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The Edo Period's Boom in Ancient History: Early modern Japanese people's tracing of their roots

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Thoughts about the ancient period

People in the Edo Period had nostalgia for ancient times, just as we are keen to learn about the ancient period today. Upon the first performance of CHIKAMATSU Hanji's¹ *jōruri* (puppet play *Imoseyama Onna Teikin* (*Proper Upbringing of a Young Lady at Mount Imose*) (1771) at the Ōsaka Takemoto Za theatre, a pamphlet issued by the National Bunraku Puppet Theatre declared: 'This portrays a woman made victim for her family during the Taika Reforms'. Setting aside to what degree it was historically accurate, the fact that it looked to the Taika Reforms for its setting was innovative. It was ground-breaking to attract an audience to the world of the seventh century, given that contemporary plays such as *sewamono* (domestic tales) and *bukemono* (samurai tales) were mostly based respectively on events in the Edo and Kamakura Periods.

Around the same time, the *kokugakusha* (Nativist) scholar MOTOORI Norinaga (1730–1801) in Matsuzaka at Ise was writing *Kojikiden*,² a revised manuscript of which appeared in 1767. And in 1784 the ancient Gold Seal of King Na, now a National Treasure, was found at Shikanoshima Island in Fukuoka Prefecture. Taken together, these events all occurred around the 1770s and 1780s. Ideas about, and interest in, the ancient period increased all over Japan in the middle of the 270-year-long Edo Period. This marked a 'boom in ancient history in the Edo Period.'

Norinaga's love of maps

Norinaga's role in this was preeminent. *Kojiki* (Wadō 4, 712 CE) is an ancient history comparable with *Nihon Shoki*, which was written entirely in *kanbun* Chinese-style script. He glossed it with Japanese readings, and facilitated its comprehension in Japanese. We are so familiar with this as a work in Japanese that nowadays virtually nobody reads *Kojiki* in its original *kanbun* text, and that is entirely down to him. For example, Norinaga glossed the characters 天地初発之時 at the opening of the Preface with the Japanese readings '*Ametsuchi no hajime no toki*' ['At the time of the beginning of heaven and earth,...'].³

A retrospective exhibition of Norinaga's life and works was held in 2017 in celebration of the 35th anniversary of the Mie Prefectural Art Gallery, and I had the opportunity to visit it. I was struck by Norinaga's love of maps. He drew his *Dai Nippon Tenka Shikai Gato* (*Illustrated Map of Great Japan's Lands and Seas*)³ at the age of seventeen, and his *Miyako no Zu* (*Map of the Capital*)⁴ when aged twenty-three. That he actually travelled to Kyōto is attested in his *Zaikyō Nikki* (*Diary of Visiting Kyōto*).⁵ Loving maps was the flip side of loving travel, and that was another boom of the times. In Norinaga's case, the spatial perception indicated by maps created a work that visualised time as a ground plan too: his *Amatsuchi no Zu* (*Map of the Cosmos*)⁶ showed *Takamagahara* (Heaven) at the very top, and *Ne no Kuni* (Hell) at the bottom. His artistic bent

1 Translator's note: Playwright for *bunraku* puppet plays, 1725–1783.

2 Translator's note: a commentary on *Kojiki* in 44 volumes, commenced in 1764 and completed in 1798, but published in parts. A woodblock print edition appeared from 1790.

3 Translator's note: *Dai Nippon Tenka Shikai Gato*, 5th month of Enkyō 3, 1747.

4 Translator's note: *Miyako no Zu*, 1752.

5 Translator's note: *Zaikyō Nikki*, in 3 volumes, 1752–1757.

6 Translator's note: *Ametsuchi Zu*, 1772(?).

meant that he left behind him a famous self-portrait painted when he was 61 years old. ‘Time travel’ to the ancient past and ‘spatial travel’ to the capital and Yamato were interconnected for him.

The ‘time and space’ of KAIBARA Ekiken

There is another famous scholar: KAIBARA Ekiken (1630–1714), who served in the feudal domain of Fukuoka Kuroda, where the Gold Seal of King Na was found. He lived a century before Norinaga, but unlike him, his original field of scholarship was not Nativism but Confucianism; nevertheless, Ekiken produced works in both areas. As regards space, there is *Chikuzen no Kuni Zoku Fudoki* (A Sequel to *Chikuzen Fudoki*),⁷ which was commissioned by the domain’s lord KURODA Mitsuyuki⁸ and took him sixteen years to complete. This attempt at an Early Modern *fudoki* was Ekiken’s pet project, but Lord Mitsuyuki only granted him this wish providing he first compile *Kuroda Keifu* (A Genealogy of the Kuroda Family), which he did not complete until 1688.

It is noteworthy that they respectively used their personal interests to bargain with each other: as a *daimyō* Kuroda Mitsuyuki had set his sights on tracing his family’s roots, while as a Confucian scholar Ekiken had set his on compiling a regional gazetteer. In fact, it was obligatory for *daimyō* to submit accurate genealogies to the Shogunate, such as *Kan’ei Keizu*⁹ and *Kansei Chōshū Sho Kafu*.¹⁰ The model for *Kan’ei Keizu* was *Shinsen Shōji Roku* (New Selection and Record of Hereditary Titles and Family Names) (814 CE), as is indicated by the explanation ‘Following the format of *Shōji Roku*, the imperial family is listed first, then Shintō shrine families, followed by samurai.’ In some senses, if there were no experts familiar with genealogies, the *daimyō* and *hatamoto* (top ranks of samurai) across the country could not have traced their origins. So there was a pragmatic reason for widespread samurai interest in the ancient period.

Harima no Kuni Fudoki

The trend set by Ekiken with *Chikuzen no Kuni Zoku Fudoki* and *Kuroda Keifu* continued. Harima’s man of letters HIRANO Tsunenaga¹¹ was one such, and he set about compiling *Chishi Harima Kagami* (A Guide to the Topography of Harima).¹² This seventeen-volume work commenced with Shikitō-gun, and followed on with Shikisai, Inami, Kako, Akashi, Miki, Katō, Kasai, Taka, Ittō, Issai, Akō and Shisō; each *gun* (rural district) was divided into three parts, comprising Shintō shrines, Buddhist temples and a section on famous places, historical sites and *waka* poems, and Confucian aphorisms on filial piety. The preface is dated Hōreki 12 (1762), and there are several extant drafts apart from that presented to Lord Sakai of Himeji domain after its completion.

In the case of Hirano, we can surmise that he must have had a wide network of samurai in the same field of study all over Harima, for collecting such broad topographical information about the whole of Harima Province. A letter he sent to the ophthalmologist TANIGAWA Ryōgen of Yado, Katō-gun (present-day Katō-shi), makes that clear. In it, Hirano seeks his cooperation, saying ‘I have great aspirations, and am planning a guide to Harima Province.’

However, what Hirano wanted above all was *Harima Fudoki*. In a line in the Preface, he vents his frustration at being unable to refer to it: ‘That work is held in an archive and is not accessible to anybody.’ Only, Hirano had no way of knowing that contrary to his expectations, *Harima Fudoki* was not at the residence of the *daimyō* in Himeji domain, but in the private

⁷ Translator’s note: *Chikuzen no Kuni Zoku Fudoki*, 1688.

⁸ Translator’s note: 1628–1707.

⁹ Translator’s note: *Kan’ei Keizu*, a compendium of 1,400 family genealogies ordered by the third Tokugawa Shōgun, Iemitsu, in 1641.

¹⁰ Translator’s note: *Kansei Chōshū Sho Kafu*, completed 1812.

¹¹ Translator’s note: A doctor and calendar maker of Inami-gun, Hiratsu *Mura* (present-day Hiratsu, Yoneda-chō, Kakogawa-shi, Hyōgo Prefecture).

¹² Translator’s note: Often abbreviated to *Harima Kagami*. Date of completion unclear, but possibly 1762.

collection of the Sanjōnishi family, courtiers in Kyōto. It took more than another century for the literati of Harima who ‘wanted to look at *Harima Fudoki*’ to achieve that.

Having roots in the Tanji Family¹³

In the case of the Kuroda family of Fukuoka, a breakthrough came between *Kan’ei Keizu* and *Kansei Chōshū Sho Kafu*, upon the discovery of the gravestone of Shigetaka, father of Mototaka who had founded the domain (Mototaka’s family name was originally Kodera and was changed to Kuroda during the lifetime of his son, Kanbei/Yoshitaka).¹⁴ The gravestone was verified by the local Amakawa family of Himeji, upon the 250th anniversary of the death of military strategist Kanbei/Yoshitaka, and was thereafter placed in the care of domain officials. This tells us that oral history handed down locally was important for the production of genealogies and historical bibliographies. For samurai families who rose to prominence during the Sengoku Period like the Kuroda, increasing the plausibility of their domain founders and family ancestors was an issue they shared in common.

The Kuroda family are listed with several offshoots such as the Idagenji and Sasaki; and the Ōzeki lineage of Kurobane domain in Shimotsuke Province was traced back to Prince Kamieha, the third son of ancient King Senka. It was ŌZEKI Masunari (1782–1845), the domain’s 11th *daimyō*, who established that; and he himself compiled a total of ten volumes in *Tōke Shōtō Rekisei Kō* (*A History of the True Lineage of this Family*) and *Tajihishi Keiden* (*The Genealogy of the Tajihishi Family*), in which he recorded in his own handwriting the dates of death and *kojigō* (official posthumous Buddhist names) of successive domain *daimyōs* and their wives. He is well-known as a man of letters who corresponded with the likes of MATSUDAIRA Sadanobu,¹⁵ MATSUURA Seizan,¹⁶ SANEDA Yukitsuru,¹⁷ and MITO Nariaki.¹⁸ What is interesting is that he paid a visit to Tanpi Shrine, which enshrines the Tajihishi family, while he was stationed as *kaban*¹⁹ at Ōsaka Castle between the 8th month of 1813 and the 7th month of 1814. Around that time, Tanpi Shrine was listed in a popular guidebook, *Kawachi Meisho Zue* (*A Guide to Famous Places in Kawachi Province*) (1801), citing *Montoku Jitsuroku*²⁰ and *Sandai Jitsuroku*.²¹ Doubtless Masunari had a copy of *Rikkokushi* (*Six National Histories*).²² Not only that, but he also edited and published the Kurobane edition of *Nihon Shoki* in 1820, in 30 scrolls and 15 books.

Funeō Go Boshi (Epitaph of Lord Fune)

¹³ Translator’s note: The following section is based on *Tajihishi Keiden* by ŌZEKI Masunari [1781–1845], who traces the roots of the extended family of Tanji; this name has the variants Tanji, Tanpi, Taji, Tajihishi. This locally powerful family was based in Kawachi Province, and its ancestral Tanpi Shrine still stands in Tajii, Mihara-ku, Sakai-shi.

¹⁴ Translator’s note: Yoshitaka KURODA, aka Kanbei KURODA: 1546–1604.

¹⁵ Translator’s note: Sadanobu Matsudaira, [1759–1829], *daimyō* of Shirakawa domain.

¹⁶ Translator’s note: Seizan Matsuura [1760–1841], *daimyō* of Hirado domain.

¹⁷ Translator’s note: Yukitsura Saneda [1791–1852], *daimyō* of Matsushiro domain.

¹⁸ Translator’s note: also known as Nariaki Tokugawa [1800–1860], *daimyō* of Mito domain.

¹⁹ Translator’s note: one of the official positions assigned to *daimyō* in the Edo Period, as castle guards at Ōsaka and Sunpu (Suruga) Castles. At Ōsaka Castle there were four at any one time, whose posting commenced annually in the 8th month.

²⁰ Translator’s note: A history of the reign of Emperor Montoku [850–858] in 10 volumes, commissioned in 879 CE. Vol. 5 of *Rikkokushi*.

²¹ Translator’s note: A history of the three reigns of Emperors Seiwa, Yōzei and Kōkō, spanning 858–887, commissioned in 901. Vol. 6 of *Rikkokushi*.

²² Translator’s note: the *Six National Histories*, compiled by the Imperial Court during the 8th and 9th centuries.

There are *Kojiki*, *Fudoki*, *Rikkokushi*, gravestone epitaphs and oral history, and then there are archaeological finds. The Gold Seal of King Na is a prime example. Several people are attributed as finding it, including the peasants Jinbei, Hideji and Kahei, and theories abound as to the reason for its discovery, but what is noteworthy is that its historicity was attested in *Kin'inben* (*Attestation of the Gold Seal*), by KAMEI Nanmei (1743–1814), professor at the Fukuoka Domain School Gakumonjo Kantōkan (Academy), writing, 'It is the gold seal granted by the Later Han Chinese Emperor Guangwu [5 BCE–57 CE].' That the *daimyō* employed Confucian scholars as advisors was not simply for political purposes. It was because their knowledge of classical Chinese erudition was valuable to them.

MATSUZAKI Kōdō (1771–1844) was well-known, along with SATŌ Issai,²³ as a brilliant scholar at the Shōheikō²⁴ Academy in Edo. He was tutor to ŌTA Sukemoto,²⁵ *daimyō* of Kakegawa domain, and he applied himself to going round Kawachi and Yamato Provinces collecting epitaphs in 1829, while Ōta was serving as Constable²⁶ at Ōsaka Castle in his capacity as *hankō* (chief administrator of his domain). In his *Nichiroku* (*Diary*, published by Tōyō Bunko), he states 'In Bunsei 12 [1829] our Lord Ōta ordered facsimiles and rubbings of epitaphs to be taken of about twelve inscriptions, and the epitaphs of four families—Lord Fune, Lord Ina, the Takaya and the Ki families—were taken by the Lord himself. The remainder were were all made by me.' One of these, *Funeōgo Boshi* (*Epitaph of Lord Fune*), has been designated a National Treasure, being Japan's earliest known epitaph, dated 668 CE. It was found on Matsuokayama Hill (Kashiwara-shi) in the Edo Period, and was long held as a treasure of the historic Sairinji Temple.

Antiquarianism

The gilded bronze cinerary urn of Ina no Ōmura²⁷ was unearthed in Yamato.²⁸ KIMURA Kenkadō,²⁹ a polymath scholar of natural history in Ōsaka, identified it from its inscription of 392 graphs, and wrote *Thoughts on the Provenance of the Epitaph of Ina no Ōmura Mahito on a Bronze Vessel*, in 1770. According to him, it had been found a little earlier in Anamushiyama, a hill in Katsuge-gun, Yamato Province (present-day Kashiba-shi). A replica by Kenkadō was handed down through ISE Sadatake,³⁰ YASHIRO Hirotaka,³¹ and TŌ Teikan,³² while the actual vessel, a National Treasure, has been kept at Shitennōji Temple to the present.

As regards such interest in finds of ancient artefacts, another noteworthy man was Kakuho (1729–1815), High Priest of Kongōrinji Temple in Kawachi (Habikino-shi, Ōsaka Prefecture). Kakuho became a priest at Kongōrinji at the age of thirty, and making the most of his local knowledge, he continued to research burial mounds, and enjoyed authenticating the ancient mirrors that were excavated from the tombs. AKISATO Ritō³³ edited *Kawachi Meisho Zue* (*Pictorial Guide to Scenic Places in Kyōto*) (1801), in which he included illustrations of the ancient crotal bell and mirror that were treasures of the temple, saying of Kakuho that 'he is always reciting poetry and learning about Japanese history', 'he shuns worldliness and amuses himself with ancient

²³ Translator's note: Confucian scholar, 1772–1859.

²⁴ Translator's note: aka Shōheizaka Gakumonjo, an academy of Confucian Studies.

²⁵ Translator's note: a high-level office holder within the Tokugawa shogunate. 1799–1867.

²⁶ Translator's note: Cf. 'Constable of the Tower', the most senior appointment at the Tower of London.

²⁷ Translator's note: Ina no Ōmura, a courtier, died in 707 CE.

²⁸ Translator's note: found during the Meiwa era, 1764–1772.

²⁹ Translator's note: KIMURA Kenkadō, Japanese artist, 1736–1802.

³⁰ Translator's note: biographer who was interested in ancient customs, 1718–1784.

³¹ Translators note: Nativist scholar, 1758–1841.

³² Translator's note: antiquarian, 1732–1797.

³³ Translator's note: poet and writer, date of birth unknown; died 1830.

artefacts'. Nowadays, the 'bronze mirror with design of four Buddhas and four animals'³⁴ in the collection of Kyōto National Museum is regarded as one of the items recovered in 1781 when a hillside near the temple collapsed, and an ancient mirror, vermilion, a gold ring, *magatama* curved beads, and a bronze crotal appeared. The *Kongōrinji Jūbutsu Kyōrei Zu (Illustrations of the Kōngorinji Temple Treasures Mirror and Crotal Bell)* is held in the collection of the Motoori Norinaga Memorial Museum, and is said to have been gifted to him by Kyōto draper MURAI Kogan³⁵ (1741–1786). They were linked by their love of antiquities.

'Shūkojūshu' and Reitōkaku Shū Kochō

Among notable works that resulted from the rise in antiquarianism was the collection *Shūkojūshu* by MATSUDAIRA Sadanobu (1758–1829).³⁶ Its Preface is dated 1800, and it covers epitaphs, inscriptions on bronzes, weapons, bronzes, musical instruments, writing implements, seals, *hengaku* (gateway and lintel inscriptions on framed boards), historic paintings and copybook practice pieces for calligraphy. In Hyōgo Prefecture, we have *Reitōkaku Shū Kochō*, an album illustrating ancient artefacts and documents that were collected over three generations from the late Edo to early Meiji Periods by the wealthy merchant YOSHIDA Kiheiji of Sumiyoshi, Ubara-gun, Settsu Province. Research on this is proceeding apace thanks to collaboration between the National Museum of Japanese History and Kōbe University.

According to HITSUMOTO Sei'ichi (2002) in *Hyōgo Kenka no Shutsudo Kokyō (Ancient Bronze Mirrors Excavated in Hyōgo Prefecture)*, the first mirror to be found in Settsu Province was at the Abo Shinnō Zuka burial mound in Ashiya-shi in Genroku 4 (1691); and *Reitōkaku Shū Kochō* includes illustrations of a mirror and *sekitai* (leather belt, lacquered and inset with jewels, worn in ceremonial court dress), which were excavated from Uchide *Mura* (Ashiya). In short, there is no doubt that as a result of such collaborative research, new knowledge has been added to 'the study of ancient history in the Edo Period' in Hyōgo Prefecture.

³⁴ Translator's note: *Han'en hōkei gamontai shibutsu shijū monkyō*.

³⁵ Translator's note: Nativist scholar.

³⁶ Translator's note: Daimyō of Shirakawa Domain; and Chief Councilor to the Shogunate from 1787.