The Hachiman Cult and the Dōkyō Incident

by Ross Bender

One of the gravest assaults ever made on the Japanese imperial institution was launched by the Buddhist priest Dōkyō in the 760s. Dōkyō, who came from a clan of the low-ranking provincial aristocracy, gained the affection of the retired Empress Kōken in 761 and proceeded to gather political power to himself; by the end of the decade he stood as the paramount figure in the court bureaucracy and had already begun to usurp imperial prerogatives. It was in 769 that an oracle from the shrine of Hachiman in Kyushu was reported to Nara: the god prophesied peace in the realm if Dōkyō were proclaimed emperor. Kōken (who had reascended the throne as Empress Shōtoku), upon the advice of the god given her in a dream, dispatched Wake no Kiyomaro to Kyushu to ascertain Hachiman’s true will. Kiyomaro returned to the capital with the famous oracle:

Since the establishment of our state, the distinction between lord and subject has been fixed. Never has there been an occasion when a subject was made lord. The throne of Heavenly Sun Succession shall be given to one of the imperial lineage; wicked persons should immediately be swept away.

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1 代縁
2 恭謙
3 称徳, 和気の清麻呂
4 Shoku Nihongi [SN] 続日本紀, Jingo Keiun 3.9.25.

Shoku Nihongi is the second of the Six National Histories (Rikkokushi 六国史) and was completed in 797. The work is in 40 volumes and was compiled under the direction of Sugano no Mamichi 宮野宗道 and Fujiwara no Tsugunawa 藤原继縁. The first entry corresponds to 22 August 697, and the last, 16 January 792. Although the language of the narrative is Chinese, the imperial edicts were written in semmyōgaki 宣命書き, which used man'yōgana 万葉仮名 for particles and inflected endings. I have used the following editions in translating the entries relating to Hachiman: Kuroita Katsumi 黒板勝美, ed., Shoku Nihongi, Kokushi Taikei Kankōkai, 1955, and Hiraizumi Kiyoshi 平泉隆, ed., Shoku Nihongi, Dai-Nihon Bunko, 1939. The latter edition contains a complete interlinear gloss, but only the first half of the work has been published.

Although the priest took his vengeance upon Kiyomaro by exiling him to Osumi, Dōkyō’s own power soon dissolved, for the empress died in the following year and Dōkyō was banished from the capital. He died three years later while serving in a lowly post at a temple in Shimotsuke.

The Dōkyō incident marks a colorful and crucial point in Japanese history, and can be fruitfully studied in many different ways. One might analyze the relations of the great clans of the Nara period and the contribution of factional struggles to Dōkyō’s rise; one might explore the pattern of female rule in early Japanese history and its demise in the Dōkyō incident;⁵ the coup attempt might be studied solely out of fascination for the intriguing personalities involved. There are myriad possibilities, but the present article is concerned with the doctrinal threat which Dōkyō’s rise posed to the legitimacy of the Japanese imperial family. The primary focus of this inquiry will be an examination of the participation of the Hachiman belief in this crisis of legitimacy. The discussion will center on the question of how Hachiman, a formerly obscure god, came to be associated with political events of the Nara period and will attempt to deal with the problem of the significance of the deity’s role in this crucial chapter of Japanese history.

Who, then, was Hachiman, a deity so powerful that he could pronounce on the succession to the imperial throne? Why was he so greatly revered that it was necessary for imperial messengers to travel all the way from the political center of power in Nara to the northeast corner of Kyushu to ascertain his will? As one writer asks rhetorically, ‘Weren’t there any gods in Nara?'⁶ Hachiman is commonly identified as the ‘Shintō god of war’. This, for example, is the definition in Robert K. Reischauer’s reference work Early Japanese History, and he cites the worship of Hachiman by Minamoto generals.⁷ The Minamoto cult has likely been the most important source for this martial identification of Hachiman—when Bashō visited a Hachiman shrine at Kurobane, his thoughts turned to the exploits of Nasu no Yoichi Munetaka, a Minamoto retainer who called on Hachiman at the Battle of Yashima in the final stages of the Gempei War.⁸

Japanese scholars, however, have looked beyond this medieval phase of the Hachiman cult and begun the task of interpreting earlier stages of the belief. A number of Western writers have also discovered the complexity of the faith. U. A. Casal, despite the title of his article (‘Hachiman, der Kriegsgott Japans’), concluded after a brief historical sketch and examination of the popular cult that the war-god aspect was only part of the picture—Hachiman was to a great extent a protector and preserver of life in non-military contexts.⁹ (Casal found, inciden-

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⁵ After Shōtoku, no woman occupied the throne until the 17th century. The last two empresses in their own right were Meishō (r. 1629–43) and Go-Sakuramachi (r. 1762–70).
tally, that Hachiman’s powers are so broad that women bring infants to the shrine to pray for protection against intestinal worms.) Jean Herbert, proceeding from the present-day identification of Hachiman with Ōjin and Jingū at most shrines, discussed the Kojiki and Nihongi legends of these sovereigns.¹⁰

The resulting picture of Hachiman is one of an amorphous deity with myriad functions, and certainly this image contributes little to an understanding of the broader political significance of Hachiman in Japanese history. It is hoped that confining this essay primarily to an exploration of Hachiman as perceived by the Nara court will help to produce a clearer image of the deity and his political functions in the eighth century.

**The Origin of the Hachiman Cult**

Shoku Nihongi is the earliest official history to mention Hachiman; the name appears in neither Kojiki nor Nihongi. The Hachiman of Shoku Nihongi is enshrined at Usa¹¹ in Buzen province on the northeast coast of Kyushu. Unfortunately this chronicle contains no account of the foundation of the Usa shrine and the earliest surviving legend of its origin dates from the ninth century.

This legend concerns the first manifestation of Hachiman and appears in *Usa (Jōwa) Engi*,¹² compiled by the governor of Buzen in 844. According to this account, an old blacksmith lived in the late years of Kimmеi’s reign (late sixth century) near a lake below Mt Ōmoto in the Usa region. He was visited by a man named Ōmiwa,¹³ who stayed there for three years, spending his time in prayer. Then, in the thirty-seventh year of Kimmеi’s era, a golden hawk appeared to Ōmiwa. Swiftly the hawk transformed itself into a dove, which in turn changed into a young boy, who announced: ‘I am the sixteenth human emperor, Homuda Tennō, the broad-bannered Hachiman-maro.’¹⁴

This account does not tell us much about the origin of the cult in question, and it is not surprising that Japanese scholars have doubts as to the significance of the myth. One authority suggests that the dating of the manifestation in Kimmеi’s reign may connote an early association with Buddhism;¹⁵ it is not generally believed that the figure of Ōjin (Homuda Tennō) was associated with the Hachiman belief from its beginnings. Beyond the point that the references to the smith and to the possession of a child by a god suggest a shamanistic origin of the cult,¹⁶ there is probably little to be gained from an examination of this tale.

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¹¹ 宇佐
¹² 字佐 (承和) 緣起
¹³ 大神
¹⁵ ‘Homuda Tenno’ 興田天皇 in the text refers to Emperor Ōjin.
However, within the last decade a Japanese scholar has completed an extensive investigation into the origins of Hachiman, and the results of his study will be summarized briefly here. In *Hachiman Shinkōshi no Kenkyū*, Nakano Hatayoshi proceeded from the premise that the development of Shinto cannot be separated from the *shizoku*17 society which produced it. Accordingly he studied the histories of the *uiji*18 which are known from ninth-century documents to have been connected with Hachiman and attempted to produce a clearer picture of the early development of the cult. Nakano believes that the Hachiman faith did not originate exclusively at Usa, but was rather the result of a process of amalgamation of the *uijigami* beliefs of various clans which finally found its center at the present shrine in Usa. The three clans whose deities were the principal constituents of this amalgam were the Usa clan, the Karajima19 clan, and the Ōmiwa clan.

The Usa clan itself was the result of a union of clans, the most important of which was the Ama20 clan, which had worshipped a divine dragon king. A reverence for this deity was common among maritime peoples along the coast of Kyushu, but what distinguished the deity of the Usa clan was the animistic worship of three megaliths on the Maki peak of Mt Ōmoto. Although this would seem to indicate a phallic cult, the Usa clan god was actually identified as a female deity and had a maritime association (the rocks being used as guides to shipping.) The area occupied by the Usa clan corresponded roughly to what became the southern half of the ancient province of Buzen and was termed ‘Yamakuni’ in the clan histories.

Nakano believes that the Karajima clan originated from a group of immigrants from Korea who worshipped a Korean deity. This tribe possessed bronze weapons and its religion was characterized by shamanistic elements such as the employment of *miko*,21 or mediums. The area which they originally occupied seems to have been the northern area of Buzen, identified as ‘Toyokuni’, but Nakano thinks that sometime between the third and sixth centuries they pushed south and conquered the Usa people. Resulting from the Karajima move was a political union of the two major clans of the ‘Yama’ and ‘Toyo’ regions.

At this point it is necessary to digress and comment on the name ‘Hachiman’. The ancient Japanese pronunciation of the characters was ‘yawata’; this at any rate was the reading Motoori Norinaga gave them when he transcribed the imperial edicts of *Shoku Nihongi*.22 The characters mean literally ‘eight banners’, and there are later legends which relate that at the founding of the Usa shrine eight banners descended from heaven and planted themselves on the roof of the shrine. Casal believes that the ‘banners’ refer to a Chinese system of banner standards for troops and hence have a military significance,23 but the orthodox view

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17 氏族
18 氏
19 辛嶋
20 海
21 巫女

23 Casal, p. 1.
is that the name is derived from an ancient place name and perhaps has an agricultural connotation derived from *hatake* (‘field’). Miyaji Naokazu suggests *yakita*; Casal suggests *yahata*.24

Nakano adheres to the place-name theory but offers a rather novel explanation. As we have seen, the union of the Karajima and Usa clans resulted in a political union of the Yama and Toyo regions; this union also entailed a merger of the *ujigami* of the two clans. The god who symbolized this political union, then, was ‘yamatoyo’, from which was eventually derived ‘yawata’, later read ‘Hachiman’.

Here it would be useful to summarize Nakano’s picture of the early Hachiman as existing about the mid-sixth century, by which time the first shrine had been established at Usa. The earliest phase of the faith had been a primitive animistic religion with maritime connotations, involving a female deity. This belief was overlaid by a shamanistic cult brought from Korea. The amalgam of beliefs was reflected in the new deity, Hachiman, who symbolized the political union between two clans. Associated with the cult was the memory of the conquest of one clan by the other.

It is interesting to compare this picture with that presented by another legend of the origin of the god, a legend which dates from medieval times. This tradition relates the beginnings of the cult to the *Kojiki* story of ‘Fire-Shine’ and ‘Fire-Fade’. According to this interpretation, Hikohohonobi25 represented the imperial ancestral clan in Kyushu; the Dragon King God of the Sea symbolized the *Watatsumi*26 clan, a maritime people living along the coast. In this account, Hikohohonobi married Toyotamahime,27 the daughter of the Sea God, and the resulting composite deity, including both figures, was Hachiman, who thus represented the union of the imperial and maritime tribes.28 As can be seen, the myth features the maritime, feminine, and composite characteristics of the deity which Nakano deduced from separate sources.

The third clan contributing to the Hachiman cult was the Ōmiwa. *Usa (Jōwa) Engi* records a journey by a certain Ōmiwa from Yamato to Usa, where he arrived about the end of the sixth century.29 Nakano’s theory is that a branch of the Yamato Ōmiwa was dispatched to Kyushu to help maintain Yamato’s grip on the area during a time of trouble both at court (the Soga-Mononobe struggle) and in Korean relations. According to Nakano, the original Ōmiwa clan of Yamato had close relations with the Ōjin/Jingū cult, and the Ōmiwa introduced this cult to Usa.

Ōjin incidentally, was the fifteenth or sixteenth emperor (in the traditional genealogy), depending on whether his mother Jingū is counted as empress or regent. Although Jingū is described in *Nihongi* as carrying out the conquest of

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24 Miyaji, p. 15; Casal, p. 3.
25 彥火々出見
26 西津見
27 豊玉姬
28 Miyaji, p. 17; Saida Moriuji 厳田司氏,

29 Recounted in Nakano, p. 137.
Korea, Ōjin appears as a relatively pacific emperor whose only warlike attribute was the fleshy pad on his arm which resembled an archer’s arm-guard. Perhaps his most notable feat was to remain in his mother’s womb for twelve months while she completed her conquest of Korea.\(^{30}\)

As has been noted above, it is not generally believed that Ōjin was associated with the Hachiman cult from its very beginning, but there are various views concerning the origins of this connection. Nakano’s explanation as to how and when the link began is not without problems. He admits that the Jingū cult grew up over a wide area of north Kyushu, probably during the fourth to sixth centuries in a context of difficulties with the Korean peninsula, but his premise constrains him to find a specific clan which might have brought the faith to Usa. Another problem is that, as Nakano acknowledges, the only documents relating Hachiman to Ōjin date from Heian times.\(^{31}\)

It would be fascinating to speculate about the meaning of the Ōjin aspect of the Hachiman belief, especially since some scholars have linked Ōjin with a fourth-century invasion of Japan from Korea and named him the actual founder of the Japanese imperial institution.\(^{32}\) Nevertheless, since Shoku Nihongi contains no reference to Hachiman as associated with Ōjin, we must conclude that the Nara court’s view of Hachiman was not colored by the Ōjin cult. For the purposes of the present article the issue of the date and significance of the Hachiman-Ōjin union must thus remain a moot question.

**Hachiman in Early Nara Times**

The first reference to Hachiman in Shoku Nihongi is dated Tempyō 9 (737), when offerings were dispatched to five shrines on the occasion of friction with Silla.\(^{33}\) The Hachiman shrine then proceeded on a meteoric path, gaining in wealth and power until, within the space of about thirty years, the god was called on to make its pronouncement on the imperial succession. Our first problem concerns the court’s sudden attention to a previously obscure shrine. Why did Hachiman rise so abruptly to national prominence?

A fundamental reason involves the significance of the Usa region itself. Usa is mentioned in Nihongi in connection with the legend of Jimmu’s drive to the east, the chronicle relating that, during Jimmu’s campaign, the expedition paused in Usa and was entertained by the local nobility. Then, by imperial command, a princess of the region was married to the emperor’s attendant minister, who was an ancestor of the Nakatomi.\(^{34}\) This passage would seem to indicate an early link of some sort with the Yamato court, or at least that Usa was an important local center. More significant was Usa’s position in regard to the importation of conti-

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\(^{31}\) Nakano, p. 30.  
\(^{33}\) *SN*, Tempō 9.4.1.  
\(^{34}\) Aston, *Nihongi*, i, p. 112.
nental culture; a coastal area in northern Kyushu with a good harbor, it was certainly in an excellent position to receive and transmit new cultural impulses to the court.

There is in fact evidence that the Buzen region was known at Nara for a unique and powerful religious culture, tinged with Buddhism from an early period. Nihongi, for example, records that in 587 a priest from Toyokuni was invited to court.\(^\text{35}\) In the early seventh century an Usa priest named Hōren, who was renowned for his healing abilities, visited the court and was rewarded by the emperor.\(^\text{36}\) Nakano holds that there was a difference between the miko of Buzen and those from elsewhere in Japan. The unique quality of the Buzen religion, he suggests, was due to its combination of Korean, Buddhist, and native beliefs, and it was perceived at Nara as potent magic.\(^\text{37}\)

The location of Usa and its peculiar and prestigious religious forms were the broader reasons for the rise to national attention of the Hachiman cult, but there were more specific factors. One of these was a growing integration of Kyushu into national political life as a result of the centralizing trends of the Taika and Taihō reforms. The Taihō code provided that appointment to the post of Dazai Sochi\(^\text{38}\) (Governor General of Kyushu) entailed advancement to the third rank, and his holder ranked just below the Chūnagon\(^\text{39}\) in the political hierarchy.\(^\text{40}\) The position was thus valuable to a clan striving for supremacy at court, and in fact the Fujiwara gained possession of the post in 732; in that year one of Fujiwara Fuhito’s sons, Muchimaro,\(^\text{41}\) the Dainagon, was appointed to serve concurrently as Dazai Sochi. The Sochi’s area of responsibility included the administration of Kyushu shrines.

A second factor was the role of the Hachiman shrine during the Hayato\(^\text{42}\) disturbances which troubled Kyushu particularly from the Wadō (708–714) to Yōrō (717–723) periods. The most important event was a Hayato rising in Ösumi and Hyūga in 720. Shoku Nihongi records that this rebellion occurred and that it was suppressed,\(^\text{43}\) but makes no reference to Hachiman. Other Nara documents, however, note in their report of the incident that prayers were made at the Hachiman shrine and that the priests led a divine army to subjugate the Hayato. One scholar concludes from this that the Dazaifu prayed to Hachiman in wartime as an important local deity.\(^\text{44}\)

It was in fact to Hachiman as a war god that the Nara court made its first appeals. As noted above, in Tempyō 9 offenses on the part of Silla were reported to the Hachiman shrine (actually the text mentions ‘the two shrines’—a reference to both the Hachiman shrine proper and that of Himegami,\(^\text{45}\) the attendant

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\(^{35}\) Aston, Nihongi, ii, p. 110.
\(^{37}\) Nakano, p. 112.
\(^{38}\) 大宰帥
\(^{39}\) 中納言
\(^{40}\) G. B. Sansom, ‘Early Japanese Law and Administration (Part II)’, in TASI, 2nd series, xi (1934), pp. 118–9.
\(^{41}\) 森原不比等, 武智麻呂
\(^{42}\) 华人
\(^{43}\) SN, Yōrō 4.3.4.
\(^{44}\) Yokota Ken’ichi 横田鑑一, Dōkyō, Yoshi-kawa Kōbunkan, 1960, p. 188.
\(^{45}\) 比咩神

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female deity) as well as to four other major shrines. Three years later the occasion for prayer to Hachiman was a revolt by Fujiwara Hirotsugu. Hirotsugu had been the governor of Yamato, but two years before had been demoted to the post of Dazai Shōni (vice-Governor of Kyushu) as a result of factional struggles at court. In 740 he raised a revolt and in response the court issued an edict to the general Azumabito ordering him to pray to Hachiman. Azumabito then led about 15,000 troops against Hirotsugu, who tried to flee to Silla, but was forced back by storms, captured, and executed. In the following year, Shoku Nihongi records, gifts of land, servants, horses, and Buddhist sutras were made to the shrine and a pagoda was built, presumably in thanksgiving for the subjugation of Hirotsugu.

Thus the court’s first appeals to Hachiman were made in time of war. Yet Hirotsugu’s revolt was the last instance in the Nara period in which such prayers were addressed to Hachiman, and so we can hardly conclude that the war-god aspect was the primary significance of the deity during this period; nor do these early prayers to Hachiman shed much light on the god’s later importance in the Dōkyō incident. We can summarize by observing that the importance of the Usa region, its unique religious forms, and its growing contact with Yamato helped propel Hachiman to the court’s attention, and that the court first regarded Hachiman at least in part as a war god. But further developments in other areas must be described in order to provide the proper context for the story of Dōkyō’s intervention in government.

**Hachiman and the Construction of the Daibutsu**

The construction of Tōdaiji, its Daibutsu, and the attendant system of provincial monasteries and nunneries was a chapter of major significance in Nara history. James Murdoch observed,

...it has often struck us that an ingenious writer might well contrive to mass a fairly complete account of eighth century Japan around the story of this Nara Daibutsu. For in one way or another it appears to come into contact with almost every phase of the contemporary national activity.

For the purpose of this article, however, the principal interest lies in the fact that it was Hachiman’s divine aid in the construction of the Daibutsu which brought the Shinto deity into intimate association with the imperial institution and which catapulted it from the ranks of regional gods to the status of the most revered divinity in Japan.

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46 SN, Tempyō 9.4.1.  
47 藤原通嗣  
48 大宰少弐  
49 東人  
50 SN, Tempyō 12.10.9.  
51 SN, Tempyō 13.3*24. The asterisk in dates refers to intercalary months.  
Although we cannot attempt a full account of the political events which formed the background for the construction of the Daibutsu, we must describe briefly the factional strife which immediately preceded it. The most important aspect of the situation seems to have been a hiatus in Fujiwara power and the entry to court of a Buddhist party.53

The Fujiwara ancestor Nakatomi no Kamatari, who had come to power in the events of the Taika period, had married his grandchildren into the imperial family, and Emperor Shōmu had not only a Fujiwara mother but also a Fujiwara wife. Both mother and wife were daughters of Fuhito, and the ascent of Shōmu to the throne and the designation of his Fujiwara wife as Empress Kōmyō aided in the establishment of Fujiwara hegemony in the period from about 729 to 733. The most powerful figures in the Fujiwara clan were Fuhito’s four sons (one of whom, Muchimaro, we have noted serving as Dainagon and concurrently as Dazai Sochū).

The newly established Fujiwara power was not to last. In 735 reports reached the court that an epidemic was raging in Kyushu and by 737 the plague had penetrated to Nara. Despite the court’s order that sutras be read throughout the country as a prophylactic measure, many of the nobility, including Fuhito’s four sons, succumbed to the plague. Significantly, however, the emperor did not fall ill, and one imperial prince who had been stricken recovered. This was attributed to the ministrations of the Sōjō (Abbot) Gembō,54 and the abbot’s success aided his political fortunes enormously.

The Fujiwara control had been greatly weakened and in the aftermath of the catastrophe Tachibana no Moroe55 emerged as the head of government, holding the title Dainagon and later Sadaijin.56 Gembō was closely associated with Moroe and was one of the leading forces in the Tachibana clique. A priest of the Hossō school, Gembō had studied in China for eighteen years and he is credited with establishing upon his return the Naidōjō,57 an imitation of the T’ang office of Buddhist priests serving in the palace. The Naidōjō was the first permanent institutional entry which Buddhism gained to the imperial palace and it was to be a key factor in the later rise of Dōkyō.

Thus with the hiatus in Fujiwara authority a Buddhist party became an influential political force at court. The construction of the system of provincial temples may have been to some degree due to Gembō’s instigation, although Gyōgi was certainly more closely associated with the Daibutsu project. But Shōmu personally was likely the major force behind the temples’ establishment. Although the seeds for such a system had been sown in the previous century when Temmu ordered

53 The story of this factional strife is readily available in general secondary histories. I have relied on the accounts in Aoki Kazuo 青木和夫, Nara no Miyako 奈良の都 (Nihon no Rekishī 2), Chūō Kōronsha, 1965, and Okada Akio 岡田章雄, Asuka to Nara 飛鳥と奈良 (Nihon no Rekishī 2), Yomiuri Shimbunsha, 1960.  
54 備中正敏  
55 榊野光  
56 左大臣  
57 内藤瑞
Buddhist images placed in houses throughout the provinces, Shōmu laid the actual foundation of the network in 728. In that year he ordered ten scrolls of the *Konkōmyō* Sutra dispatched to each province to have them read for the peace of the nation; the doctrine which undergirded the system was the belief that the Guardian Kings would protect those countries which revered the Buddhist teaching. Then, in 741, an edict was proclaimed: in each province a monastery and nunnery were to be erected, the former to be called *Konkōmyō Shitenno Gokoku no Tera* and the latter *Hokke Genzai no Tera*. The collective term for the system was *Kokubunmichi*. Each temple was assigned sustenance land and the sutras were to be read every month for the peace of the people and the protection of the nation.

Then, in 743, an edict was issued ordering the construction of a great image of Roshana Buddha at Tōdaiji, which was to be the capstone of the *Kokubunmichi* system. Shōmu had previously visited a temple in Kōchi where he had viewed a statue of Roshana which had been built as a result of spontaneous communal action. The factional strife at court probably weighed heavily on Shōmu’s mind as he ordered the image built, for his edict called for the ‘cooperation of all, mutually taking counsel, in order that all might attain enlightenment.’ To that end the monk Gyōki began to make his rounds to solicit contributions, no matter how humble, from the common people. The hierarchical network of temples itself probably contributed to a greater awareness of the ideal of state centralization. Tōdaiji in the capital, with its system of lesser provincial temples, was associated with the symbolism of the Daibutsu itself—the Buddha was enthroned on a great lotus, upon whose petals sat miniature Buddhas.

After numerous failures the casting of the Daibutsu was accomplished in 749. Although the final dedication was not made until 752, the success of the casting was marked by a great ceremony at Tōdaiji, which Shōmu, now the retired emperor, Kōmyō, and their daughter Kōken, the reigning empress, all attended. An edict was read thanking Hachiman for his aid and awarding the god the highest court rank. Precisely how Hachiman was thought to have helped in the undertaking is not clear; Nakano believes it had to do with the discovery of gold for the gilding in Mutsu, and there is evidence that the Usa shrine sent large monetary contribution for the project.

At any rate, the *Shoku Nihongi* record demonstrates the extraordinary reverence shown at Tōdaiji to this previously obscure god, and it is clear that Hachiman was receiving increased attention from the capital. In 745 offerings were made to the Usa shrine and seven images of the Yakushi Buddha were erected there. The occasion was an illness of the emperor and offerings were made to many other shrines as well. Three years later, promotions of Usa shrine officials were an-

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58 金光明経
59 金光明四天王護国寺，法華滅罪寺，The first term might be translated as ‘Temple for the Protection of the Nation by the Golden Light Sutra and the Four Heavenly Kings’; the second as, ‘Temple for the Extinction of Sin by the Lotus Sutra’.
60 国分二寺
61 Nakano, p. 165; Yokota, p. 198.
nounced. First, two shrine maidens of the Ōmiwa clan were raised from the eighth rank to the fifth; then, in 749, one of these women, the Negi ('Priestess') Ōmiwa Morime and the Kanzukasa ('Shrine Official') Ōmiwa Tamaro were both granted the kabane of Ason. The reason for the promotions is not stated, although it may well have been thanks for Hachiman's divine aid to the Daibutsu project, for which the god himself was rewarded about a month afterward.

Later that year the report reached Nara that the Great God Hachiman had announced that he would proceed to the capital. Accordingly, courtiers were dispatched to aid in the journey, and they were men of relatively high rank, a sangi of the fourth rank and his retainer of the fifth. Moreover, a hundred soldiers were called out in each province adjoining the route to escort the god. The killing of living things was prohibited in those provinces; wine and meat were not to be consumed by the escorts, and the route was to be kept clean of defilement. After about a month, the god and his attendants approached the capital. To welcome them, about one hundred courtiers were dispatched; half of them were of the fifth rank and twenty were from the various guard units in the capital. Hachiman was enshrined in a newly constructed hall, and forty priests carried out the Buddhist Rite of Repentance there for a week.

At the end of the month, the great ceremony was held at Tōdaiji, and Shoku Nihongi records it as follows:

The nun and priestess of the Great God Hachiman, Ason Ōmiwa Morime, worshipped at Tōdaiji. (Her palanquin was of a purple color, like that of the imperial palanquin.) The empress and the retired emperor and empress also proceeded to the temple. On this day, great numbers of government officials and various members of the aristocracy all gathered at the temple. Five thousand priests prayed, performed ceremonies of veneration of the Buddha, and read sutras. The music of Great T'ang, Palhae, and Wu and the Gosechi and Kume dances, were performed. Then the Great God Hachiman was awarded the first rank, and Himegami the second. Sadaijin Tachibana Moroe presented an edict and read it to the god:

The sovereign emperor proclaims, saying:

In a recent year, We worshipped the Roshana Buddha at Chishikiji in the Agata district of Köchi. Because we desired to construct such an image and yet were unable to do so, we appealed to the Great God Hachiman of the Broad Ways who dwells in the Usa district of Buzen province. The god said:

We, leading and inviting
The gods of heaven and earth,
Shall certainly accomplish this thing . . .
We will turn water into steam for the casting;
We will merge our body with the grass, trees and earth.
It shall be done without hindrance.

Because of the proclamation of the god, We were overjoyed, and We have been

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63 SN, Tempyō 20.8.17.
64 "神宜大神柱女, 生神大神田麻吕"
65 SN, Tempyō Shōhō 1.11.1.
66 SN, Tempyō Shōhō 1.11.19 & 24, and 1.12.18.
67 "五顏, 久米"
able to accomplish this work. And now, although it is with awe and trepidation, we confer a cap [of the first rank].

The nun Morime was awarded the junior fourth rank, lower grade. Kanzukasa Ason Ōmiwa Tamaro was awarded the outer junior fifth rank, lower grade. Four thousand sustenance households, one hundred male servants, and one hundred female servants were bestowed on Tōdaiji. Also, those involved in building the temple were given rank according to their labor.68

Here we should emphasize again the precipitous nature of the rise in the court’s esteem for Hachiman. Hachiman, who had received no notice in the first official histories compiled in the Nara period, and who was the recipient of offerings from the court for the first time in 737, ascended in the space of little over a decade to the position of the most revered native god in Japan. By 750 the priestess of Usa held the fourth court rank, while the highest official of the shrine of Amaterasu at Ise remained in the fifth.69

It is not surprising, then, that the shrine continued its close association with affairs at court. In the year after the casting of the Daibutsu, the Usa shrine received large grants of rank land and sustenance households.70 In 756, upon the fatal illness of the retired Emperor Shōmu, offerings were again dispatched to the Hachiman shrine.71 But perhaps the most significant feature in the history of the shrine during the decade between the Tōdaiji ceremony and the beginning of Dōkyō’s rise to power was the increasing political link between the capital and Usa.

In 750 a rescript was issued at court announcing a promotion of Fujiwara Otomaro72 from the senior fifth rank to the junior third and appointing him to the post of Dazai Sochi. This, said the proclamation, was done according to the instruction of the Great God Hachiman.73 There are a number of important points here. First, Otomaro was the brother of Nakamaro,74 who at this time was the driving force behind the reassertion of the clan’s power at court. Second, we should note the importance which factions at Nara attached to the post of Dazai Sochi (we have seen earlier Fujiwara serving concurrently as Dainagon and Dazai Sochi). Finally, we should remark on the use of Hachiman in legitimizing an appointment to political office. Unfortunately nothing is known of the details of the Usa medium’s trances and pronouncements, whether, like the Pythia at Delphi, she chewed laurel leaves or prophesied while seated on a tripod. It is apparent, however, that the Kanzukasa (in this case Ōmiwa Tamaro) served as an interpreter of the words of the medium (Ōmiwa Morime) and hence had a great power over these pronouncements.

Thus the elevation of Otomaro at precisely the time that his brother was reasserting Fujiwara power should raise our suspicions, and it is not a great surprise to find, in the year 755, a notice in Shoku Nihongi that Tamaro and a priest of

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68 sn, Tempyō Shōhō 1.12.27.  69 Nakano, p. 112.
70 sn, Tempyō Shōhō 2.9.29.  71 sn, Tempyō Shōhō 8.4.29.  72 藤原乙麻呂
73 sn, Tempyō Shōhō 2.10.1.  74 仲麻呂
Yakushiji in Nara ‘conspired together and practised sorcery.’ The details of the plot are not given, but as a result both Tamaro and Morime were stripped of their court rank and exiled.\(^7^5\) The position of Kanzukasa reverted to the Usa clan,\(^7^6\) and in the following year Hachiman delivered a fascinating oracle: ‘We do not desire that false pronouncements be made of Our will. There is no use for the excess lands and households that have been received, and they are as though abandoned on a mountain. They should be returned to the court, and only the permanent shrine lands should be retained. . . .’\(^7^7\)

In the decade preceding Dōkyō’s rise to power, then, there were increasing links between Usa and Nara: a Fujiwara’s promotion was dictated by an oracle from Usa, and a shrine official conspired with a Nara priest. Although the conspiracy at the shrine was exposed, a precedent had been set for Hachiman’s will to be used as a sanction for rise to political office.

We have remarked on the Fujiwara resurgence during this period, and we should give an outline of the political events of the 750s. The reassertion of Fujiwara power began with the illness and retirement of Emperor Shōmu and the accession of his daughter Kōken in 749. The real power, however, lay with the retired empress, Shōmu’s Fujiwara wife Kōmyō. Soon after Kōken’s enthronement, Kōmyō changed the name of her household office to Shibi Chūdat;\(^7^8\) she appointed her nephew Fujiwara Nakamaro as its head, and he began a reorganization which was to make the office the most powerful organ of government in the 750s. The nominal head of government was Sadaijin Tachibana no Moroe, but as Nakamaro’s power waxed, that of Moroe waned. In 755 he was forced from office, and a planned revolt by his son two years later was thwarted.

After Shōmu’s death in 757, Nakamaro and Kōmyō were left without effective rivals for power. They set aside the prince whom Shōmu had designated as heir to Kōken and made Prince Ōi,\(^7^9\) to whom Nakamaro had married his daughter, Crown Prince in his stead. In 758 Kōken was forced to abdicate and Prince Ōi took the throne as Emperor Junnin; he was to be nothing more than a puppet of Nakamaro, who received new grants of land and the name Emi Oshikatsu.\(^8^0\) In 760 Oshikatsu was awarded the first rank, junior grade, which not even his grandfather Fujiito or his father Muchimaro had been able to attain. But his triumph was short lived, for later in the year his main pillar of support, Empress Dowager Kōmyō, died.

Until this time there had been no great friction between the retired empress Kōken and the Nakamaro-Kōmyō party. With the death of her mother, however, Kōken was to assert herself. In 761, while Kōken was residing at the detached palace of Hora in Ōmi, she fell ill and was attended by the priest Dōkyō. In the following year she returned to Nara and issued a decree announcing that henceforth

\(^{7^5}\) sn, Tempyō Shōhō 6.11.24 & 27.  
\(^{7^6}\) Nakano, p. 164.  
\(^{7^7}\) sn, Tempyō Shōhō 7.3.28.  
\(^{7^8}\) 柴微中台  
\(^{7^9}\) 大炊  
\(^{8^0}\) 怖美押勝
she would deal with all important matters of state.\textsuperscript{81} Although he did not actually abdicate, Junnin took priestly vows and retired to a temple.

**Dōkyō's Attempt on the Throne**

Having recounted briefly the political events and the developments in the Hachiman cult which were the prelude to Dōkyō's rise to power, we should now retrace our steps to discuss the question of Dōkyō's antecedents and early life.\textsuperscript{82} Although there was a tradition dating from the late Heian period that Dōkyō was the grandson of Emperor Tenji, he was actually born into a relatively low-ranking clan, the Yuge no Murai of Kōchi province. In pre-Taika times the Yuge were apparently a collateral of the Mononobe, probably serving as the supervisors of the *be* which produced bows for the Mononobe.

Although little is recorded of Dōkyō's early life, we know that he had a Confucian teacher and that he was later a pupil of the Abbot Gien.\textsuperscript{83} Gien was a senior priest of the Hossō school who, after studying in China, became the teacher of such prominent Nara monks as Gembō, Gyōgi, and Rōben;\textsuperscript{84} Dōkyō was a pupil of his later years. The notice of Dōkyō's death in *Shoku Nihongi* relates that he was well versed in Sanskrit;\textsuperscript{85} this was relatively rare among Japanese monks and indicates that he was intellectually in the front ranks of Nara Buddhists. It is probable that he studied it under Gien.

*Shoku Nihongi* also records that Dōkyō was known for his meditative practice. Meditation was a relatively common feature of official Nara Buddhism and there were meditation halls at Gengōji and Daianji, but there was another, similar type of discipline which was less approved by the Buddhist establishment. This was the practice of isolated sitters whose aim was not so much the attainment of nirvana as the acquisition of supernatural powers. This 'shamanistic Buddhism',\textsuperscript{86} associated with the famous Nara figure En no Gyōja,\textsuperscript{87} aimed at the mastery of powers of healing and control over nature by the practice of austerities in the mountains; Mt Katsuragi was a famous center for such disciplines, and both En no Gyōja and Dōkyō stayed there. Another aspect of Dōkyō's Buddhist education was his study of esoteric sutras which dealt with magical spells and astrology. Dōkyō's Buddhism, then, although including an orthodox strand, gives strong evidence of heavy influence by the magical practices of an earlier phase of Japanese religion.

\textsuperscript{81} sn, Tempyō Hōji 6.6.3.
\textsuperscript{82} The material in this section (with the indicated exceptions) is drawn from Yokota, Dōkyō.
\textsuperscript{83} 義清
\textsuperscript{84} 良辨
\textsuperscript{85} sn, Hōki 3.4.7. 'There was a report from Shimotsuke province that Dōkyō, steward for the construction of Yakushiji, had died.'
\textsuperscript{86} The phrase is Joseph Kitagawa's, in his *Religion in Japanese History*, Columbia U.P., 1966, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{87} 役行者
Dōkyō first appears in the official records as an acolyte serving under Rōben at Tōdaiji in 748 and it was perhaps through Rōben’s influence that he gained entry to the Naidō in the early 750s. He developed a reputation as a healer and, as has been noted, it was in this capacity that he was called upon to minister to the retired Empress Kōken in 761. At the time the empress was about 45 years old and Dōkyō was in his fifties.

A scandalous tradition grew up in Heian and medieval times concerning the relations between Dōkyō and the empress, but Shoku Nihongi tells us only that Dōkyō received the ‘favor’ or ‘affection’ (chōkō) of the empress. Specimens of the calligraphy of both parties have been preserved and modern scholars assert that Dōkyō’s hand shows signs of a vigorous and bold nature. The four characters which remain from Kōken’s hand allegedly demonstrate strength and an ‘awe-inspiring gravity’. Yokota has concluded from this that, whatever the degree of intimacy in their relations, the empress was not swept off her feet by Dōkyō’s charm, but rather that their relationship was due to the mutual attraction of two strong natures.

As noted above, the retired empress returned to Nara in 762. In an edict she decreed that the reigning Emperor Junnin would thenceforth deal only with ceremonial matters, while she herself would have jurisdiction in major affairs of state and over rewards and punishments. The same edict has reference to friction between Kōken and Junnin, which was apparently caused by disagreement on the propriety of her relations with Dōkyō. The following year Dōkyō was appointed Shōsozu, the third rank in the ecclesiastical hierarchy after Sōjō and Daisozu. Dōkyō’s appointment meant the displacement of Jikun, a priest who was an intimate of Oshikatsu (Nakamaro).

The death of Kōmyō and Junnin’s retirement to a monastery had been grave blows to Oshikatsu’s power, and Dōkyō’s ousting of Jikun is a sign of Oshikatsu’s decline. However, Oshikatsu retained sufficient leverage to engineer the assignment, in 764, of family members to the headship of one of the guard units in the capital and certain other strategic positions. This maneuvering proved a portent of Oshikatsu’s intentions, for later in the year he gathered troops and started an Insurrection. The attempt failed and he fled to Echizen, where he was killed.

About a month after the failure of Oshikatsu’s coup, troops surrounded the temple where Junnin was in retirement and, accused of complicity in the revolt, he was taken off to exile in Awaji, where he died in the following year at the age of 33. Kōken, now a nun, reascended the throne as Empress Shōtoku; an edict was issued in which the argument was made that an ordained monarch should have an ordained Chief Minister and accordingly Dōkyō was made Daijin Zenji. This appointment signified his entry into the political hierarchy proper, in contrast to his earlier post in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In the following year, 765, Dōkyō

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88 龍辛. SN. Hōki 3.4.7.  
89 Yokota, pp. 101–9.  
90 Sansom, ‘Imperial Edicts,’ p. 34.  
91 少僖都. 大僖都  
92 慈訓  
93 大臣禅師
was made Daijō Daijin Zenji;94 Daijō Daijin was the highest bureaucratic office in the land and it has been seldom filled throughout history.

It is significant that, just as an earlier hiatus in Fujiwara power was followed by the entrance of a Buddhist party to court, the demise of Oshikatsu, which began with the death of Kōmyō, was followed by Dōkyō’s rise. Oshikatsu’s elder brother, Udaijin Toyonari,95 who died shortly after Dōkyō’s appointment to the highest office, was replaced by another grandson of Fuhito, Nagate.96 Nagate, however, was unable to exert effective influence during Dōkyō’s regime.

After Dōkyō’s rise to political authority, certain patterns of policy emerged, the most notable of which was the active propagation of Buddhism. The earlier Nara period had, of course, witnessed striking advances in the establishment of state Buddhism, but Dōkyō greatly accelerated this trend. Certain changes were relatively minor: for example, a decree was issued which forbade the raising of falcons and dogs for hunting, and the presentation of meat and fish for the emperor’s table was prohibited. More significant was the acceleration of the construction of the Kokubunji; these were to have been financed with monies from local sustenance lands, but there were apparently cases where provincial officials had appropriated the revenue and were delaying building operations. Allied to this was the policy of founding new temples, the greatest of which was Saidaiji. Existing establishments received lavish donations from the empress, who made frequent pilgrimages to the great temples in the Yamato area; often she bestowed court rank on those involved in their building.

In tandem with Dōkyō’s Buddhist policy, measures were taken to limit the power of the great clans. Since 743 it had been government policy that those opening new lands for cultivation be allowed to hold those lands in perpetuity; Dōkyō reversed this policy, but made exceptions for temples. He also attempted to oust the Fujiwara from certain posts which they had traditionally held, particularly in the guard units of the capital.

As part of this effort members of the Yuge clan were promoted to important office in the guard and elsewhere, and by the end of Dōkyō’s regime there were ten Yuge who held the fifth rank or above, although none had held such high positions before. The most phenomenal example of such advancement was that of Dōkyō’s brother, Kiyohito.97 When Dōkyō first took power, Kiyohito stood in the junior eighth rank; by 769 he had advanced to the junior second rank and held the position of Dainagon. Despite these measures, the Yuge clan never gained a decisive hold on the government. Dōkyō failed to achieve control of the middle levels of the bureaucracy or, with a few exceptions, of important regional posts. In the wings lurked the Fujiwara shadow government, and Dōkyō’s fall after Shōtoku’s death was to be startlingly sudden.

Whether it was a deliberate policy on Dōkyō’s part is uncertain, but under his regime the Usa Hachiman Shrine, which had previously divested itself of

94 太政大権関
95 右大臣藤成
96 永季
97 華人
excess lands, began to recoup its wealth. Grants of land to the shrine were made in 764 and again in 766; the latter grant, according to Shoku Nihongi, was made ‘in response to the wish of the god’. In 766 the exiled Tamaro was restored to his place in the fifth rank, and although he was not reappointed to his post at the shrine, he received office in the provincial government of Bungo. In the following year construction was begun on a temple at the Hachiman Shrine.

In the previous month a certain Nakatomi Suge no Asomaro had been appointed as the Vice-Governor of Buzen. This man was made Dazai Kanzukasa in 769, and it was he who reported the Hachiman oracle urging Dōkyō’s enthronement to the court. From the fact that construction of the shrine temple began a month after Asomaro’s appointment, Nakano infers that Dōkyō was deliberately favoring the Hachiman Shrine, with an eye to its oracular powers. Whatever the truth of this, it is certain that Dōkyō had come to regard the control of Kyushu as an important political factor, for in 768 he appointed his brother, Dainagon Kiyohito, to serve concurrently as Dazai Sochi.

Dōkyō’s keen awareness of the power of oracles and omens can be demonstrated in other areas. In 766 it was discovered that a relic of the Buddha had issued from the Bishamonten statue in Sumidera in the northeast corner of Nara. The empress was overjoyed and proclaimed the following edict:

We do affirm in this edict Our belief that when the Law of Buddha, the Supreme One, is worshiped and revered with perfect sincerity of heart, he is certain to vouchsafe some unusual Sign. The sacred bone of the Tathāgata which has now been manifested, of perfect shape and unusually large, is brighter and more beautiful of color than ever We have seen; the mind cannot encompass its splendor. . . . Thus, it has been due to acts of leadership and guidance in consonance with the Law performed by Our Chief Minister and Master, who stands at the head of all priests, that this rare and holy Sign has been vouchsafed Us. How could so holy and joyous a thing delight Us alone? Hearken, all ye people, to your sovereign’s will: We bestow on Our teacher, the Chief Minister, the title of King of the Law. We declare again that such worldly titles have never been of his seeking; his mind is set, with no other aspiration, on performing the acts of a bodhisattva and leading all men to salvation.

Suspicious that it was indeed due to Dōkyō’s acts that this rare and holy sign had been vouchsafed were raised by the later discovery that a priest friend of Dōkyō’s had manufactured the omen. Nevertheless, Dōkyō had been granted the title Hō-ō, which was very similar to the title which had been granted up to that time to retired emperors who took the tonsure.

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98 SN, Tempyō Hōji 8.9.29; Tempyō Jingō 2.4.12.
99 SN, Tempyō Jingō 2.10.2.
100 SN, Jingo Keiun 1.9.18.
101 中世宫廷の阿贄麻呂
102 大宰主神
103 Nakano, pp. 135–6.
105 Both titles were hō-ō. However, Dōkyō’s title was 法王, while that used for the emperors was 法皇.
Dōkyō’s food, clothing, and palanquin were now like those of an emperor, and his assumption of the title marked a crucial stage in his ascent toward the throne.

Auspicious five-colored clouds were sighted over Mikawa and Ise in 767; the omen was interpreted as favorable to Dōkyō’s reign, and the era name was changed to Jingō Keiun (Divine Protection [evidenced by Auspicious] Clouds). Dōkyō took the opportunity to appoint a relative as second-in-command of the Bureau of Yin-Yang, which was charged with reporting such omens. In 768 there arrived in Nara a veritable parade of auspicious animals from various provinces: white pheasants, turtles, ravens, and a gray horse with a white tail. Whether Dōkyō orchestrated the procession is questionable, but it is known that his nephew was the Vice-Governor of the province which presented the pheasants. At any rate, there seems to be sufficient evidence to demonstrate that Dōkyō was well aware of the concrete political power which omens exerted at the Nara court, and that he made efforts to control the manifestations of such omens.

In 769 the report of the fateful oracle arrived in Nara, and Shoku Nihongi records the results as follows:

_Dazai Kanzukasa_ Suge no Asomaro yearned for success and he flattered Dōkyō. Accordingly, he fabricated a pronouncement of Hachiman, which said: ‘Let Dōkyō be made emperor and there shall be a great peace in the realm.’

Hearing this, Dōkyō was greatly overjoyed and boasted of it. The empress summoned Kiyomaro to her and said: ‘Last night in a dream a messenger of the Great God Hachiman came to me and said: “Summon the nun Hōkin for the purpose of determining the god’s pronouncement on this matter. Send Kiyomaro in her place to hear the divine command.”’

As he was about to set out, Dōkyō enticed Kiyomaro with the following words: ‘The god has no doubt requested a messenger in order to announce my election to the throne. If this is accomplished, I will bestow government rank and office on you.’

Kiyomaro departed and proceeded to the shrine, where the god gave an oracle which said: ‘Since the establishment of our state the distinction between lord and subject has been fixed. Never has there been an occasion when a subject was made lord. The throne of heavenly sun succession shall be given to one of the imperial lineage; wicked persons should immediately be swept away.’

Kiyomaro returned and reported to the empress as the god had instructed. Dōkyō then became exceedingly angry. He dismissed Kiyomaro from his original post and appointed him _Inga Suke_ of Inaba. He had not yet proceeded to his post when an edict was issued depriving him of rank and exiling him to Ōsumi. His elder sister Hōkin was defrocked and sent to exile in Higo.

There is a later description of these events contained in ‘Wake no Kiyomaro

106 SN, Hōki 3.4.7.  
107 法均  
108 具外介  
109 SN, Jingō Keiun 3.9.25. The edict exiling Kiyomaro and Hōkin claims that the empress could tell from Hōkin’s countenance as she reported the oracle that she was lying. Apparently Kiyomaro had given the oracle’s message to Hōkin, who in turn transmitted it to the empress.
Den’, an account of Kiyomaro’s life recorded in Nihon Kōki, on the occasion of his death in 799. Although this biography shows certain evidence of a fictionalized treatment, it does amplify the Shoku Nihongi record and the differences in the two narratives should be noted here. The Kōki account informs us that both Kiyomaro and his sister were greatly cherished and trusted by the empress and ascribes to Kiyomaro a great and upright character; details of Kiyomaro’s rise from a prominent provincial family and of his loyal service after recall from exile are presented. The primary difference with the Shoku Nihongi’s story of the Dōkyō incident involves the details of Kiyomaro’s visit to the shrine.

According to Kōki, Kiyomaro arrived at the shrine and the god gave an oracle. Unsatisfied, he prayed to the god, saying: ‘That about which the god is now giving instruction is a matter of grave importance for the state. The oracle is difficult to understand. I implore you to reveal a miracle.’ Thereupon the god manifested itself: its height was about three jō (about thirty feet), and its aspect was like that of the full moon. Kiyomaro trembled at the spectacle and hid his face. Hachiman then pronounced the following oracle, which differs slightly from the Shoku Nihongi version:

In our state, the distinction has been established between lord and subject. Dōkyō presumes to aspire to the sacred regalia. Because of this, Our Divine Spirit trembles with rage and we do not heed his prayers. When you return, speak to the empress as We have commanded. One of the imperial lineage shall certainly succeed to the throne of heavenly sun succession. Do not fear Dōkyō’s wrath for We shall surely preserve you.

Kiyomaro delivered the oracle at court and, although the empress ‘could not bear to punish him’, Dōkyō took his vengeance with puns. Kiyomaro’s name (literally, ‘Pure Maro’) was changed to Kitanamaro (‘Dirty Maro’); his sister’s from Hiromushi (‘Broad Mushi’) to Samushi (‘Narrow Mushi’). Both were exiled. Dōkyō dispatched a messenger to kill Kiyomaro en route, but a sudden storm intervened and before the assassination could be carried out a pardon arrived from the capital.

The most interesting addition to the story, apart from the literary embellishment, is Kiyomaro’s rejection of the first oracle, whose text is unfortunately not given in any source. If we can place any credence in this account, it would seem to hint that Kiyomaro exercised his own judgment as to the wishes of the deity. Some scholars have in fact surmised that Kiyomaro was in league with the Fujiwara to discredit Dōkyō, but the theory is not generally held. It may be best to conclude that Kiyomaro’s sense of integrity and loyalty to the throne played at least a part in the transmitting of the Hachiman oracle.

A logical question at this point would be why, after the rejection of Kiyomaro’s

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110 Nihon Kōki 日本後紀, Enryaku 18.2.21. In Kokushi Talki 国史大系, Ⅲ.
111 ibid.
112 肥後
113 広虫, 狸虫
114 See Yokota’s discussion, pp. 221–6.
message and his punishment, did the empress not proceed to make Dōkyō emperor. The Kōki note that the empress 'could not bear to punish' Kiyomaro suggests that she may have been deeply affected by the oracle and that her own sense of rectitude prevented such a course of action. There were also political factors involved; Yokota believes that the Kiyomaro oracle sufficiently strengthened the anti-Dōkyō faction at court to make his enthronement impossible. In fact the anti-Dōkyō forces had begun to triumph even before the empress’s death. Four months before she died in 770, Udaijin Fujiwara Nagate and Sadaijin Kibi Mabito gained control of five of the guard units in the capital, leaving only one in Yuge hands. Although no Crown Prince had been designated, immediately upon Shōtoku’s death Nagate and Mabito elevated Prince Shirakabe as Emperor Kōnin and thereafter Nagate emerged as the chief political power at court.

Dōkyō was demoted and sent to exile as the steward of Yakushiji in Shimotsuke. This relatively lenient treatment is attributed in Dōkyō’s Shoku Nihongi obituary to the court’s memory of the empress’s great affection for him; the passage also relates that Dōkyō stood guard at the imperial tomb after her death. But Dōkyō’s ruin was complete. The priest who had ascended so close to the imperial honor was buried by commoners.

If Dōkyō’s fall from grace was rapid, that of the Usa Hachiman was equally so. The last court offering to the shrine in the Nara period was in 770 after Kōnin’s accession, and it is symbolically fitting that the occasion of the presentation was an eclipse. Although Shoku Nihongi makes no further reference to Hachiman, a ninth-century shrine document describes an investigation launched at the Usa Shrine in 773 by Kiyomaro, who had been appointed governor of Buzen. Divination was carried out by three priests as a method of verifying the accuracy of previous oracles. All the details are not given, but the outcome of the inquest was that the woman (of the Karajima clan) who had been the medium at the time of the Dōkyō oracle was replaced. A young girl from an area controlled by the Ōmiwa clan was chosen in her place; although another Karajima was appointed as hafuri, the Usa clan lost their claim to shrine office.

Hachiman Cult in the Heian Period

The Heian period heralded a new phase in the life of the Hachiman cult, but this is beyond the scope of this article. We should look briefly at the beginning of this development, however, lest the impression is given that Hachiman permanently lost the reverence of the court. That Hachiman was perceived in a new way in Heian times is evident from the title of Great Bodhisattva (Dai-Bosatsu) which he was assigned for the first time in the official histories in 809.
The head of the Daibutsu in Nara suddenly tumbled to the ground in the 850s, greatly distressing the court, and an immediate start was made to repair it. A messenger went to Usa with apologies and requests for the god’s aid in the repairs. After the restoration of the head, an edict was read to Hachiman. It cited the god’s guidance in the original casting of the Daibutsu and announced that, with the aid and protection of the Bodhisattva Hachiman, it had been possible to repair and strengthen the statue, and that the country had thereby attained peace.

It was shortly thereafter that the Iwashimizu Hachiman Shrine in Kyoto was founded. The legend of its origin occurs in ninth-century shrine records, although not in the official history. Inspiration for the shrine is ascribed to the priest Gyōkyō, who traveled to Usa and spent six months in devotions there. After continuous prayer, Gyōkyō received an oracle from Hachiman directing him to go to the capital and pray for the protection of the land. The priest proceeded to Kyoto and built a hermitage on Otokoyama. Soon a brilliant light was seen on the mountain; the emperor and empress had simultaneous dreams of a cloud that descended from the peak and settled over the palace. An order was accordingly given that a shrine be constructed at Otokoyama, and this was the origin of the Iwashimizu Shrine. This account does not appear in Rikkokushi, but Nihon Sandai Jitsuroku does include a notice that Gyōkyō had been dispatched to Usa to copy the complete Buddhist canon for Hachiman; the purpose of the mission was to bring ‘peace in the realm’.

Thus we can see that, although the aftermath of the Dōkyō incident marked a temporary lapse in Hachiman’s prestige, the cult was sufficiently strong that the deity soon regained the reverence of the court. Our glimpse of the early Heian events indicates an even greater identification of the god with Buddhism than was the case in Nara, but the process of Hachiman’s incarnation as a Bodhisattva is another story.

The Political Meaning of Hachiman in Nara Japan

The Dōkyō incident was the culmination of an exceedingly turbulent segment in the history of the imperial institution in Japan. The events of the Taika and Taihō eras had radically transformed the institutional pattern of emperorship, yet the FujiWARA, who were to be the architects of the pattern of imperial impotence largely characteristic of the rest of Japanese history, had not yet achieved a firm hegemony. During the greater part of the period we have considered, Shōmu and Kōken-Shōtoku dominated the political structure, but this rule of strong sovereigns

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122 Nihon Montoku Tennō Jitsuroku 日本文德天皇実録, Saiko 2.5.23, in Kokushi Taiketsu, III.

123 Nihon Montoku Tennō Jitsuroku, Saiko 2.9.6.

124 行教

125 Recounted in Miyaji, p. 52.

126 Nihon Sandai Jitsuroku 日本三代実録, Jōgan 17.3.28, in Kokushi Taiketsu, IV.
lapsed temporarily with the reign of Junnin, who was a puppet of Fujiwara Nakamaro. Fujiwara power waxed and waned, alternating with that of the Tachibana and Yuge clans. Further contributing to the general unrest was the development of a Buddhist institution at court. The fluctuation in the degree of imperial power and the frequency of revolts and coup attempts in the mid-Nara period suggest an institutional system which had not reached equilibrium.

Allied to this instability in the institutional sphere was a theological uncertainty, a doubt concerning the divine foundations of sovereignty. The entry of Buddhists as a distinct political force at court and the theoretical placement of the Japanese emperor within a Buddhist cosmological framework, as symbolized in the Nara Daibutsu, brought about a crisis in the emperor's relationship with the various divine forces which were looked to as sanctions for his reign. Shōmu's famous edict, in which he declared himself a 'slave of the Three Treasures', lacked a reference to the emperor's descent from Amaterasu and his own consequent divinity; however, as Sansom points out, that divinity was reaffirmed in the following edict.127 This is only one indication of a theological confusion, and we shall discuss this uncertainty more thoroughly below. Suffice it to say here that during the Nara period there was a crisis in the emperor's relations with the gods; since the gods were appealed to as the ultimate sanction for human reign, this meant a crisis of legitimacy.

As we have observed, a most striking characteristic of the Hachiman cult in this period was its precipitous rise to prominence, and the equally sudden decline in the court's attention to the god after the Dōkyō incident. The phenomenon of the court's sudden and extreme reverence for the deity would seem to suggest that it was responding to some fundamental political need. I would like to suggest that it was in response to the aforementioned crisis of legitimacy that Hachiman was summoned up and made the recipient of lavish honors by the court. Hachiman in the Nara period was not primarily a war god, nor merely a deity with vague and broad powers of protection. The thesis of this article is that Hachiman came to be perceived, albeit for a very short period, as the ultimate arbiter of legitimacy. It was in this context that the appeal was made to Hachiman to render a decision on the imperial succession.

We should now retrace our steps to discuss more fully the crisis of legitimacy which culminated in the Dōkyō incident and the appeal to Hachiman. The source of the emperor's legitimacy which is cited in the earliest records is, of course, his descent from the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu Ōmikami. The commission of Amaterasu to her son by Susanoō is recorded in Kojiki as follows:

Then *AMA-TERASU-OPO-MI-KAMI* and *TAKA-KI-NÔ-KAMI* commanded the heir apparent *MASA-KATU-A-KATU-KATI-PAYA-PI-AMÉ-NÔ-OSI-PO-MIMI-NÔ-MIKÔTO*, saying,

‘Now it is reported that the pacification of the Central Land of the Reed Plains has been finished. Therefore, descend and rule it, as you have been entrusted with it.’\(^{128}\)

(It was, however, *Osi-po-mimi-no-mikoto’s* son, *Ninigi-no-mikoto*, who made the actual descent from the sky.)

At the point of departure for his eastern conquest, the first earthly sovereign, *Jimmu*, is credited with a speech affirming the divine mandate:

Of old, our Heavenly Deities Taka-mi-musubi no Mikoto, and Oho-hiru-me no Mikoto, pointing to this land of fair rice-ears of the fertile reed-plain, gave it to our Heavenly ancestor, Hiko-ho no ninigi no Mikoto. Thereupon Hiko-ho no ninigi no Mikoto, throwing open the barrier of Heaven and clearing a cloud-path, urged on his superhuman course until he came to rest. At this time the world was given over to widespread desolation. It was an age of darkness and disorder. In this gloom, therefore, he fostered justice, and so governed this western border.\(^{129}\)

The mandate here sanctioned *Jimmu’s* efforts to bring under his sway the ‘distant territories which do not enjoy the blessings of imperial rule’.

The emperor, then, ruled by virtue of his divine descent, and this theory of legitimacy was repeatedly articulated in the imperial edicts of Nara times. The most frequently employed terms were, in Sansom’s translation, ‘the Sovereign that is a Manifest God’ (*akitsukami*), and ‘the throne of Heavenly Sun Succession’ (*amatsu hitsugi*).\(^{130}\) There were also frequent explicit references to the decree of Amaterasu that her descendants should reign. The preface to the first *Shoku Nihongi* edict contains all these elements and is worth quoting here at length:

Hearken ye all to the Word of the Sovereign. . . . Sovereign Prince of Yamato . . . who is a Manifest God ruling over the Great Land of Many Islands in performance of the Task of this High Throne of Heavenly Succession, in the same wise as the August Child of the God of Heaven, as it was decreed by the God which is in Heaven, that from the beginning in the High Plain of Heaven, through the reigns of our Distant Ancestors down to these days and onwards, Sovereign August Children should be born in succession for ever to succeed to the rule of the Great Land of Many Islands.\(^{131}\)

The influence of Chinese thought is reflected by the presence of Confucian ethical and political ideas throughout *Nihongi* and particularly in such documents


\(^{129}\) Aston, *Nihongi*, i, p. 110.

\(^{130}\) 现津神, 天津日嗣

\(^{131}\) Sansom, ‘Imperial Edicts’, p. 10.
as Prince Shōtoku’s constitution, and there are also occasional references in the *Shoku Nihongi* edicts which show Confucian concepts of legitimacy superimposed on the nativist theory. The sixth edict contains the customary reference to the origins of the throne in the descent of the first sovereign from Heaven, but it proceeds to note that auspicious omens appear when the emperor is a sage (*hijiri*)\(^{132}\) and has wise ministers. As Sansom indicates, this is a Chinese sentiment, referring to the Confucian doctrine that the sovereign’s rule is based on his virtue.\(^{133}\) The interpretation of omens during Dōkyō’s rule as evidence of the merit of his regime is another symptom of this concept at work. Nevertheless, there is no indication that in the Nara period the corollary of the Confucian doctrine, that is, a wicked sovereign could be deposed, was recognized. Since it does not appear that Confucian doctrines played a part in the attack on the nativist concept of legitimacy which formed the basis of the Nara crisis, we shall forego further discussion of them and proceed to discuss Buddhist concepts of legitimacy.

The predominant Japanese Buddhist view affecting the imperial institution is embodied in the doctrinal tradition of protection of the state (*gokoku shisō*)\(^{134}\) by Buddhism. This tradition was firmly established in the first few centuries after the introduction of the religion, and was echoed by the founder of almost every major new sect in later times. The scriptural basis for this tradition rested particularly in *Ninnō-hannya-kyō*, *Konkōmyō-saishō-kyō*, and *Hokke-kyō*;\(^{135}\) these became known as the *gokoku-kyō*, or *chingo kokka sambun*,\(^{136}\) the three sutras protecting the state. In these sutras are passages which promise divine protection by Deva kings and bodhisattvas to those lands whose sovereigns revere Buddhism.

Of special interest are the provisions which specifically concern the sovereign. In addition to promising peace to the kingdom, *Konkōmyō-kyō* guarantees special protection for the king’s person. For example, it is stated that the king shall be free from all disease and calamity, and that his life shall be long and without obstacles. The king will have no enemies and his warriors will be brave and strong.\(^{137}\) Most significantly, *Ninnō-kyō* contains a section bearing directly on the legitimacy of the sovereign: the sutra asserts that kings have attained their rank because they served the Buddhas in former lives.\(^{138}\) It further states that the Buddha has committed this sutra specifically to the care of the *kings* of the country—and not to the monks or nuns—since in the Latter Days of the Law only the kings have the authority necessary to establish and protect the Law.\(^{139}\)

The primary tendency of these doctrines was very evidently to reinforce the religious status ascribed to the Japanese emperor; the new religion was to be an instrument of the monarch not only for maintaining peace and prosperity, but also for guarding his own person as well. The sovereign had attained his rank

\(^{132}\) *Sansom*, ‘Imperial Edicts’, p. 21.


\(^{134}\) *Visser*, I, p. 138.

\(^{135}\) *Visser*, I, p. 137.
because of past virtue, and his spiritual authority was such that the care of the sutras was assigned directly to him and not to the clergy. Given the contribution to the imperial religious charisma and the supremacy over the priesthood granted to the emperor, it is difficult to see how this Buddhist concept could have given rise to anything of the nature of Dōkyō’s attack on the throne.

Nevertheless, upon closer examination we can discern factors which helped to produce the atmosphere of theological crisis to which we have referred. The Buddhist theory of legitimacy is neatly summed up in Sources of Japanese Tradition:

[The Konkōmyō-kyō] . . . set forth a doctrine of kingship based on merit—merit achieved in former existences and through wholehearted support of Buddhism. It is thus strongly implied that kings rule by a kind of ‘divine right,’ which is not based on any hereditary claim but rather on the ruler’s proper performance of his duties.\textsuperscript{140}

Thus the crucial difference between the nativist and Buddhist concepts is pinpointed. In the former, legitimacy was ascribed to the sovereign as a divine descendant, regardless of his actions. In the latter, legitimacy was conditional on any given monarch’s choice to revere or reject Buddhism.

In the case of Shōmu, for example, the problem arose as to precisely what constituted a proper reverence for Buddhism. Did it involve a renunciation of the emperor’s own divinity? The edict proclaiming Shōmu as the servant of the Three Treasures makes no reference to the emperor’s divine descent. Sansom comments:

It will be noticed that the Emperor abstains from all reference to his own divine ancestry, and styles himself the servant—indeed the word used, yakko,\textsuperscript{141} can be translated ‘slave’—of the Buddha. Yet in other rescripts of the time he consistently styles himself ‘the Sovereign that is a manifest God,’ because he is of divine descent, and, though the gods that dwell in heaven are hidden, those who descend to rule on earth are visible to men.\textsuperscript{142}

Here Sansom has pointed to the central philosophical difficulty of the imperial acceptance of Buddhism. The question was whether the influence of the new faith would be strong enough to erode the nativist foundations of legitimacy.

Although Sansom did not go on to make a complete analysis of the edicts, we find that a further examination of their language reveals in a graphic way the significance of the problem. The majority of the Shoku Nihongi edicts begin with standardized prefaces, of which there are three main categories. These may be very liberally translated as follows:

\textsuperscript{140} Tsunoda, I, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{141} 叡
\textsuperscript{142} Sansom, Japan: A Short Cultural History, p. 129.
(a) 'the emperor who is a manifest God decrees . . .'
(b) 'the emperor decrees . . .'
(c) 'it is decreed . . .'  

There is some debate as to whether the employment of any one of these patterns in an edict is dictated by the events which the rescript treats. Engi Shiki provides that the most elaborate prefaches be reserved for such events as accessions or the designation of a Crown Prince; yet Kurano has proved that the Shoku Nihongi edicts conform to no such pattern, and concluded that there was in fact no pattern at all in the eighth century.  

While it is true that it would be very difficult to form a theory that explains completely the use of language in the edicts, an analysis by reign reveals one very important point. There are sixty-two edicts in the chronicle, distributed among eight reigns, from Mommu to Kammu. In all of these reigns, save one, the pattern using the language 'manifest God' was used in about a third of the edicts or more, the rate of use commonly ranging between thirty and forty-four percent. In one reign, however, the pattern was employed in only five percent of the edicts—one edict out of nineteen. This, of course, was the reign of Shôtoku, who reascended the throne after coming under Dôkyô's influence. Even the one edict which did employ this preface was issued only two months before the empress's death, when she was ailing and Dôkyô's power was trickling away. The chart given below would thus seem to provide corroborative proof, if any is needed, that Shôtoku's reign marked the climax of direct Buddhist political influence on the imperial institution during the eighth century. Here we have a striking demonstration that Dôkyô's rise represented a definite doctrinal assault on the nativist concept of legitimacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REIGN</th>
<th>NUMBER OF EDICTS</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE USING PATTERN (a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mommu</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gemmei</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shômu</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kôken</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junnin</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shôtoku</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Könin</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kammu</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The formula arrived at in one of Shôtoku's edicts to express her relationship to Buddhism, Shinto, and Confucianism was a hierarchical arrangement: her duties were, 'first to serve the Three Treasures . . ., then to worship the Gods . . ., and next to cherish the People.' Even with this system of priorities, however,
there remained the problem of defining what it meant to serve the Three Treasures. The Buddhist priesthood was one of the Three Treasures, and it is easy to surmise the danger to the throne if a vow by the emperor to be the slave of the clergy were understood literally. There is evidence that Shōtoku’s conception of service to the Three Treasures did involve an acknowledgment of the political prerogatives of the priesthood. The edict appointing Dōkyō as Daijin Zenji illustrates the concrete threat which Buddhism ultimately posed to the government:

Although Our head has been shaven and We wear Buddhist robes, We feel obliged to conduct the government of the nation. As Buddha declared in the [Bommo, Brahmajāla] Sūtra, ‘Kings, ye who take up thrones, receive the ordination of the bodhisattvas!’ These words prove that there can be no objection even for one who has taken holy orders in administering the government. We deem it proper therefore, since the reigning monarch is ordained, that the Chief Minister should also be an ordained priest.146

We can here summarize our discussion of the crisis of legitimacy which occurred in the mid-Nara period. Over the nativist theory that the emperor’s legitimacy stemmed from divine ancestry was superimposed a Buddhist concept providing that an emperor’s legitimacy was conditional on his reverence for Buddhism. Although the Buddhist doctrine of divine protection of the state was certainly understood primarily by the court as a new and powerful sanction for imperial rule, events of the mid-Nara period threatened to alter this sanction into a threat to the throne. The establishment of a permanent Buddhist institution at court and the resulting intimacy between emperors and such politically skilled and charismatic priests as Gembō and Dōkyō spurred a deeper examination of the meaning of service to the Three Treasures. The doctrinal threat which emerged at least as early as Shōmu’s edict was a doubt about the meaning of the emperor’s own divinity. In Shōtoku’s reign, the concept that priests as such deserved political authority became a concrete political threat to the survival of the imperial institution. At the root of the crisis was an uncertainty as to the relative potency of the support provided by the native gods and that promised by the new divinities, and an uncertainty as to what actions were necessary to gain the blessing of these divinities.

Thus, the context for Hachiman’s rise was the Nara attempt to discover an acceptable political balance of native and Buddhist beliefs. The advantage of Hachiman over other native deities in such a situation was the great degree to which the cult had already assimilated Buddhist elements, owing to Usa’s location. That syncretism had already developed at the shrine is evident from Shoku Nihongi: gifts of sutras were made and a pagoda was built; the priestess was also a nun; when Hachiman entered Nara, Buddhist priests performed Buddhist ceremonies before the god.

As a powerful god from the Toyokuni region, long known at court for its Buddhism, Hachiman was naturally looked to for guidance in such a great undertaking as the construction of the Daibutsu. It should be noted here that the tale of Gyōgi’s visit to Ise, in which Amaterasu gave her blessing to the project and identified herself as Mahavairocana, is an anachronistic account appearing in later times.147 The concept that a god was actually a Buddha betrays the later origin of the story, for it is too sophisticated for the Nara period—even Hachiman was not identified as a Bodhisattva in Rikkokushi until the ninth century.148 The Ise Shrine maintained a jealous independence of Buddhism through the centuries, despite the later association of Amaterasu and Mahavairocana. The appeal to Hachiman, rather than to Amaterasu, was symptomatic of the temporary loss of faith in the power of the Sun Goddess and her mandate.

The casting of the Daibutsu was the first great event in which Hachiman was appealed to as an arbiter. The emperor apparently felt the need to obtain the sanction of a native god for a state undertaking with such extensive religious and political implications. The lavish rewards by the court after the god had given a favorable oracle and the work had been completed with his divine aid, show that the potency and supreme prestige of the deity had been acknowledged. The ceremony at Tōdaiji set the stage for further appeals to Hachiman as an arbiter in state affairs. With the oracle urging promotion of Fujiwara Otomaro, the shrine became involved in also deciding questions of practical politics.

Dōkyō’s ascent exacerbated the Buddhist challenge to the native political tradition, and in the incident of 769 the underlying crisis of legitimacy came to the surface. In the form of a question as to whether a Buddhist priest of humble origin rather than a descendant of the Sun Goddess should succeed as emperor, the problem of legitimacy was referred to Hachiman. It should be reiterated that the fact that the appeal was made to Hachiman rather than Amaterasu demonstrated the severity of the theological crisis, the extent to which the political authority of Buddhism had penetrated the national consciousness. The final oracle, however, reaffirmed definitively the native theory of imperial legitimacy: only a member of the imperial line, a descendant of Amaterasu, was to take the throne of ‘Sun Succession’.

The Dōkyō incident and the Hachiman oracle marked the climax and resolution of the fundamental theological and political problem of the Nara period. With this resolution Hachiman temporarily receded from the central political stage, and when he reappeared, it was as a Bodhisattva. A Shinto god had absorbed a Buddhist ideology: the role he played was that of a protector of nation and emperor.

In Nara times, though, Hachiman’s function was oracular; the god was appealed to for decisions upon matters which were considered beyond human solution. Like the Delphic oracle of Apollo, the oracle of Hachiman at Usa delivered


148 See n. 121, above.
pronouncements on great affairs of state, including succession disputes. Combining as he did traits of the old religion and the new, Hachiman naturally gained the status of the most prestigious arbiter during a period in Japanese history when the court was becoming conscious of the problems involved in syncretizing two powerful religious strains. The Dōkyō incident is a crucial event in Japanese history, for it represents the most dramatic challenge to the traditional ideology of the imperial institution and the victory of that ideology. The Hachiman oracle brought to Nara by Kiyomaro demonstrated the tremendous resilience of the native Japanese tradition—the primitive conception of divine rule was able to withstand the challenge of much more sophisticated systems of religious and political thought. During the medieval and Tokugawa periods, the original Japanese theory that the emperor’s legitimacy rested upon his descent from the Sun Goddess was repeatedly expounded and it has survived to the present day.

Conclusion

Hachiman first appeared in Japanese history as a god whose primary function was oracular and his most famous pronouncement concerned a central problem of political legitimacy. Although the martial and tutelary images usually associated with Hachiman both appear in this narrative of a brief segment of the history of the cult, neither aspect was dominant in the Nara period. The task which remains is the investigation of the further development of the belief with a view to assessing the varying degrees of importance of the different faces of Hachiman. There are indications that the early oracular role survived. In 939, Taira no Masakado claimed an oracle of the god as justification for his revolt; an intriguing passage in Gukanshō asserts that Hachiman had decreed the recent ascendancy of the Minamoto.

If Shinto cults so often appear to Western eyes as amorphous hodgepodge whose central figures are impossible to define, it is perhaps because there has hitherto been little attempt to investigate these deities as they were understood in a specific historical context. It may be hoped that this article has made a contribution to the task of understanding the political significance of the gods in Japanese history.