This chapter focuses on the Japanese government’s efforts to visualize the mythical Empress Jingū as a representation of the new nation-state in the 1870s and 1880s. As modern as they were supposed to look, the symbols and proxies of nation-states throughout the world in the nineteenth century were more often than not rooted in legends and myths, historical narratives and heroes of the past. In the wake of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition* and Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (both 1983), the visual mythmaking of national histories in nineteenth-century art has become the focus of several important publications. But much still needs to be done regarding the use and definition of gender in the process of selecting national heroes for modern objectives in East Asia.

I come to this topic via my interest in pre-modern pictorial narratives and their visual and textual reception within gendered as well as socially and politically defined contexts. My approach is informed by this type of social art history; in this chapter I also employ an

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ethnological methodology that incorporates a cross-section of elite and popular cultural products for public consumption, most notably the design of banknotes.

To start with my conclusion: Empress Jingū served as an ideal proxy for not only Meiji Japan at large but for both the Meiji Emperor and, in another reading, for the Meiji Empress. How was this possible? This female deity—empress/queen, mother of the deity of war, cross-dressing female warrior, and successful invader of the Korean kingdoms—was imbued with rich layers of textual, visual, and ritual significance for all strata of Japanese culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Meiji government counted on the shared knowledge of these multiple facets of Jingū, and it saturated the newly constructed, hybrid images of this imagined figure with varying implicit modern objectives. The process of choosing Jingū as representative of the early Meiji state on banknotes, bonds and stamps, and adapting her imaginary portrait to suit the ideologies of a Westernizing, modernizing and ultimately colonizing nation-state is best defined as a palimpsest. Although the term palimpsest was originally a term associated with medieval manuscripts and has recently been most commonly used in the field of literary studies, it adapts itself perfectly to the phenomenon examined in this chapter. The Meiji images under investigation here show Jingū as a western Amazon, an allegorical figure, and in a bust portrait—all of which seem to defy previously known concepts and perceptions of Jingū’s multifaceted persona. Her oscillating gender in previous texts and pictures was compelled to yield to a clearcut gender definition as stipulated by the Meiji government in its wide-ranging attempt to emulate Western culture. However, as we shall see, the Jingū images preceding the Meiji era continued to live on in a variety of media that included votive tablets, school textbooks and paintings. They shaped the reading of those hyper-texts of official attempts to recast her in partly Western, partly Japanese guises and thus helped create a modern understanding of a shared Japanese past. This process of overwriting is by no means unique to the creation of Jingū imagery in the Meiji era, but applies to other images in both Japan and elsewhere, as will be discussed below.

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