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Gender in Early Classical Japan

Marriage, Leadership, and Political Status in Village and Palace

YOSHIE AKIKO

Translated by JANET R. GOODWIN

IN JAPAN'S early classical age—the eighth and ninth centuries—women known as *toji* 刀自 played a major role in rural society in the management of agricultural enterprises and the supervision of labor. On a higher social level, consorts of the sovereign known as *ōtoji* 大刀自 (also written 夫人), or “grand *toji*,” managed productive enterprises within their own independent residences. Building upon a synthesis of previous research on the history of women in the classical age, in this article I will examine the social, political, and economic activities of *toji* on both levels. The article will focus primarily on the eighth and ninth centuries but will trace specific phenomena back in time to the fourth and fifth. In addition, I will follow some developments into subsequent periods, using a later vantage point to illuminate earlier conditions.

The discovery that women played a surprisingly powerful role in early classical times has not yet been incorporated into our general understanding of the history of the age. Let us take, for example, Ishimoda Shō's 石母田正 argument that between the sixth and ninth centuries members of the local chieftain (*zaichi shuchō* 在地首長) class were the key figures in communally organized productive activities—in other words, that such local chieftains constituted the base of

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the administrative structure of the realm.¹ Much of the debate concerning ancient and classical history has revolved around Ishimoda's thesis since he proposed it in the mid-1970s. Unfortunately, this debate has largely ignored the existence of female chieftains, and female village leaders rarely appear in analyses of the breakdown of the ancient communal framework after the ninth century and its replacement by a new local order.²

Official sources compiled by order of the court, such as chronicles and compendia of ritual, contain very little direct evidence about women. When women do appear in such works, moreover, they are often depicted from the perspective of those who sought to promote Chinese concepts of patrilineality and male dominance. For instance, maxims found in official works that purport to record conventional images of the roles and productive activities of men and women often convey biased or anachronistic concepts of gender relations. To uncover the figures of women "hidden" in such sources, we need to turn to other types of material. Central among these are *setsuwa* tales relating the lives of the common people and archaeological findings such as *mokkan* 木簡, wooden tablets used for keeping routine records of various sorts because paper was such a precious commodity. Unlike the situation with chronicles and such, *toji* appear with some frequency in this sort of material.

A close examination of these different sources reveals the central role played by *toji* in the early classical age. It also makes clear that *toji* should not be regarded as "wives" who exercised leadership in local society simply as proxies for their husbands. To understand women's economic and administrative roles we need to situate their activities within the context of the patterns of family and marriage and legal and governmental structures current at the time. Archaeological evidence likewise points to the independent status of the sovereign's consorts in this period and to the earlier widespread presence of female chieftains throughout the Japanese archipelago. Exploration of the commonalities between village and palace centered on women's roles should yield more than an enhanced appreciation of the position of women; it promises to shed light on various central features of early classical society and government.

Legal Codes and Actual Conditions

From the second half of the seventh century, the Yamato court, drawing from Chinese models, began a full-fledged overhaul of the country's political structure. A legal system patterned on that of China provided the skeletal framework for government control of the populace. Administrative regulations (*ryō* 令) issued at the end of the seventh century were combined in the eighth with penal codes (*ritsu* 律), forming a governmental system generally known as the *ritsuryō*

¹ For his thesis on the local chieftains system, see Ishimoda 1971.

² For the leading explanation of the forces behind the breakdown of the communal order (the "prosperous subjects" thesis), see Toda 1967. The few scholars who have examined women's roles in this context include Kawane 1990 and Fukutō 1991, part 3, chapter 4.

polity. There were many gaps between the idealized *ritsuryō* political structure and actual social conditions within Japanese society. The efforts of people at both the central and local level to cope with these gaps brought about the gradual transformation of the *ritsuryō* mechanisms of rule into a system that better accommodated the social and economic actuality of the time. Parallel to this transformation, however, the formal *ritsuryō* structures of government also had a decisive impact on earlier customs. The ninth century was a turning point in this two-sided process of adaptation.³

As an example, let us consider developments in lineage patterns during these centuries. Drawing from the theories of cultural anthropologists and research on lineage records and inheritance patterns, historians have concluded that classical Japan was not organized along patrilineal lines. Rather, it was a bilateral society in which both mother's and father's lineages were important.⁴ Prior to the end of the seventh century, lineage records noted male and female ancestry for three or four generations on both the mother's and father's side and included female as well as male children, grouping offspring born to the same mother. An example of such a record, dating from the seventh century, is the lineage record of Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子 known as *Tenjukoku shūchōmei* 天寿国繡帳銘.⁵ Likewise, individuals might claim membership in either their father's or mother's lineage. Sometimes, in fact, they identified themselves with both. An example from the late sixth century is Mononobe no Yuge no Moriya 物部弓削守屋, whose father was the chieftain of the Mononobe and mother the daughter of the chieftain of the Yuge. Moriya himself not only used the names of both lineages, but also served as chieftain of both.⁶ Provincial notables' choice of lineage often was a matter of political expediency.

Other findings support the conclusion that early Japan was a bilateral society. Akashi Kazunori 明石一紀, for instance, has found that early kinship terminology indicated generational differences and differences between main and collateral lines, but made no distinction between paternal and maternal lines. In China, where patrilineal and patriarchal family structures were the rule, people strictly observed such distinctions, using different characters for paternal and maternal uncles, for example. This was not true in early Japan. Akashi has noted that father's brothers and mother's brothers both were called *ochi* ヲチ. Similarly, both maternal and paternal grandfathers were called *ōchi* オホチ, and grandmothers on both sides were called *ōha* オホハ, while nephews were called *oi* ヲヒ and nieces, *mei* メヒ, regardless of whether they were children of brothers or of sisters.⁷

³ See Yoshida 1983.

⁴ Yoshida 1983; Akashi 1990. The term "bilateral" (*sōhōsei* 双方制) is taken from the work of the anthropologist Muratake Seiichi 村武精一. See Muratake 1981, pp. 273–91.

⁵ The record, embroidered on an offertory banner, was also included in *Jōgū Shōtoku hō teisetsu* 上宮聖徳法王帝説, the oldest biography of Shōtoku Taishi, compiled in the mid-Heian period from sources dating sometime after the mid-seventh century. See Ienaga 1975; Ienaga 1976.

⁶ See Yoshie 2000b, pp. 74–76.

⁷ Akashi 1990, part 3, chapter 2.

The attempt to transcribe the native undifferentiated terms with kanji that presumed a distinction between paternal and maternal relatives resulted in substantial confusion and contradictions. This can be seen in census and tax registers from the Nara period, which try to incorporate Chinese principles of kinship. Census registers from Shimōsa province dated 721, for example, would appear to refer to daughters of brothers as 娣 and daughters of sisters as 姪. Tax registers for Otagi 愛宕 district in Yamashiro province, however, seem to have referred to brothers' daughters as 姪女 and sisters' daughters as 甥女. We may assume that the spoken term for all was *mei* (niece). But in other instances, such as in census registers from the western provinces dated 702, the character 娣 appears to refer to a woman's younger sister rather than a niece. Because of such discrepancies, researchers often can only hypothesize the nature of the familial relationship the writer intended to convey.⁸

Despite major contradictions between Chinese-style codes and Japanese reality, the power of political centralization and advanced Chinese culture was overwhelming, and principles of the new legal system gradually penetrated society, transforming family, marriage, and inheritance systems. At the end of the seventh century it was formally established that children born between free subjects belonged to the father's lineage.⁹ By the beginning of the ninth century, lineage records submitted to the court included only male children and their patrilineal forebears. They also listed sons in order of birth rather than grouping children born to the same mother. From the late eighth through early ninth centuries, central aristocrats and provincial notables frequently submitted petitions noting that although previously they had traced their ancestry through their mother's lineage, this had been a "mistake" (*ayamari* 謬, 誤) and they wished to change their affiliation to their father's lineage.¹⁰

But while in some cases, such as lineage affiliation, the patrilineal premises of the codes had an erosive effect on earlier bilateral practices, in other instances, the formulators of the codes tried to accommodate existing orientations.¹¹ In China, mourning regulations, for example, strongly favored paternal kin in terms of the range of relatives for whom mourning was to be observed and the length of the term of mourning. The Japanese codes, by contrast, stipulated that mourning for maternal kin should be almost equivalent to that for paternal relatives.¹²

⁸ Nanbu 1992, pp. 10–21. Census registers (*koseki* 戸籍) were compiled every six years; tax registers (*keichō* 計帳) were compiled annually. Transcriptions of extant registers may be found in *Dainihon komonjo*, vols. 1 and 2. The joining of the fragmentary originals in these volumes is often problematic; for a list of revisions made subsequently by later researchers, see Sugimoto 2001, part 3, chapter 1.

⁹ The law is recorded as part of the Taika reforms of 645. See *Nihon shoki*, Taika 1.8.5; Aston 1972, part 2, p. 203. In actuality, it appears to have been promulgated some decades later.

¹⁰ See, for instance *Shoku Nihongi*, Tennō 1 (781).5.29; Enryaku 7 (788).8.13; Enryaku 10 (791).12.8. See also Yoshie 2000b, part 1, chapter 2; part 2, chapter 3.

¹¹ For a comparison of various aspects of Chinese and Japanese legal codes, see the supplementary notes to *Ritsuryō*.

¹² See Akashi 1990, part 2 chapter 1; *Ritsuryō*, pp. 349–50.

Inheritance was another area where the compilers of the codes seem to have incorporated Japanese customs. Before the middle of the eighth century, when private land possession had not as yet developed, the major forms of heritable property were slaves, who provided labor; the *yake* 宅, or homestead, used as an operating base for economic activities; rice, held in storehouses; and horses and oxen used for transportation. In earlier times, *uji* 氏, extended kinship groups or lineages, seem to have held such property in common, with the *uji* head allocating use of it to individual *uji* members, both male and female. In contrast to Chinese regulations, which mandated the division of a father's property among his sons, the Japanese codes continued to recognize, in effect, the authority of the *uji* head to allocate common assets.¹³ They also affirmed the right of women both to inherit and bequeath property.¹⁴ According to the census registers of 702 from Mino province, for example, a woman named Agata no Miyatsuko Nanimome 県造奈爾毛壳, listed as the mother of the head of the residence unit (*koshu* 戸主), held thirteen slaves, while her son had none.¹⁵ At the time property was typically passed on from parent to child, or from one *uji* head to the next; it was not yet customary to inherit property from a spouse. Nanimome thus had probably inherited the slaves from her own parents, and she was the one with managerial rights over this property. Her son may have been listed as *koshu*, but until her death, he had no claim to his mother's slaves.

Following the issuing in 743 of a law permitting the permanent possession of newly opened fields, private land ownership developed rapidly. In line with the recognition in the codes of women as holders of property, women as well as men participated in this process, and women's names appear frequently in records of land sales and purchases.¹⁶ Such evidence and the codes' residual affirmation of bilateral kinship point to the status of women as independent social actors in this period. These same factors, however, also suggest that the gap between Japanese social reality and the underlying principles of the codes may have made it difficult to apply the codes as they were written. A consideration of patterns of marriage will further confirm this situation, for although the codes, in line with Chinese practice, assumed the basic unit of production to be a patriarchally

¹³ See the reconstruction of the Taihō code discussed in *Ritsuryō*, pp. 559–60; and *Ryō no shūge*, vol. 2, pp. 291–330. What the codes refer to as *chakushi* 嫡子 (heir; eldest son) may be interpreted as in actuality indicating the position traditionally occupied by the *uji* head. For a discussion of this issue, see Yoshie 1986, part 1, chap. 1; Yoshida 1983, pp. 167–78. Research on the nature of *uji* has advanced greatly in recent years, leading to revision of the old interpretation of *uji* as a kinship organization based on patrilineal descent. For an overview of this research, which is not yet reflected in the accounts to be found in older historiographical encyclopedias, see the entry on *uji* in the most up-to-date such work, *Rekishigaku jiten*, vol. 10, p. 43.

¹⁴ See Yoshie 1986, part 1, chapter 2.

¹⁵ *Dainihon komonjo*, vol. 1, p. 63. For the nature of “residence units” (*ko* 戸) and *koshu*, see below, pp. 446–48.

¹⁶ Volume 1 of *Heian ibun* contains many records of the purchase of land by women dating from the late eighth and early ninth centuries, beginning with several purchases by Nakajima no Muraji Ōtoji-me/ko 中嶋連大刀自咩/古, who accumulated a great deal of land. See documents 47, 53, 54, 60. See also Fukutō 1991, part 3, chapter 1; Sekiguchi 2004, vol. 1, part 1, chapter 1.

organized household in which husbands and wives lived together, such households were not necessarily the norm in Japan. The conjugal relationship was typically fluid and unstable, with husbands and wives often living separately and frequently changing partners.

Family and Marriage in Early Classical Times

Research into Japanese women's history of the classical period began with studies of marriage and the family. Discovering evidence for a matrilineal descent system in classical sources, the pioneering scholar Takamure Itsue 高群逸枝 argued that in the Nara period and earlier, married couples usually lived separately, a system known as *tsumadoikon* 妻問い婚 (duolocal or visiting marriage). In the Heian period, according to Takamure, husbands often lived at their wives' residences (*shōseikon* 招婿婚, or uxorilocal marriage); only later in the Muromachi period did the standard form become *yometorikon* 嫁取り婚, a form of virilocal marriage in which the wife was taken into the husband's family.¹⁷ Subsequent research and interpretations of individual documents refuted or revised many of Takamure's findings, such as her emphasis on matrilineal descent,¹⁸ her general views on "adopting a son-in-law," and the timing of the change to the virilocal system. Takamure's systematic evidence that a society centered on patrilineal "houses" (*ie* 家) emerged only after a long period of historical change, continues, however, to be of considerable significance.¹⁹

There is, in fact, as yet no general scholarly consensus on issues such as the primary form of marriage residence in early classical times, or the ability of women to initiate or to consent freely to marriage or divorce.²⁰ Individual historical sources show considerable variation—for instance, some marriages seem to be duolocal, some uxorilocal, and some virilocal—and researchers have made arbitrary judgments based on a selection from this evidence. Some have attempted to apply statistical analysis to examples of marriage residence found in tale collections, but such a method can hardly be valid for a society that has left no statistically significant samples. Yoshida Takashi 吉田孝, who has made a comprehensive overview of the relationship between kinship structures and the *ritsuryō* system, states that "the most fundamental sources among the materials available to us today are those recording kinship terminology and incest taboos."²¹ He concludes that these and other sources attest to the fluid nature of marriage in early classical times. Eighth-century legal experts regarded a husband and wife living in the same administrative village (*sato* 里) who had not

¹⁷ See Takamure 1966b.

¹⁸ See Takamure 1966a.

¹⁹ In present-day usage the term *ie* refers to a patrilineal stem family of several generations. As we shall see later in this article, however, the term carried different meanings in early classical times. See below, pp. 453–54.

²⁰ Regarding the debates over these issues, see the articles collected in Yoshie 2002b, and the background discussion by Yoshie at the end of the same volume. For an overview of family, marriage, and lineage in early classical times, see Yoshie 2000a.

²¹ Yoshida 1983, p. 133.

had contact with each other for three months to be divorced, he notes. *Man'yōshū* 万葉集 love poems in which it is impossible to be sure whether or not the lovers are married indicate the absence of a clearly defined marriage ceremony.²² Yoshida's findings support the assumption that the dominant form of marital residence in the early classical period was in effect duolocal: marital relationships were not stable unions continuing over time, but temporary pairing arrangements that could be easily dissolved by either party.

In noting the value of materials recording "kinship terminology and incest taboos" as a source of information about family and marriage structures in the early classical period, Yoshida referred to the work of Akashi Kazunori. Akashi, whose discussion of kinship terminology I have cited above (p. 439), hypothesizes that the early classical family consisted of "mother and children, plus the husband": while ties between mother and children were strong, loose ties between husband and wife were the general rule. The "husband" appended to the group at any given time was not necessarily the father of the children, and it might happen that the wife's husband, in visiting the household, would have sexual relations with the wife's daughter, or that the daughter's husband would have sexual relations with the daughter's mother. Akashi draws support for this hypothesis from his analysis of the categories of sexual violation listed in the Great Purification Ritual (Ōharae 大祓) liturgy. Among the "earthly offenses" (*kunitsutsumi* 国津罪), the liturgy includes "the offense of violating a mother and her child, the offense of violating a child and her mother." These two offenses presume a situation, Akashi argues, in which a man visiting a particular woman also has sexual relations with her daughter or mother living in the same household. Combining such evidence with his analysis of kinship terminology, Akashi concludes that large patrilineal families were not the norm at this time in Japan.²³

On the official level, the loose family structure and fluid marital relationship made it difficult to handle matters concerning women solely within the framework of the conjugal unit. As a consequence, as Umemura Keiko 梅村恵子 has shown through a comparison of the terms designating women in Chinese and Japanese law codes and regulations, the eighth-century Japanese law codes assigned women an independent status as individuals that they did not have in the Chinese context. The Tang codes, Umemura points out, conceived of women as existing only within the family, in relationship to a father, husband, or son.²⁴ Terms for "woman," such as *fu* 婦 (son's wife), *nū* 女 (daughter), *funū* 婦女 (wife and daughter), or *fujen* 婦人 (wife), all "indicate relationships within the family." According to the law, a woman living in her natal household was a "daughter" who, as such, had no legal standing. She acquired such standing only when she left her natal household and became a "wife."

²² Yoshida 1983, pp. 137–41. For the eighth-century opinion on divorce, see *Ryō no shūge, koki* 古記, vol. 2, pp. 302–303.

²³ Akashi 1990, pp. 16–17. For the Great Purification Ritual liturgy, see *Kojiki, Norito*, p. 425; Philippi 1959, p. 46.

²⁴ For the following discussion, see Umemura 1997.

In Japan, by contrast, because the conjugal couple was not yet firmly established as a social unit, “marriage” did not result in a definite change in a woman’s position, and adult women could not easily be identified as “wives” or not. Instead the Japanese codes created the comprehensive legal category *onna* 女, “woman,” without reference to marital status. Such *onna* also had recognized public standing as legal persons not seen in the Tang Chinese codes that served as a model for the *ritsuryō* codes. Regulations on the distribution of taxable agricultural land (*kubunden* 口分田) in the *Yōrō* code, for example, specified a woman’s allotment to be two-thirds of a man’s.²⁵ This applied to women (女) in general, whether or not they were married. In Tang China, women only received an allotment if their husbands had died—if they were widowed wives or concubines (*guaqiqie* 寡妻妾); the character 女 does not appear in the pertinent Chinese records. The Japanese regulation concerning the number of attendants allotted to women of rank likewise states, “A woman (女) receives half [of the number of attendants assigned to a man of equivalent rank].”²⁶ The use of the character 女 without distinguishing between married and unmarried women clearly indicates that in Japan, women of rank held their position on their own, in contrast to their married counterparts in China, whose public position and treatment was determined by the rank of their husbands.

Examining the early classical family from different angles, Akashi and Umemura both verify the fluidity of conjugal ties and the absence of a stable conjugal unit. Although men and women alike maintained ties with their mothers and their siblings of the same mother, and lineages were important, the “family” was not yet a coherent institution. The patrilineal, patrimonial structure known as the *ie* in fact only took shape over an extended period of time. Beginning in the 1980s, scholars such as Sekiguchi Hiroko 関口裕子, Yoshida Takashi, Fukutō Sanae 服藤早苗, and myself have closely examined this process. Focusing on later periods, other scholars have demonstrated that three developments in particular attest to the emergence of the *ie*: the establishment of a stable husband-wife relationship, patrilineal succession to political rank, and the disappearance of the public role of women, especially wives.²⁷ In early classical times, all three developments were just in their beginning stages.

Research on marriage ceremonies and inheritance practices indicates that among the highest nobility stable conjugal units became more common from the

²⁵ *Ritsuryō*, p. 240.

²⁶ *Ritsuryō*, pp. 333–34.

²⁷ Takahashi Hideki 高橋秀樹 has argued that the transmission of public rank and position was the basis of the *ie*’s formation. Between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, he points out, it gradually became the custom within courtier society for family professions (or public duties), political rank, and property to be passed down from father to sons (Takahashi 1996, part 1, chapter 3). Gotō Michiko 後藤みち子 has also closely examined the process of the formation of the *ie*, arguing that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, virilocal patterns of marriage were consolidated when it became the norm for parents and the main heir and his wife to live together under the same roof. Simultaneously, among aristocratic families, wives ceased almost completely to perform public duties related to family professions (Gotō 2001, pp. 15–93).

mid-ninth century. Umemura Keiko argues that one important factor underlying this development was recognition of the primary wife as holding a special position differentiated from that of other wives. Although in the polygynous marriage system practiced by Heian nobles, the chosen mode of residence—duolocal, uxorilocal, or neolocal—varied according to changing conditions and the strength of the couple's relationship, the position of the primary wife was marked by the consent of the parents of both households and marriage rituals announced in advance. Her male children might expect to advance further and more rapidly at court than the sons of other wives and her female children to form marital relationships with men of higher rank and prestige. Appearing within the regents' household in the course of the ninth century, the primary wife system gradually spread in later centuries to the middle and lower aristocracy.²⁸ We can see evidence of this development, for example, in Fujiwara no Akihira's 藤原明衡 *Shinsarugakuki* 新猿樂記, written in the middle of the eleventh century. The text presents a model picture of the family of a lower-level court official—a large family with three wives and many sons and daughters. The “first wife” (primary wife) is advanced in years, and the husband feels no sexual attraction to her. “Even though she has many drawbacks,” he thinks, however, “since she has already given birth to many children, what can I do?”²⁹ Whether or not he has sexual relations with her, her secure position as first wife is guaranteed by the longevity of the marriage and her achievement of bearing him many children. This marks a substantial change from the fluid conjugal situation of the Nara period.

Katsuura Noriko 勝浦令子 has demonstrated that by the end of the Heian period, these patterns had spread yet more widely, as reflected in evidence of strong bonds between husband and wife among middle-level official and upper-level farming families. In the thirteenth century, she points out, husbands and wives often performed religious activities as a unit, participating in rituals for the well-being of “the children they had borne together” (*shosei aishi* 所生愛子), memorials for the parents of both husband and wife, and prayers for a harmonious conjugal relationship, not only during the couple's lifetimes but after death as well. Late Heian and Kamakura sources likewise refer to the karmic ties (*entomo* 縁友) irrevocably binding together husband and wife, indicating that the two would remain together in the next life as well.³⁰ These rituals and notions indicate that a stable conjugal structure—husband and wife, plus children—had replaced the fluid family patterns of the Nara period—wife and children, plus the husband—and that society had come to recognize husband and wife as a partnership.

²⁸ Umemura 2002.

²⁹ *Shinsarugakuki*, pp. 135–36. For a discussion of sexual relationships in *Shinsarugakuki*, see Fukutō 1995, chapter 2 and conclusion.

³⁰ Katsuura 1995.

Gender and the Ritsuryō System of Taxation and Control

The ritsuryō reforms were imposed on a society characterized not only by fluid and unstable conjugal relations, but also, as noted above, by the absence of the private possession of land. The agricultural labor of planting and harvesting was typically organized communally at the level of the hamlet or groups of hamlets. These circumstances inevitably led to gaps between the formal system for extracting taxes and labor services from the populace and the underlying social reality. In principle the population was formally organized into “residence” units called *ko* 戸 for purposes of taxation and conscription. The *ko* system appears, on the surface, to be an actualization of the Chinese system of taxation, based on the household (*hu=ko*), which, in turn, was assumed to be founded on the marital unit. In reality, however, the situation was far more complex.

Based on a literal reading of extant population registers (*koseki* 戸籍) from the eighth century, *ko* were once understood as large extended patriarchal families.³¹ In the 1950s, however, critical examination of pertinent historical sources led to recognition of significant differences between evidence of actual family patterns and the *ko* depicted in the registers.³² Subsequently, in the late 1960s, some scholars proposed that the *ko* was in fact a unit artificially created for purposes of taxation and conscription.³³ Today, this argument, known as the “artificial *ko*” (*henko* 編戸) theory, is widely accepted, and those engaged in research on family and marriage in early classical times have focused considerable attention on extracting the realities of family and marital relationships from registers of the artificially constructed *ko*.

As listed in the registers, each *ko* contained between twenty and thirty members, including three to five adult males, with one person—a man—designated as *koshu*, or head. The registers noted the relationship to the *koshu* of males and females in his paternal lineage, extending as far as his cousins. The listing of paternal relatives of the *koshu* followed Chinese methods of household registration, but since actual family relationships in Japan and patterns of residence were not based on patrilineal principles, this resulted in various contradictions and anomalies. Although the registers usually list the wives of the *koshu*, for instance, they often do not record those of other male members. Given the fluid conjugal residence patterns discussed above, moreover, the inclusion of the wives of the *koshu* in the register does not necessarily mean that these women lived in the same household as the *koshu*.

In the late 1970s, Sekiguchi Hiroko, building on the research of Takamura

³¹ See, for instance, Ishimoda 1988.

³² E.g., Kishi 1973.

³³ See Araki 1984; Yoshie (Urata) 1972. Many of those who equated the *ko* with actual family units also linked the *ko* to small clusters of dwellings, which were assumed to cooperate with each other in the daily labor of agriculture. In recent years, however, some researchers have expressed strong reservations about the archaeological methods used to identify such clusters of dwellings, and have thus raised further doubts about the validity of the *ko*-as-a-reflection-of-reality thesis. See Doi and Shibue 1987; Sekiguchi 2004, vol. 2, pp. 862–74.

Itsue, examined some of the anomalies concerning family relationships as found in the *ko* registers. She noted, for instance, that although the registers appeared to distinguish the “main wife” (*sai* 妻) and “concubines” (*shō* 妾) and listed one son, born of the “main wife,” as the “heir” (*chakushi* 嫡子) and other children as “offspring of a concubine” (*shōshi* 妾子), certain features suggested that such distinctions were quite arbitrary.³⁴ The Mino province census register dated 702, for instance, includes twenty-two examples of women listed as “concubines” of the *koshu*, but the offspring listed as “children of concubines” are all female. Since it is highly unlikely that all the children born to concubines would have been girls, presumably no effort was made to distinguish boys born to wives from those born to concubines. As we have already seen, the primary wife system implicit in the form of the registers took shape only later. The registers’ attempt to differentiate between wife and concubine thus did not reflect social reality; it was no more than a formalistic recording device adopted in response to the official policy (based on the Chinese model) that a man could have only one living “main wife.”³⁵

Scholars such as Kishi Toshio 岸俊男 and Hirata Kōji 平田耿二 have argued that *ko*, as they were originally constructed at the beginning of the eighth century, more or less corresponded to actual households, but ceased to reflect reality as individuals were added to or subtracted from the *koseki* over the years.³⁶ I agree, however, with those scholars who hold that from the time the population registration system was first introduced, it was an artificially created unit of conscription and taxation based on a fictional patrilineal structure.³⁷

To understand the nature of this artificial unit, let us look more closely at the reasons for its creation. *Ko* occupied the bottom rung of a hierarchy of provincial administrative structures: *kuni* 国 (province), *gun* 郡 (district), and *sato* 里 (also read *ri*; administrative “village”).³⁸ When the first realm-wide census was carried out at the end of the seventh century, enabling a uniform system of tax collection and standard military organization throughout the country, provincial notables lost their earlier independent authority to collect taxes and maintain guardsmen; instead they were incorporated into the new administrative system

³⁴ How other sons of the mother of the *chakushi* were listed is a complex issue. This circumstance is itself an indication that the *chakushi* system was not yet well established in Japan. See Sekiguchi 2004, vol. 2, pp. 551–52.

³⁵ Sekiguchi 1993, vol. 1, p. 217. See also Takamura 1966b; Sekiguchi 2004, vol. 2, part 2, chapter 1.

³⁶ Kishi 1973; Hirata 1986.

³⁷ Another indication of the discrepancy between the formal structure of the *ko* and actual residence patterns is the listing of certain members of the *ko* as “appendees” (*kikō* 寄口), indicating that they were cohabitants who did not fit within the paternal lineage. For an examination of the *ko* and its significance from the viewpoint of women’s history, see Yoshie 2000a. For critiques of the arguments of Kishi and Hirata, see Nanbu 1992; Sugimoto 2001.

³⁸ The character 里 was used in two different ways in historical materials of the time. In addition to denoting an administrative unit as discussed in these paragraphs, the character sometimes indicates a natural village or hamlet. The precise meaning in each instance must be deduced from the nature of the source or the context in which the term appears.

and became bureaucrats responsible to the center for control of the provinces. The court dispatched nobles from the center to serve as provincial governors—the chief administrative officers of the provinces. District chiefs were appointed from among powerful regional notables, while the heads of *sato*—*richō* or *sato osa* 里長—were typically local elites from the petty chieftain class. Each district usually comprised two to twenty *sato*, and the *sato*, in turn, consisted of fifty *ko*. It appears that the *ko* were constructed by selecting fifty prominent persons from within the *sato* to serve as *koshu*; each of them, along with twenty or thirty of his relatives, made up one *ko*.³⁹

The *sato osa* and *koshu* occupied quasi-public positions, but unlike the district chiefs and provincial governors above them, they were not officials whose rank, salary, and length of service were determined by law, and the actual methods by which they were appointed is not clear. Under the direction of the district chief, the *sato osa* was supposed to oversee management of the populace, provide support for agriculture, maintain peace, and supervise the requisition of labor services.⁴⁰ As heads of the lowest-level units, *koshu* served the central polity by allotting paddy to *ko* members for cultivation, collecting taxes, and mobilizing men for military service. The *koshu* were not actual family patriarchs, but rather the persons responsible for leading the administratively created *ko*.⁴¹

Since real families and natural villages vary in size, the relative uniformity of *ko* and *sato* provides a clue to their artificial nature. Uniformity was necessary because *ko* and *sato* were used in the first instance as a base for military conscription. Under the *ritsuryō* system, one of every three adult men was to be conscripted for military service. On the average, each *ko* was expected to supply one soldier to the realm, and one *sato* (fifty *ko*) served as the framework for forming a platoon of fifty soldiers. *Ko* were also used as accounting units to calculate salaries for officials and official support for temples and shrines. A *dainagon* 大納言 (major counselor), for instance, received the produce of eighty designated *ko*, and certain temples and shrines received the produce of twelve. This circumstance made it desirable to equalize, at least on paper, the tax receipts to be obtained from each *ko*, and in theory one *ko* was assumed to yield the taxes of four persons.⁴² But although the government may have sought in principle to equalize the tax goods and labor services yielded by each *ko*, it seems likely that this was more an abstract ideal than a tangible goal. Further, the actual collection of taxes appears to have occurred at the level of the community rather than household. A closer look at the place of women's labor within the system of taxation can help to bring this situation into focus.

The *ritsuryō* codes specified three categories of taxation: *so* 租, *yō* 庸, and *chō* 調. Among these the *so*, which was levied on fields, was relatively unimportant as a source of government revenue. Described as an “offering to the gods”

³⁹ Akashi 1977.

⁴⁰ *Ritsuryō*, p. 225.

⁴¹ Regarding the responsibilities of the *koshu*, see Kawane 1971.

⁴² Yoshie (Urata) 1972.

(*hatsuho* 初穂), presumably it was to be collected by the *koshu* from the members of the *ko*, male and female, who had received allocations of fields under the *kubunden* system.⁴³ The main taxes, the *yō* and *chō*, consisting in large part of textiles and regional products, were levied exclusively on individual adult males. Women were not directly responsible for paying such taxes. Textiles produced as tribute goods that have been preserved in the Shōsōin 正倉院 in Nara corroborate this principle. Some of the textiles include an ink inscription noting the person responsible for payment, and without exception, these are men.⁴⁴ In actuality, of course, many of the textiles submitted in the names of men must have been produced by women. Poems from the *Man'yōshū*, for instance, offer ample evidence of the part played by women in cultivating the hemp plant that provided the raw materials for textiles and in weaving it into cloth. Examples include: “the woman (*imo* 妹) who harvests and dries the hemp” (no. 1800); “the woman (*wagimo* 吾妹) who plants the hemp” (no. 995); “the woman of the eastern provinces (*azumaomina* 東女) who bleaches cloth” (no. 521); “This is cloth I have worn myself out weaving for you, my lord, with my own hands” (no. 1281).

Women were not usually involved in weaving luxury silk goods. Only artisans of the court had the skill to produce fine textiles such as brocade and figured silk. The central government dispatched lower-class officials known as *ayatorishi* 挑文師 to the provinces as teachers, and under their tutelage, male artisans made fine textiles in provincial government ateliers.⁴⁵ Women seem to have been largely responsible, however, for the routine raising of silkworms and the production of silk goods for everyday use, and, in some instances, the central government called upon women as well as men to transmit skills in silk production to others. In the late eighth century, for example, the court subjugated the Emishi in the northern reaches of Honshu, bringing under its authority new territories from which to extract *yō* and *chō* levies. To establish silkworm-raising technology in these areas, and thereby facilitate the payment of such taxes, the government sent women from the provinces of Ise, Mikawa, Sagami, Ōmi, Tanba, and Tajima to Mutsu province to serve for two years as teachers.⁴⁶

Female involvement in the production of tax goods paid in the name of men draws our attention to several anomalous features of the *ko* as a mechanism for levying taxes. In China, the household, based on the conjugal relationship, could

⁴³ Researchers regard the *so* tax as a legacy of pre-*ritsuryō* patterns of taxation. For a brief discussion, see the supplementary note in *Ritsuryō*, p. 570.

⁴⁴ See Matsushima 1978.

⁴⁵ *Shoku Nihongi*, Wadō 4 (711).i6.14; *Ruijū sandai kyaku, daijōkanpu* 太政官符 dated Kōnin 13 (822).i9.24, pp. 279–80.

⁴⁶ *Nihon kōki*, Enryaku 15 (796).11.8. On the central role women played in textile production, see Fukutō 1982. Women also seem to have participated in the performance of labor services technically requisitioned only from men. Only adult males were legally responsible for the thirty to sixty days of corvée labor (*zōyō* 雜徭) levied for public works such as the construction and repair of roads and bridges, but sources report women also laboring to repair storehouses and construct royal tombs. See *Nihon shoki*, Jitō 1 (687).10.22; Aston 1972, part 2, p. 387.

function simultaneously as a unit of residence, production, and taxation. As a system there was no particular difficulty in treating the male household head as the representative of the total unit and in collecting from him the goods assumed to be produced by the various members of the household he headed. But in classical Japan, as we have seen, conjugal ties were fluid, and husband and wife frequently did not reside in the same household. How, in these circumstances, were the tax goods produced by women collected? Further, if, as on paper, the aim were to requisition textiles as tax goods uniformly from the *ko*, each *ko* would have had to contain approximately equal numbers of adult females as well as males. But while extant *koseki* list for each *ko* the standard three to five adult males, the number of adult women varies widely.⁴⁷ Textiles—the result of women’s labor—thus cannot have been extracted in equal amounts from each *ko*. Beyond that, textiles were supposed to be supplied in one-roll units, but this was greater than the amount assessed each *ko*.⁴⁸ Although the *ko* may have functioned to maintain military units of equal size, it cannot have served as an effective mechanism for appropriating tax goods and labor. These, in practice, must have been collected through other means.

The discrepancy between the length of the textiles to be supplied as taxes and the amount in principle assessed each *ko* indicates that most likely such textiles were produced through communal labor at the level of the hamlet or natural village rather than by individual *ko*. Sasaki Keisuke 佐々木恵介 has argued that the *ko* was simply a unit of calculation and that the actual collection of taxes was done at the level of the *sato*, or administrative village.⁴⁹ This supposition is supported by *mokkan* attached to tax goods sent to the court and recording the item and the person responsible for supplying it. As Tōno Haruyuki 東野治之 has pointed out, some of these tags bear the signatures of chiefs of administrative villages (*sato osa* or *gōchō* 郷長), indicating that the administrative village was the supplier of the goods.⁵⁰ Constructed as an aggregation of fifty *ko*, the *sato*, too, was an artificial entity and did not necessarily correspond to a natural territorial division. It would seem, however, typically to have included three or four natural communities. As noted above (pp. 442–43), legal scholars of the eighth century, while attesting to the instability of conjugal ties, assumed that men and women would normally find marital partners within the framework of the *sato*. Compared to the *ko* or the individual conjugal unit, the *sato* was thus a more suitable basis for collecting tax goods produced at the level of the local community.

These circumstances raise two questions. How was the communal labor to produce tax goods organized, and how did district officials, in theory operating through the *ko* and *sato*, appropriate the tax goods and labor services that did not fit neatly within the framework of those artificial entities? The most logical

⁴⁷ Yoshie 1995, p. 224.

⁴⁸ Ishigami 1973.

⁴⁹ Sasaki 1986.

⁵⁰ Tōno 1983, pp. 67–74. In 717, *sato* were renamed *gō* 郷 and the *sato osa* became the *gōchō* 郷長.

hypothesis is that officials utilized various informal and quasi-official channels of influence that connected more directly than did the *ko* and *sato* with the actualities of the communal forms of life and labor current at the time. In seeking evidence of such channels we should not overlook the managerial role likely played by women, whose actual social existence also did not correspond to the patrilineal, patriarchal structure of the *ko*. We are reminded that to establish silkworm-raising in the northeast, the government dispatched women from the central provinces to serve as instructors. Unlike the male *ayatorishi* sent out to the provinces to transmit the advanced technology for manufacturing brocade, these women did not receive official appointments, but in actuality they performed a public function very similar to that of the *ayatorishi*. May we not suppose that at the local level, too, women played an important role in coordinating the production of tax revenues outside the framework of the *ko*? Evidence from *setsuwa* and archaeological findings bear out such an assumption, as I will discuss below.

The Independent Social and Economic Status of Toji

Considerable evidence from Nara and early Heian sources indicates that among the common people, women as well as men managed land and labor, doing so in their own right rather than as wives of male landholders or male household heads. These women were often referred to as *toji*.

From classical through modern times, *toji* has been used as a term of respect for women. It is not a formal title indicating an official position, but an informal designation. Among the various explanations of the term's origin, the most plausible is that it means the chief (*nushi* 主) of a place (*tokoro* 処), indicating the leader of a group of people and an association with agriculture.⁵¹ It is not clear why the term was applied only to women. In early modern and modern times, *toji* came to be used to refer to the mistress of the household. Yanagita Kunio 柳田国男, the pioneering scholar of Japanese folklore studies, concluded that in ancient times as well, this was its basic meaning, as reflected in the term *ie toji* 家刀自, which he took to mean "toji of the household."⁵² This interpretation became widely accepted among historians as well, and the *toji* who appear in Nara and early Heian sources have been understood simply as housewives who assisted their husbands and represented them in their absence.

The picture of everyday life that can be reconstructed from recently discovered *mokkan* and a rereading of *setsuwa* of the same period indicates, however, that *toji* had a far different meaning in the eighth and ninth centuries. Such sources suggest that in the classical period *toji* referred to women of the provin-

⁵¹ Yoshie 1997a.

⁵² Yanagita 1962, 1963. For a critique of Yanagita's interpretation, see Fukuda 1992 and Kuraishi 1995. In an earlier work, I have argued that Yanagita, misconstruing the actual evidence found in historical materials from the classical period, in effect sought to create a historical precedent for an image of "the mistress of the house" befitting the *ie* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Yoshie 2004a, pp. 84–91). Note that, as seen below, various characters were used to transcribe the term *toji*.

cial notable class (*sato toji* 里刀自) who organized and led productive activities. It also was applied to well-to-do women who operated household enterprises (*ie toji*) and to women of the aristocracy (*ōtoji*). In light of the weakness of marital ties discussed above, all these categories of *toji* can best be understood as acting outside the confines of the conjugal unit. Examination of their activities not only can bring us closer to grasping the dynamics of early classical society, it also should demonstrate the importance of understanding the vocabulary of historical sources as it was used in its own time.

Toji as Leaders of Sato

In 1993, a *mokkan* from the mid-ninth century was discovered at an archaeological site in northeastern Japan, 1.5 kilometers to the northwest of the district headquarters of the time. It stated, “The chief official of the district orders the *sato toji* to lead a group of thirty-four men and women in planting his office fields (*shikiden* 職田).”⁵³ This *mokkan* attracted considerable scholarly attention because, judging from its writing style, it was a legitimate order of the district chief, and because it was addressed to a woman.

The standard path for official orders was from the central government to the provincial government headquarters, then to the district office, and finally to the *sato* office. Under the official system, the order from the district office should have gone to the male *sato osa*, not the female *sato toji* who was not in the formal chain of command. But as an everyday memorandum preserved by accident, this *mokkan* provides evidence that, in practice, officials also looked to female leaders within the community—the *sato toji*—to coordinate labor services on their behalf.

A number of scholars have interpreted the *sato toji* to whom this *mokkan* refers as deriving authority from her position as wife of the male *sato* head, exercised by proxy in her husband’s absence. To cite one example, Hirakawa Minami 平川南 acknowledges that the phrase *sato toji* used in this *mokkan* indicates the important role played by women in control and management of agriculture. Based, however, on his assumption that the more common term *ie toji* refers to a housewife who manages the household, Hirakawa sees *sato toji* as a term of respect for the wife of the *sato* chief. He argues that when the *sato* chief traveled to district headquarters on official business, his wife, the *sato toji*, “no doubt took charge of the activities of the members of the *sato* and exercised covert power over agricultural management.”⁵⁴ We must say that, as with Yanagita’s interpretation of the meaning of *toji*, this reading projects back into earlier periods an understanding of the term based on much later assumptions about marital structures and gender roles. We might better conclude that this *mokkan* demonstrates the ongoing extracodal authority of women of the provincial notable class and the readiness of district officials to tap that authority to secure communal labor services not readily accessible through the formal structures of the *sato* and *ko*.

⁵³ Iwaki-shi 1995; Mokkan Gakkai 2003, p. 64, plate 42.

⁵⁴ Hirakawa 1996, p. 17.

Another *mokkan* supports the supposition that women of this class engaged in managerial activities in their own right rather than as proxies for their husbands. In 1983, an excavation turned up a ninth-century *mokkan* inscribed with financial accounts from a private estate (*shōen* 莊園) located near the former capital of Fujiwara 藤原.⁵⁵ The record lists a number of persons, female as well as male, who had contracted with the estate holder (*ryōshu* 領主) to oversee agricultural labor. Under her own name, a woman referred to as Yamada-me 山田女 had agreed to be responsible for the cultivation of an especially large area. Yamada-me, whom Fukutō Sanae has characterized as an independent agricultural manager,⁵⁶ is clearly the same sort of figure as the woman whom the district official in the previous *mokkan* addressed as *sato toji*.

The evidence from these two *mokkan* attests that in the ninth century, in both northeastern Japan and the central region, there were women who supervised ordinary cultivators—male and female—and managed large-scale agricultural projects. The *mokkan* demonstrate that such women could act as de facto *sato* leaders as well as overseers who formed private contracts with estate holders.

Ie Toji and the Management of Economic Enterprises

We can get a better view of the type of woman figuring in the *mokkan* discussed above by examining women described as *ie toji* by the early ninth-century setsuwa collection *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記 (Miraculous Tales of Japan). *Nihon ryōiki* was compiled for didactic purposes to spread Buddhist teachings among the populace. It was modeled on a similar Chinese text, *Mingbaoji* 冥報記, and a number of its stories of karmic cause and effect derive from that source. Nevertheless, the author also made his message relevant to his audience by incorporating many circumstantial details drawn from the society of his own time, and scholars have long turned to *Ryōiki* as a valuable source of information about daily life and customs in the eighth and early ninth century. Several *Ryōiki* episodes depict provincial notables and wealthy farmers who carried out large scale agricultural projects. These stories often portray figures identified as *ie gimi* 家長 (“head of the household”) or *ie toji* 家室. Sometimes these are presented as pairs, and researchers have standardly interpreted the *ie gimi* as a male agricultural manager and the *ie toji* as his helpmate in charge of household consumption.⁵⁷ Such interpretations overlook the fact, however, that various episodes present *ie toji* as carrying out management projects on their own. The *Ryōiki* tales illuminate not only the concept of *toji*, but also that of the *ie*—a term generally translated as “household” or “family” that actually had different implications in early classical times.

As Yoshida Takashi has pointed out, in early Japan, the character 家 was used to transcribe two different Japanese terms, *ie* and *yake*. *Ie* indicated a familial

⁵⁵ For an overview of the methods of management of the estate based on evidence from this *mokkan*, see Murai 1985.

⁵⁶ Fukutō 1991, pp. 245–49.

⁵⁷ Kawane 1971; Kitō 1993.

unit of unspecified composition—usually, as discussed previously, “mother and children, plus the husband.” *Yake*, by contrast, implied the physical location where economic activities were conducted or managed; it might include an office, a storehouse, stables, and a kitchen, in an area bounded by a wall.⁵⁸

Until around the eighth century, the terms *ie* and *yake* overlapped to some extent, probably because both were represented by the same character, but they were essentially different things. Men and women from the provincial notable and aristocratic strata alike had *yake* of their own from which they conducted various enterprises. They might marry one another and form a single *ie* (family), or, if they divorced, form a new *ie* with a new partner, but throughout they often continued to manage their own *yake*. Ordinary people, of course, did not have a *yake* to serve as the base for economic operations; they only had fluid *ie*. The concurrence of *ie* and *yake* in the form of a family based on a stable conjugal unit that also functioned as the site of economic production was a phenomenon of late Heian times. It was from this time that the *ie* (household) as it has been understood in later periods took shape as a social reality.

In reading the stories from *Nihon ryōiki*, we thus need to remember that the process of fusion of *ie* and *yake* was still in the beginning stages at the time this work was written. The male and female pairs identified in *Ryōiki* as *ie gimi* and *ie toji* may have formed an *ie* (family), but they typically operated separate *yake* as locations of economic enterprise. With this proviso in mind, let us take a closer look at some of the depictions of women of the provincial notable class found in *Nihon ryōiki*.

Tale 3:26 portrays a wealthy woman named Hiromushi-me 広虫女, who lives in the district of Miki 美貴 in Sanuki province, as a shrewd operator. She owns houses and cattle, slaves, and fields, and has accumulated great stores of rice and money that she lends out at high interest, impoverishing other villagers in the process. After falling ill, she relates a dream in which she is summoned before Enma 閻魔, the King of Hell, who indicts her for the following three transgressions:

One, appropriating many sacred treasures without returning them, two, selling watered-down sake, and, three, using two different measures—one that holds seven *me* 目, when [she] sold [rice or sake] to someone else, and another that holds twelve *me*, when [she] obtained these goods for [herself]. Enma told [her], “You have been summoned to judgment for these sins and will be punished immediately.”

Hiromushi-me died, and in accord with King Enma’s judgment, she was restored to life seven days later as a hideous creature with the upper body of an ox.⁵⁹ We may note that, although the compiler describes Hiromushi-me as the wife of the chief official of the district, he depicts her as the one responsible for making vil-

⁵⁸ Yoshida 1983, pp. 71–114.

⁵⁹ *Nihon ryōiki*, pp. 393–97. For an English translation of this tale, see Nakamura 1973, pp. 257–59.

lagers suffer from her greed. Consequently she is the one to receive karmic retribution. There is no mention of Hiromushi-me's husband participating in her projects, and he does not share in her punishment.

Another *Ryōiki* story, tale 2:32, portrays the entrepreneurial activities of a prominent local woman in a more favorable light. The woman, who is known both as Sakura no Ōomina 桜大娘 “the great lady of Sakura,” and Okada no Suguri Oba-me 岡田村主姑女, “the lady village chief of Okada,” is identified as “the head of a sake-making *ie*” (*sake o tsukuru ie gimi* 酒を作る家主).⁶⁰ *Nihon ryōiki* describes her activities as follows:

In the reign of Shōmu Tennō 聖武天皇, residents of Mikami 三上 village in Nagusa 名草 district, Kii province, organized devotees on behalf of Yakuō temple 薬王寺 to endow a fund for supplying medicines for all. . . . Donations [of rice] were entrusted to the *ie* of Okada no Suguri Oba-me [Sakura no Ōomina], who used them to make sake, which was then lent out at interest [to benefit the medicine fund].

In other words, the temple deposited rice with Ōomina, the head of a sake-making *ie*, and having produced sake from it, she lent the wine out with interest so as to build up a fund for obtaining medicine for the villagers. The tale goes on to relate the fate of a man who borrowed two barrels of sake from her and died without repaying them—as punishment, he was reborn as an ox. Ōomina's older brother Iwahito 石人, having heard of the man's plight, “proceeded to his sister's *ie*” to learn the truth of the matter.⁶¹

This tale contains several points significant for understanding the concepts of *toji* and *ie*. The *ie* described in it is in fact a *yake*, a center of economic activity, and Ōomina, identified as *ie gimi*, is the head of that *yake*, where she is in charge of making and lending out sake. She maintains a separate residence from her older brother. Whether or not she had a husband is not clear, but if she did, he had nothing to do with her business operations.

Many scholars do not clearly differentiate between the *ie* depicted in *Nihon ryōiki* and the *ie* established as an economic unit later in history. Sekiguchi Hiroko has pointed out the error in interpreting the *ie toji* as simply the helpmate of the male household head. Noting that, as mentioned earlier, women's names appear frequently in land-sale records, she has shown that, even after marriage, women as well as men held independent management rights and carried out large-scale reclamation projects.⁶² She considers the stories of Hiromushi-me and Ōomina from this perspective. Yet even Sekiguchi tends to situate gender relationships within individual *ie* and to focus on the division of authority within such *ie* between the male household head and the *ie toji*. Although she offers

⁶⁰ Suguri is a *kabane* 姓 (title granted by the Yamato ruler) that indicates a village chief; it was generally given to families who traced their descent from the Asian continent, particularly the Korean peninsula.

⁶¹ *Nihon ryōiki*, p. 271–74; Nakamura 1973, pp. 203–205.

⁶² Sekiguchi 1977, pp. 1–3; Sekiguchi 2003, p. 36.

excellent evidence that wives had ownership and management rights separate from those of their husbands, she does not provide a concrete analysis of what that “management” entailed or locate the role of the *ie toji* in a broader social context. The activities of Hiromushi-me and Sakura no Ōomina, however, have much in common, and they were clearly exercised in a much broader setting than an individual *ie* constructed with a husband.

Recall that Hiromushi-me’s three sins included stealing from a temple and selling watered-down sake. It appears that, just as with Sakura no Ōomina, a major part of Hiromushi-me’s business was to take rice that had been donated to the temple, use it to make sake, and lend the sake out at interest. In the Ōomina story, a man who had failed to return the temple property that he had borrowed through her was punished by karmic retribution, but in the case of Hiromushi-me, she herself used materials donated to the temple without returning them, and thus she was the one punished, also by being reborn as an ox.

The two stories are also linked by the business of sake. For both women sake-making and lending were major economic activities. Why was this, and why were villagers ready to borrow the sake at high interest? To answer the latter question first, in early classical society, sake was an important source of capital for agricultural operations. It was common to use the promise of sake and food to attract laborers during the busy agricultural season.⁶³ Sake-making was a natural enterprise for Hiromushi-me and Sakura no Ōomina because through the medieval period sake-making and related activities were customarily the responsibility of women. Indeed we can see an association between *toji* and the making of sake from the fact that at the court, sake jars referred to as *toji gami* 刀自神 (the *toji* deity) were venerated in the sake-making office.⁶⁴ Only with the emergence of ideas about female impurity in early modern times were women banned from sake-making.⁶⁵

As influential figures at the center of village agricultural production, women of the provincial notable class such as Hiromushi-me and Sakura no Ōomina made large quantities of sake, lent it out to villagers as agricultural capital, and accumulated sake to use as payment for workers in their own large-scale enterprises. Temples, recognizing the power of these female entrepreneurs in everyday economic life, thus quite naturally entrusted them with temple property designated for the welfare of the entire village.⁶⁶ In hiring agricultural laborers and managing large-scale projects, these women occupied the same quasi-public

⁶³ As evidence for this practice, see the following government edicts warning against extravagant feasting issued between the seventh and the ninth centuries: *Nihon shoki*, Taika 2 (646).3.2 (Aston 1972, part 2, p. 223); *Ruijū sandai kyaku*, *Daijōkanpu* dated Enryaku 9 (790).4.16, p. 625; *Nihon kōki*, Kōnin 2 (811).5.21, p.101.

⁶⁴ *Engi shiki*, vol. 3, p. 883; Yoshie 1997b.

⁶⁵ Wakita 1992, section 1. The depiction of women as sake-makers and yeast-sellers in the poem scroll *Shichijūichi-ban shokunin utaawase* 七十一番職人歌合 provides evidence of women’s continued involvement in sake-brewing in medieval times. See *Shichijūichi-ban shokunin utaawase*, nos. 6 and 38.

⁶⁶ Yoshie 1996, pp. 199–208; Wakita 1992, pp. 112–17.

socioeconomic position as the *sato toji* seen in the *mokkan* discovered in north-eastern Japan.

Independent female entrepreneurs, found all over Japan, were called *ie toji* because they managed land privately, but their authority to supervise laborers and their management activities extended beyond their own families and involved the livelihood of other villagers. In this regard there was little difference between *ie toji* and *sato toji*. Women such as Sakura no Ōomina, who took charge of villagers' contributions and invested temple property, performed an economic function that also could be utilized as a semiofficial channel for organizing resources and labor. We can see a dimension of this in the role *toji* played, disguised within the framework of the formal system, in readying tax goods such as polished rice.

From ancient times women had typically undertaken the work of polishing rice in a group, as seen in the engraving on a bronze bell from the Yayoi period that shows two women facing each another, grinding grain with pestle and mortar. In early classical times the actual labor of women pounding rice was rendered invisible in the public system of taxation, under which only men were responsible for supplying this product. Every *mokkan* shipping label for polished rice found in archaeological excavations of the palace at Heijō-kyō 平城京 (present-day Nara) contains the name of a male taxpayer, along with his province and district. For example, following the designation for province, district, and *sato*, one *mokkan* reads: "The head of the residence unit (*koshu*) Tajihi no Muraji Michimaro 丹比連道万呂 [sends] one bale of white rice."⁶⁷ Outside the official government system things were different. The *mokkan* shipping labels for polished rice discovered at the mansion of a noble in Heijō-kyō (which may be assumed to have been attached to rice sent him from his personal holdings) include one recording a woman's name: "Wadō 3 (710).4.10: Atobe no Shikita-me 阿刀部志祇太女, polished rice."⁶⁸ Only the date is noted; there is no notation for province, district, *sato*, or *ko*.

The different notations on these two shipping labels clearly demonstrate the relationship between the *ritsuryō* taxation system and gender. While only men's names appeared as taxpayers responsible for paying tribute to the government, and women's labor in producing that tribute was concealed, polished rice sent directly to individual aristocrats from their private holdings was treated differently. It did not go through the head of the *ko* and the official provincial organization of province, district, and *sato*; records of its payment openly display the names of women who undertook or supervised the labor of polishing the rice. As an incidental detail in another tale from *Nihon ryōiki* indicates, however, the rice furnished the government under men's names was likewise produced by the labor of women in the village. The story relates that "in the second and third month, when it was time to pound the rice from the year's harvest, the *ie toji*

⁶⁷ *Heijō-gū mokkan*, vol. 2, no. 2742.

⁶⁸ *Heijō-kyō mokkan*, vol. 1, no. 17.

would enter the workroom to distribute snacks to the female laborers.”⁶⁹ Mino province, the setting of the tale, was one of twenty-two provinces designated to supply polished rice to the capital under the *ritsuryō* system. The “year’s harvest” refers to the white rice sent to the capital from Mino, and it was to ready this product that village women gathered to polish the rice under the *ie toji*’s supervision. In other words, both the *ie toji* and the women working under her were directly involved in processing taxable goods.

The quasi-public position of *ie toji* and *sato toji* was rooted in such managerial activities, carried out within a social context characterized by communal forms of labor and loose conjugal ties. That higher-level officials should turn to them to mobilize labor and material resources that the official system could not fully tap was only natural. At the same time, women of this background were well situated to take advantage of the new economic developments of the ninth century, such as the acquisition of private holdings through the purchase of land. What part did the *toji* who engaged in such activities play in the breakdown of the communal structure of local society, which became increasingly apparent from this period? This is an important topic for future research. What is certain is that the strength and importance of the “wife’s” leadership within the medieval *ie* derived historically from the leadership exercised by *toji* within the early classical local community.

Men Farm and Women Weave: Myth or Reality?

Researchers have failed to recognize the extent of women’s managerial role in local society in part because of the presumption that the notion of a gendered division of labor was already widely accepted in classical society. One may indeed find passages in the eighth-century *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 that promote the concept adopted from China that “men farm and women weave” (*nangeng nüzhi* 男耕女織) or “a husband farms and a wife weaves” (*fugeng fuzhi* 夫耕婦織). One episode speaks of Yūryaku Tennō 雄略天皇 (ca. fifth century) encouraging his consort and concubines to engage in sericulture.⁷⁰ In a later entry, the sovereign Keitai Tennō 繼體天皇 (ca. early sixth century) declares that men should farm and women spin, and that the ruler and his chief consort should provide examples of such gendered productive activities.⁷¹ Scholars have also held that in the eighth century the court conducted ceremonies expressing such an idea in ritual form.

To be sure, in early Japan women were closely associated with textile production, as discussed above. But as we have likewise seen, women also participated in farm work, both as laborers and managers. Although the compilers of *Nihon shoki* may have incorporated rhetorical flourishes bespeaking the ideology of a gendered division of labor, this does not mean that such an ideology

⁶⁹ *Nihon ryōiki*, p. 69; see Nakamura 1973, pp. 104–105.

⁷⁰ *Nihon shoki*, Yūryaku 6.3.7; Aston 1972, part 1, p. 347.

⁷¹ *Nihon shoki*, Keitai 1.3.14; Aston 1972, part 2, p. 5.

was generally accepted, let alone practiced in classical Japan. To the contrary, a closer examination of ceremonies that have sometimes been adduced as efforts to introduce tangible models of gendered social roles shows that they did not at all convey the premise of a sharp distinction between functions appropriate to men and women.⁷²

One example sometimes cited as evidence that the court adopted Chinese agriculture and sericulture rituals connoting a gendered division of labor is a poem in the *Man'yōshū* that, according to the head note, was composed at a banquet held on Tenpyō-hōji 2 (758).1.3. At this banquet, assembled ministers of state were given special brooms for the ceremonial cleaning of a silkworm-rearing room. The rite, which celebrated the beginning of spring, was known as the *ne no hi* 子の日 (day of the rat) banquet.⁷³

The poem, composed by Ōtomo no Yakamochi 大伴家持, reads:

初春の初子の今日の玉箒手に執るからにゆらく玉の緒

<i>Hatsuharu no</i>	Today, at the start of spring
<i>hatsu ne no kyō no</i>	On the year's first day of the rat
<i>tama bōki</i>	I grasp the broom
<i>te ni toru kara ni</i>	that sweeps the silkworm room
<i>yuraku tama no o</i>	And shake its beads. ⁷⁴

Yakamochi was the head of the Ōtomo, an ancient and powerful lineage, and held various important court positions. As such he had intimate knowledge of court ceremonies, and his poems are often used as a historical source. The preservation at the Shōsōin in Nara of two spades and two brooms, both dated 758.1 and marked for use at the *ne no hi* celebration, verifies the historical actuality of the ceremony depicted in Yakamochi's *ne no hi* poem. The question is what this ceremony involved and was meant to convey.

A number of scholars have argued that the *ne no hi* ritual was patterned after ceremonies conducted at the Chinese court in which the emperor initiated the year's planting and the empress, the year's raising of silkworms. Recognizing that there is no evidence that the Japanese court practiced such rituals in later centuries, they hold that the Chinese ceremony was imported into Japan in the middle of the Nara period as part of the effort to adopt Chinese culture, but never took root or was eventually transformed into something quite different.⁷⁵ In my view, however, from the beginning the ritual of 758 represented something quite different from the Chinese ceremony; it cannot be taken as evidence of even an abortive attempt to adopt the Chinese-style farming and silkworm-raising ritual. We may note, for instance, that although the Shōsōin collection contains actual ceremonial spades and brooms, no extant written source allocates the spade to a

⁷² I have discussed the points taken up in this section in Yoshie 2003a, pp. 95–97.

⁷³ The term *ne* 子, or “rat,” is the first in the list of twelve calendrical signs traditionally used to indicate years, days, and hours.

⁷⁴ *Man'yōshū* 4493.

⁷⁵ Inoue 1978, 1988; Yamanaka 1972, pp. 122–27; Maruyama 1992, pp. 200–208.

male monarch (husband) and the broom to his consort. In the ceremony described by Yakamochi, in fact, the sovereign was the female *tennō* Kōken 孝謙, and the jeweled brooms were shaken by both men and women: the dowager queen-consort (*kōtaigō* 皇太后) Kōmyō 光明, the female sovereign Kōken, and male ministers of state, including Yakamochi himself.⁷⁶

A clue to the nature of the ceremony lies in the shape of the brooms, which were made by bundling together plant stalks and attaching glass beads of various colors to their ends. The use of such beads suggests the ritual practice of shaking beads (*tama* 玉) to arouse spiritual forces (*tama* 魂). Heian sources relate that on the first *ne no hi* of the first month, courtiers went out to the springtime meadows and picked seedling pines and young grasses to offer to the ruler. Like this Heian *ne no hi* ritual, that described by Yakamochi undoubtedly was intended to awaken the productive power of the spirits of earth and nature. As a fertility rite related to agricultural production, the 758 ritual used implements adopted from China (the spade and the broom), but put them to quite different purposes. The underlying premise manifested by the ritual was that a good crop depended on magical manipulation of the powers of nature, not the exemplification of models of gendered productive labor.⁷⁷

We see a similar modification of Chinese practices in another institution that has been assumed to be based on a gendered division of labor—the commendation of “diligent agriculturalists” (*rikiden* 力田). Pointing out that there are many cases in China of *rikiden* (*li tian*) commendations of married couples who devoted themselves to agriculture and sericulture, Sakae Wataru 坂上渉 has argued that the appearance of the same term in Japanese sources such as *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀 attests to a similar practice.⁷⁸ In fact, however, Japanese *rikiden* awards differed significantly from those in China. To take one example dating from 747 cited by Sakae, *Shoku Nihongi* records that “the diligent agriculturalist Zenhō Hōkō 前部宝公, of the outer senior sixth rank, lower, has been granted the rank of outer junior fifth rank, lower. His wife, Kume no Toneri Imo-me 久米舍人妹女, has been granted the rank of outer lesser apprentice, higher.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Inoue Kaoru 井上薫 argues that Kōken’s then favorite courtier, Fujiwara no Nakamaro 藤原仲麻呂, held the spade while Kōken held a broom (Inoue 1988, p. 200), but there is no foundation for this speculation.

⁷⁷ It was, in fact, only in recent times that rituals expressing a gendered division of labor and similar to those performed in imperial China were incorporated into Japanese court ceremonial. From 1875 it became customary for the empress to conduct a ritual sweeping of the silkworm-rearing room. The timing of the adoption of this ritual reflects the contemporary importance of the textile industries and female labor to national economic development (see Umemura 1996, pp. 323–26). Although some proposed that the emperor perform a parallel symbolic rice-planting ceremony, this was not instituted until the enthronement of the Shōwa emperor in 1925. See Takagi 1997.

⁷⁸ Sakae 1992, 1997, 1998.

⁷⁹ *Shoku Nihongi*, Tenpyō 19 (747).5.16. There were two categories, inner and outer, in the court rank system; “inner” ranks were given to aristocrats and notables from the Kinai region, while “outer” ranks were granted to provincial notables.

What is striking about this commendation is that it names the wife individually together with the husband. Chinese awards for *li tian* do not name the wife in this fashion, only the husband. They completely subsume the wife's contribution to the couple's agricultural activities within the commendation of the husband. Commendations of a married woman in her own name typically were given to widows, who were praised for their chastity in refusing to remarry.⁸⁰ In contrast, Zenhō Hōkō and his wife, Kume no Toneri Imo-me, were commended individually and rewarded with an increase in rank. This demonstrates that husband and wife were alike considered as responsible for agriculture and that the productive activities of both were recognized. Although the Japanese commendation system was indeed modeled on Chinese practice, it differed in the open recognition it gave to female productive activities.

In classical Japan, of course, commendations were also given to "filial daughters" and "virtuous wives," following Chinese Confucian models. Sugawara Ikuko 菅原征子 has noted, however, significant differences between Chinese and Japanese concepts of such paragons. In Japan, the model filial daughter was one who refused to marry and remained by her parents' side. There is not a single example of a woman being named a filial daughter, in Chinese style, because of service to her parents-in-law. Moreover, women in China who received commendations as virtuous wives generally had been widowed young. Those recognized as virtuous wives in Japan had been widowed at an older age, but thereafter continued to live by their husbands' graves. These widows belonged to the elite of the village and "exercised some sort of religious power within the village community." Sugawara speculates that the rewards given them reflect indigenous Japanese magical religious beliefs more than the aim of instilling family virtues basic to Confucianism.⁸¹

Comparisons between the two commendation systems thus illuminate the differences between Chinese and Japanese conjugal patterns, labor practices, and concepts of familial virtue. Rather than attesting to the existence of notions of a gendered division of labor, the *rikiden* wife calls to mind the *toji* who appear as independent female entrepreneurs in documents and *setsuwa* from the early classical age. Like the *sato toji*, Yamada-me, Hiromushi-me, and Sakura no Ōomina, Kume no Toneri Imo-me came from the stratum of upper-level cultivators or minor provincial notables. We can gain further insight into the origins of the economic and social leadership such women exercised in local society by considering evidence going back to the fourth and fifth centuries of the widespread presence of female local and regional chieftains. Such female chieftains were also the predecessors of women who in the classical period exercised power at the very highest level of the realm, as occupants of the throne or as the sovereign's consorts.

⁸⁰ See Sakae 1998, pp. 36–41.

⁸¹ Sugawara 1998, pp. 5–13.

Female Chieftains as Seen in Tomb Excavations

More than ten thousand mounded tombs have been discovered in the Japanese archipelago, ranging from large keyhole-shaped mounds, some more than four hundred meters long, thought to be the graves of ancient rulers (*ōkimi* 大王), to smaller round or rectangular mounds where chieftains of small communities were buried. Many scholars have taken for granted that the occupants of these mounds must have been male. When the remains of women were found, wearing splendid bracelets and necklaces, they were held to be “shamans” (*miko* 巫女) rather than rulers in their own right. Imai Takashi 今井堯, who has systematically assembled information on human remains from tomb burials dating from the fourth and fifth centuries, has, however, called such views into question. Imai’s analysis can be summarized as follows:

- Burial mounds dating up to the mid-fifth century, in which mature women either are buried alone or occupy the main position, have been found in central locations throughout the archipelago, from Kyushu to the Kantō.
- As sole occupants of burial mounds, male chieftains only slightly outnumber female ones.
- Judging from the burial goods, which include weapons and tools, female chieftains of regional polities not only exercised ritual authority, but, like their male counterparts, also held power over military affairs and economic production.⁸²

As a typical example of a female chieftain as sole occupant of a burial mound, Imai cites the eighty-seven-meter long Mukōnoda 向野田 tomb in the city of Uto 宇土, Kumamoto prefecture. This is a keyhole tomb dating from the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century, where a woman in her late thirties was buried alone. In addition to three mirrors and stone and bead jewelry, grave goods included numerous iron weapons such as long swords, short swords, straight swords, and halberds, and iron tools such as axes and knives. Since the Mukōnoda tomb is the largest example from this period in the general area, the woman buried there must have been the region’s highest-ranked chieftain. Based on the presence of weapons and tools among the grave goods, Imai maintains that this female chieftain oversaw military and economic activities.⁸³

Mori Kōichi 森浩一, pointing to the locations of tomb burials, argues that female chieftains had authority over transportation. One of his examples is the Ōtani 大谷 tomb in the city of Kyōtango 京丹後, Kyoto prefecture, situated atop a hill at the headwaters of the Takeno 竹野 river, which flows through the Tango 丹後 peninsula to the Japan Sea. The sole occupant of this tomb is a mature woman. Along with mirrors and jewelry, grave goods include swords and axes made of iron. Dating from the early fifth century, this small keyhole tomb thirty-two meters in length is the finest and oldest tomb in the region. At the time, the Japanese were unfamiliar with techniques for producing cast-iron goods from

⁸² Imai 1997.

⁸³ Imai 1997, p. 132.

ore, and people relied on imports of bars of iron from the Korean peninsula as the raw material for weapons and tools. It thus appears that the occupant of the Ōtani tomb was a small chieftain who procured these items as a result of holding authority over transportation and trade in her immediate area.⁸⁴

The archaeological findings of Imai and Mori indicate that up to the middle of the fifth century, large numbers of female chieftains in various parts of the archipelago exercised authority over economic production, military affairs, and trade. Unfortunately, Imai was not able to include the tombs of *ōkimi* in his analysis, because the Imperial Household Agency, which oversees these tombs as imperial graves, will not allow them to be excavated. Of course, according to *Nihon shoki*, rulers from the mythological first *tennō*, Jinmu 神武, through the thirty-second, Sushun 崇峻, were all male—until Suiko 推古, a woman, ascended the throne in 592. As shown previously in this article, however, it is dangerous to accept the information in *Nihon shoki* literally. So far as we rely on archaeological evidence, it appears that both in numbers and the content of chiefly authority, at the regional level there was no conspicuous difference between male and female chieftains, and we may assume that there may also have been female *ōkimi* who are not recorded in *Nihon shoki*.

Female Chieftains as Seen in Legend and Official History

Beginning in the second half of the fifth century, the Yamato court (based in the region around present-day Nara) consolidated its authority over other regions through military might and then established structures of political control. The figures of the regional power holders subjugated in the process appear in accounts of local customs, legends, and history known as *fudoki* 風土記, compiled in the eighth century.⁸⁵

Using terms such as Kuzu 国栖, Saeki 佐伯, and Tsuchigumo 土蜘蛛, *fudoki* portray the chieftains conquered by the Yamato court as barbaric aliens. The best-known such name is Tsuchigumo (literally, earth-spiders). According to the mythologist Mizoguchi Mutsuko 溝口睦子, although accounts of the Tsuchigumo overlay traditions specific to the region with the ideology of central power (*ōken* 王權), we can still deduce from them valuable information concerning the history of the region.⁸⁶

Many stories of male and female Tsuchigumo chieftains who consolidated villages, led soldiers, or engaged in battle with or submitted to the emerging central authority appear in the northern Kyushu *Bungo no kuni fudoki* 豊後国風土記

⁸⁴ Mori 1987, pp. 85–88.

⁸⁵ In 713, the throne ordered the compilation of topographies from all provinces, recording special products, the origins of place names, regional traditions, and the like. Today the *fudoki* of five provinces—Izumo, Hitachi, Harima, Bungo, and Hizen—are extant in more-or-less intact or partial form. Many fragments of otherwise lost *fudoki* are quoted in other texts. The *fudoki* are important for knowledge of regional legends and traditions that cannot be found in *Kojiki* 古事記 or *Nihon shoki*.

⁸⁶ Mizoguchi 1997.

and *Hizen no kuni fudoki* 肥前国風土記. There are no significant gender-based differences in the kinds of activities these chieftains performed, and female and male chieftains figure in approximately equal numbers.⁸⁷ The explanation of the name of Hayami 速見 district in Bungo province stands as an example of an account that verifies the authority of a local female chieftain. It notes that the female local leader Hayatsuhime 速津媛 came out to greet the sovereign (*tennō*) who had come to subjugate the people of the entire region. She pointed out to him the place where five Tsuchigumo had barricaded themselves, and “he had them all killed. From then on this was known as the place of Hayatsuhime, and later on its name was changed to Hayami.”⁸⁸

Another example relates the origin of the name of a mountain in Kishima 杵島 district in Hizen province. It tells that “eighty women of the Tsuchigumo” barricaded themselves at the top of a mountain, refusing to obey the sovereign’s commands. The sovereign “dispatched soldiers and had the women all killed. From then on the mountain was called ‘Omina’ 嬬子 mountain [Mountain of Women].”⁸⁹

Tsuchigumo do not appear in the *Harima no kuni fudoki* 播磨国風土記. Instead, there are a number of legends about male and female deities who, just like ordinary human beings, make love, supervise agricultural labor, and fight over the control of territory. Just as with the Tsuchigumo who control outlying regions, we see in these deities “traces of village chieftains.”⁹⁰ One example is the entry regarding Minashi 美奈志 river in Ibo 揖保 district:

The two children of Iwa Ōkami イワ大神, Iwatatsuhiko イワタツヒコ [a male kami] and his sister Iwatatsuhime イワタツヒメ [a female kami] disputed over rights to use the water from the river. The male kami wanted to channel the flow of the river to Koshibe 越部 village in the north and the female kami to channel it to Izumi 泉 village in the south. When the male kami pounded down a hilltop to make the river flow northward, the female kami, thinking [his conduct] unreasonable, blocked the flow with her comb, dug a ditch from the waterhead, and had the water flow to Izumi village. The male kami then diverted the lower reaches of the river to the west, to Kuwabara 桑原 village, but the female kami did not allow this either, and she succeeded in redirecting the water to the paddy fields of Izumi by means of an underground trough.⁹¹

The entry regarding Hiroyama 広山 *sato* in the same district relates that Iwatatsuhime from Izumi village shot an arrow that flew as far as this village, “ramming so deeply into the earth that only its shaft was visible.”⁹² In other words, Iwatatsuhime also succeeded in claiming the territory between Izumi and

⁸⁷ Yoshie 2003b, pp. 92–96; Yoshie 2005, pp. 14–29.

⁸⁸ *Fudoki*, pp. 369–70; for an English translation, see Aoki 1997, p. 244.

⁸⁹ *Fudoki*, p. 403; Aoki 1997, p. 266. “Eighty women” (*yasome* 八十女) indicates a large number.

⁹⁰ Kuratsuka 1962.

⁹¹ *Fudoki*, p. 307; Aoki 1997, p. 202.

⁹² *Fudoki*, p. 293; Aoki 1997, p. 191.

Hiroyama. This method of asserting authority over land is a familiar one, seen also in stories about male kami.

In these stories, the female kami's keen judgment enables her to best her male counterpart; she is skilled in superior technology, allowing her to divert water for agricultural use to her own village; and she has the muscular strength and military skill to shoot an arrow over a long distance. The prototype for such a figure was female chieftains, who likewise combined these characteristics.

Female chieftains are found in official histories as well as in the realm of folklore. *Shoku Nihongi* records the subjugation of the Hayato 隼人, people of southern Kyushu who, from the end of the seventh century to the early eighth century, launched the last major rebellion against the Yamato court. It lists the names of several Hayato chieftains who took up arms and surrounded emissaries from the court. At the head of the list—indicating that the court considered them ring-leaders of the uprising—are the names of three female chieftains, Satsuma no hime 薩末比売, Kume 久売, and Hazu 波豆.⁹³

The combined evidence from human remains and grave goods found in tombs, *fudoki* legends, and official records thus attests that from the fourth century through the beginning of the eighth, there were many female chieftains in different parts of the Japanese archipelago and that they led military operations and economic production in the same way as did male chieftains. *Toji* were the heirs of these female chieftains. In the process of unification under the Yamato court, local male and female chieftains lost their positions as independent political hegemony. With the introduction of the *ritsuryō* system in the early eighth century, male chieftains were incorporated under the authority of the polity as district officials and heads of *sato*. Female chieftains were completely excluded from public office, but in fact they retained considerable power to organize and lead other villagers. To make its new system of taxation and the requisition of labor services function, the government had to continue to utilize this power. This is the historical background for the extracodal position of authority held by *toji*, as seen in *mokkan* and *setsuwa*. *Sato toji* were from the same class stratum as male village heads, and in some cases may have had a marital relationship with such men. But the power of *sato toji* as persons of authority and as agricultural managers and labor overseers did not derive from their position as wives of village heads—the ties between husbands and wives were too tenuous for marital status to be an effective base for exercising influence over local society.

Sovereigns' Consorts: Toji at the Highest Levels

The legacy of the power and authority of the female chieftains of earlier periods can also be seen in the political and social position of consorts of early classical sovereigns and in the fact that women occupied the throne itself on multiple

⁹³ *Shoku Nihongi*, Monmu 4 (700).6.3; Yoshie 2004b. The use of the character 売 indicates that the first two are female. In that all three are identified only by name and not, as was the case with the male chieftains listed, by court rank and title, we may conclude that Hazu, too, was a woman.

occasions during this period. Between the end of the sixth and the late eighth century six women served as sovereign, two of them twice. Scholars have long debated the nature of and basis for their power: some have argued that the female sovereigns were simply interim rulers to guarantee the succession to the throne of a particular male line, while others have claimed that female sovereigns held special abilities as shamans. These explanations continue to be widely accepted, although they have been challenged in recent debates on the nature of royal authority.⁹⁴ Here, however, I wish to focus on the circumstances not of the female sovereigns as such, but of other women at the highest level—the sovereign’s consorts known as *ōtoji* (grand *toji*).

The term *ōtoji* was originally a term of respect applied broadly to women of the ruling lineage and other leading lineages. Under the *ritsuryō* system its scope was narrowed to apply to consorts other than the “main consort,” the *kōgō* 皇后. Following the Chinese model, the *ritsuryō* system established four ranks of consorts: *kōgō*, *hi* 妃, *bunin* 夫人, and *hin* 嬪, and also specified that the first two ranks were reserved for women from the royal line and the latter two for women from aristocratic lineages.⁹⁵ Neither of these practices had existed earlier. In ancient times, consorts (*kisaki*) were not distinguished by rank, and they came from both the royal line and other lineages. Indeed the rank system soon broke down. Already in the Nara period the selection of *Kōmyō* of the Fujiwara lineage as *kōgō* violated the regulation that this position was to be filled only by women of the royal line,⁹⁶ and in the Heian period, Fujiwara daughters nearly monopolized the *kōgō* position.

From the ninth century other titles, such as *nyogo* 女御 and *kōi* 更衣, were devised for consorts apart from the *kōgō*, taking the place of the previous *hi*, *bunin*, and *hin*. Notably, however, during the period when the four-rank system was technically in effect, the Japanese reading *ōtoji* was used for the “Chinese” term *bunin* and also, on occasion, to refer to *hi*.⁹⁷ In effect, all *kisaki* could be termed *ōtoji*.

In considering the implications of the position of *kisaki* as *ōtoji*, one important issue is where they resided. *Nihon shoki* refers to the marriage of sovereigns as “taking [a woman] into the rear palace” (*kōkyū ni meshiuru* 納後宮), thus conveying the impression that consorts lived collectively in the inner quarters of the ruler’s palace and served him there.⁹⁸ This expression has acted as a powerful fetter on interpretation of the actualities of the consorts’ situation.⁹⁹ Recently,

⁹⁴ See Araki 1999; Yoshie 2002a; Nitō 2003.

⁹⁵ *Ritsuryō*, p. 197.

⁹⁶ See *Shoku Nihongi*, Tenpyō 1 (729).8.14.

⁹⁷ An order from the throne dated 817 verifies the custom of referring to *hi* as *ōtoji*. See *Ruijū fusenshō*, order of the throne dated Kōnin 8 (817).6.23, p. 131.

⁹⁸ See, for instance, *Nihon shoki*, Suinin 34.3.2; Keikō 4.2.11; Aston 1972, part 1, pp. 183, 190. For a list of the passages in *Nihon shoki* where this term is used, see Misaki 1997, pp. 5–7. For an example of interpretations that take such statements at face value, see Emori 2002.

⁹⁹ For a discussion of the importance of critically examining historical materials concerning family and marriage, especially those in *Nihon shoki*, see Yoshie 2000a, pp. 159–63.

however, Misaki Yūko 三崎裕子 has challenged this interpretation, based on her critical examination of *Nihon shoki* itself, and archaeological investigation has produced evidence to confirm her arguments.

According to Misaki, prior to the eighth century, reflecting the custom of duolocal marriage and inheritance practices in which property was bequeathed to women as well as men, the consort did not reside in the sovereign's palace, and the households of the two were managed independently. She notes that these circumstances can be detected even within the references to the women's quarters in the sovereign's palace recorded with Chinese-style terminology in *Nihon shoki*. An example is the Tsubaichi no miya 海石榴市宮 of Bidatsu Tennō's consort Kashikiya-hime 炊屋姫 (later Suiko Tennō): although termed "rear palace" (*kōkyū* 後宮, namely the quarters of the consort), it was in fact a separate palace of her own, a center of agricultural production (*yake*) under the control of her natal family.¹⁰⁰ The same can be said about the palaces of two of Shōtoku Taishi's consorts in the early seventh century, the Okamoto no miya 岡本宮 of Soga no Tojiko no Iratsume 蘇我刀自古郎女 and the Akunami no miya 飽波宮 of Kashiwade no Hokikimi no Iratsume 膳善岐々美郎女.¹⁰¹ Tenmu Tennō's 天武天皇 consort (*bunin*) Fujiwara no Ioe no Iratsume 藤原五百重娘 maintained her own residence, the Ōhara no yake 大原宅, as did his *kōgō* (later Jitō Tennō 持統天皇), who had her own Kōgō no miya 皇后宮. Neither lived within Tenmu's Kiyomihara no miya 淨御原宮.¹⁰² In the *Man'yōshū*, in fact, Ioe was referred to as the *ōtoji* of Ōhara (大原大刀自).¹⁰³ Even though *Nihon shoki* refers to the sovereign as "taking [a woman] into the rear palace," this does not mean that the consort moved into the ruler's palace, but only that she had attained the status of *kisaki*. Misaki's research also affirms that this mode of residence continued in somewhat different form under the *ritsuryō* system established in the early eighth century.¹⁰⁴

The initial appearance of this study in 1988 aroused considerable attention among researchers in women's history, but, in general, scholars of ancient and classical history have been skeptical of Misaki's findings. Archaeological work at the remains of Nara palaces, however, has supported her interpretation. Excavations of the inner quarters of Nara-period monarchs' palaces at Heijō-kyō have shown that there were no residential quarters for consorts, even for *kōgō*.¹⁰⁵ This is clear from comparison of the layout of the sites with later palaces at Heian-kyō, where the functions of individual buildings are well-documented. At the Heian palace, the southern half of the palace was official public space and included large buildings constructed in Chinese style that were used for ceremonial purposes. Behind this, in the northern half of the palace grounds, were many small buildings constructed in Japanese style. This was the so-called "rear

¹⁰⁰ Misaki 1997, pp. 10–12. *Nihon shoki*, Yōmei 1.5; Aston 1972, part 2, p. 108.

¹⁰¹ See Nitō 1998, part 2, chapter 1.

¹⁰² Misaki 1997, pp. 12–15.

¹⁰³ *Man'yōshū* 1465.

¹⁰⁴ Misaki 1997, pp. 15–21.

¹⁰⁵ Nara Bunkazai Kenkyūjo 1991.

palace” (*kōkyū*) where *kisaki* and their serving women lived. By contrast, excavations at Heijō-kyō have shown that both north and south sections of the palace were occupied by large buildings and open space; there are no collections of small buildings like those in the Heian palace.¹⁰⁶

Misaki’s findings indicate that mansions in which consorts lived were not simple residences. They likely included management centers for private estates on the outskirts of the capital, as well as storehouses containing valuable goods and implements. Many retainers and servants were employed there. Women of the sovereign’s family and of other noble families, just like their male counterparts, occupied positions as landholders and land managers that they acquired through inheritance or their own service to the government. After marrying a man from another noble family or even after becoming a consort of the sovereign, a woman of noble birth could continue to act as an independent land manager—just as women of local elite strata continued as independent managers, whether or not they had husbands. The palaces of *kisaki* were large-scale versions of the *yake* where *sato toji* and *ie toji* conducted their business. Unlike the *toji* of the provincial elite class, however, *kisaki*—in particular the *kōgō*—exercised political power at the level of the realm. As research on the history of the power of the throne in the classical period indicates, *kōgō* were almost co-rulers with their husbands. Behind this situation lay the independence of the consort’s palace.

In the latter part of the eighth century, this situation began to change. Women’s quarters were established within the palace, altering the basis for the power of consorts. According to Hashimoto Yoshinori 橋本義則, the *kōgō*’s quarters were incorporated within the sovereign’s palace during Kōnin’s 光仁 reign (770–781), while women’s quarters for consorts of the second rank and below came to be situated within the palace during the following reign of Kanmu 桓武 (781–806).¹⁰⁷ These developments led to a reduction in the independence of the sovereign’s consorts.

One reason for the decline in the independence of consorts was the weakness of Kōnin’s *kōgō* Inoe 井上, whose lineage did not provide her with an effective backing. Even though she was the daughter of Shōmu Tennō, almost all the other princes and princesses of Shōmu’s line had perished or lost their power in the political conflicts of the preceding years. Inoe’s mother, moreover, came from the weak Agata-Inukai 県犬養 lineage. A more general reason, however, was that the *ritsuryō* bureaucratic system imported from China at the beginning of the century had finally taken hold, resulting in the firmer establishment of a male-centered political system.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Scholars speculate that the large buildings in the north were constructed for the retired sovereign, an example of the practice of the sovereign continuing to live in the palace after retirement. See Hashimoto 1995, pp. 53–59. It was in the time of Saga Tennō 嵯峨天皇 that retired sovereigns first established residences outside the palace.

¹⁰⁷ Hashimoto 1995, pp. 69–98.

¹⁰⁸ Aristocratic women also played an important political role at the Nara court as female attendants (*nyokan* 女官) on the emperor. Occupying an office known as *Kōkyū Jūnishi* 後宮十二司,

Yet the decline in the independence of consorts did not necessarily bring a consolidation of the conjugal unit within the palace. Rather than the sovereign's consorts, the key figure in the women's quarters seems to have been his mother. Nishino Yukiko 西野悠紀子 has pointed out that in the eighth century, prior to the establishment of quarters for the consort within the palace, there already were instances where the sovereign's mother took up residence there. Fujiwara no Miyako 藤原宮子, the mother of Shōmu Tennō, for example, lived outside the palace when she was the consort (*bunin*) of Shōmu's father, Monmu Tennō 文武天皇, but at the time of her death, she was living in the palace. It appears that she moved her residence there after her son's accession to the throne.¹⁰⁹ When Junnin Tennō 淳仁天皇 was surrounded by soldiers in a coup in 764, his mother, Taima no Yamashiro 当麻山背, was likewise residing in the palace with him.¹¹⁰ It thus seems that the defining characteristics of Nara-period families—the strength of ties between mother and children and the weakness of conjugal bonds—also applied to monarchs. In place of the Chinese trope of the monarch and his consort as a pair, eighth-century Japanese paired the monarch and his mother. Within this system in which the mother was more influential than the consort, the concept of a chief consort continued to be very weak.¹¹¹ In fact, no one held that position for about a century, from the reign of Ninmyō 仁明 (r. 833–850) to that of Suzaku 朱雀 (r. 930–946). After the consorts were relocated to the palace, control of the women's quarters was exercised by the sovereign's mother, even if she had not been elevated to the position of *kōgō*.

The co-residence of monarch and mother carried over into the mid-Heian period, when the throne fell under the control of Fujiwara regents. Indeed, the strong ties between mother and child were a major element in regental government. This is reflected in the appearance at this time of the term *kokumo* 国母 (mother of the realm) as an epithet for the mother of the emperor. As Furuse Natsuko 古瀬奈津子 has pointed out, when a sovereign retired he would move out of the palace, but his consort—the reigning sovereign's mother—would remain to watch over her son. The regent (the father of the reigning sovereign's mother) maintained an office within the palace, and at the end of the tenth century, the *nyoin* 女院 (retired consort) system was established as a political structure to support the sovereign's mother, enabling her to “participate in government from the same position as the retired ruler.”¹¹² In other words, an administrative structure similar to the In-no-chō 院庁 maintained by the retired ruler made it possible for

they fulfilled a function parallel to that of male courtiers. Around the mid-ninth century, however, such female attendants lost their prerogatives and their political position to male officials. See Nomura 1978; Yoshikawa 1998. This system of female offices did not derive from the Chinese governmental structure that served as the model for the *ritsuryō* system. For a discussion of the implications of these female offices, see Yoshie 2003a.

¹⁰⁹ *Shoku Nihongi*, Tenpyō-shōhō 6 (754).7.13.

¹¹⁰ *Shoku Nihongi*, Tenpyō-hōji 8 (764).10.9.

¹¹¹ Nishino 1997, pp. 151, 165.

¹¹² Furuse 2001, p. 15. *Nyoin* was a title of respect given to the mother or other close female relative of the monarch.

the *nyoin*'s office to exercise political power at court. The role of the sovereign's mother as "mother of the realm" was not simply that of a puppet controlled by the regent, who was often her own father. Citing examples in which the sovereign's mother made decisions on ministerial appointments and the formal recognition of *kōgō*, Furuse has pointed out that after the death of her father, Michinaga 道長 (966–1027), Fujiwara no Shōshi 藤原彰子 (998–1074) actually held the most powerful position in the realm, to the extent that she forced her brother Yorimichi 頼通 to hand over the regency to another brother, Norimichi 教通.¹¹³ The political power of the *kōgō*, which appeared to have weakened once they came to live in the palace at the end of the eighth century, seems to have reemerged in the form of the power of the mother of the realm, or *nyoin*.

The political authority of the mother of the monarch as a mother was peculiar to the mid-Heian age. It was born of two elements—the forms of family and marriage that dated from previous periods and the Chinese-style patrilineal system of government introduced in early classical times. After the eleventh century, the strong ties between mother and children seen in everyday life no longer manifested themselves on the stage of court politics. Women were ultimately excluded from power. The practice of passing political rank from father to son also took firm root during this time. In the subsequent Insei period (from the end of the eleventh century), the reigning monarch fell under the direct influence of his father, the retired monarch, not his mother; the mother lived not with her son, the monarch, but with her husband, the retired monarch. The power remaining to her was exercised as a proxy for her husband.¹¹⁴ While the regental form of government in the mid-Heian period was based on the political power of the *kisaki*'s natal family and of *kisaki* themselves as mothers of the realm, in the Insei period, reflecting a change in dominant marital structures, the authority of the mother of the realm derived from her position as wife of the retired sovereign.

We have seen that various points link the power of female chieftains in the fourth and fifth centuries, the quasi-public activities of village *toji* that lasted until the mid-ninth century, and the political role of *kisaki*, which persisted despite changes until the twelfth century. Viewed from another angle, the *kōgō*'s residence in the ruler's palace dated from Kōnin's accession upon the death of Shōtoku 称徳 (r. 764–770), the final female sovereign before the Tokugawa era, and was followed in the next reign by the incorporation within the palace of *kisaki* of other ranks. In short, consorts lost their independence at about the same time that women ceased to occupy the throne, a significant parallel. Both sets of factors are closely related to the patterns of family and marriage and the economic structures current at the time. These circumstances should be considered when assessing female occupancy of the throne.

¹¹³ Furuse 2001, p. 15. For the examples cited by Furuse, see the entries for Chōwa 5 (1016).6.10 in *Midō kanpaku ki*, *Shōyūki*, and *Sakeiki*; and *Midō kanpaku ki*, Kannin 2 (1018).7.28.

¹¹⁴ See Kuriyama 2002.

Conclusion

I have argued that figures of independent, entrepreneurial woman can be found at various levels of classical society, even though they are often hidden behind a smokescreen of ideological distortions, dating both from the classical period and more recent times. Building upon research that has clarified the nature of marriage, family, and artificial structures designed to organize and tax the populace, I have focused on the concrete activities performed by *toji*, women of provincial notable and prosperous farming families. I have shown that *toji*, as independent labor overseers, lenders, and managers of productive enterprises, undertook tasks of organizing and supervising villagers outside the official framework of the *ko*, and have argued that their predecessors were fourth- and fifth-century female chieftains. I have also suggested that at the highest political level, early classical consorts (*ōtoji*) incorporated the power of female chieftains as they maintained their own independent residential palaces where they operated economic enterprises on a large scale.

My arguments are based on the analysis of historical materials of various sorts. Because *mokkan* are records of everyday life, they are particularly valuable sources for understanding the labor and position of women who remain hidden in many other sources. Silences and gaps in legal materials such as the *ritsuryō* codes and in court histories such as *Nihon shoki* and *Shoku Nihongi*, help us to realize why these women have been unseen until now. Even though such sources tend to slight women and reflect an official ideology of gender relations, we may find hidden figures of women within them—as has Misaki Yūko in *Nihon shoki*. I have also reexamined historical terms such as *ie* and “take [a woman] into the rear palace,” arguing that these terms should be understood not as they were construed in China or in modern times, but as Japanese of early classical times interpreted them. Close analysis of historical terminology depends upon the critical investigation of historical materials and the revisionist reading of tale literature. If we regard the modern role of the “wife” and the concept of the *ie* as ahistorical givens, it will be impossible to grasp what “wife” and *ie* may have meant in earlier times. By refining the focus that we, as researchers, bring to bear on historical materials, we not only can uncover the women hidden in these sources, but also can illuminate from a new perspective the nature of the society and times in which these women lived and acted.

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