

The circumstances surrounding  
the investiture of Fujiwara no Miyako's  
with the title "Daibunin"

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In 724 the Emperor Shomu 聖武 (r. 724-749) invested his natural mother Fujiwara no Miyako 藤原宮子 with a title "Daibunin" 大夫人 by Imperial command, against the objections raised by Prince Nagaya 長屋 and the other councilors of the Daijokan 太政官 that the title should be "Kotaibunin" 皇太夫人 according to the Ritsuryo codes. Emperor Shomu finally acquiesced to the objection and rescinded his command. This article reexamines this well-known event in the political history of ancient Japan and comes to the following conclusions.

- 1) "Daibunin" was intended to be a personal honorific title devised by the Fujiwara 藤原 clan, with which the Imperial Household would sympathize.
- 2) The intention to use this title was to heighten Miyako's nobility to a level at which she would be treated like an empress dowager of royal blood (kotaigo 皇太后), similar to the title of "Daibunin" bestowed upon Taima no Yamashiro 当麻山背, the natural mother of Emperor Junnin 淳仁 (r. 758-764).
- 3) Among the Fujiwara clan and the Imperial Household this title was also bestowed upon Agatainukai no Tachibana no Michiyo 県犬養橘三千代, the natural mother of the Empress Komyo 光明, for the purpose of heightening her daughter's nobility.
- 4) This kind of honorific title is mainly found being bestowed upon women related to the Fujiwara clan during the thirty or so years during the mid-eighth century when the Imperial Household and the Fujiwara clan confronted various kinds of difficulty with respect to succession.
- 5) The essence of the event in question lies in the conflict that existed between Emperor Shomu, who was supported by the Fujiwara clan, and Prince

**Nagaya, who was apprehensive that the Fujiwaras would soon appropriate the Imperial House as its personal possession.**