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JAPANESE BELIEFS ABOUT THE KOREA-JAPAN
RELATIONSHIP

Inoue (1968: 15) states that when the Sui Dynasty unified China in A.D. 581, Suiko sent a large number of students and priests to accompany the *Kenzuishi* 遣隋使 (envoys to Sui) and “[f]rom then on Japan acquired continental culture directly from China instead of through Korea.” The Japanese are fond of emphasizing the *direct* Chinese influence on their early cultural development and of minimizing the Korean influence. A typical example is found in Morishima (1982: 20): “Throughout her history until the Meiji Revolution (1867-68), Japan was under the influence of Chinese culture; cultural stimuli and encouragement came from China either directly or through Korea.”

After gingerly admitting some minimal Korean influence, the Japanese usually hasten to present some version of the following story found in Morishima (1982: 21-30): “Since about 370 the Japanese had occupied the southern tip of the Korean peninsula. This Japanese territory, which was called Mimana, adjoined Paekche and Silla which in turn adjoined Koguryeo. Japan had also had extensive influence in Paekche and Silla from about the same time, and they paid tribute to her . . . [T]he Soga and the Mononobe clans . . . enriched themselves by exploiting the colony which Japan held in Korea at that time . . . Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 . . . also planned an attack on Silla which was threatening the security of Mimana. However, all efforts to preserve the colony were in vain, and after his death in 622, Japan finally had to abandon it . . . Naka no Ōe 中大兄, while he was the Crown Prince under Empress Saimei 齊明, responded to Paekche’s desperate plea for help to withstand an attack from the allied forces of T’ang and Silla by sending a large army to Korea . . . [The] Japanese government did not try to attack Korea again until Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 sent an expedition there in 1592-98.”

Morishima's story is simply a faint recitation from his childhood memory of the Meiji-style history textbook. A typical version of the Korea-Japan relationship goes as follows (Kuno, 1937: 193, 234, 235 & 242): “The power of Japan to rule in Korea began with the creation of the State of Mimana as

her protectorate . . . [I]t is a widely accepted historical fact that prior to the seventh century a sort of suzerain and tributary relationship existed between Japan and the Kingdoms and states in southern Korea . . . The kingdoms in Korea had for a time been Japan's [Yamato Wa's] main source of national wealth . . . [Eventually, however,] the kingdoms of Korea had become heavy military and financial burdens to Japan: because of the traditional suzerain and tributary relations, Japan was obliged to undertake dangerous and expensive military expeditions on behalf of Mimana, the Kingdom of Kudara 百濟, and even the Kingdom of Korai 高句麗 . . . After the destruction of the Kingdom of Kudara in 663, and of the Kingdom of Korai in 668, Japan abandoned her claims in Korea, her authority having been completely overthrown . . . owing to the steady rise of the intellectual and military power of a Korea united under the rule of Shinra, . . . [Yamato Japan's] ambitious plans to reestablish her power in Korea were gradually abandoned. In the latter part of the sixteenth century, Toyotomi's invasion of Korea, which lasted seven years, was finally abandoned in 1598 because of his death from old age . . . In 1910, when Korea was annexed to Japan, the Japanese magazine *History and Geography* . . . issued a special edition, the Korean Number. In the preface to this edition, the chief editor made the following statement: . . . 'This great accomplishment may be regarded by some as the restoration of Japan's ruling power in Korea that she had lost in the seventh century. However, we must not look upon this great national event as the mere regaining of Japan's ruling power in Korea of the ancient period, but we should consider it as the natural outcome of the glorious life of our empire for two thousand years.'

Saeki (1977) notes that "the [Meiji] historians of the Kokugaku 國學 (national learning) school, which had emerged in the Tokugawa period, launched a vigorous campaign against the textualists, in line with the political policy of the Meiji government. Placing complete faith in the accounts in the *Nihon Shoki*, they contended that the Korean chronicles were unreliable since they had been compiled much later. Moreover, both in order to enhance the authority of the emperor, who had been reinstated as head of the state by the Meiji government, and also to give historical sanction to the aggressive policies then maintained by the government toward Korea, they insisted on handling as historical fact such legendary material as the story of the Empress Jingū 神功. The Meiji government, on its part, introduced these nationalistic views into education in order to further its policies and to regiment national thought." In fact the Meiji government encouraged Japanese historians to indulge in unrestricted speculation and to be inventive in thinking up all kinds of self-entertaining possibilities.¹

Bitō Masahide (KEJ: 2.102) notes that in 1869, one year after the Meiji Restoration, the new government set up an office to undertake a compilation of historical evidence that endorsed a view of history extolling the preeminence of a policy based on loyalty to emperor and state. The office was eventually moved to Tokyo University where it became the Historiographical Institute (Shiryō Hensanjo 史料編纂所). Consequently, when scholars came into conflict with the official view, they were repressed. For instance, Kume Kunitake 久米邦武 wrote an article critical of the Shinto beliefs that provided the religious underpinning for the emperor system. He was dismissed from Tokyo University. In Japan, history increasingly became an instrument of the state which sought to foster an extreme nationalism.²

Inspired by the bits and pieces of rhetorical exaggerations recorded in *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, Japanese historians have indeed enthusiastically manufactured and accumulated theories upon theories about Mimana 任那 and the Yamato State 大和倭, all of which are variations on the same familiar theme. However, with such a fragile foundation, this overloaded pile of self-entertaining propositions can only eventually crumble under its own weight.

According to Saeki (1977), “[T]he study of ancient Japanese history has made striking progress since World War II By questioning the authenticity of the descriptions in the *Nihon Shoki*, which had hitherto been regarded as one of the central classics, it also awakened the academic world to the need for textual criticism of historical sources. These studies led to the conviction that the accounts in the *Samguk sagi* are authentic, while those concerning early Japanese history in the *Nihon Shoki* are dubious. It also showed that legends such as Empress Jingū’s Korean expedition, which had hitherto been treated as historical fact, are unauthentic.”

It is true that younger generations of Japanese scholars have attempted to reappraise basic historical and archeological sources and to advance many new theories. One may even agree with Saeki’s (1977) statement that “the study of ancient Japanese history is on the point of a new birth.” It seems, however, that many younger Japanese historians have not really been able to emancipate themselves from the doctrines of the Kokugaku scholars; they remain captives to the Meiji-style history education promoted in their primary and secondary schools. Inoue (1968: preface) states that: “The study of history in Japan has made remarkable progress since the end of the Second World War, because of the fact that the strong political influences of prewar days were cast off and truly critical studies were openly undertaken in every

¹See also 津田 (1966: 111). <1.12>

²See also 津田 (1966: 165). <1.14>

field. One important consequence of this academic liberation has been that many Japanese, who were educated before 1942, are today confused by the great difference in current interpretations of Japanese history.” But then Inoue (1968: 9-11) himself repeats the old fashioned story: “In the middle of the fourth century . . . the Yamato Court established a colony called Mimana in the southern part of Korea and started military action against Paekche and Silla, which were then newly founded The inscription on this [King Kwanggae’to’s] monument 廣開土王碑 also states that at the end of the fourth century Japan had crushed Paekche and Silla, and fought with Koguryeo From about the beginning of the fourth century, the Yamato Court began to grow stronger, and before long its troops swept over Kyū shū 九州 It becomes clear that Japan advanced into Korea in the latter half of the fourth century, carved out territory in south Korea, and brought back a large number of skilled workmen and slaves [and] with so many skilled workmen and slaves brought from Korea, the power of the Yamato Court was markedly strengthened.”

Aoki (1974: 92 n.) notes that: “Although enriched by recent critical scholarship, Japanese historiography today is still under the influence of this nineteenth century viewpoint.” Furthermore, when it comes to the ordinary Japanese, their understanding of the Korea-Japan relationship in the early period still remains at the level of Morishima, i.e., at the level of the primary school history textbook of the Meiji Restoration 明治維新 period. Aoki (1974: 19) states that: “. . . there is a strong inhibition among Japanese historians to accept a theory that the origin of the Japanese ruling class was anywhere but the Japanese islands. This tradition was built up by the nationalist scholars in the nineteenth century. It tended to regard the history of Japan as an isolated, unique phenomemon of the world rather than to accept [that it was] . . . a result of cultural diffusion. For ten years preceding 1945, no sensible studies about the beginning of Japanese civilization could appear, because serious students of the subjects were persecuted, directly and indirectly. However, at the end of World War II, the ban on such studies was lifted, and since then no one has been subject to insular prejudices. Nevertheless, long-lived nationalistic sentiment among the Japanese is still so strong as to hinder the objective study of the birth of Japanese civilization.” The attitude of Japanese people toward the birth of Yamato Wa is identical to the position Aoki described toward the “beginning of Japanese civilization.” So strong was the indoctrination on the origin of Yamato Wa at the hands of pre-War Japanese educational authorities, and so severe were the penalties for any deviation from this fascist-nationalist orthodoxy, that even today the misconceptions persist. To this very day, most of the Japanese historians who

specialize in the Kofun period are conducting their research under the perceptions imposed by the pre-War orthodoxy and this very fact is still hampering every variety of serious inquiry in this field. Miller (1980: 105) comments that “the rigid thought control of the fascist-nationalistic rulers who led Japan to her defeat in the war proved to be the most durable of their many unlamented concoctions.” One can only hope that some day a new generation of Japanese scholars will begin to free themselves from the lingering psychological barriers that have been hampering their research into Japan’s past.³

In the mid-1950s, the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO created a special committee to cooperate with the International Commission in the preparation of a History of the Scientific and Cultural Development of Mankind. Suematsu (1958) states in an article that was prepared under the auspices of the special committee and published as the fifth of a series of articles in the *Journal of World History on Japanese History* that: “between 366 A.D. and 371 A.D., the Japanese control over South Korea was increased, and the ‘Mimana Government,’ as [it is] referred to in the old records of Japan, was started. . . The government of Mimana meant the direct control of almost all the communities of [Three] Han still unannexed to the territories of Paekche and Silla. Moreover, the Japanese regarded these two countries as included in their political control, and treated them in that way. . . Silla’s unification of the peninsula marked an epoch in the history of Korea. The relation between Silla and Japan, however, developed along the lines of the agreement concluded in 646 A.D., whereby Silla was to send a prince, make an annual report of political affairs, and pay tribute to Japan.” It is obvious that, as long as some Japanese historians keep entertaining their people with these kinds of stories, the Korean people and the Japanese people can only maintain a very difficult relationship.

The Japanese government established the International Society for Educational Information in 1960 with the object of providing authors, publishers and educators in foreign countries with “more correct” and “up-to-date” information on Japan, stating that: “Mutual understanding among the

³Miller (1980: 122-123) notes that: “As long as Korea was part of the Japanese state, [during 1910-45], it was quite impossible to provide official recognition for Korean evidence that did not fit the confines of the official orthodoxy . . . Korean archaeologists have made impressive advances in the three short decades since they achieved academic freedom; but also like the situation in Japan, inherited patterns of conceptualization and approach are difficult to overcome, particularly for the older generation of scholars that, in both countries, still in large measure sets the overall tone for these and related studies.”

peoples of the world is a vital cornerstone in the building of any lasting international peace.” The society commissioned Sakamoto, Professor Emeritus of Tokyo University, to write a monograph on the Japanese Emperor, which was published in 1984. Sakamoto (1984: 19) states that: “After the middle of the fourth century, Japan directly governed Mimana on the southern tip of the Korean peninsula and held Paekche as a protectorate.” The emphasis of this monograph (1984: 13-15) is given to the idea that “the Japanese emperors and the Japanese populace both stem from the early Yamato peoples – the monarchy most probably does not descend, as some have theorized, from a different race that invaded the country and conquered the native population The fundamental characteristics of these people, formed over the ten thousand years of the pre-pottery and Jomon periods, were not basically changed even by the later introduction of wet rice cultivation and metal implements. The unity of the emperor and his subjects stemmed from this basic ethnic homogeneity [T]he Japanese emperors were not members of a separate, conquering people, and [thus] enjoyed, as a result, a strong ethnic bond to their subjects.”⁴ One can easily understand why the Japanese people ardently desire to believe in this cherished idea, but one might not be so sure whether such a belief is conducive to building a lasting international peace.

⁴Sakamoto (1984: 15) admits that the mother of Kammu 桓武 [A.D. 781-806] “was a descendant of the Paekche kings on the Korean peninsula” and that the Shinsen-shō ji-roku 新撰姓氏錄 compiled in A.D. 815 records that more than thirty percent of the ruling clans “in the provinces around the capital traced their origins to immigrants from the continent.” But he simply states that: “The native Japanese population accepted these people from abroad without discrimination and made full use of their learning and technical knowledge Soon their foreign origins were forgotten by both the natives and the immigrants themselves.”