

Finding the Self through the Other: The Role of Rituals in the *Dai Nihon shi* (*The History of Great Japan*)¹

Alíz Horvath
Eötvös Loránd University

Introduction

More than two thousand years ago, the Sun lay the foundation of this realm. Subsequently, divine descendants succeeded one after the other, and no rebel or traitor dared to usurp it. [...] In the medieval period, heroic sovereigns appeared who preserved the imperial line and maintained its prosperity without bringing shame on the ancients. But due to the lack of sources for this period, the advice of the sages is gradually fading into oblivion, to my profound regret. This is the reason for the creation of this history.²

Tokugawa Mitsukuni 徳川 光圀 (1628-1700)³, the second daimyo of the Mito domain who initiated the monumental historical project the *Dai Nihon shi* 大日本史 (*The History of Great Japan*), set forth the compilation with the abovementioned statement.⁴ The work, which aimed both to express loyalty to the imperial court and to provide a moral example, attempted to record the dynamics of Japanese history through a complex approach that included Shinto and Confucian elements and the format of Chinese dynastic histories, as well as by emphasizing the role of the Japanese imperial lineage as “the embodiment, mystic or symbolic, of Japanese society and nationhood.”⁵

As a multilayered, but relatively under-researched, text, the *Dai Nihon shi* constitutes an excellent source for examining the meaning of history and history writing, as well as the role of Confucianism in this context. In the following article, I examine the approaches of the authors of the *Dai Nihon shi* to these themes by discussing a hitherto neglected part of the work on the question of rituals. I claim that the role of rituals can be interpreted on multiple levels: first of all, as an instrument to criticize moments, events, and figures in history that Mito scholars deemed problematic, and secondly, as a mediator and instrument of self-expression as well as of the establishment and maintenance of human relationships in a broader social context. Moreover, at present, only a relatively brief part of the text has been translated into English (specifically the introduction and certain sections of the *Imperial Annals*). My translation of the ritual-related section of the *Dai Nihon shi*, presented below, thus constitutes the first English-language version of the material.

¹ The spelling of Japanese names and terms follows the convention of the modified Hepburn romanization system.

² Tokugawa Mitsukuni, ed, *Dai Nihon shi* (Tokyo: Dainihon Yūbenkai, 1928-1929) Vol. 1. Translation slightly modified from Ryusaku Tsunoda's translation of this passage. Tsunoda, Ryusaku et al. ed., *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958): 373.

³ Tokugawa Mitsukuni was also the grandson of Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康 (1543-1616).

⁴ This point itself constitutes a mysterious part of the text since it is attributed to Mitsukuni but was apparently recorded by Tokugawa Tsunaeda 徳川綱條, and the attached date to it is 1715. It is thus unclear whether the ideas mentioned in the excerpt truly originate from the initiator of the *Dai Nihon shi*.

⁵ Herschel Webb, “What is the *Dai Nihon shi*?,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 19 (1960): 139.

To some extent, the scholarly pursuits of the Mito school, particularly the *Dai Nihon shi*, appear in many historical analyses, but it has not drawn particular attention in English-language scholarship. The focus of the limited existing scholarship related to Mito concentrates primarily on the structural features and fundamental content of the *Dai Nihon shi*, as well as on certain contentious issues surrounding the circumstances of its production.⁶ More detailed and specifically Mito-focused analyses can be found, for example, in the works of Herschel Webb and Victor Koschmann, who focused on early and late Mito thought in their respective studies. Webb's dissertation, which includes an introduction to the structural characteristics of the *Dai Nihon shi* and the translation of three *Imperial Annals* (those of Jingū, Kōbun, and Godaigo), constitutes one of the first thorough engagements with the work.⁷ On the other hand, Victor Koschmann's analysis of Mito ideology predominantly concentrates on the later period and explores the extent to which Mito thought contributed to the ideological basis of the Meiji Restoration; however, it only briefly mentions the *Dai Nihon shi*, confining itself to a structural description. An interesting concept in Koschmann's work is the "Confucianized Shinto" character of (later) Mito ideology which refers to the fact that the Mito school did not reject Confucianism (as opposed to the Nativists), and that Mito scholars, particularly in the late Tokugawa period, "renewed belief in mythical accounts of the age of the gods."⁸

On the other hand, while the relevant Japanese-language scholarship is also fairly limited, it includes more works with a specific focus on Mito. Here, the thorough studies of Suzuki Eiichi and Takayama Daiki to the study of Mitsukuni's and certain later Mito scholars' life can be considered important contributions to the field.⁹

The existing Western scholarship thus unearths the major features of the *Dai Nihon shi*'s format, but in terms of content, it essentially narrows the scope of its inquiry to the *Imperial Annals*, to the extent that according to John Brownlee, the subsequent parts of the work (for

⁶ The relevant English-language scholarship includes, for example, Atsuko Hirai, *Government by Mourning: Death and Political Integration in Japan (1603-1912)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014), Bitō Masahide, *The Edo Period: Early Modern and Modern in Japanese History* (Tokyo: Tōhō Gakkai, 2006), Kate Wildman Nakai, "Tokugawa Confucian Historiography: The Hayashi, Early Mito School, and Arai Hakuseki," in *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture*, ed. Peter Nosco (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 62-91., John S. Brownlee, *Japanese Historians and the National Myths, 1600-1945: The Age of the Gods and Emperor Jinmu* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), James E. Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and its Persecution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), Luke S. Roberts, *Performing the Great Peace: Political Space and Open Secrets in Tokugawa Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), John W. Hall and Marius B. Jansen, ed., *Studies in the Institutional History of Early Modern Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), Julia Ching, "Chu Shun-Shui, 1600-82. A Chinese Confucian Scholar in Tokugawa Japan," *Monumenta Nipponica* 30 (1975), 177-191.

⁷ See Herschel Webb, "The Thought and Work of the Early Mito School" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1958): 34-43.

⁸ Victor Koschmann, *The Mito Ideology. Discourse, Reform, and Insurrection in Late Tokugawa Japan, 1790-1864* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987): 39.

⁹ See for example Suzuki Eiichi, Suzuki, Eiichi, *Mitohan gakumon, kyōikushi no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1987), Suzuki Eiichi, *Tokugawa Mitsukuni* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2006), Suzuki Eiichi, *Fujita Tōko* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1998), and Takayama, Daiki, "Hōken no yo no Karei: Zhu Shunshui, Asaka Tanpaku, Ogyū Sorai no sosenshū saikiron." *Nihon Shisōshi* No. 81 (2014): 113-132.

example, the *Essays and Tables*) “are generally not given due credit for their accuracy and usefulness.”¹⁰ Therefore, “modern scholars concentrate instead on the more interesting political questions about the imperial house that are raised in the basic annals and biographies.”¹¹ However, a thorough study of these hitherto relatively neglected sections can contribute to understanding and situating Mito thought and its relations to foreign (particularly Chinese) ideas within a Japanese context. Here, as the initial step in such an inquiry, I will draw attention to the section on rituals, a pivotal element of Confucianism. Through the survey of the historical evolution of rituals and the description of concrete examples, this part of the *Dai Nihon shi* not only provides insights into the Mito ideas regarding the mechanisms of history, but, at the same time, facilitates an understanding of the complex role of Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan as well.

The role of rituals in the *Dai Nihon shi*

Historical objectives and characteristics

[I], Tsunaeda, had the privilege of listening to his [Tokugawa Mitsukuni's] remarks regarding history as a record of the facts [記事]. “Write it faithfully based on facts, and the moral implications will manifest themselves [事宜書勸懲自見焉]. The manners of the people, whether refined or vulgar, and the government and administration of successive eras [...] should be recorded from ancient times to the present [...]. Good deeds can become an example, whereas bad deeds can serve as admonition [善可以為法惡可以為戒]. [...] This will be beneficial for educational purposes and the maintenance of social order. The writing must be true, and the facts must be exhaustive [文不可不直事不可不核]. A reliable history 信史 cannot include arbitrary selections or intentional alterations [...] even at the expense of stylistic excellence.”¹²

The above excerpt from the preface of the *Dai Nihon shi* shows how Mito scholars determined the essence of history and history writing. The authors regarded history as a “record[ing] of facts,” one that they intended to accomplish by incorporating all accessible data into their work and presenting them as exhaustively as possible. This endeavor resulted in a scholarly product that aimed at revealing an authentic history and was completed in multiple phases, attaining its ultimate form only in 1906. The *Dai Nihon shi*, written in *kanbun*, intentionally follows the characteristics of Chinese dynastic histories, particularly those of Sima Qian's *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Historian*), in order to “cause future ages to know what should be emulated.”¹³ According to Herschel Webb, the Mito scholars' pursuit of factuality shows that they did not

¹⁰ Brownlee, *Japanese Historians*, 35.

¹¹ Brownlee, *Japanese Historians*, 35.

¹² Translation modified from Tsunoda et al., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 373., original text: Tokugawa Mitsukuni, ed., *Dai Nihon shi*. Vol. 1. (Tokyo: Dai Nihon Yūbenkai, 1928-1929), 1-9.

¹³ Preface, see Webb, “What is,” 137. Webb also adds that the Chinese model's influence can be traced in the choice of the title as well for several potential versions appeared in the course of writing, for example, *Honchō shiki* (*The Shiji of Japan*). Webb, “What is,” 137. The latter option implied the significance of the project for the authors because they intended to produce a text comparable to the quality of the *Shiji*. The fact, however, that eventually they chose the presently known title (*Dai Nihon shi*) may reflect an effort to emphasize the uniquely Japanese characteristics as opposed to the Chinese example.

intend to interpret historical events themselves, but, as the preface explicitly explains, merely to provide an exhaustive record of data and allow moral implications to “manifest themselves.”¹⁴ This, however, did not entail a complete lack of guidance from the compilers regarding the priority of certain values or the importance and (indirect) evaluation of specific ideas and events.

In most cases, the existing scholarship supports Webb’s points by taking examples from the *Imperial Annals*, which emphasize the central role of the imperial lineage (as opposed to the position of the shogun).¹⁵ Nevertheless, the subsequent chapters of the *Dai Nihon shi* also include sections that enable a refinement of our ideas. For example, the section on rituals in the *Essays* portion provides insight into the social status and significance of rituals in Japan as symbols of “Confucianized Shinto” (according to Victor Koschmann), and, simultaneously, into the dynamics of the intertwinement of domestic and foreign traditions in historical context.¹⁶ I will discuss the complexity of this phenomenon first from a historical perspective, highlighting the role of rituals as a form of criticism, and, subsequently by concentrating on their social role, particularly with regard to their dual significance as a means of self-expression and in the formation of human relationships.

The origins of rituals and their role as a form of criticism

The section on rituals is in scroll 334 in the *Dai Nihon shi* and is divided into two major parts: the text first examines the origins and history of rituals and then provides concrete examples, principally through the detailed description of court ceremonies. Here, the authors’ focus on exhaustive factuality already manifests itself, intending to preserve the account of the development and exact performance of rituals for future generations.¹⁷ In addition, as I demonstrate below, this section also serves as a platform for the Mito scholars to show their sympathy with the emperor, rather than the shogun.

The *Dai Nihon shi* begins to map the historical evolution of rituals as follows:

From the imperial court, garments, celebrations, court assemblies, and rituals to music and the enjoyment of singing, all originates from the age of the gods and

¹⁴ Webb, “What is,” 138. Another characteristic of the *Dai Nihon shi* is the consistent reference to earlier historical works in the form of double-column notes to justify the credibility of their statements. These “footnotes” also provided an opportunity for them to evaluate the “existing scholarship” by noting the shortcomings or mistakes of those materials. The sources of the *Dai Nihon shi* include the products of earlier history writing and oral tradition as well.

¹⁵ Dealing with the shogunal biographies consisted one of the major problems of the Mito scholars due to the lack of a similar rank in Chinese history. Eventually, they resolved the problem by placing the deeds of the shogun into the biographies section, along with those of other notable persons. Some scholars claimed the *Dai Nihon shi* did not question the role and the *raison d’être* of the shogun, but they merely focused elsewhere. In my view, although this certainly seems to be a potential explanation, it clearly needs more evidence.

¹⁶ Koschmann, *The Mito Ideology*, 39.

¹⁷ As they put it at the beginning of the section: “By considering their [the rituals] evolution, we can shed light on gains and losses. [...] We create the records of rites and music.” *Dai Nihon shi*, Vol.13, 2. For a comparison of the descriptions of ceremonies in the *Dai Nihon shi* and those of the *Jingishi* (one of the major sources of the *Dai Nihon shi*), see: Nishiyama Isao, “Jingishi no gakumonteki kachi,” in *Dai Nihon shi no kenkyū*, ed. Hiraizumi Kiyoshi 435-460 (Tokyo: Tachibana Shobō, 1957).

were transmitted by the successive leaders who ruled the realm through them. [...] After the death of Izanami, Izanagi cried and buried her. This is where the burial ritual originates. The gods of the ancestors wove their heavenly garments and made offerings using the grain of that year. This is how the heavenly ceremony was created.¹⁸

The abovementioned excerpt shows that the Mito scholars traced the cultural history of rituals to the age of the gods. This is in contrast to the *Imperial Annals*, which begin with the deeds of Jinmu *tennō*.¹⁹ Therefore, the fact that unlike previous histories such as the *Kojiki* or the *Nihon shoki*, the annals section of the *Dai Nihon shi* does not return to the origin myth is presumably because of the fact-based and rational approach of the compilers.

How are we to explain the inclusion of the mythical past in the present case then? The answer is probably found in a certain “Japan-centered” approach to cultural history that can be detected in numerous parts of the material, where Mito scholars emphasized that the most fundamental traditions (those related to specific stages of life) had been extant in Japanese society since ancient times. At the same time, this point can also be considered a manifestation of ideas tinged with Nativist approaches, which likely influenced at least a part of the Mito compiler group in the late Tokugawa period, but a more thorough investigation of this problem must await further research.

In any case, the section in question constitutes a useful example to show how Mito scholars synthesized the usage of Chinese ideas and the format and style of Chinese dynastic histories with a content that emphasized the “indigenous” aspects of rituals. For instance, the authors make references to Shōtoku Taishi 聖徳太子 (or Prince Shōtoku, 574-622) whose achievements significantly contributed to the implementation of Chinese ideas and rituals during the early seventh century. Hence, the quotes from the relevant sections of the *Jūshichijō kenpō* 十七条憲法 (Seventeen-Article Constitution), attributed to the *kōtaishi*²⁰ and the Mito authors’ commentaries all refer to the long process of cultural transmission:

The basis of governing the people lies in propriety. If the lord does not possess propriety, then the subordinates will not obey him. If the subordinates do not possess propriety, it is unequivocally a sin. The leading officials should consider propriety as their foundation.” (See *Nihon shoki*.)²¹ In the same year, he [Shōtoku Taishi] also revised the court rituals. (See *Nihon shoki* and *Kaifūsō*.) [...] The *kōtaishi* supported the government, received invitation from the Sui court, and sent students there to study. [...] One of the students said that the Tang is largely based on the order of propriety. Envoys should continuously

¹⁸ *Dai Nihon shi*, Vol. 13, 1-2.

¹⁹ Jinmu (660-585 BC, mythic). The term *tennō* is usually translated as “emperor” or “sovereign.” However, it is not identical with the European version of “emperor”; therefore here, along with other court rank names, I utilize the Japanese version mentioned in the original text. I am grateful to the reviewer of the present paper for reminding me that the term *tennō* only came to be used in the Nara period making the appearance of the term in the *Dai Nihon shi* even in the case of figures, such as Jinmu, somewhat curious.

²⁰ Commonly translated as crown prince, here a reference to Shōtoku Taishi.

²¹ The *Dai Nihon shi* consistently indicates the sources of the statements in the form of two-line notes. In the English translations, I use brackets to separate these parts from the main body of the text.

be sent there. (See *Nihon shoki*.) The court subsequently started to utilize various Tang rituals, which led to the transformation of old customs.²²

The abovementioned excerpts show that the introduction of Chinese rituals in Japan, with their similar ideological basis, signified a conscious process through which, at least according to Mito scholars, the Japanese intended to provide a more concrete form to a pre-existing abstract essence which, contrary to its Chinese counterpart, had no written record. This led to the intention to preserve such knowledge, the first attempt of which occurred during the reigns of Tenji *tennō* (r. 668-671) and Tenmu *tennō* (r. 673-686) when “the compilation of the order of ritual texts was completed,” and subsequently continued in the *Dai Nihon shi* as well.²³

Using various Tang rituals, they [the Shikibushō]²⁴ had the officials learn the dance steps of court rituals. (See *Nihon kiryaku* and *Shoku Nihon kōki*.) Kanmu *tennō* [r. 781-806] devoted himself to the traditional rituals and ordered the modification of the rituals of the two Ise shrines. (The part after “ordered” is based on the two shrine-related ritual books of the Enryaku era.) [...] The *tennō* was preoccupied about the lack of ritual texts and ordered *sadaijin*²⁵ Fujiwara Ason Uchimarō,²⁶ among others, to create the written collection of formalities, but he [the *tennō*] died before its completion.²⁷

At this point, however, the *Dai Nihon shi* sheds light on the consequences of the transmission of foreign patterns which, according to its authors, resulted in the neglect of indigenous traditions and in an emphasis on form instead of content. This motif, the critique of the organization of luxurious ceremonies and the tendency to focus on the execution of ritual movements without an adequate understanding of their meaning, is a recurring element in the text that, in most cases, appears as another manifestation of how Mito scholars used rituals to provide the moral criticism of past phenomena.

All rituals and music followed the Sui-Tang system, but learning them without understanding their meaning and ignoring their roots, resulted in only grasping the surface. [...] The customs continuously changed. The beauty of music and ceremonial behavior could still be observed, but the simple style of ancient times gradually diminished day after day. Why did the custom of recording [rituals] not persist? Although [rituals] were performed for a long time, but they [officials of the highest ranks] learned them without examining them. It is similar to proceeding further without looking back. [...] In the end, they [officials of the highest ranks] did not know the propriety of governance and the like. As a result, the court could not control the realm properly.²⁸

²² *Dai Nihon shi*, Vol. 13, 3.

²³ *Dai Nihon shi*, Vol. 13, 4.

²⁴ Ministry of Ceremonial from the Taihō era until the Meiji.

²⁵ Minister of the left.

²⁶ Udaijin (Minister of the Right) (756-812).

²⁷ *Dai Nihon shi*, Vol., 13, 5.

²⁸ *Dai Nihon shi*. Vol. 13, 2. Here, the traces of two relevant teachings of Confucius's *Analects* (Ch. *Lunyu*) can be detected. The first is: “2.15 The Master said: ‘Learning without due reflection leads to perplexity; reflection without learning leads to perilous circumstances.’” The second is: “3.12 The expression ‘sacrifice as though present’ is taken to mean ‘sacrifice to the spirits as though the spirits are present.’ But the Master said: ‘If I myself do not participate in the sacrifice, it is as though I have not sacrificed at all.’” Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont,

In his book, Herschel Webb briefly touches upon the section on rituals, referring to them as “reminders”.²⁹ To some extent, I agree with this statement, for rituals were considered the embodiments of certain spiritual values, therefore they can be regarded as reference points. However, the *Dai Nihon shi* presents a more complex phenomenon where rituals fulfilled multiple roles on a historical and a spiritual level. The *Dai Nihon shi* seems to attribute the changes in the role and execution of rituals to the influence of the shifts that occurred in the sociopolitical environment surrounding them, thus rituals essentially appear to embody those changes. In addition, the case of rituals serves as a tool in the authors’ hands to indirectly criticize those moments in the past that they considered particularly impactful and problematic. For example, this approach can be witnessed regarding the explanation of the rise of military power and of the imperial schism during the fourteenth century, when rituals were essentially neglected and, according to the text, the essence which gave content to the form (that is, the concrete execution of rituals) continued to exist solely among ordinary people.

[T]he warriors created havoc and ruled the realm arbitrarily [...while] the virtue of the heavenly governance of the ancestors incessantly remained in the hearts of the people. [...] From Toba *tennō* [r. 1107-1123] on, officials all shaved their eyebrows and their beard and painted their teeth black and performed the ritual movements. (See *Ama no mokuzu*.) Customs were not respected, the court gradually decayed and declined during the Hōgen rebellion [1156] and the Heiji rebellion [1160]. Hence, rituals were not held for the most part. (See Jinnō shōtōki.) [...] Godaigo *tennō* [1318-1339] focused mostly on the ancient meanings [of traditions]. (See Taiheiki.) He returned to the ancient origins and revived the myths. He also carefully selected certain materials and revised them under the title Kenmu *nenjū gyōji*. (See Kenmu *nenjū gyōji okugaki*.) However, following the great wars of the era, the *tennō* wandered far away and established his court there. (See Taiheiki.) How could they spend time discussing the rituals then?³⁰

The above passages provide excellent examples to explain the technique Webb also mentions, through which the Mito scholars obliquely communicated their assessments by introducing certain contents via the comments of others and using specific terminology instead

Jr., trans., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 79. and 85. Further, the text briefly mentions the rise of Buddhism as well (also of foreign origin), which, according to the authors, contributed to the changes in rituals and to the creation of mixed ceremonies and thus represented a phase in the process of decline: “Nevertheless, with the prosperity of Buddhist principles, burial rituals faded away, and the recitation of Buddhist texts became more important than court rituals. (See *Nihon shoki*, *Shoku Nihongi*, *Engi shiki*, and *Ruiju kokushi*.) In addition, mixed rituals started to prosper [...] [These events] were frequently exceedingly luxurious. Thus, the ancient rituals gradually faded away.” *Dai Nihon shi*, Vol. 13, 6-7. Furthermore, the final section of the *Essays* deals with “Buddhist affairs.” *Dai Nihon shi*, Vol. 14. Scrolls 364-369. According to Herschel Webb, the fact that the section on “Buddhist affairs” comes last can be considered as one example of how Mito scholars expressed their antipathy in an indirect way. (For them, Buddhism represented the opposite of the more practical Confucian teachings.) Herschel Webb, “The Thought and Work,” 118.

²⁹ Herschel Webb, *The Japanese Imperial Institution in the Tokugawa Period*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 186.

³⁰ *Dai Nihon shi*, Vol. 13, 2 and 7.

of voicing their explicit evaluations.³¹ This can be detected, for example, in the Mito method of handling the account of Godaigo *tennō* and the Kamakura *bakufu*. Here, rituals served as instruments to demonstrate the Mito scholars' sympathy with the former and their more complicated approach to the latter. While rituals were neglected for the most part in both cases, as we saw in the previous excerpt, the authors appeared to be more forgiving towards Godaigo ("How could they spend time discussing the rituals then?") than towards the shogun: "[T]he governance returned to the warriors, which essentially entailed the disappearance of rituals and music. But the warriors were also aware that the realm could not be sustained without rituals."³² However, the shogun's attempt to revive rituals resulted in the organization of extravagant ceremonies and festivals such that by the end of the fourteenth century, "it was an intolerable [situation], therefore they [the commentators] did not express their opinions [regarding this matter]. (See *Taiheiki*, *Ashikaga family chronicle*, *Gaun nikkenroku*, and *Bunroku seidan*.)"³³

Finally, the problematic intertwinement of history and rituals, and the "other" and the "domestic" (expressed through the imperial regalia), concludes with the determination of the role of rituals by emphasizing the importance of their spiritual essence as opposed to their forms. In the present case, the authors' relevant criticism is wrapped into the content of Fujiwara Kanezane's petition:

"Enthronement without the sword regalia had never occurred since ancient times. [...] We demand that those above pray for the gods and those below ask the shogun and through these efforts attempt to retrieve it [the sword]. [...] Uselessly holding the great ceremony shows the lack of respect towards the heavenly regalia." [...] "Enthronement without returning the sword will definitely result in subsequent turmoil." His [Kanezane's] thoughts were not taken into account. (See *Gyokukai*.)³⁴

It is clear that the Mito scholars prioritized the regalia (here, specifically referring to the role of the sword) over rituals, the former being the symbol of the unchanging essence of Japaneseness and the embodiment of imperial lineage. Therefore, according to the *Dai Nihon shi*, enthronement without the regalia was a mere formality which failed to manifest that essence. Thus, the changing characteristics of rituals, in this case those of the enthronement ceremony, serve here as an instrument to criticize the distorted nature of the emperor's circumstances in the fourteenth century.

At this point, the other/domestic dichotomy becomes secondary in the text: here, the material does not explicitly refer to the problems of Chinese (foreign) forms. Rather, it focuses on the problem of rituals in general and their relationship with the regalia. Thus, here the role of rituals as a form of criticism gets intertwined with the importance of the formation of collective

³¹ In line with the objective inclusion of facts, in some cases, the Mito scholars openly criticized the existing scholarship claiming that the previously made commentaries were not sufficiently profound and extensive, thus justifying the necessity for the compilation of the *Dai Nihon shi*: "Essentially all commentaries on rituals were complicated and insignificant, and merely grasped the surface. Therefore, the officials were not familiar with the great ceremonies and focused solely on vanity, and the range of [rituals] extended merely to bending and marching one after another. (See *Saikyūki*, *Ekashidai*, and *Chōyagunzai*.)" *Dai Nihon shi*, Vol. 13, 2 and 7.

³² *Dai Nihon shi*, Vol. 13, 2 and 7.

³³ *Dai Nihon shi*, Vol. 13, 2 and 7.

³⁴ *Dai Nihon shi*, Vol. 13, 10.

identity. As I will show in the subsequent section, this latter concept manifested itself in the *Dai Nihon shi* in the mixture of the concept of “Japaneseness” and the expression of human relationships where “not losing the roots was essential.”³⁵

Self, society, and rituals

Rituals appear in the *Dai Nihon shi* not only as a form of criticism reflecting the current sociopolitical circumstances and situation of morals; at the same time, they constitute an organic part and method of self-expression, reinforcing a sense of belonging—the relationship between the ruler and the people—and providing a form and framework for human existence. This interpretation of rituals is relatively close to the ancient Confucian understanding of the notion 禮 (*J. rei*, Ch. *li*), as a form of expressing various virtues. It is captured in the text as follows:

They [the people] acted truthfully and performed rituals accordingly. [...] The old customs prospered, and the ruler and the people got closer to each other. [...] This presumably became the foundation of all eras which never ceased to exist. [...] Since ancient times, the rites were severe and their ceremonial procedures were complicated, and it became the rule that the lords were respected, and the subordinates were controlled. This unity became the rule in administrating affairs.³⁶

The first excerpt shows that people originally performed rituals to express various virtues. This refers to the Confucian idea and process of self-cultivation, the final phase of which was the ability to use the acquired skills in practice through rituals.³⁷ Rituals were thus considered instruments to convey the importance of certain qualities and, as the latter excerpt shows, to extend these values to society in its entirety, thus improving human relationships and order.

Furthermore, the social role of rituals can be detected in certain parts of the text that introduce the adequate methods of addressing the sovereign and his immediate relatives, the explanation of hierarchy in family relations, and the classification of imperial documents. In these cases, however, the authors took particular pains to emphasize the Japaneseness of this systematization, clearly tinged with Confucian characteristics, for example, by applying various linguistic and stylistic forms to underline the Japanese origin of certain people and gods. This manifested itself in the consistent provision of the Japanese pronunciation of names and in the utilization of the *heishutsu* and the *ketsuji* methods, which were not typical in Chinese history writing.³⁸

³⁵ *Dai Nihon shi*, Vol. 13, 2.

³⁶ *Dai Nihon shi*, Vol. 13, 1-2. The term that I translated as *unity* is a four-character compound, which can also be found in the *Genealogies* portion of the *Shiji*, more precisely in the section on the House of Confucius. Interestingly, however, the *Dai Nihon shi* switched the order of the original, since the *Shiji* uses the following version: 一文一質. Sima Qian, *Shiji*, Scrolls 47-49. Based on the context, the meaning does not seem to differ significantly, but the change may arguably imply a divergence from the Chinese model.

³⁷ Ancient Confucianism treated rituals not merely as tools, but also as the part of one's life, almost a second nature which facilitated self-expression in daily interactions. For a more extensive analysis of the original meaning of rituals, see Ames and Rosemont, *Analects*, 51-53.

³⁸ *Heishutsu* refers to a method when the name (of an important person) is written at the top of the line. *Ketsuji* refers to the insertion of a one- or two-character blank space before the names of the *tennō* or his relatives mentioned in a document.

In the present case, however, I would emphasize the concept outlined in the abovementioned excerpt that indicates the significance of order based on social relations and expressed through rituals. It is important that at this point the text does not make a clear distinction between Chinese and domestic forms, but rather stresses the appearance of rituals as an instrument of self-expression and a mediator of the network of human relationships in general. Therefore, despite the initial reference to the Chinese origin of certain ritual forms, when attempting to situate the role of these rituals, the authors seemed to put their function, rather than their origin, into the spotlight. This idea corresponds to the original objectives of Shōtoku Taishi (and allegedly those of Suiko *tennō* [r. 592-628]), previously mentioned in the text, who wished to explore and implement Chinese ritual customs due to the presumed similarity of their inherent spiritual content.

It is thus clear that rituals fulfilled a significant role in society, and their appropriate execution constituted a crucial part of the foundation of moral order. Adequate knowledge regarding rituals was of primary importance; neglecting them essentially resulted in the decay of their spiritual content and, consequently, that of the essence of collective identity.³⁹ Thus, in line with their connection to history, in a predominantly Confucian sense rituals were also intertwined with the questions of society and identity, serving as a bridge between them.

Conclusion

I selected the ritual-related part of the *Dai Nihon shi*, a monumental product of history writing, as the subject of my analysis because I presumed that this section would delineate the relevant Japanese (or at least, Mito) ideas regarding the late Tokugawa interpretation of Confucian ideas through the concept of a pivotal notion—ritual—in this system of ideas. I examined the text from two major aspects: first, as a form of criticism to indirectly draw attention to specific phenomena that Mito scholars considered problematic in history, and second, as a certain mediator of human relationships and social order.

Based on the abovementioned analysis, the *Dai Nihon shi*'s relevant accounts show how Mito scholars used the role and performance of rituals as a form of criticism. The detailed description of rituals served multiple goals: first, it was a means to preserve information about the traditions of bygone eras and second, it was a tool to map how diverse historical figures, events, and ideological shifts influenced the role and execution of rituals and what these changes tell us about the morals and identity formation of those times from the perspective of Mito scholars.

Victor Koschmann referred to the *Dai Nihon shi* as the manifestation of “Confucianized Shinto.” During the investigation of the text, I have found many excerpts that can be interpreted from a Confucian perspective. However, the extent to which these contents represent the amalgamation of Confucian and Shinto concepts is, at present, unclear. Mito scholars' interpretation of rituals as instruments of self-expression and of the maintenance of human relationships echoes the notion's ancient Confucian understanding predominantly found in the *Analekts*. At the same time, the *Dai Nihonshi*'s focus seems to be on showing a refined intertwinement of Japanese and foreign ideas and forms. A more thorough investigation of this issue, particularly in juxtaposition with the Nativist ideas that became widespread in parallel

³⁹ A similar idea can be found in the following excerpt as well: “In ancient times, the prostration rituals were abolished, but at present, officials, in- and outside of their offices are not strict and firm [anymore]. Without the proper ceremony of advancement and retreat, the rules of lining up and return [visit] ceremonies will vanish.” *Dai Nihon shi*, Vol. 13, 5.

with the production of this latter part of the *Dai Nihon shi* is beyond the scope of the present article. Here, however, we can conclude that the authors of the *Dai Nihon shi* seem to have treated rituals as some sort of bridge between the critical analysis of problematic historical moments in the past and the moral interpretation of rituals as instruments of the expression of social order and human relationships. Moreover, contrary to the Nativists' general rejection of foreign ideas, the Mito school's interpretation acknowledged the influence of Chinese concepts, embodied by the steps of various rituals, which brought the Japanese closer to the rediscovery of their own "essence," their collective identity by giving a more concrete form to these abstract ideas.

Lastly, a close study of "footnotes" in the *Dai Nihon shi* containing references and additional comments and a comparison between the main body of the text and the sources used by the compilers, the characteristics of the earlier and later phases of the compilation, and a more profound overview of various linguistic solutions would further refine our understanding of Tokugawa concepts of rituals and history. This would also raise further questions on the role of Confucianism and to what extent certain texts can be considered or interpreted as Confucian, and, more broadly, the transmission of knowledge, its implementation in a novel environment, and its influence on identity formation.