own language and that all sounds, even the sounds of animals and instruments, are natural and right. He argues that in ancient times, the reading of poetry was accompanied by musical instruments and that if Ame no Uzume's stamping accompanied by the laughter of the deities outside the heavenly rock cave would have made a disharmonious sound, Amaterasu would have disappeared further into the cave (Motoori, 1972/1976a, pp. 382–383). Akinari's conviction that all languages in the world as well as other countries' myths had a right to exist was destructive to Norinaga's entire interpretive strategy which was based on the absolute authority of the *Kojiki* and its language.

Yamagata Bantō's atheist perspective on the Kojikiden

Yamagata Bantō (1748–1821), a merchant and scholar from Ōsaka, was another fierce critic of Norinaga's ideas. His *Yume no shiro* consists of twelve parts that, among other issues, concern the divine age chapters of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, the non-existence of spirits, astronomy, and economy.[20] In this work, it becomes very apparent why Bantō is often described as an atheist (e.g., Arisaka, 1970, p. 2). For instance, he explicitly expresses that he does not believe in the immortality of the soul (Yamagata, 1973, pp. 558–559) or the existence of ghosts and demons (Yamagata, 1973, p. 484). He clearly states that the *kamiyo* stories are not historical facts; only the parts of the *Nihon shoki* starting with Emperor Ōjin can be trusted (Yamagata, 1973, p. 279).[21] He also takes specific aim at Norinaga's *Kojikiden*. In a comparative

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[20] For a German translation of parts of the *Yume no shiro* and an analysis of the text, see Kracht (1986, pp. 200–251, 359–385). English translations of selected paragraphs can be found in Najita Tetsuo's (1987/1997, pp. 248–284) comments on Bantō's work.

[21] The semilegendary emperor Ōjin is said to have reigned between 270 and 310 CE,

manner reminiscent of Akinari, Bantō remarks that phenomena similar to Amaterasu's connection with the sun can be witnessed in China with the mythical figure Pangu, in Ryūkyū with the Tenson clan, and in India with Amida Buddha. In the same part of the text, Norinaga's demand that people from foreign countries should worship Amaterasu is rejected vehemently (Yamagata, 1973, pp. 271–272).

Akinari's and Bantō's critical positions still ring true many decades later. During the Second World War, people in countries under Japanese occupation were forced to worship at shrines erected for Amaterasu (Minamoto, 1971, p. 38). Norinaga's statements on Amaterasu's influence created the basis for this expansionism, expressed in the concept of *hakkō ichiu* 八紘一宇, "the whole world under one roof" (Antoni, 2016a, pp. 260–261). His political ideas had been instrumentalized and turned into fanaticism, a process that was set in motion by Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843) and his disciples (Antoni, 2012, p. 418; Minamoto, 1971, p. 38). Thus, it is of great interest to closely analyze the positions of Norinaga's critics who seemed to sense the dangers in this system.

Outlook

The scholars that will be discussed in this focus area all have in common that they undermine Norinaga's sacralization of the *Kojiki*. Norinaga and his intellectual adversaries engaged in this discourse with great intensity and their positions offer many relevant insights into questions of belief and disbelief in myth as well as the relevance and authority of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* during the Edo period.

Future research in this focus area will delve into a detailed analysis of three spheres of interest. Currently, the hypothesis is that they each stand for a distinctly different way of interpreting the ancient sources as to the status of their sacrality. The first sphere is concerned with the tension between the authority of a written text and an emphasis on the supremacy of a spoken, sacred language within Norinaga's sacralization of the *Kojiki*. The second

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see for example the Imperial Household Agency's (Kunaichō 宮内庁) website: https://www.kunaicho.go.jp/e-about/genealogy/pdf/keizu-e.pdf.

sphere would then be a relativization of the ancient texts' sacrality but, as is the current assumption, not a complete desacralization. The third sphere that will be explored is a possible desacralization of the ancient sources. The ultimate goal is to illuminate how Norinaga's three adversaries Ueda Akinari, Tō Teikan and Yamagata Bantō as well as the *jindai moji* discourse fit into this system..

Focus Area 2: The Establishment of the Empire as Modern Japan's Political Mythology

Klaus Antoni

Following the Meiji Restauration, the KiKi myths were instrumentalized based on Motoori Norinaga's sacralization of the *Kojiki*. This political functionalization of the KiKi myths is a key point of interest for focus area 2.[22] A central example of this political mythology may be considered to be the empire-founding myths, beginning with the descent of the Heavenly Grandson Ninigi no mikoto on Mount Takachihō in the ancient Japanese countryside of Himuka (Hyūga), i.e., present-day Miyazaki Prefecture, in southern Kyūshū.[23] This episode plays a decisive role in imperial mythology, as it forms the basis for the mythical founding of the empire by the supposed first emperor of Japan, Kamu-Yamato Iware-biko alias Jinmu-tennō (Lisiecki, 2016; Weiss, 2020). While the mythical foundation of the empire has its geographical place of origin in present-day Miyazaki, it finds its conclusion and completion in mythical-legendary terms in central Japan, in present-day Nara Prefecture. It was here, in Kashihara, that Kamu-Yamato Iware-biko allegedly founded the Japanese Empire in 660 BCE, a purely fictitious date and calendrical issue that will be discussed in more detail later in this focus area. Kamu-Yamato Iware-biko's campaign from Himuka to Kashihara is known as Jinmu's Eastern Expedition (*Jinmu tōsei* 神武東征). The research

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[22] For a more in-depth discussion of the topic, see the following publications by the author: Antoni (2012, 2016a, b, 2021, 2022), as well as Antoni & Antoni (2017).

[23] The related myths in southern Kyūshū (Hyūga) were the subject of extensive activities in today's Miyazaki Prefecture (https://www.furusato-pr.jp/tourism/miyazaki/hyugashinwa.html); see Antoni (2022, p. 53).

of this focus area ultimately seeks to answer the question of how and why the Jinmu figure abruptly underwent explicit deification and sacralization with the onset of the Meiji Restoration. This sacralization of Jinmu-tennō occurred parallel to the sacralization of the ancient sources themselves, especially the *Kojiki*, as can be seen for example in Itō Hirobumi's constitutional commentary on Art. 3[24] of the Constitution of the Empire of Japan (Meiji Constitution). The ideological force of the Jinmu myth is also illustrated by the fact that the Meiji Constitution was promulgated on the day of the supposed founding of the empire, February 11, 1889 (Antoni & Antoni, 2017, pp. 12–13). [25] Thus, the mythical-legendary figure of Jinmu underwent a historically important sacralization through corresponding texts which all refer to *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. The aim was to legitimize the new imperial system of modern Japan as a whole, thus rendering it immune against any form of delegitimization. Of special interest in this context are sacred grounds and places of memory dedicated to the Jinmu-tennō myth in Kyūshū and Yamato. The astonishing topicality of this issue was recently demonstrated during the enthronement of Tennō Naruhito in 2019.

The imperial succession in 2019

With the voluntary abdication by the previous Tennō Akihito (Heisei-tennō) and the accompanying change to the era of the new Tennō Naruhito, the year 2019 brought with it a historically extraordinary caesura for Japan. After the enthronement of Emperor Naruhito, the era name changed from *heisei* 平成 (January 8, 1989 – April 30, 2019) to *reiwa* 令和 on May 1, 2019, which also became a new starting point for the official calendar in Japan. There is hardly a circumstance that underscores the fundamental importance of the emperorship for today's Japan as much as the fact that with the new Tennō,

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[24] "The Emperor is sacred and inviolable" (*Tennō wa shinsei ni shite okasu bekarazu* 天皇ハ神聖ニシテ侵スヘカラス), see https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/etc/j02.html. Itō Hirobumi (1906/1978, pp. 6–7) quotes the *Kojiki* right at the beginning of his commentary on this third article: "'The Sacred Throne was established at the time when the heavens and the earth became separated' (Kojiki). The Emperor is Heaven-descended, divine and sacred. […]." See also Antoni & Antoni (2017, p. 26).

[25] For the sequence of events, see *Meiji-tennō-ki*, vol. 7 (1968–1977, pp. 216–218).

the calendar and official time were also changed. It is also not surprising that in the wake of these developments, Japan's imperial institution has received enormous attention both at home and abroad.

The highly complex ceremonial and ritual calendar carried out in this context lasted for almost a year, beginning with the abdication of the previous Tennō Akihito on April 30, 2019, and ending with the proclamation of the official heir to the throne on April 19, 2020. However, the events reached their climax as early as November 2019 with the celebrations for the Daijōsai 大嘗祭 and the ceremonial visits of the new imperial couple to the mausoleums of the imperial ancestors. The timing and content of the ceremonies were announced to the public in two separate time schedules published on the internet in advance by the Office of the Prime Minister on the one hand and the Imperial Household Office (Kunaichō 宮内庁) on the other (TS1, 2019; TS2, 2019). In this context, the ceremonies of the Office of the Prime Minister (TS1, 2019) were considered state events, while those of the Imperial Household Office were regarded as private in character (TS2, 2019). In this way, constitutional problems concerning the religious nature of some of these rituals could be elegantly circumvented. With the rite of his abdication on April 30, 2019 (*taiirei seiden no gi* 退位礼正殿の儀), the current Emperor Emeritus Akihito had taken leave of office after holding the throne for a period of more than thirty years. Through the rite of ascension (*kenji tō shōkei no gi* 剣璽等承継の儀) on May 1, 2019, and the official enthronement (*sokuirei seiden no gi* 即位礼正殿の儀) on October 22, 2019, the change of emperor was considered ceremonially accomplished at the state level (TS1 2019, p. 1).

Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that the festivities surrounding the handover of the throne in 2019 with its multitude of ceremonies deeply rooted in religion can also be understood as a clear sign of the longevity of an explicitly traditionalist image of the emperor in Japan today. This is the case because the ritual calendar was an invention of modern Japan, starting in the Meiji period. In this context, it is noteworthy that the new emperor, accompanied by the empress, personally paid his respects to the sun deity Amaterasu at an official ceremony in Ise on November 22, 2019, informing her of his enthronement. Following in the footsteps of their predecessors

since Meiji-tennō, the emperor and empress then visited the tombs of four previous Tennō: the mausoleums of their three direct predecessors and, most notably, the tomb of the mythical-legendary founder of the dynasty, Jinmu-tennō.[26] The ritual announcement of the change of throne in front of the supposed tomb of Jinmu-tennō on November 26, 2019, showed how deeply the mythology of origins is still interwoven with official historiography and the legitimation of rule. The fact that the mythical founding of the empire by Jinmu cannot be corroborated by historical evidence is entirely disregarded; thus, it seems almost impossible to separate real history from the mythical. Although since the late 19th century archaeological research has proven the mythical foundation of the empire to be entirely fictional, the supposedly authentic tomb of Jinmu-tennō at Unebi Mountain still suggests a historicity of this 'First Emperor' and his achievements. The project addresses these topics against the background of current archaeological and historical research, focusing on the Unebi mausoleum in the town of Kashihara, Nara prefecture.

The historicity of Jinmu-tennō: Image and reality

Whoever deals with Japanese pre- and early history will realize very quickly that there are several different, mutually incompatible systems of linear chronology on this subject.[27] On the one hand, there are the findings of the historical sciences which are constantly being updated. Here we are confronted with a sequence of archaeological periods and early historical epochs that put the history of human settlement on the Japanese islands in a linear time system. These epochs are categorised by their own terms, each marking their historical and cultural succession. A linear and evolutionary progression of early archaeological history beginning with the Jōmon period is developed in

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[26] The official title of this ritual visit is *sokuirei oyobi daijōsai go Jinmu-tennō sanryo oyobi Shōwa-tennō izen yondai no tennō sanryo ni shin'etsu no gi* 即位礼及び大嘗祭後神武天皇山陵及び昭和天皇以前四代の天皇山陵に親謁の儀) ("Rite of worship at the Mausolea of Emperor Jinmu and the four recent Emperors up to Emperor Shōwa after the Enthronement and Daijōsai") (TS2, 2019, p. 4).

[27] Regarding the linear chronology in Japan and Asia, see Zöllner (2003, p. 56) and Antoni (2021).

this way.[28] However, this scientific understanding of the earliest history is contrasted with a completely different system which continues to be important in contemporary Japan, albeit in a more symbolic sense. This alternative view of history is not based on archaeological findings or other historical artefacts but written traditions from the early 8th century CE, mainly the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, which convey mytho-historical narratives from the beginning of the world to the founding of the Japanese state. This traditional view of history was of fundamental importance as the historical legitimization of the imperial system in the modern state after 1868 until the end of the Second World War. The mytho-historical zero point within this conception of history was given by the concrete founding date corresponding to the year 660 BCE in the 'Western', Gregorian or Julian calendar.[29] A separate calendar system called *kōki* 皇紀 (imperial era) used this date not only as the early historical starting point of an exclusively Japanese historiography but also postulated a generally valid, linear chronology, comparable to Christian chronology with its zero point marked by the birth of Jesus Christ (Antoni, 2012, pp. 375–376). This supposed event is still commemorated in present-day Japan in the form of a national holiday, the National Foundation Day (*kenkoku kinen no hi* 建国記念の日) on February 11 (Lokowandt, 1981, pp. 153–172). Notably, the founding of the empire and even the existence of the supposed first Tennō Jinmu are never mentioned in scholarly research on early history. There are no archaeological or other indications of the historical factuality of this imperial founding figure.[30] Researchers regard Jinmu as a figure from the myth about the founding of the empire or the historical founding saga,

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[28] For an overview, see Antoni (2012, pp. 278–323).

[29] The traditional lunisolar calendar was abolished by a government decree of the Great Council of State (Dajō-kan 太政官), No. 337 (Dajō-kan fukoku 太政官布告), on December 9, 1872 (Meiji 5/11/9). The introduction of the solar calendar with reference to the accession of Emperor Jinmu occurred six days later, with decree No. 342 on December 15 (Meiji 5/11/15). For a discussion of this calendar change, see Zöllner (2003, pp. 49–53).

[30] Unfortunately, another historical narrative cannot be discussed in this context, although of utmost importance for the actual beginnings of Japanese statehood, i.e., the reports of the Chinese historiographies *Wei-chih* and *Hou Han-shu* on the first state structures on Japanese soil, especially the state of 'Yamatai' ruled by a queen ('Himiko'). There is no mention of an Iware-biko, alias Jinmu-tennō, in these historically credible accounts, whose plausibility has been largely confirmed by research; see Seyock (2004) and Antoni (2012, pp. 301–306).

yet Jinmu and the founding of the empire are still widely treated as historical facts. This is evident in popular publications on the history of the Japanese imperial house which refer to an alleged history of the imperial institution in Japan of nearly 2,700 years.

The mytho-history of Jinmu-tennō

In our search for the origins of the traditional view of history, we come across the two works already mentioned which are considered the oldest surviving Japanese texts: the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*. Directly following the age of the gods and without any discernible break, the era of the people and their emperors begins, starting with the aforementioned Jinmu-tennō. He is thus a genuinely mythical figure, descended from the gods of the high heavens, even if, strictly speaking, the stories concerning the expansion of his power already fall into the realm of the historical founding saga. Despite being the first ruler and direct descendant of the heavenly deities, he is known to the sources only by his rather modest, personal name: Kamu-Yamato Iware-biko,[31] the second part just meaning "the man from Iware."[32] Departing from the landscape of Himuka (Hyūga) in the southern part of Kyūshū, this Iware-biko headed east (*Jinmu tōsei*) accompanied by a small army. There, he would eventually build his palace at Kashihara in Yamato, thus founding the empire. This is the mytho-historical foundation legend. As far as the traditional narrative of the ancient sources is concerned, the creation of the world and the Japanese state reaches its conclusion through this act. At this point, the history of the human emperors and thus the age of mankind begins. These descriptions from the sources formed the basis for the traditional

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[31] This spelling is based on modern usage; the historically correct transcription would be: Kamu-yamató-ihare-biko (Antoni, 2012, p. 105).

[32] In research, the question is raised whether the name component *ihare* could bear clear indications of a Korean origin or identity of the 'man from Iware.' Gary Ledyard (1975), in his theory on the continental origin of the Japanese imperial house, devotes detailed linguistic considerations to this problem. As he points out, this name element can not only be detected in the name of the 'founder of the empire,' but also in the name of the residence of the later ruler Homuda-waké (Ōjin-tennō), which obviously has the closest relations to the Korean peninsula, i.e., the kingdom of Paekche: "The Korean variant is *Ipar […] while Ipare is the older Japanese form of Iware" (Ledyard, 1975, p. 247). See also Antoni (2012, p. 615).

image of Japan's early history and the founding of the imperial state which was to endure into modern times in the sense of an absolute historical and sacred fact, unquestionable and of final authority. Until the eve of modern historiography in the late 19th century, the narratives from the ancient sources were often regarded as historical fact. Even today, one can often encounter relics of this mythical explanation of the world, not least in official Shintō teachings concerning the origins of the imperial family.

Archaeological and early historical research

Archaeological research led to a complete deconstruction of this mytho-historical view of early history. From the late 19th century onwards, it was more and more recognised that the surviving narratives on the founding of the Japanese state did not deserve historical credibility. Modern historical research developed in that exact period and proved the pure fictionality of the subject, i.e., Jinmu-tennō's founding of the empire, beyond any doubt.

A starting point for the historical-critical analysis of Jinmu's foundation story is the Kashihara jingū. Founded in 1889/90 – and thus coinciding with the proclamation of the Meiji Constitution – this place is dedicated to the divine ancestral souls of the supposed first emperor Jinmu and his wife. The shrine is located in the southern part of Nara Prefecture, in the city of Kashihara.[33] A hill at the foot of nearby Mount Unebi is considered the site of Jinmu's imperial tomb (*misasagi* 陵), the Unebi goryō. Kashihara jingū and Unebi goryō are popular tourist destinations today, and most visitors likely assume that they are looking at the actual site of Jinmu's former palace and tomb. Not even the slightest indication of the questionable nature of this site regarding its historical factuality can be found at either the

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[33] The name *kashihara* means "oak heath." Ledyard (1975, pp. 248–249), however, gives a completely new theory on the origin of the name by referring to a corresponding passage in the Korean source *Samguk yusa*, which in connection with the foundation of a royal capital shows striking linguistic analogies to the tradition discussed here. After a detailed analysis, he concludes: "The parallel is too striking to ignore." For Ledyard, the topos "Kashihara" represents an essential element in the postulation of his extended "Horserider Theory," according to which "Jinmu-tennō's" conquest should actually be understood as an invasion by Manchurian Puyo warriors. See also Antoni (2012, p. 630).

shrine or the nearby tomb. Here, the mytho-historical perspective of early Japanese history led to a sacred site and place of memory being postulated as authentic. In fact, however, the issue of the authenticity of Jinmu's tomb proves to be extraordinarily complex, as recent scholarly studies on the subject, such as Michael Wachutka's (2013, p. 38) remarks, show: "[…] on 5 December 1862, already in the final days of the Tokugawa shogunate, Emperor Kōmei expressed his desire that the dilapidated imperial tombs of Jinmu and others be repaired and restored."[34] Historical studies support this critical view. As Brigitte Pickl-Kolaczia (2015, p. 65) points out, the decision on the supposed location of Jinmu's tomb was made personally by Emperor Kōmei (1831–1867), the father of the Meiji-tennō. In a decree (*gosata* 御沙汰) dated April 4, 1863, he himself determined the Jibu (Jinmu)-den 神武田,[35] which had been repeatedly associated with the tomb since the Middle Ages, as the actual location of Jinmu's burial place: "Regarding the matter of the Jinmu-tennōryō, we order that the Jibu-den be designated [as the correct location]" (Pickl-Kolaczia, 2015, p. 62).

However, this decision was never verified; no attempt was ever made to investigate whether a tomb or coffin had actually existed at this site. As the Jibu-den shows, people began to search for the location of the tomb that they knew from ancient sources as early as the Middle Ages without ever finding it. The imperial decree was thus based on speculative traditions, not archaeological or scientific empiricism. Therefore, Pickl-Kolaczia (2015, p. 66) speaks of "a completely new creation of a cult site" in this context.

Reference should also be made to comprehensive studies about the supposed tomb of Jinmu at Unebi by two Japanese researchers: Harunari Hideji (1975) and Takagi Hiroshi (2000). Harunari (1975, p. 59) states right in the beginning of his research paper: "Today, almost no one believes that the 'Jinmu Tomb' near the village of Unebi in the town of Kashihara is the actual tomb of Jinmu-tennō." In his study, Takagi (2000, p. 83) aims to explore this site as well as the surrounding landscape as remnants of Jinmu-tennō's sacred

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[34] The question of the veneration of imperial tombs in the Bakumatsu and early Meiji period was already discussed in detail by Lokowandt (1978, pp. 73–83).

[35] The meaning is probably derived from *jinmutei goryō no ta* 神武帝御陵の田 ("Field of the tomb of emperor Jinmu"); see Pickl-Kolaczia (2015, p. 62). For an English summary of her results, see Pickl-Kolaczia (2017).

sites, beginning with the Bakumatsu period up to the 2,600th anniversary celebrations of 1940. He shows that until the end of the Bakumatsu period, the Unebi mound had been in a secluded location amidst the rice fields of the Takaichi district in Yamato Province. However, in the third year of the Bunkyū era (1863), in a section of Misanzai village[36] to the northeast of the flat mount Unebi, earth was piled up and the circular burial mound of Jinmu-tennō was built. In 1880, *unebiyama* 畝傍山 was bought up as the property of the imperial family and planted with trees, and ten years later, in 1890, the Kashihara shrine was finally built there. This site which consists of three parts – mount Unebi, Jinmu tomb, and Kashihara shrine – is subsequently understood as the authentic 'Sacred Site' of Jinmu (*Jinmu 'seiseki'* 神武「聖蹟」) to this day and maintained as such.

Outlook

The myths and legends on the founding of the empire, featuring the supposed first emperor of Japan, Jinmu-tennō, continue to play a remarkable, albeit hidden role in the politics even of present-day Japan. These topics have received special attention only recently, during the new Tennō's enthronement in 2019. Regardless of all historical-critical research undertaken by historians, archaeologists, etc., it is a fact that in the long run scientific investigations and doubts could not prevail against the ideological constructs of political mythology. There is no way around the realization that outside the sphere of objective scientific research, the illusion of the founding of the empire by Jinmu-tennō not only remained intact, but rather advanced to become a powerful weapon in the ideological armament of modern Japan.

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[36] See also Pickl-Kolaczia (2015, pp. 64–66), and Harunari (1975, pp. 61–63).

Focus Area 3: Japanese Imperial Mythology in Contemporary Popular Media

Julia Dolkovski

The ideological dimension of the myths so prevalent in pre-war and wartime Japan had to be discarded after World War II. Following Japan's surrender on September 2, 1945, the imperialistic reading of the myths that served as evidence for the divine origin and superiority of the Japanese people had to make way for a dehistoricized and depoliticized interpretation. While up to this point the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* were treated similarly to histories or religious texts, now they became "sources of national myths and legends" (Shirane, 2000a, p. 248) and as such part of the folk canon. Notwithstanding the above, the myths of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* stand in a long tradition of legitimizing the imperial rule and were constantly reinterpreted according to the political ideology held by the respective groups (Kōnoshi, 2000). Thus, modern iterations too must be understood as part of this history of reception. Considering this, one arrives at the question of whether and how the conception of the KiKi myths is still influenced by earlier ideas today.

As the third part of this research project, focus area 3 is concerned with the interpretation and reconfiguration of Japan's imperial mythology in post-war and present-day Japan. One might expect these myths to have lost relevance after their instrumentalization during the Second World War, yet they are as prominent as ever, if not more so, in surprisingly many aspects of everyday life. The goal of this focus area is to identify motifs and figures from the imperial mythology in contemporary Japanese popular culture to reach a better understanding of the status that the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* enjoy more than 1300 years after their compilation.

Central to this focus area is a thorough hermeneutical analysis of selected works of Japanese popular media that retell or utilize the KiKi myths, each in a unique way. The findings from these case studies will be compared to observations from other contemporary phenomena, for instance the way the imperial mythology is incorporated into political rhetoric. At the point of writing, it seems probable that in the examples discussed, the KiKi

mythology is actively used to represent Japanese culture. Notably, in some cases references to earlier ideologies are clearly visible, while others could rather be understood as a reinvention of culture. In order to investigate this nexus between mythology, ideology, and identity, four case studies are planned.

The book *Kojiki no monogatari: Hieda no Are ga kataru yukai na "nihon no shinwa"* 古事記の物語・稗田の阿礼が語るゆかいな「日本の神話」 by Kobayashi Seimei and Miyazaki Midori was first published in 1999 and is a retelling in easy modern Japanese meant to be read to children (Kobayashi & Miyazaki, 1999/2015, p. 264). Another example for a retelling is the website *Ranobe kojiki* ラノベ古事記 by Onodera Yū. The author's first light novel *Ranobe Kojiki: Nihon no kami-sama to hajimari no monogatari* ラノベ古事記・日本の神様とはじまりの物語 encompassing the *kamiyo* chapters was published in 2017. Similar to the *Kojiki no monogatari* this website retells the *Kojiki* in a lighthearted way. Here, the text is even accompanied by illustrations of the characters in a manga art style. While these two cases follow the story of the original *Kojiki* quite closely, the other two chosen works pick individual episodes or figures from the myths and integrate them into their own narrative. In the video game *Ōkami* 大神 (2006), the player assumes the role of the sun deity Amaterasu and embarks on a journey to free the lands of Nakatsukuni ナカツクニ and Kamui カムイ from the evil Yamata no Orochi and his demons. The game's core story is based on the episode of Susanoo's conflict with Yamata no Orochi, but players encounter numerous other characters based on myths, legends, folklore, and even history. The fourth case study is less obvious with its references. *Tensui no Sakuna-hime* 天穂のサクナヒメ (2020) adapts the same story about Susanoo and Yamata no Orochi and imagines its continuation. The title character Sakuna-hime is the daughter of the god of war Takeribi and the harvest deity Toyohana who are based on Susanoo and his wife Kushinada-hime respectively. The main antagonist of the game, Ōmizuchi, is another reimagination of Yamata no Orochi.

In the following, the video game *Ōkami* and the book *Kojiki no monogatari* will serve as examples for two different possible approaches used when translating the myths of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* into works of contemporary media.

The Kojiki no monogatari – *A modern retelling*

According to the cover text of the *Kojiki no monogatari*, the book aims to pre-serve the myths of the *Kojiki* for future generations by asking parents to read them to their children. The text itself is written from the perspective of Hieda no Are, claiming to have come to the present age to tell the stories of his *Kojiki* or *Furukotobumi*,[37] as it is called in this case, to a new audience (Kobayashi & Miyazaki, 1999/2015, p. 6–7). This is also visible in the subtitle of the work *Hieda no Are ga kataru yukai na "nihon no shinwa"* – The joyful myths of Japan told by Hieda no Are. This emphasis on the person of Hieda no Are is significant, as he has become a centerpiece for the ideologically charged interpretation of the *Kojiki* by various authors since Motoori Norinaga and Hirata Atsutane. To them, the supposed oral nature of the text held great significance (Antoni, 2012, pp. 326–330), an issue that is discussed in focus area 1 as well. The fact that the authors of the *Kojiki no monogatari* similarly put an emphasis on the oral nature of Hieda no Are's memorate without a doubt positions their retelling in a framework of corresponding ideas that originated in the early modern period. Accordingly, the *Kojiki* is framed as a text that reflects the original Japanese language and beliefs of the distant past (Kobayashi & Miyazaki, 1999/2015, pp. (7), 264). It seems to be the act of *kataru* 語る, telling or reciting, that best conveys the myths, expressed by the authors' frequent use of the term. In addition, Ō no Yasumarō, who compiled the *Kojiki* based on Hieda no Are's memorate and, in contrast to Hieda no Are, is confirmed to be a historical person (Antoni, 2012, p. 282), is named only once. Ō no Yasumarō is mentioned when Hieda no Are tells the reader about how his story (*watashi no hanashi* わたしの話) was written down to preserve it for the future (Kobayashi & Miyazaki, 1999/2015, p. (6). Yasumarō thus fades into the background while Hieda no Are's oral tradition is framed as the starting point of the *Kojiki*.

A similar sentiment can be observed in a sentence integral to the authors' understanding of the ancient text: "A people who forget their myths will perish"

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[37] In the *Kojiki no monogatari*, Hieda no Are calls the text *Furukotobumi*, the Japanese pronunciation of the Characters 古事記 which are most commonly known by their Si-no-Japanese reading *Kojiki*. Norinaga also mentions this version of the title in the preface to his *Kojikiden* (Motoori, 1968/1976d, p. 16).

(*jibuntachi no shinwa o wasureta minzoku wa horobimasu* 自分たちの神話を 忘れた民族は滅びます). Not only is this sentence mentioned on the cover text and in the epilogue but in the authors' postscript as well (Kobayashi & Miyazkai, 1999/2015, pp. 264, 269). In this postscript, they reminisce on how a whisper of Hieda no Are telling them these exact words motivated them while struggling with their project. Additionally, in the epilogue, the narrator Hieda no Are is wondering whether the contents of the *kamiyo* volume could be conveyed well to the younger generation, stating that knowing the myths is paramount since the readers were born because their ancestors lived during the age of the gods (Kobayashi & Miyazkai, 1999/2015, pp. 263–264).

The national anthem of Japan *kimigayo* 君が代 is quoted as well and, in a rather untypical interpretation, used to connect the readers to the primordial deities Izanagi and Izanami (Kobayashi & Miyazaki, 1999/2015, p. 265). The poem this anthem is based on is usually interpreted as a wish for prosperity to the Japanese imperial family and Japanese nation,[38] but the *Kojiki no monogatari* reinterprets it into a wish for the continuity of the Japanese people from the time of the mythical parents Izanagi and Izanami into the modern day. Fittingly, the text ends with Hieda no Are asking the readers to follow the example of these two deities. He states: "You are the new Izanami and Izanagi who live in the 21st century. Engage in sexual intercourse in harmony and bring many good children into this world" (Kobayashi & Miyazaki 1999/2015, p. 265). Thus, the *Kojiki no monogatari* depicts the *Kojiki* as an oral tradition from ancient Japan with unparalleled importance for the country and its people. Accordingly, forgetting it could cause the fall of the Japanese nation itself. It tells stories from the beginning of the world and the country during an era of gods where the supposed ancestors of the readers walked the earth. As such, this retelling follows in the footsteps of interpretations of the *Kojiki* as a text that embodies the Japanese nature in its most unspoiled form. Through the remark "You were born because your ancestors lived in the age of the gods" (Kobayashi & Miyazaki, 1999/2015, p. 264) it seems as if these stories are presented as true and historical.

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[38] For an in-depth discussion about the meaning and historical use of the *kimigayo* as well as the *hinomaru* 日の丸 flag, see Cripps (1996/2015). Before this background of the poem's history, the quotation in the *Kojiki no monogatari* carries strong ideological undertones which have to be thoroughly discussed in this focus area.

In the *Kojiki no monogatari*, it is lamented that: "In the *Furukotobumi* a story of utmost importance is written down […]. Nevertheless, in addition to the *Furukotobumi* not being understood by the people of Japan today, it is in the process of disappearing altogether" (Kobayashi & Miyazaki, 1999/2015, pp. (6–7). It seems, however, that this fictional Hieda no Are has no need to worry anymore, as the *Kojiki* and its myths are popular sources for numerous works of media where they are retold and preserved. Yet at the same time, the unrivaled superiority and authority attributed to the *Kojiki* in works like the *Kojiki no monogatari* is contrasted by a less ideologically saturated utilization in popular media such as *Ōkami*. The *Kojiki no monogatari* depicts the *Kojiki* and its myths as the foundation of Japan's culture, as a purely Japanese work that passes down ancient customs and stories. In examples like *Ōkami*, however, these myths are indeed innately Japanese but neither the origin of all that is Japanese in nature nor connected to the real world.

Ōkami – *Reimagining myth as a secular story*

First released in 2006, *Ōkami* tells the story of the sun deity Amaterasu who travels through the land of Nakatsukuni, the world's name being a clear reference to *toyoashihara no nakatsukuni* 豊葦原の中国 from the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. The game is not without fault, as pointed out by various authors (Hutchinson, 2019; Llovet Ferrer, 2017). For example, the integration of Japanese myths and their sun deity, none other than the ancestral deity of the imperial family herself, into Ainu mythology is to be recognized before the background of the historical discrimination of this people (Hutchinson, 2019, pp. 61–66). Except for the Ainu people who are notably not integrated into the equivalent of mainland Japan, *Ōkami* depicts the Japanese culture as relatively homogenized as well. Nevertheless, a militaristic or imperialistic undertone as postulated in *Japanese Culture through Videogames* by Rachel Hutchinson (2019, p. 66), the most prominent publication discussing *Ōkami* to date, is highly debatable.[39] In many

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[39] This does not mean that Hutchinson's critique of the game is unjustified. Nevertheless, problems in her argumentation arise, for example when she states: "The fact that the game-world was called 'Nippon' in the game design, not 'Yamato' or even 'Wa,' is a linguistic slippage that confirms the islands as the modern nation-state of Japan" (Hutchison, 2019, p. 66). She

instances the political implication of the sources is not incorporated into the story or the world of *Ōkami*. The weapons available to the player, for example, are based on the imperial insignia of Japan but are not in fact used to establish or legitimize an imperial reign. A connection between the sun deity and the imperial family is completely neglected within the game's story world as well.[40] Rather, *Ōkami* as a game is characterized by the creative liberty taken with its original sources. Tales from mainland Japan and Ainu culture are changed and woven together to form a new narrative with the character of Amaterasu at the center.

This does not imply, however, that these myths are deprived of their importance for the Japanese culture. *Ōkami* is very much a reimagination of Japan's past interwoven with its myths and folklore (Guyker, 2016, p. 328). Its game world is clearly modeled after the main Japanese islands of Honshū, Hokkaidō, Shikoku, and Kyūshū, while Okinawa is notably omitted. The name of the game's world Nakatsukuni is the mythical name for these islands in the *Kojiki* and *Nikon shoki*. Yet neither the sources themselves nor Hieda no Are and Ō no Yasumarō are mentioned in the game. Thus, it is difficult to argue that the game attributes authority or relevance to these texts in particular. Rather, it highlights the Japanese culture and pays homage to the countless stories told throughout its history, including not only myths but folktales, legends, and (semi-)historical episodes as well. As such, *Ōkami* stands as a prime example for the way the imperial mythology was incorporated into a folk canon.[41] One could argue that in this case, what takes place is not a sacralization of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* but rather a romanticization of the Japanese culture in which they are rooted.

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ignores, however, that the original Japanese name for *Ōkami's* game world is Nakatsukuni, which firmly anchors the game's setting in mythical Japan, not the modern nation-state.

[40] In *Ōkami*, the lack of connection between Amaterasu and the emperor called Takara no Mikado is for instance visible in the fact that Takara no Mikado is not able to recognize Amaterasu as the deity she is. A divine genealogy of the emperor is not mentioned either. What has to be noted, however, is the rather careless stylization of the sun resembling the rising sun flag (*kyokujitsuki* 旭日旗) (Llovet Ferrer, 2017, pp. 11–12).

[41] For the canonization of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, see Shirane (2000b, p. 18).

Outlook

While it is impossible to look at all retellings of the KiKi myths published to this day and similarly unthinkable to find every mention in independent stories, the four chosen case studies, *Kojiki no monogatari*, *Ranobe kojiki*, *Ōkami*, and *Tensui no Sakuna-hime*, supplemented with further examples, will give an insight into the functions the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* serve in contemporary Japan. Further comparison with existing research on the original texts as well as on their reinterpretations in modern-day Japan will illuminate exactly if and how contemporary tendencies are to be located within historic processes of sacralization and desacralization. It will be of great interest how earlier interpretations and ways of utilization of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* influenced contemporary receptions of the texts. Of course, the selected case studies can only grant a glimpse at the relevance given to the imperial mythology in contemporary Japan. They will nevertheless prove symptomatic for how works of contemporary media serve to contextualize and recontextualize the myths of *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*.

A Selection of Shared Approaches on Identity and Myth

The three focus areas all deal with different periods in time but share an overarching goal: the analysis of sacralization and desacralization with a focus on the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* as well as a concrete definition for these processes in the Japanese case. This will then contribute to the larger research group in understanding sacralization in an interdisciplinary context. In order to achieve this goal, we especially want to look at the construction of the Japanese nation state and cultural identity, and how this process is related to the attribution of authority to the two texts. Several theoretical approaches are already proving useful for this endeavour.

    Connections between texts and the formation of a national identity can, for instance, be found in Haruo Shirane's idea of canonization. He partially rejects the traditional approach to canonical texts which views them as inherently special or of some absolute value. While Shirane acknowledges that there are formal and content-related characteristics that influence a texts reception, to him, texts are attributed with value by groups. Therefore,

a constant re-production of the text and its value is vital to the process of canonization (Shirane, 2000b, pp. 2–3). In this, Shirane's approach to canon theory overlaps with the way our research group understands sacralized texts, although it will also be an important task to explore the differences between the two adjacent fields of sacralization and canonization.[42]

In addition, Shirane identifies five issues of canon formation, one of them being nation building. He states that:

> […] the dominant canon, particularly as a result of official or state nationalism, can function as a tool of exploitation or political control by creating a larger sense of cultural homogeneity, a center of authority or standard that unites disparate individuals and groups while often denying the identity of a particular gender, class or subgroup (Shirane, 2000b, p. 11).

During the Meiji period, nationalistic ideals like the idea of a common language representing a united nation were the basis on which the first definitive canon of Japanese literature was formed. The *Kojiki*, more so than the *Nihon shoki*, stood at the center of this newfound national canon, and the 'Japanized' version of the text constructed by Motoori Norinaga was recognized by the Meiji government as being able to serve exactly the aforementioned purpose (Kōnoshi, 2000, p. 64).

The construction of the *Kojiki*, and in affiliation the *Nihon shoki*, as texts legitimizing the Japanese nation state can be analyzed using Eric J. Hobsbawm's and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) as a theoretical basis.[43] Hobsbawm (1983/2012, p. 1) points out that there are many traditions which are intentionally invented or manipulated and whose traditional nature is merely assumed. Looking at the Japanese case this way

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[42] A possible approach is to posit sacralization as the process of emphasizing a text over others, of claiming that this text alone holds the ultimate truth. Klaus Herbers and Karin Steiner (2019, p. 9) relate sacralization to this claim of ultimate authority. In contrast to this, canonization implies that several texts are imbued with value by society. A sacralized work can be part of a canon, but not all works in a canon necessarily undergo the process of sacralization.

[43] For a detailed discussion of invented traditions in the Japanese context, see Antoni (1997).

makes it possible to recognize seemingly archaic traditions, like the imperial enthronement ceremony, the Empire Foundation Day on February 11, or even the national flag and national anthem, as what they truly are: inventions of the 19th century. They paint an essentialist image of Japanese culture that in reality is dependent on an ideology of an eternal Japanese nation with a timeless, uniform culture. In addition, this topic is closely related to the issue of religious traditionalism as coined by the German historian Dietmar Rothermund. This concept is extremely useful for analyzing both real and invented traditions, as traditionalism "is a conscious attempt at streamlining tradition so as to fit a particular need for a useful past" (Rothermund, 1970, p. 35). Traditionalists select, systematize, and create ideological systems in which heterogeneous cultural traditions are reshaped into a homogenous national ideology. Within this process, sacralized texts play a crucial role as well. As Rothermund (1989, p. 147) writes: "[T]he search for identity is the 'traditionalist's' conscious goal for the purpose of fostering solidarity."

Here, a connection can be drawn to Jan Assmann's theory of mythomotorics. Referring to Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities,[44] Assmann (1992, p. 42) states that for the 'imagining' of community, myths can function as an integral tool. In this context, he describes myth as drawing "an identity-founding, action-guiding and present-interpreting power from the past." It was by means of these exact processes that the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* have been imbued with authority during their long history of reception.

Conclusion

By delving deeper into this long history of reception and, accordingly, structuring the project "Sacred Narrative" in a chronological manner, we aim to gain an in-depth understanding as to why the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* have been integral to the formation of Japanese identity, especially since the 18th century, and are still vital to upholding this identity today. The three

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[44] According to Anderson (1983/2006, p. 6), every larger community is imagined, because the connection between the individual members is seldomly based on face-to-face interaction, but rather on a shared sense of kinship. He points out: "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (Anderson, 1983/2006, p. 6).

focus areas are linked by the ongoing construction of a uniquely Japanese culture based on the ancient sources. Motoori Norinaga pushed for a superior Japanese culture validated by the *Kojiki* and was criticized by many of his contemporaries for his controversial ideas. Starting in the late 19th century, the figure of Jinmu-tennō then played a crucial role in the construction of this Japanese culture, the sacralization of Jinmu's person happening during a time in which Japanese superiority was a central issue. Even today, Japanese culture is still inseparably linked to the myths, as shown by examples from popular culture, such as *Ōkami* and *Tensui no Sakuna-hime*.

In many instances, readings of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* as well as a general interest in and a passion for the ancient period are not linked to nationalist sentiments. This can be observed in phenomena such as the recent rise of interest in the kofun period. The singer Marikofun, for example, leads the group *Kofun ni kōfun kyōkai* 古墳にコーフン協会.[45] On their website, the group stresses the aesthetic qualities of the burial mounds and even introduces two stylized mascots in the shape of the mounds (Kofun ni kōfun kyōkai, n.d.). Here, a seemingly non-political interest in the ancient period is displayed; it must be stated, however, that the political usage of ancient materials, especially of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, is still an issue in present day Japan.[46] In this context, the organization of the 2016 G7 summit in Ise should be mentioned. It notably took place at the shrine of the sun goddess and ancestral deity of the imperial house, Amaterasu, whose position is ultimately justified solely by the mythical chapters of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. A similar tendency can be witnessed in the rise of national Shintō associations such as the *Shintō seiji renmei* 神道政治連盟 (Shinto Association of Spiritual leadership).[47] This association advocates for a constitutional revision based on Shintō values, so that the Japanese people can, once again, be proud of their country (Shintō seiji renmei, n.d.). Some politicians even

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[45] *Kofun ni kōfun* can be translated as "excitement about burial mounds (kofun)" and includes a wordplay on the two similar words *kōfun* 興奮/コーフン (excitement) and *kofun* 古墳 (burial mound).

[46] This issue could be explored within "Sacred Narrative" in a potential fourth focus area.

[47] For a more detailed discussion on this topic, see Hardacre and Shimazono in Wachutka, et al. (2018, pp. 182–204).

go so far as to openly state that Jinmu-tennō was a real person and that Japan is thus the country with the longest history in the world.[48]

By taking a closer look at these examples, it becomes apparent how deeply myth and religion are still interwoven with the construction of a uniquely Japanese identity and history, so that it seems almost impossible to separate reality and myth. This circumstance shows that an analysis of the sacralization and desacralization of *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* through the lens of a rational, historical-critical science is required, especially at the present time.

List of abbreviations

MY	*Manyōshū* 万葉集
NKBT	*Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 日本古典文學大系
NST	*Nihon shisō taikei* 日本思想大系
SNKBZ	*Shinpen nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 新編日本古典文学全集
TS	Time Schedule

PROF. DR. KLAUS ANTONI

Department of Japanese Studies
Faculty of Humanities
University of Tuebingen
Wilhelmstraße 90, 72074 Tübingen (Germany)
klaus.antoni@uni-tuebingen.de

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[48] Mihara Junko stated this during an event with the title *Ima koso kenpō kaisei o! Kanagawakenmin daishūkai* 今こそ憲法改正を!神奈川県民大集会 ("Let us change the constitution now! A big assembly of the citizens of Kanagawa") on February 20, 2016. This incident is described by Iwakami Yasumi and Andō Miki (2016) in an article on the web journal IWJ, which is operated by Iwakami, and can also be found on the journal's youtube channel (Movie Iwj, 2016). A year prior, Mihara Junko openly used the phrase *hakkō ichiu*, a phrase that is linked to Japanese nationalism, especially during World War II, and that is ascribed to Emperor Jinmu ("Wartime slogan should stay buried," 2015). For a contextualization of Mihara's remarks, see Antoni & Antoni (2017, p. 22).

JULIA DOLKOVSKI, M.A.

Department of Japanese Studies
Faculty of Humanities
University of Tuebingen
Wilhelmstraße 90, 72074 Tübingen (Germany)
julia.dolkovski@uni-tuebingen.de

LOUISE NEUBRONNER, M.A.

Department of Japanese Studies
Faculty of Humanities
University of Tuebingen
Wilhelmstraße 90, 72074 Tübingen (Germany)
louise.neubronner@uni-tuebingen.de

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