

**A Reference Guide to the  
*Nihonshoki* Myths**

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ISSUES

THE Japanese universal chronicles, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihonshoki*, divide time into discrete ages:

- 1) chaotic time, or acosmic time (from uncertain beginnings to the parthenogeneses of the deities Izanaki and Izanami);
- 2) cosmogonic time, or the divine age (from the time of Izanaki and Izanami until the cathodos to earth of their great-grandson, Ninigi, and the exploits of Ninigi's children);
- 3) legendary time, or the heroic age (from the birth of Emperor Jinmu, the first emperor, until the time of the sixteenth emperor, Emperor Nintoku);
- 4) historical time (from the time of the seventeenth emperor, Emperor Richū [r. 400–405] onward).<sup>1</sup>

The *Kojiki* is very straightforward in its presentation of all these ages, making it a fairly easy-to-reference text. Beginning with legendary time, the *Nihonshoki* also is straightforward, but it presents the mythical (that is, chaotic and cosmogonic) material in overlapping sequences of variants, which creates problems for reference.

Fortunately, the *Nihonshoki* orders its myth variants well. The ordering method is as follows. First a logical sequence for all the basic blocks of myths is determined, as in the *Kojiki*, then variants for each myth block are collected into their respective places within this sequence, then for each myth block a “main variant” (called variously *honbun*, *honmon*, or *honsho*) is designated, then for each myth block the remaining variants (called *issho* or *betsu-den*) are presented behind their main variant in a numbered subsequence beginning from number one. Overall, the sequence runs like this: *main*<sub>1</sub>, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; *main*<sub>2</sub>, 1, 2; *main*<sub>3</sub>, 1; . . .

This system is followed by modern Japanese mythologists when making textual references to the *Nihonshoki*'s myths, hence it must be familiar to anyone seriously studying Japanese mythology. The system does require a general familiarity with the Japanese myth sequences, but while baffling to the uninitiated, the system is a good one, for in most

common situations it allows any edition, even a translation, to be consulted without attention to pagination, obviating the need for a reader to obtain the same edition used by a mythologist-author (note, however, that minor differences do exist among early manuscripts, and that these might be preserved among modern editions).

The table below, intended to help the uninitiated get started, is a locator for the *Nihonshoki*'s myth variants in the English translation by Aston, and in the Iwanami edition, which, though not the best Japanese-language edition, is a good one and the one most widely available. References are given in the following form:

Iwanami edition: *page/column—page/column*

Aston edition: *page/line—page/line*,

where the column and line numbers are inclusive. When counting columns and lines, the titles, captions, illustration space, and blank areas are skipped over. For the Iwanami edition, only the transliterated text sprinkled with furigana is referenced; the kanbun text is ignored, since anyone able to read it can find the location from the place in the transliterated text.

REFERENCE GUIDE TO THE *NIHONSHOKI* MYTHS

Myth block	Variant	Iwanami ed.	Aston ed.	Notes
1. Kamiyo no nana-yo <sup>2</sup> (Seven ages of deities)	Main Variant	76/1-76/8	1/1-4/2	Book 1. Chaotic time.
	Variant 1	76/9-77/2	4/3-4/14	
	Variant 2	77/3-78/1	4/15-4/21	
	Variant 3	78/2-78/3	5/1-5/4	
	Variant 4	78/4-78/6	5/5-5/12	
	Variant 5	78/7-78/9	5/13-5/20	
	Variant 6	78/10-78/12	5/21-6/2	
2. Kamiyo no nana-yo (Seven ages of deities)	Main Variant	78/13-78/17	6/3-6/17	
	Variant 1	79/1	6/18-6/19	
	Variant 2	79/2-79/3	6/20-7/2	
3. Kamiyo no nana-yo (Seven ages of deities)	Main Variant	79/4-79/5	7/3-7/7	
	Variant 1	80/1-80/3	8/1-10/2	
4. Kuni umi (Birth of the lands)	Main Variant	80/4-82/3	10/3-14/11	Cosmogonic time.
	Variant 1	82/4-84/4	14/12-16/12	
	Variant 2	84/5-84/8	16/13-16/19	
	Variant 3	84/9-84/10	16/20-16/24	
	Variant 4	84/11-84/13	16/25-16/30	
	Variant 5	84/14-85/1	16/31-17/6	
	Variant 6	85/2-85/4	17/7-17/14	
	Variant 7	85/5-86/1	17/15-17/20	
	Variant 8	86/2-86/4	17/21-17/27	
	Variant 9	86/5-86/7	17/28-17/33	
	Variant 10	86/8-86/9	17/34-18/3	
5. Sankishi tanjō (Birth of the three noble children)	Main Variant	86/10-88/4	18/4-20/4	
	Variant 1	88/5-88/11	20/5-20/19	
	Variant 2	88/12-89/5	20/20-21/10	
	Variant 3	90/1-90/4	21/11-21/16	
	Variant 4	90/5-90/7	21/17-21/24	
	Variant 5	90/8-90/10	21/25-22/2	
	Variant 6	90/11-96/9	22/3-28/21	
	Variant 7	96/10-97/4	28/22-29/8	
	Variant 8	97/5-98/5	29/9-29/20	
	Variant 9	98/6-98/17	29/21-30/19	
	Variant 10	99/1-100/14	30/20-32/3	
	Variant 11	100/15-102/14	32/4-33/19	
6. Ukei (Covenant)	Main Variant	102/15-106/10	33/20-36/16	
	Variant 1	106/11-108/6	36/17-37/34	
	Variant 2	108/7-110/4	37/35-39/18	
	Variant 3	110/5-111/3	39/19-40/25	

7. Ama no iwaya to (Door to the rock-grotto of heaven)	Main Variant	111/4-113/5	40/26-45/18	
	Variant 1	114/1-114/11	45/19-47/7	
	Variant 2	114/12-116/9	47/8-48/15	
	Variant 3	116/10-120/17	48/16-52/6	
8. Ya-mata orochi taiji (Crusade against the octocephalic dragon)	Main Variant	121/1-123/5	52/7-55/4	
	Variant 1	124/1-124/5	55/5-55/16	
	Variant 2	124/6-125/5	55/17-56/25	
	Variant 3	126/1-126/9	56/26-57/13	
	Variant 4	126/10-127/4	57/14-58/16	
	Variant 5	127/5-128/9	58/17-59/5	
9. Tenson kōrin (cathodos of heaven's scion)	Main Variant	134/1-142/10	65/1-73/11	Book 2.
	Variant 1	142/11-149/4	73/12-79/12	
	Variant 2	149/5-156/4	79/13-85/23	
	Variant 3	156/5-156/10	85/24-86/8	
	Variant 4	156/11-157/4	86/9-88/2	
	Variant 5	157/5-160/2	88/3-89/19	
	Variant 6	160/3-162/10	89/20-91/16	
	Variant 7	162/11-162/16	91/17-91/34	
10. Umisachi, Yamasachi (Gift of the sea, Gift of the land)	Main Variant	163/5-168/4	92/10-95/15	
	Variant 1	168/5-172/9	95/16-98/29	
	Variant 2	172/10-176/1	98/30-101/2	
	Variant 3	176/2-180/12	101/3-105/4	
11. Jinnō shōun <sup>3</sup> (demigods)	Main Variant	185/3-186/1	108/10-108/17	
	Variant 1	186/2-186/5	108/18-108/25	
	Variant 2	186/6-186/7	108/26-108/29	
	Variant 3	186/8-186/9	108/30-108/33	
	Variant 4	186/10-186/11	108/34-108/36	

## NOTES

1. Actually, in the historian's eyes, legendary time gradually fades into historical time from the reign of the tenth emperor, Emperor Sujin (r. 97-30 B.C.; the first emperor who is considered to have really lived) up to about the time of the twenty-sixth emperor, Emperor Keitai (r. 507-531). The intricacies of discriminating between the legendary and historical ages fortunately are not of concern here.

2. The first three myth blocks are called the "Seven ages of deities." In the first block, there are three generations of unpaired deities:

1. Kuni no toko-tachi no Mikoto
2. Kuni no sa-tsuchi no Mikoto
3. Toyo-kumu-nu no Mikoto

In the second block, there are four generations of paired deities:

4. Uhiji-ni no Mikoto & Suhiji-ni no Mikoto
5. Oho-to no Ji no Mikoto & Oho-to Mabe no Mikoto

6. Omo-daru no Mikoto & Kashiko-ne no Mikoto

7. Izanaki no Mikoto & Izanami no Mikoto

Thus there are seven generations in all. The third block is a summary of the first two. Therefore, the first three myth blocks actually form a single unit. (Note that the second, third, and fourth generations differ somewhat in the *Kojiki*.)

3. *Jimmō shōun* actually means "transition from gods to emperors." The personages of this myth block are demigods who belong as much with myth as with legend. The myth block itself functions only to couple the previous myths with the subsequent legends.

#### REFERENCES CITED

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