

*Book 7 of the Yōrōryō: A Research and Translation  
Project*

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**Introduction: The historical context**

China's influence on the cultures of its neighbors is impossible to overstate, and nowhere is this truer than in Japan: the transmission of key elements of Chinese culture to Japan clearly provides one of the most important examples of the spread of a civilization from a central core area to neighboring or overseas peoples. The ancient Japanese political elite adopted the Chinese administrative and legislative system, creating a centralized bureaucratic state molded on the Chinese model in order to attain equal status with China. In the eighth century, this process of assimilation culminated in the bureaucratic state of the Nara period (710–784), known as the “State grounded in codes” (*ritsuryō kokka*), namely penal (Chinese *lü*, Japanese *ritsu*) and administrative codes (Chinese *ling*, Japanese *ryō*).

Insofar, the annotated translation has been already completed and, at present, the authors are working on the introduction. Then, the work will be submitted to specialized academic journals for publication.

**Description: The text**

The *Yōrō ritsuryō* (Yōrō Era Code) is the vast corpus of administrative and penal laws enacted in the Nara period; it was completed in 718 as a revision of some previous codes, especially the *Taihō ritsuryō* (Taihō Era Code) of 701–702. The Yōrō Era Code was compiled under the

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direction of Minister Fujiwara no Fuhito (659–720), but only entered into force in 757, under the reign of Kōken (718–770; r. 749–758, 764–770) and her minister, Fujiwara no Nakamaro (706–764). The *ritsu* (penal code) sections have largely been lost, but the *ryō* (administrative code) have been reconstructed thanks to supplementary legislation and, in particular, to two later commentaries featuring substantial quotations from the original, namely the *Ryō no gige* (Commentary on the Administrative Laws; 833) and the *Ryō no shūge* (Collected Commentaries on Administrative Laws; 859–877). Moreover, it also served as the main point of reference for subsequent legislation, in particular for those regulations later collected in the *Engishiki* (Regulations of the Engi Era; 927) and the *Ruiju sandaikyaku* (Supplementary Laws of the Three Eras, Categorized; 11th c.), as well as some edicts recorded in the *Shoku Nihongi* (Annals of Japan, Continued; 797).

Our project consists of the study and philological translation—for the first time into English<sup>1</sup>—of Book 7 of the *Yōrōryō*, which contains the *Giseiryō* (Law on Ceremonies and Regulations), the *Ebukuryō* (Law on Robes and Garments), and the *Yōzenryō* (Laws on Buildings and Repairs).

The *Giseiryō* contains twenty-six articles regulating—as the title suggests—details of etiquette at the court, official ceremonies, and outside the palace; ornaments and implements to be used by officials; behavior in the event of auspicious omens; etc. The fourteen articles of the *Ebukuryō* concern the attire of the dynastic family, high and low civil officials, and military officials in three different contexts, namely ceremonies, court life, and regular work. The *Yōzenryō* features seventeen articles related to the construction and/or repair of state infrastructure, means of transportation, arsenals, and factories, as well as the hiring of workers and artisans.

## Methodology

The translation is based on the text of the critical edition of the *ritsuryō* by Inoue Mitsusada's research team (1976) and published in the *Nihon shisō taikēi*, but our exegesis is also based on various textual, visual, and material sources.

On a textual level, we consult historical commentaries such as the *Ryō no gige* and the *Ryō no shūge*, including testimony from older commentaries such as, in particular, the *Koki* (Ancient Comment), an anonymous commentary dating from the early eighth century; the *Ryōshaku* (Code Interpretation), a commentary on the Yōrō Era Administrative Code, probably written in the early years of the Enryaku era (782–806) by Iyobe no Yakamori (?–?); the *Kekki*

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<sup>1</sup>For a translation into German, see Hans A. Dettmer, *Der Yōrō-Kodex. Die Gebote. Einleitung und Übersetzung des Ryō no gige. Bücher 2–10* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010).

(or *Anaki*), composed by the unidentified scholar Anō in the late eighth century; and the *Shuki* (Comments in Red Characters), which dates from the early ninth century and was penned by an anonymous author who added his exegesis to the main texts in red script. We also take into account later supplementary legislation, such as the *Engishiki* and the *Ruiju sandaikyaku*, and the book of protocols known as the *Gishiki* (Ceremonial Procedures; *post* 872), besides often-quoted Chinese sources such as the *Liji* (Record of Rites; ca. 3rd c. BCE) and the *Zhouli* (The Rites of Zhou; mid-2nd c. BCE), especially its apocryphal sixth part, titled *Kaogongji* (Records on the Examination of Craftsmanship; ca. 5th c. BCE). Niida Noboru's painstaking reconstruction of Tang administrative law, *Tōrei shūi* (1933), is a constant point of reference for comparison with the Chinese codes.

Much use is also made of the *Wamyōruijushō* (Classified Notes on Japanese Nouns; 933), the encyclopedic dictionary compiled by Minamoto no Shitagō (911–983), which by means of its thematic classification scheme let us check the technical terminology that appears so frequently in Book 7 of the *Yōroryō*. Moreover, it quotes several Nara-period technical dictionaries for low-ranking officials, such as the *Yōshi kangoshō* (Notes on Chinese Names by Master Yako; ca. 720.)

On a visual and material level, we make use of the outstanding website of the Shōsōin (<https://shosoin.kunaicho.go.jp/>), the repository of Tōdai Monastery in Nara, which preserves artifacts connected with the sovereign Shōmu (701–756, r. 724–749) and his consort Kōmyō (701–760), as well as arts and crafts of the Tenpyō period (729–749) of Japanese history. We also take into account some other visual sources of the eighth century, such as wall decorations from tumuli, sketches drawn by carpenters on ceiling boards and wooden statues, etc.

## Objectives and expected results

Dealing with everyday life, Book 7 is a worthy reference for the cultural and historical reconstruction of ancient Japan, especially for investigating the various aspects of Japanese culture centered on state officialdom: it can certainly shed light on several material aspects of Nara-period society. Moreover, on the synchronic axis, we aim at eliciting Chinese models not only from legal sources, but also from the Chinese classics—with their reception and reenactment in the Japanese context—in order to demonstrate the textual networks related to Book 7. On the diachronic axis, we aim at tracing the legacy this book has had on later laws, material culture, and society in general.

A complementary line of research concerns the terminological study of the three laws. Indeed, the laws feature nomenclature that is standardized at the institutional level: the *Gi-seiryō*, for example, sets out rules for addressing the sovereign and other members of the

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dynastic family, as well as a detailed kinship terminology, also useful for further anthropological research; the *Ebukuryō* fixes the complex technical terminology of garments, accessories, materials, types of textiles, types of sewing, etc., which makes this law double as a reference thesaurus; and the *Yōzenryō* establishes terms to use on a more technical level, representing one of the best sources not only for reconstructing technical knowledge, but also specialized terminology.

Moreover, as every law contains references to other laws of the *Yōrōryō*, we can obtain a clear overview of the compilation of the Nara-period legal corpus, as well as the process of accepting the Chinese laws, rejecting them, or changing those elements that did not meet the standards of the Japanese bureaucratic state elite. The fact that some elements belonging to Chinese tradition were rejected is not surprising, as it confirms that cultural assimilation did not take place wholesale or uncritically, but rather through intense and vital intellectual activity that reached such a degree of maturity that it was possible to choose some elements and omit others. The very unevenness of this process contributed to the wealth of Japanese literary heritage.