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## THE ORIGIN OF THE YAMATO IMPERIAL CLAN:

*Examining the Register of Imperial Families  
and Tracing Their Origin to the Paekche Royal Family*

Tsunoda, et al.(1958: 85) state that: “The importance of genealogy in determining claims to sovereignty was demonstrated by the *Records of Ancient Matters* (A.D. 712). The Japanese, who thus stressed the divine descent of the imperial family, were confirmed in this by the Han view of the Mandate of Heaven as conferred, not on individuals, but on dynasties which them-selves had been provided with genealogies going back to the sage-kings.”

The genealogies of important families in Japan, however, were in a state of great confusion until the seventh century, but during the latter part of the so-called Tempyō Shōhō era 天平勝寶 (A.D. 749-57), a number of eminent scholars were summoned to compile a register of important families. Before their work was half completed, however, the government became involved in certain difficulties and the group of scholars was disbanded. Later, in the reign of Saga (A.D. 809-23), the work was resumed, and the scholars produced in A.D. 815 the “New Compilation of the Register of Families” 新撰姓氏錄 (Shinsen Shōji-roku), which includes the names of 1,182 important families (uji) living in the capital and the five surrounding provinces.<sup>1</sup>

The preface to Shinsen Shōji-roku reads as follows (translated by Tsunoda, et al., 1958: 86-88): “They say that the Divine Dynasty had its inception when the Grandson of Heaven 天孫 descended to the land of So 襲 and extended his influence in the West, but no written records are preserved of these events. In the years when Jimmu assumed command of the state and undertook his

<sup>1</sup>According to G. Cameron Hurst III (KEJ: 7.124), the compilation was begun at the order of Kammu in A.D. 799 by a committee led by his son Prince Manda 萬多親王 (A.D. 783-830).

campaign to the East . . . the chieftains surrendered in great numbers and the rebels vanished like mist. . . . Land was allotted to men who were deemed virtuous in accordance with their merits. Heads of clans 土命氏 were granted such titles as Local Chieftain 國造 [Kuni-no-miyatsuko] and District Chieftain 縣主 [Agata-nushi] for the first time. Suinin cultivated good fortune by his ever-renewed benevolent favors. . . . clans and families were gradually distinguished one from the other. Moreover, Imna came under our influence 況復任那欽風 and Silla brought tribute. [No mention of Paekche!] Later, barbarians from other countries, in due reverence for his virtue, all wished to come to Japan. Out of solicitude for these aliens, he bestowed family names on them 賜姓 . . . . During the reign of Ingyō [a King related to Silla's royal families], however, family relationships were in great confusion . . . . While Kōgyō 持統 held the Regalia, the provincial records were all burnt . . . . Then, when the Emperor Tenji was Heir Apparent, Eseki, an archivist of the Funa family 船史惠尺, presented to the court the charred remains of the records. In the year of metal and horse (A.D. 670) the family registers 戶籍 were recompiled and the relations of clans and families were all clarified. . . . During the Tempyō Shōhō era 天平勝寶季中 (749-57), by special favor of the court, all aliens 諸蕃 who had made applications were granted family names. Since the same surnames were given to the immigrants as Japanese families possessed, uncertainty arose as to which families were of alien and which of native origin. There were commoners everywhere who pretended to be the scions of the high and the mighty, and *immigrant aliens* from the Korean kingdoms claimed to be the descendants of the Japanese deities 日本之神胤 [a more honest, literal translation should read: "The respected guests from Three Han 三韓蕃賓 claimed that . . . ."] As time passed and people changed, scarcely anyone was left who knew the facts. . . . Our present Sovereign [Saga, 809-23], of glorious fame, desired that the work be resumed at the point where it was abandoned . . . . We have searched out the old and new, from the time of the Emperor Jimmu to the Kōnin era (811-24) to the best of our abilities. The names of 1,182 families are included in this work, which is in thirty volumes. It is entitled the New Compilation of the Register of Families. . . . Since . . . it is concerned with the key to human relationships, it is an essential instrument in the hand of the nation."<sup><1></sup>

The Register of Families is divided into three books, the first of which lists those imperial clans that claimed descent from former emperors. The second book lists those divine clans that claimed descent from heavenly and earthly deities and the third book lists alien clans that claimed descent from Chinese and Korean progenitors.<sup><2></sup> The compilers of the Register seem to have

attempted to make clear distinctions among the “imperial clans” [kobetsu 皇別] originating from 天孫 line of Paekche royal families, the “deity clans” [shinbetsu 神別] originating from the heavenly and earthly deities, and the “foreign clans” [shoban 諸蕃] originating from the important non-imperial families that came from Korea. “Imperial clans” refers solely to clans whose original progenitor was an emperor, rather than to the imperial family itself 天皇皇子之派. As Egami (1962) suggests, the clans originating from heavenly deities 天神 may represent the descendants of those who came to Japan from Korea before the 天孫 -Yamato era, while clans that claimed descent from earthly deities 地祇 may represent the descendants from the genuinely native Japanese deities.<sup>2</sup> Among the 403 families that were classified as the deity clans, 373 were recorded as descendants of heavenly deities and only 30 of them were recorded as descendants of native earthly deities. Geographically, the imperial clans were located mostly in capital areas 京畿 and the “deity clans” were primarily found in the provinces.

Miller (1976) notes that Temmu had established a new system of “Eight-Rank” hereditary titles (Yakusa no kabane) in A.D. 684, and that the top kabane rank *mahito* 真人 [Jin-person] was granted exclusively to imperial clans that could trace their origin back to 天孫, Keitai (A.D. 507-531), Senka (A.D. 535-539), Bidatsu (A.D. 572-585) and Yōmei (A.D. 585-587). According to Nihongi (NII: 301), Temmu 天武 himself was called “the Emperor Ama no Nunahara oki no MAHITO (MABITO) 天渟中原瀛真人.” The imperial clans who claimed kinship to emperors who supposedly had reigned prior to 天孫 were granted the second title of the eight ranks, “asomi 朝臣.”<sup>4</sup> The ancestry of the clans descended from 天孫 was traced back through a cadet line of 天孫 descendants from whom Keitai was selected. Miller (1976) notes that the Register never provides a genealogical tree for a

<sup>2</sup>Japanese mythology distinguishes the heavenly deities (Amatsu-kami 天津神) from the native deities (Kunitsu-kami 國津神). As noted earlier, Egami (1962) suggests that “the so-called heavenly deities . . . represent foreign conquerors, while the native gods represent the chieftains of aboriginal tribes in Japan.” In a somewhat different context, Tsunoda, et al. (1958: 86) states that: “. . . these deities ruled over the land of Japan before the arrival of the imperial family from Heaven . . .”

<sup>3</sup>The eight titles 八色之姓 were Mahito 真人, Asomi (Ason) 朝臣, Sukune 宿禰, Imiki 忌寸, Michi no Shi 道師, Omi 臣, Muraji 連 and Inaki 稻置. Aston (NII: 365n) notes that the fourth title Imiki was specially given to the Imaki Aya 今來漢 people from Paekche.

<sup>4</sup>According to KEJ (1:103), the asomi rank was bestowed upon 52 clans, but later it was granted to virtually all prominent clans and, with the rise of the asomi-ranked Fujiwara family in the late 8th century, asomi in effect replaced the mahito rank.

noble clan but simply provides the name of its progenitor, while in some cases noting the progenitor as being the descendant of some emperor or deity or as having the same ancestor 同祖 as such and such a clan.

The preface of the Register states that “since *mahito* [Jin-person] is the sovereign one among the imperial clan names 真人是皇別之上氏也, those *mahito* clans in capital areas are compiled in Book One and presented at the beginning of the imperial group 附皇別首.”<sup><2></sup>

The first four *mahito* imperial clans listed at the very beginning of Book One of the Register were recorded as descendants 出自 of Homuda-wake 譽田天皇 𑖀𑖄𑖅, the fifth clan as descendant of Keitai 繼體, and the seven following *mahito* clans as descendants of Bidatsu 敏達; then the following eight *mahito* imperial clans (i.e., from the thirteenth to the twentieth) were recorded as the descendants of “the Prince of Paekche” 百濟親王之後也. However, the twelfth one, that is, the *mahito* clan immediately preceding those recorded as the descendants of “the Prince of Paekche,” was recorded not only as the descendant of Bidatsu but also as the offspring 出自 of “the King of Paekche” 敏達孫百濟王也. In other words, “the descendants of Bidatsu” is equivalent to “the offspring of the King of Paekche.”<sup><3></sup> Furthermore, according to Nihongi (NII: 1, 36 & 90), Bidatsu (Nunakura futo-dama-shiki) was the second child of Kimmei (Ame-kuni Oshi-hiraki Hiro-niha) who was the rightful heir of Keitai (Wohodo) who, in turn, was “a descendant in the fifth generation” of 𑖀𑖄𑖅 (Homuda-wake). In other words, the Register records that the entire *mahito* imperial clan, from the first to the twentieth, were the offspring of “the King of Paekche.”

According to Nihongi (NII: 33, 106, 157, 274 & 301), Senka (Take-wo Hiro-kuni Oshitate) was the second child of Keitai, Yomei was the fourth child of Kimmei, Jomei (Okinaga Tarashi-hi Hiro-nuka) was the grandson of Bidatsu, Tenji (Ame Mikoto Hirakasu Wake) was the eldest son of Jomei, and Temmu was the younger brother of Tenji. The remaining twenty-four *mahito* clans from the twenty-first to the forty-fourth were recorded as the offspring of either 𑖀𑖄𑖅, Keitai, Bidatsu, Senka, Yomei, Jomei, Tenji or Temmu. This implies that the entire forty-four *mahito* imperial clans listed in the Register can be reckoned as the offspring of the King of Paekche. This in turn implies that the entire 𑖀𑖄𑖅 line of Japan’s imperial families originated from Paekche royal families.

Out of 1,182 families recorded in the Register, 335 were classified as

<sup>5</sup>The Register somehow states that the number of deity clans is 404 instead of 403 and the number of miscellaneous clans is 117 instead of 116.

imperial clans (including the 44 *mahito* clans), 403 as deity clans, 328 as foreign clans, and 116 as miscellaneous clans.<sup>5</sup> The 403 deity clans consist of 373 heavenly-deity 天神 clans and 30 earthly-deity 地祇 clans. Among the 328 that were classified as the important families of alien origin, 158 families originated from Paekche, 42 from Koguryeo, 9 from Silla, 10 from Imna [Kaya], and 109 from China.<sup>6</sup> The Paekche families in the alien group represent the non-royal families as well as some of the royal families who came over to Japan later, particularly after the fall of Paekche in A.D. 663. The ruling families may thus be said to have consisted of 335 imperial families representing 天孫's line of Paekche royal families, 373 heavenly-deity families which may represent the Koreans who crossed over to Japan during or before the 天孫-Yamato era, 158 Paekche families recorded among the foreign clans, and 61 families from other parts of Korea [Silla, Koguryeo and Kaya], leaving only 255 families supposedly not directly related to Koreans, these consisting of 30 earthly-deity families, 109 Chinese families and 116 miscellaneous families. However, the so-called miscellaneous clans also include 34 clans originating from Paekche, Koguryeo, Silla, and Kaya -- eighteen, seven, eight, and one, respectively.<sup>5</sup> One may therefore say that, out of the 1,182 ruling clans, the Register has only 222 clans not directly related to Koreans.

The 104 families that were originally recorded in the Register as foreign clans originating from Paekche consist of 2 descendants from Paekche's "great kings" 大王, 47 descendants from Paekche kings, 11 descendants from Paekche Saju 使主 [translated as Omi], 6 descendants from Paekche Omi, 5 descendants from Paekche Kimi, and 33 ordinary people.<sup>6</sup>

This Register, particularly the first few pages on Mahito clans, clearly supports our thesis that the rulers of Yamato Wa were of Paekche descent.

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<sup>5</sup>The Register classifies 54 families of Paekche origin -- such as the descendants of the Achi-Kishi 阿知吉師(阿直岐), Wang-in 王仁, Lord of Yutsuki (Kung-weol 弓月), and Achi no Omi 阿知使主 and his son Tsuga no Omi 都加使主 who came to Wa from Paekche in the 14th, 15th, 16th, and 20th years of 天孫 respectively (NI: 261-265) -- as families of Chinese origin. We have added these 54 families to the 104 families that were recorded in the Register as foreign clans originating from Paekche.<sup>6</sup> The movement of people from the continent to Yamato Wa recorded in Nihongi was, with the exception of a few cases from China, entirely from Korea and mostly from Paekche. And yet the Register tries to exaggerate the number of clans originating from China by including in this group many of those families that were clearly recorded in Nihongi as having originated from Paekche.

That is, the ethnic origins of the imperial clan are explicitly revealed by this *New Compilation of the Register of Families*.

Tsunoda, et al. (1958: 86) note that “the influx of Korean and Chinese immigrants . . . had . . . presented a challenge to the [native] Japanese, for the immigrants were clearly superior to the [native] Japanese in their knowledge of the techniques of civilization. The advantage that the [native] Japanese [families] claimed was their descent from the [native] gods, and to this heritage they jealously clung.” According to Reischauer (1937: 19), the foreign clans “were more civilized and sophisticated than the islanders, and it was but natural that the primitive society of early Japan should change radically upon absorbing such an influx of new blood and in adapting itself to a higher type of culture.”

Aoki (1974: 87) states that: “It is worth noting that the Japanese reverence towards aristocratic lineage strongly resembled that of the Korean peoples and several peoples of Turkic origins. As discussed earlier, Koguryeo and Paekche kings came from the aristocratic tribes in Manchuria [Puyeo] . . . Social stratification according to one’s birth was rigid and absolutely inviolable.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Aoki continues: “If Japanese reformers in the early seventh century wanted to reorganize political and social institutions of their society, their mentality was like that of Korean leaders . . . In fact, the twelve-cap-ranking system of court officials was a curious admixture of Chinese and Korean traditions . . . It was a kind of salary scale whereby the sovereign granted stipend lands to a new body of aristocratic bureaucracy and changed its components’ hereditary positions and importance by giving them ranks according to their merits . . . It is significant that the new cap-ranking system clarified the positions of the royal families definitely higher than those of the other nobles.”