

PROVISIONAL TRANSLATION

(December 2018)

Only significant errors of English in the translation have been corrected—the content will be checked against the original Japanese for accuracy at a later date.

Kitabatake Chikafusa's *Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns*

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Kitabatake Chikafusa's *Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* is well known for its opening line: "The great Japan is the land of kami," and because of this, it has been considered to be a history text resulting from fanaticism or spirit possession. However, if read dispassionately, we understand that this is a book of quite composed and realistic lessons. Hence the ideological tragedy of this text is that it has been misunderstood this way by not only those who criticize but also those who admire it. For whom, for what and what kind of the work is *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns*? Since when, and how has it been misunderstood? In response to these questions, this chapter explores the ideological position of the text by centering on the theory of *shōtō* (legitimacy), which is part of its title as well as the historical context in which Kitabatake Chikafusa wrote it. This chapter also discusses how we should re-read this text today.

What is *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns*?

A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns is a historical essay written in the fall of the fourth year of Engen (the second year of Ryakuō, or 1339) by Kitabatake Chikafusa at the Hitachi camp. Originally, the Japanese history books since the six national histories, or "Rikkokushi" starting with the *Nihonshoki*, have lacked a subjective commentary such as that which existed in traditional history books in China, and they did not contextualize historical phenomena from a particular standpoint. However, during the medieval era, going through unforeseen and turbulent days, such historical essays were created that analyzed the meaning of history in the past, evaluated it, and attempted to draw lessons from it for the future. Needless to say, the *Gukanshō* written in the second year of the Jōkyū era (1220) by Jien, the head of the Buddhist Tendai sect, is a match for the *Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* as a historical essay.¹

Concerning its structure, first, after the overview of the origin of the country name of Japan and Japan's position in the world, the book deals with a discussion on the differences between it and other countries in its introduction; it describes the ages of *kami* such as the beginning of heaven and earth, the creation of Japan, the divine descent; i.e., the so-called Japanese Mythology. After that, it described the history of emperors straight from Emperor Jinmu to Go-Murakami. Placing the volume of the detailed mythology before the imperial chronicles starting from Emperor Jinmu is a

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¹ For an English translation of the *Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns*, see Paul Varley, *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.

distinct form which is not found in other historical books of this period. Such unique form is one of the reasons why it is said that this book was written based on Shinto ideas.

For example, “the mirror of the sun goddess (*yatanokagami*)” appearing in the rock-cave myth and “the sword of Ama-no-murakumo” appearing in the myth of the Yamata no Orochi (eight-headed giant snake) are connected with “sanshu no shinpō (*shinki*), or the three kinds of imperial regalia” appearing in the myth of the divine descent. Furthermore, in the section about Emperor Go-Daigo, there is the passage: “As there are the sacred mirror of the Imperial Sanctuary and the sacred jewel in Yoshino, how should it be that Yoshino is not a capital?” This consistency in his view would not be possible without his abundant knowledge of Shinto. However, his “shinkoku shisō” (view on land of kami) is by no means self-righteous and pretentious thought, but is supported by his rather objective viewpoint that Japan is situated “not in India or China but in the northeast large ocean.” This is obvious from the fact that the origin of the country name of Japan, the position of Japan in the world, and a comparison between a view of the world of Japan and that of India and China are presented in the beginning of the introduction.²

The second character of this book is that the successive emperors’ annals document not only the number of reigns “dai 代” but also the number of generations “sei 世.” As for this number of generations, Hirata Toshiharu has already noted this, and Kōchi Shōsuke has also argued that “only those emperors starting from Emperor Jinmu through Go-Murakami” whose imperial status “was inherited from a father to a son” are labeled as generations.³ Therefore, the term for legitimacy in this book indicates exclusively those emperors who are part of generations. For example, the numbers of reigns and generations documented in the sections for Emperor Ninmyō through Emperor Ichijō are shown in the following genealogy chart:

Ninmyō 54 dai; 30 sei- Montoku 55 dai-Seiwa 56 dai- Yōzei 57 dai

Ninmyō-Kōkō 58 dai; 31 sei- Uda 59; 32-Daigo 60; 33- Suzaku 61 dai

Suzaku- Murakami 62 dai; 34 sei- Reizei 63 dai- Kazan 65 dai

Reizei-Enyū 64 dai; 35 sei- Ichijō 66 dai; 36 sei

It is difficult to figure it out, as this book embellished this genealogy as if it was fixed as authentic from the beginning, but Emperor Kōkō in the chart, for example, became an emperor after his age passed fifty years old because Emperor Yōzei, the original “authentic” emperor, had “been dethroned.” The objective circumstances of that time indicate apparently that the line of Emperor Kōkō was “originally” collateral. The “collateral” imperial line became “authentic” in the end. It is the “shinkoku shisō” of this book that explains this logic by stating “as our country is a land of kami, we can reply to Amaterasu Ōmikami’s plan” (the section for Emperor Kōkō). Then, a way in which Amaterasu Ōmikami’s plan is decided is this: “as all good and evil deeds have consequences, discard one’s desires and prioritize others’ benefits” and continue to follow ‘the true path’ (the section for Emperor Ōjin). In short, it can be said that this book is a book of “*kuntoku kanyō*” (fostering virtue as an emperor), teaching that “each emperor should revere Amaterasu

² See Satō Hiro’o, *Shinkoku nihon* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shinsho, 2006).

³ Hirata Toshiharu, *Nanchō shi ronkō*, (Tokyo: Kinseisha, 1994) and Kōchi Shōsuke, *Chūsei no tennō kan*, (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2003).

Ōmikami's will, foster virtue, and rule justly," so that "such deeds will be a basis for the authentic enthronement."

The second character of this book notes that the entry of Emperor Go-Daigo who was contemporary of Chikafusa occupies one seventh of the entire book. Its descriptions are detailed and colorful, and its value as the historical material is very high as a record of experience written by someone like Chikafusa who witnessed the Emperor's reign. Above all, the fact that Chikafusa argued the ideal path of politics and criticized the Emperor's policies without hesitation has been paid attention. The commonality has been pointed out between Chikafusa's criticism and the report submitted from his first son Aki'ie to the Emperor in the previous year of Chikafusa's book, the 3rd year of the Engen era (the 1st year of the Ryakuō era), consisting of the seven articles criticizing the faults of Emperor Go-Daigo's regime of Kenmu.⁴

In other words, as long as one reads the book with simple mind, it is obvious that this is a book of the art of ruling criticizing the faults of the political regime of Kenmu and teaching the righteous path of politics toward Emperor Go-Murakami who was enthroned in Yoshino. However, in the 40th year of the Shōwa period (1965), Matsumoto Shinpachirō introduced his view that Chikafusa had written the book for Yūki Chikatomo and other warriors of the eastern part of Japan in order to claim the legitimacy of the Southern Court and to convince them to support and be loyal to the Southern Court. This view has been supported by some scholars to certain degree to this day.⁵ However, it is not correct at all. If that is the case, then since when, why, and how has Chikafusa's book been misunderstood?

The Theory of "Legitimacy" of *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns*

The first misunderstanding on the book was caused by the fact that those books on the history of Japan written during the early modern period such as *Honchō tsugan* by Hayashi Razan and Shunsai viewed that the theory of "legitimacy" of *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* as the mere claim of the legitimacy of the Southern Court. However, as mentioned, the theory of "legitimacy" of *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* explains that among the imperial lineage inheriting Amaterasu Ōmikami's line, only such descendants who nurture appropriate virtue as an emperor and match Amaterasu Ōmikami's will should be "legitimate." And it is also a book of lessons asserting that if Emperor Go-Murakami himself does not foster such virtue, the Southern Court may lose its "legitimate" status anytime.

In the first place, Chikafusa must have expected that Emperor Go-Murakami would surely foster virtue as an emperor; thus, the imperial line of the Southern Court would continue to be legitimate, and he must have believed it. However, in reality, the "legitimate" single line passing down from father to son tracing Emperor Jinmu up to Emperor Go-Murakami discontinued during the following generation Emperor Go-Kameyama. If the theory of *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* viewing the only "imperial line from father to son" as "legitimate" is applied, emperors belonging to both the Daikakuji-tou line and the Southern Court, starting from Emperor Kameyama to Emperor Go-Kameyama were excluded from the legitimate line and ended up having only the number of "dai 代;" thus, Emperor Go-Komatsu became the emperor of "the 99th

⁴ Hirata Toshiharu, *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns no kisoteki kenkyū*, (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1979).

⁵ Matsumoto Shinpachirō, "A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns no dōmō," in *Iwanami nihon koten bungaku taikai furoku geppō* 87 (1965).

reign (*dai*) and 53rd generation (*sei*).” In fact, during the Muromachi period, even such a manuscript existed that tried to correct those numbers after Emperor Go-Fukakusa of *Shōtōki*.⁶

The numbers of “dai” and “sei” as legitimacy of *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns*

Gosaga 87 dai; 46 sei- Go-Fukakusa 88 dai- Fushimi 91 dai- Go-Fushimi 92 dai

Go-Fushimi- Hanazono 94 dai

Go-Fukakusa- Kameyama 89 dai; 47sei- Go-Uda 90 dai; 48 sei- Go-Nijō 93 dai

Go-Nijō- Go-Diogo 95 dai; 49 sei- Go-Murakami 96 dai; 50 sei

The numbers of “dai” and “sei” as legitimacy after the unity of the northern and Southern Courts

Go-Fukakusa 88 dai;47 sei- Fushimi 91 dai; 48 sei- Go-Fushimi 92 dai; 49 sei- Kōgen of the Northern Court 1 dai; 50 sei- Sukō the Northern Court 3 dai- Go-Kōgen of the Northern Court 4 dai; 51 sei- Go-Enyū of the Northern Court 5 dai; 52 sei- Go-Komatsu 99 dai; 53 sei

Go-Fushimi- Hanazono 94 dai

Kōgen- Kōmyō of the Northern Court 2 dai

Go-Fukakusa- Kameyama 89 dai- Go-Uda 90 dai- Go-Nijou 93 dai

Go-Daigo 95 dai- Go-Murakami 96 dai- Chōkei 97 dai- Go-Kameyama 98 dai

Kitabatake Chikafusa expected that “the Southern Court would gain legitimacy” and wrote *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* as “the book of lessons” to make his expectation come true. However, the Southern Court ended up being destroyed, and as a result, the Northern Court became the “legitimate” imperial line. It can be said that this contradiction has made the book difficult to understand. During the Bunmei era at the beginning of war period (1469–87), Ozuki Harutomi wrote *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns Continued*, but needless to say, it was against Chikafusa’s true intention. When, in the eighth year of the Keichou era (1603), the Tokugawa family who identified themselves as descendants of a senior vassal of the Southern Court Nitta clan established the shogunate government in Edo, replacing the Ashikagawa shogunate who had once founded the Northern Court, the view of “the legitimate Southern Court” began to be discussed openly in public, and Chikafusa’s book which asserted the legitimate Southern Court as ideal was reevaluated. However, the true meaning of the view on “legitimacy” was forgotten, and it was misunderstood that the book superficially asserted the legitimacy of the Southern Court toward the Northern Court.

If the main claim of the book is merely the legitimacy of the Southern Court, then it would not be necessary that the target reader of the book should be Emperor Go-Murakami. In the first place,

⁶ Iwasa Tadashi, “A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns denpon kō,” Hiroshima daigaku bungaku bu, *Kokubungaku batsu* 35 (1964).

the view that the book was written for emperor Go-Murakami has been a commonly accepted old view found in *Ou'uniki* completed during the period of Keian (1648–52) stating that “Kitabatake Chikafusa completed five volumes titled *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* and offered to Yoshino from Hitachi no kuni.” When it came to be misunderstood that the purpose of the book was to claim the legitimacy of the Southern Court, such a view that target readers were the general public began to spread. For example, in the second year of Shōtoku period (1712), Miyake Kanran regarded *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* as the book of guidance for the general public, and the theory that *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* was written in order to convince the warriors of the eastern part of Japan appeared in *Ise kokushi kiriyaku* by Saitō Setsudō of the 11th year of the Tenpō period (1840). However, the latter never became a commonly accepted view until before the post war period.

The Motive for Writing *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns*

The second misunderstanding of *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* is a view that the biggest issue to Chikafusa being in camp at Hitachi was Yūki Chikamoto's course of action. Document titled “Shirakawa yūki monjo” including Chikafusa's letters addressed to Chikamoto was already known since the Edo period. When studies on it advanced by the development of history of modern period after the Meiji period, it came to be widely known that during as short as five years from the second year of the Engen period (the first year of the Ryakuō period or 1338) to the fourth year of the Kōkoku period (the second year of the Kōei period or 1343), Chikafusa sent enormous number of migyosho and documents to Chikamoto and urged him to raise an army soon.

As the historical image created based on these old documents, historians before World War II presented Chikamoto's indecisive image that he was noncommittal and continued to be reluctant to raise an army without knowing duty to an emperor and patriotism. On the other hand, when it came into the postwar period, the image of Chikafusa changed that he was stubborn and continued to unrealistically convince Chikamoto without trying to understand the reality of the local lord. However, whichever view one will choose, it has been thought the biggest concern of Chikafusa, who was in a camp of Hitachi, was to convince warriors of the eastern part of Japan, especially Yūki Chikamoto and to bring him over into his side.

If the main claim of the book was to show the legitimacy of the Southern Court, and Chikafusa's greatest interest was to convince the warriors and Chikamoto, then it was natural to be thought that the book had been written in order to assert the legitimate Southern Court and to try to convince them to take side of the Southern Court. In this way, the theory of Matsumoto was established. However, according to the recent studies, it was not that Chikamoto was reluctant to raise an army from the right beginning, Chikafusa. Similarly, it was not that Chikafusa continued to make unrealistic demand only.⁷ On the contrary, it can be said that from the third to fourth years of the Engen period, both Chikafusa and Chikamoto took military actions in corporation. What put Chikafusa on a losing course was the death of Emperor Go-Daigo who had been absolute spiritual pillar to the side of the Southern Court all the time and the enthronement of twelve-year-old Emperor Go-Murakami. Soon after, court nobles of the Southern Court became mentally unstable, and Kono'e Tsunetada flew away from Yoshino. After that, messengers who conspired peace initiatives with the Ashikaga group began to often appear in the eastern part of Japan.

⁷ Murai Shōsuke ed., *Chūsei tōgoku buke bunsho no kenkyū*, (Tokyo: Koshi Shoin, 2008) and Okano Tomohiko, *Kitabatake Chikafusa*, *Mineruba nihon hyōden sen*, (Kyoto: Mineruba Shobō, 2009).

Chikafusa lamented it and criticized in the letter to Chikatomo saying “The emperor of Yoshino is very young and not very familiar with politics, and court nobles became confused and lost senses.” These are no words other than those of Chikafusa that clearly indicate his suffering. The largest concern of Chikafusa being in camp at Hitachi was not the actions of the warriors of the eastern part of Japan nor Chikatomo but it was discord with the Southern Court of Yoshino which supported young emperor Go-Murakami, which resulted into determining the course of actions of those warriors. Initially, the flight of Kono'e Tsunetada happened two years after the completion of the book, in the second year of the Kōkoku period (the fourth year of the Ryakuō period or 1341), but Chikafusa, who got the news of Emperor Go-Daigo's death in Hitachi far away in August of the fourth year of the Engen period, must have been already concerned about “young age” of Emperor Go-Murakami and felt urgent necessity of education. *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* was the book of education humbly provided to Emperor Go-Murakami in fall of the fourth year of the Engen period. Chikafusa's intention of writing it should be apparent.

Additionally, regarding the issue of Chikafusa's intention to write the book, due to a preface or postscript of several manuscripts of *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* like *Shirayama bon* saying that “this book was written in order to show to certain young child in fall of the 4th year of the Engen period,” it has been questioned since the old times why Chikafusa, deeply adoring the Emperor, would have called Emperor Go-Murakami as “dōmō or young child;” thus, this initiated to establish the theory of Matsumoto. On the other hand, Agatsuma Kenji stated that referring the emperor as “dōmō” was not a problem because the term “dōmō” appears in *Shūeki* and signifies “the imperial status” there. In the past, the author of this article agreed with his view.⁸ However, when the contexts of the preface and postscript of several manuscripts and the general meaning of “dōmō” of those days were reconsidered, the author does not agree with the theory of Agatsuma.

On this issue, due to the limited space of the rest of this article, the author would like to discuss in another later article. In any way, one of the tragedies of *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* could be the fact that the intention of the book has been discussed on such terms appearing in the preface or postscript that differ from the concrete content or background of the book. The question of the purpose of the book should be discussed through analyzing the entire book.

Conclusion

As it has been discussed here, *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* was the historical book written in the fourth year of the Engen period in purpose to foster the appropriate virtue as an emperor for Emperor Go-Murakami who was enthroned at his young age. However, after the early modern period, two “misunderstandings” prevented readers from understanding it. First, Chikafusa's unique theory of “legitimacy” has not been understood correctly and was misunderstood that the book was a mere claim of the legitimacy of the Southern Court. Second, the problem of a serious breakup within the Southern Court without grasping the objective circumstances of Chikafusa being in a camp of Hitachi. The second tragedy of *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* is the fact that these “misunderstandings” were conducted by mainly those who have admired the book. During the Shōwa period before the WWII, *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* had already become a bible to teach and lead the Japanese people asserting the legitimacy of the Southern Court and the continuity of the imperial line.

When it turned the postwar period, whereas the evaluation of the book changed to the opposite direction, the second “misunderstanding” continued to be accepted. The theory of Matsumoto

⁸ Agatsuma Kenji, *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns kō*, (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1981) and Okano, *ibid*.

introduced in the 40th year of the Shōwa period was based on this “misunderstanding,” which has been already discussed here. The third tragedy is the fact that the claim of the historical studies of the postwar period, which is merely a continuity of the “misunderstanding” since the prewar period like the theory of Matsumoto, criticized recognition of the book commonly accepted during the early modern period that the book had been written for the purpose of fostering the virtue as an emperor. They criticized the recognition as if it was remnant of “kōkoku shikan or emperor-centered historiography.” Eventually, this issue ended up being contended at law due to Ienaga Saburō’s so-called lawsuit against the system of textbook authorization.⁹ Since then, discussion about the target readers and the purpose of writing *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* has been inevitably politicized, and it seems that genuine academic discussion has been impeded.

But today after the Cold War structure was put an end, finally an objective discussion has become possible. In any case, let us stop looking through colored spectacles and read *A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* with calm mind. Surely, much fascination which have been unnoticed will be rediscovered.

References

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⁹ Regarding this lawsuit, detailed investigation is found in Hirata Toshiharu, “*A Chronicle of Gods and Sovereigns* chosaku no mokuteki ni tsuite-gakusetsu no tenkai to sono hihan,” *Geirin* 27-2&3 (1978).