

## The Age of The Gods: A New Reading of the *Nihon shoki* Book 1-2

Wednesdays 4:10-6:00pm • 522A Kent Hall

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<https://calendly.com/lurie-columbia/virtual-office-hours>

### Course Rationale:

This seminar is devoted to the first two books of the *Nihon shoki* (the “god age” sections that comprise the core text for Japanese mythology). We will read through them in their entirety in the *Shinshaku Zen'yaku Nihon shoki* edition (Kōdansha, 2021; hereafter **SZNS**), the newest and most extensive modern commentary on the text and an epochal development in its reception history. Through its extensive engagement with and quotation from works of scholarship from the Heian period to the present day, students will gain a unique perspective on the *longue durée* of Japanese intellectual history, tracing the role that the *Nihon shoki* God Age volumes have played in the creation and repeated redefinition of ‘Japan’ itself. Additionally, an overview of the transcultural impact of classical Chinese literature through the Tang dynasty is provided via the particular emphasis on Sinitic intertexts displayed by the SZNS and by the early modern commentaries whose reputation it aims to refurbish.

### Prerequisites and Expectations:

Advanced reading skills in modern and classical Japanese and either *kanbun kundoku* or Classical Chinese. Anyone with concerns about their linguistic preparation should discuss them with the instructor. Students who are not already familiar with Nara period Japanese should review the discussion of some prominent departures from the Heian classical standard that is provided by pp. 308-321 of Haruo Shirane’s *Classical Japanese: A Grammar* (Columbia, 2005); other aspects will be discussed as they come up in the reading.

It goes without saying, but as this is an advanced graduate seminar, expectations for quality of preparation and participation are high. Students who miss postings, or who come to class unprepared to read and translate from the primary sources and to discuss in detail the other assigned texts, will be required to drop the course.

### Assignments:

In addition to preparing the assigned reading for each week, students are required to do the following starting with Week 2. First, submit a brief Courseworks posting (max. 500 words) by **midnight on Tuesday**, raising questions about or otherwise responding to some aspect of the SZNS commentary (main or supplementary [補注]). Then, as part of preparation for in-class reading and translation from the *Nihon shoki* text itself, by **10am on Wednesday** students are also required to *email* to the instructor (do not post on Courseworks) a short mini-report (a few sentences or a brief paragraph) about a particular key word, phrase, or grammatical pattern that interests or concerns them.

### Final project:

This paper (**due on Friday 13 May**) is meant to be a short analytic exercise (around 10 pages), with minimal reliance on secondary sources. Students are encouraged to pursue a topic with connections to their own research interests; comparative projects or discussions of theoretical

issues are welcome, but **the paper must be substantially devoted to some aspect of Books 1-2 of the *Nihon shoki*, to issues of their reception, or to parallel accounts in other ancient sources.** Please keep this project in mind from the beginning of the semester, and consult with the instructor about it by mid-April.

**Schedule:**

1) 19 Jan.: **Introduction and Orientation**

2) 26 Jan.: **Origins of Heaven and Earth/Seven Heavenly Generations 1** 天地開闢 /神代七代 1 (NS 1 sec. 1): SZNS *Kaisetsu* sec. 1 (pp. 5-22), sec. 3-4 (pp. 33-68); *Hanrei* (pp. 70-71); pp. 76-80

3) 2 Feb.: **Seven Generations 2-3; Creation of Eight Islands** 神代七代 2-3; 大八洲生成 (NS 1 sec. 2-4): SZNS pp. 80-94

4) 9 Feb.: **Birth of the Four Gods 1** 四神出生 1 (NS 1 sec. 5 main-var. 6): SZNS pp. 94-114

5) 16 Feb.: **Birth of the Four Gods 2** 四神出生 2 (NS 1 sec. 5 var.7-var. 11): SZNS pp. 114-128

6) 23 Feb.: **Vow of the Jewels** 瑞珠盟約 (NS 1 sec. 6): SZNS pp. 128-144

7) 2 Mar.: **Origin of the Treasure Mirror** 宝鏡開始 (NS 1 sec. 7): SZNS pp. 144-166

8) 9 Mar.: **Appearance of the Treasure Sword** 宝劍出現 (NS 1 sec. 8): SZNS pp. 166-186

9) 23 Mar.: **Descent of the Heavenly Grandson 1** 天孫降臨 1 (NS 2 sec. 9 main): SZNS pp. 190-204

10) 30 Mar.: **Descent of the Heavenly Grandson 2** 天孫降臨 2 (NS 2 sec. 9 var. 1): SZNS pp. 204-218

11) 6 Apr.: **Descent of the Heavenly Grandson 3** 天孫降臨 3 (NS 2 sec. 9 var. 2): SZNS pp. 218-230

12) 13 Apr.: **Descent of the Heavenly Grandson 4** 天孫降臨 4 (NS 2 sec. 9 var. 3-var. 8): SZNS pp. 230-244

13) 20 Apr.: **Visit to the Sea God's Palace 1** 海宮遊幸 1 (NS 2 sec. 10 main-var. 2): SZNS pp. 246-268

14) 27 Apr.: **Visit to the Sea God's Palace 2/Lineage of Divine Rulers** 海宮遊幸 2/神皇承運 (sec. 10 var. 3-sec. 11 var. 4): SZNS pp. 268-288

FINAL PAPER DUE: Friday 13 May

### **Editions, translations, and references:**

For the *Nihon shoki* the standard modern edition has been the 5-vol. Iwanami bunko paperback set (1994-1995), which is a corrected re-typesetting of the 2-vol. *Nihon koten bungaku taikai* (NKBT) edition (1965-67). This can be consulted along with the more recent Shōgakkan *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* (SNKBZ) edition (available on Japan Knowledge). Until the appearance of the SZNS, the best modern commentary was the first, Iida Takesato's 1902 *Nihon shoki tsūshaku*, which needed to be consulted along with the major Edo commentaries, the *Nihon shoki tsūshō* and *Shoki shikkai* (all of these works are frequently cited in the SZNS). At least two new English translations are in preparation, but at present the only published English version is W. G. Aston's 1896 *Nihongi*, which is still more or less reliable for the prose portions (less so for the poems, but there are few of those in the God Age books anyway).

For the *Kojiki*, consult the 1997 SNKBZ edition first (available on JapanKnowledge). The best extended commentary is still Motoori Norinaga's *Kojikiden* (completed in 1798 and best consulted in vols. 9-12 of the Chikuma shobō *Motoori Norinaga zenshū* [1968-1974]), but Kurano Kenji's *Kojiki zenchūshaku* (Sanseidō, 1973-1980) and Saigō Nobutsuna's *Kojiki chūshaku* (Heibonsha, 1975-1989) are also very valuable. Kokugakuin University has an online "Kojiki viewer" with an extensive in-progress commentary that will eventually be completely translated into English.<sup>1</sup> The *Kojiki* itself has been translated into English half a dozen times. The recent rendition by Gustav Heldt (Columbia, 2014) is innovative and rewarding, but for the purposes of this class the one to consult is Donald Philippi's version (University of Tokyo Press, 1969; recently reissued at an exorbitant price by Princeton University Press), which encapsulates in its copious notes much of the best mid-20th century Japanese scholarship on the text.

Valuable references include the *Nihon koten bungaku daijiten*, *Kokushi daijiten* (on Japan Knowledge, minus illustrations), *Nihon kokugo daijiten* (on Japan Knowledge), *Jidaibetsu Kokugo daijiten: Jōdai-hen*, *Nihon shinwa jiten*, *Jōdai bungaku kenkyū jiten*, and *Jōdai setsuwa jiten*. Students should familiarize themselves with all of these works, especially the first four. Other specialized sources may be introduced as we proceed through the semester.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://kojiki.kokugakuin.ac.jp/>