

THE EMPEROR'S IN-LAWS

DURING TANG'S TROUBLES, MANY CHINESE LEFT THE COUNTRY IN SEARCH OF OPPORTUNITY.



THEY WENT BY LAND OR SEA TO KOREA... SOME SETTLED, AND SOME MOVED ON... TO AN ISLAND NATION THEY HAD BARELY HEARD OF BEFORE:

JAPAN.

NO ONE KNOWS WHO FIRST PADDED ACROSS TO JAPAN, BUT BY 4500 BCE, A HUNTING, FISHING PEOPLE CALLED THE AINU HAD THE ISLANDS ALL TO THEMSELVES...



UNTIL AROUND 500 BCE, WHEN A KOREAN RELIGIOUS CULT ARRIVED, LOOKING FOR THE PROMISED LAND. THEIR LEADER, THEY BELIEVED, WAS A LIVING GOD.



THESE PIONEERS FOUND A FERTILE PLAIN AND FARMED IT... THEIR NUMBERS GREW... AND THEY PUSHED BACK THE AINU IN A SERIES OF BORDER WARS THAT WENT ON FOR CENTURIES.



UNLIKE SOME CULT LEADERS WE COULD NAME, THIS ONE HAD A SON, WHO SUCCEEDED HIS FATHER AS LEADER... HE TOO HAD A SON... AND SO ON, FROM THAT DAY TO THIS. FOR 2,500 YEARS, THE SAME FAMILY HAS RULED JAPAN, AND THE NATION WORSHIPS ITS EMPEROR.



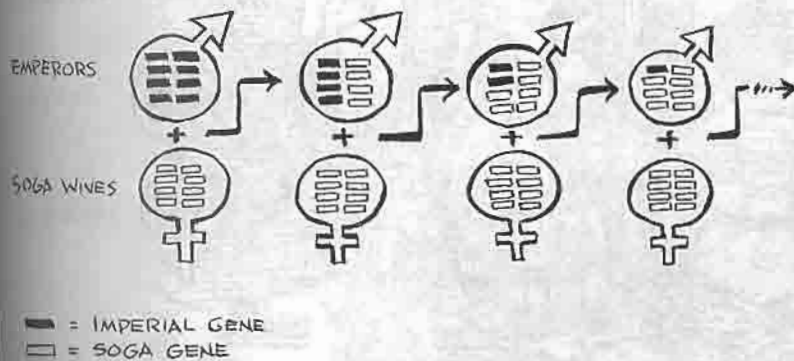
IN ALMOST EVERY KINGDOM KNOWN TO HISTORY, POWER-HUNGRY FAMILIES HAVE TOPPLED KINGS AND FOUNDED NEW DYNASTIES, BUT NOT IN JAPAN... OVERTHROWING THE EMPEROR WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION! SO WHAT WAS A POWER-HUNGRY JAPANESE CLAN TO DO?



IN THE MID-500s, A FAMILY CALLED THE SOGA FOUND A CLEVER AND PEACEFUL ANSWER:



THE PLAN: IF THE EMPEROR MARRIED A SOGA GIRL, THEIR CHILDREN'S GENES WOULD BE HALF SOGA AND HALF IMPERIAL. IF A SON ALSO WED A SOGA, THEIR CHILDREN HAVE 75% SOGA GENES... IN THE NEXT GENERATION, SOGA GENES RISE TO 87.5% OF THE TOTAL... ETC!



THE EFFECT IS LESS EXTREME IF IMPERIAL DAUGHTERS MARRY SOGA SONS, MIXING IMPERIAL GENES BACK INTO THE SOGA CLAN.

AFTER MANY GENERATIONS, THE SOGA WOULD EFFECTIVELY HAVE HIJACKED THE IMPERIAL GENOME UNTIL NOTHING WAS LEFT OF THE FIRST EMPEROR BUT HIS Y CHROMOSOME!



AND SO IT HAPPENED... FOR ABOUT A CENTURY, SOGA PRIME MINISTERS MARRIED THEIR DAUGHTERS TO IMPERIAL SONS AND SURROUNDED THE EMPEROR WITH OFFICERS FROM THE SOGA CLAN.



JAPAN DEVELOPED A UNIQUE TRADITION: INSTEAD OF FIGHTING TO TOPPLE THE EMPEROR, POWER-HUNGRY CLANS FOUGHT TO MARRY HIM! IN 644, ASSASSINS CUT DOWN THE SOGA, AND A NEW CLAN, THE FUJIWARA, BECAME THE IMPERIAL IN-LAWS.





ALL THIS TIME, CHINESE IMMIGRANTS WERE ARRIVING IN JAPAN, BRINGING THEIR OWN IDEAS ABOUT RELIGION, CEREMONY, TECHNOLOGY, CITY PLANNING, DRAINAGE, IRRIGATION, BUREAUCRACY, AND GOOD MANNERS.

PLUS THEY KNOW HOW TO READ AND WRITE!

THEY'RE AWESOME!

THE SOGA AND FUJIWARA AGREED ON ONE THING: JAPAN FACED A CHOICE.

SHOULD WE MAKE UP OUR OWN INSTITUTIONS AND CIVILIZATION AS WE GO ALONG, WHICH COULD EASILY TAKE CENTURIES...?

OR SHOULD WE COPY THEIR ENTIRE CIVILIZATION WHOLESALE?



TO POSE THE QUESTION IS TO KNOW THE ANSWER!



THE FUJIWARA EMBRACED ALL THINGS CHINESE: THEY SEIZED ALL THE LAND AND PARCELED IT OUT, TANG-STYLE, PACIFYING THE NOBLES WITH A STRONG DOSE OF BUDDHISM, FANCY CHINESE TITLES, AND PERFECT MANNERS.

BRONZE BUDDHA AT NARA (c. 740), 56 FT. TALL SITTING DOWN



THEY EVEN ADOPTED CHINESE WRITING, WHICH SUITED THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE NOT AT ALL...

SHOULD WE INVENT A NEW SCRIPT...?

OR IMPROVE THIS ONE?

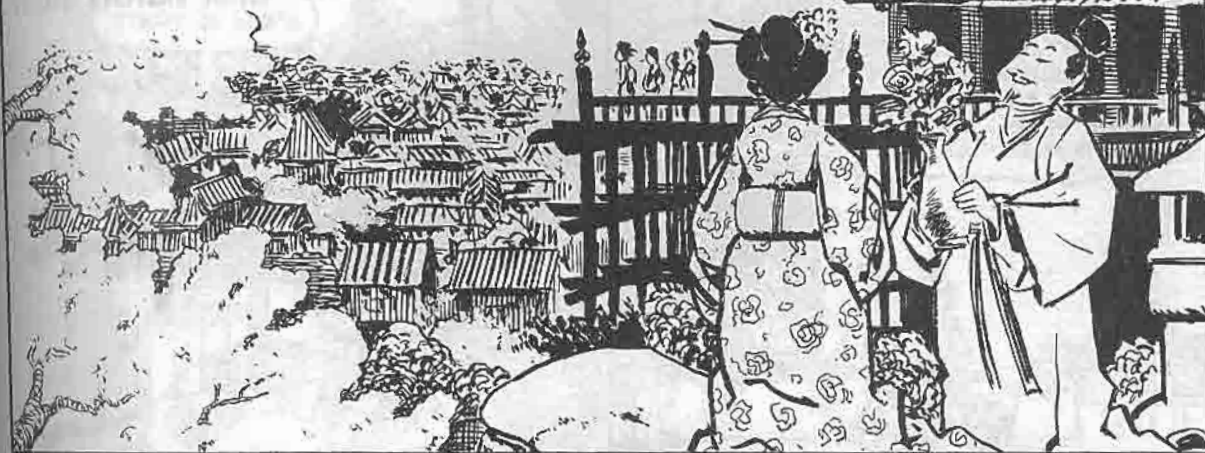
TO HOUSE THIS NEW CIVILIZATION, THE FUJIWARA LAID PLANS FOR A GRAND NEW CAPITAL CITY BUILT ON A CHINESE DESIGN. SO WHAT IF JAPAN LACKED THE PEOPLE TO FILL IT?



AND SO, IN THE 790s, KYOTO AROSE, MOSTLY... THOUGH THE WEST SIDE OF TOWN WAS A SLUM FROM THE START.



ON THE EAST SIDE, MEANWHILE, CULTURE BLOSSOMED. A NEW, SIMPLIFIED SCRIPT BOOSTED POETRY AND PROSE... PEOPLE POLISHED THEIR MANNERS INSTEAD OF THEIR WEAPONS (IT WAS ILLEGAL TO OWN THEM)... AT ONE POINT, KYOTO'S CHIEF OF POLICE WAS A 16-YEAR-OLD BOY!



BY THE LATE 900s, PEOPLE SENSED THAT AN ERA WAS PASSING. YOU CAN SEE THE PESSIMISM IN LADY MURASAKI'S GREAT NOVEL OF THE 990s, *THE TALE OF GENJI*, IN WHICH THE AMOROUS, GLAMOROUS PRINCE GENJI BEGETS A DEPRESSED, NEUROTIC SON—LITERATURE'S FIRST ANTIHERO.



BUT WHY DWELL ON IT?! LIFE WAS A PARTY! POETRY! MUSIC! DANCE! COSTUMES WITH SEVEN LAYERS OF COLOR-COORDINATED SLEEVES! CERTAINLY, THE FRONTIER, WITH ITS GROWING POPULATION OF FREE-LANCE SWORD SWINGERS, WAS FAR FROM EVERYONE'S MIND...

