

# A Study on the Relationship between Gaya and the Japanese Imperial Family

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*Translated by Jini Shim*

*The origins of the Japanese imperial family are debated between two theories: one suggests descent from the indigenous Jomon people, while the other links them to the externally introduced Yayoi people. The theory connecting the imperial family to the Jomon people, particularly the Ainu, was explored but lacked evidence. Instead, the Yayoi civilization, which introduced wet-rice agriculture and the Bronze Age culture to Japan, is traced back to migrants from Gojoseon. Artifacts from the Kofun period, closely related to the imperial family, reveal the presence of horse-riding people skilled in ironworking, originating from Gaya in the Korean Peninsula. Additionally, myths connecting the Japanese imperial ancestor Ninigi-no-Mikoto to Kim Suro, the founder of Gaya, and the identification of figures like Himiko and Empress Jingu as Gaya shamans, suggest that the Japanese imperial family is a collateral branch of the Gaya royal family, who migrated to Japan from southern Korea.*

## I. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

One of the mysteries of Japan's ancient history is concerned with the origin of the Japanese imperial family. Theories are divided between viewing them as Ainu Jomon people [조몬인 繩文人], the indigenous people of Japan, and as horse-

riding people [기마민족 騎馬民族] who migrated from outside. Within Japan, the claim that the imperial family are natives of the Japanese archipelago is emphasized by associating them with the Ainu Jomon people. However, when examining genetic analyses, historical records, artifacts and relics, it raises doubts about

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this assertion. The story of Ninigi's [니니기  
 ににぎ] Descent as the Heavenly Grandson  
 [천손강림 天孫降臨], recorded in *Kojiki*,  
*Records of Ancient Matters of Japan*  
 [고사기 古事記], implies that they brought  
 civilization from outside.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore,  
 the numerous artifacts and archeological  
 remains unearthed from Kobun (ancient  
 burial mounds, 고분 古墳) across the  
 Japanese archipelago suggest their  
 connections with horse-riding migrants  
 [도래인 渡来人]. This paper aims to analyze  
 the artifacts, relics, and historical sources  
 to explore the reality of the origins of the  
 Japanese imperial family and critically  
 evaluate the arguments of both the  
 indigenous origin theory [본토자생설  
 本土自生說] and the external migration  
 theory [외부유입설 外部流入說].

Scholars advocating the native origins  
 theory include Motoori Norinaga [모토오리  
 노리나가 本居宣長] and Hirata Atsutane  
 [히라타 아츠타네 平田篤胤]. Motoori  
 Norinaga conducted a thorough analysis  
 of the myths and legends recorded in the  
*Kojiki*, *Records of Ancient Matters of*  
*Japan* and *Nihon Shoki*, *Chronicles of*  
*Japan*, emphasizing the divine lineage of  
 the Japanese emperor as a descendant of  
 Amaterasu [the Sun Goddess, 천조대신  
 天照大神]. He argued that these myths  
 should be regarded as historical facts and  
 viewed the Japanese royal family as  
 existing within a unique ethnic history  
 directly shaped by divine intervention.  
 Hirata Atsutane, building on Motoori's

<sup>2</sup> The Korean myth of Hwanung's [환웅 桓雄]  
 descent from heaven also tells the story of the  
 Hwanung tribe, who possessed advanced  
 civilization and descended to govern the native

research, restructured Shinto theology  
 around the emperor, interpreting the  
 emperor's divinity and Japan's  
 uniqueness from a theological perspective.  
 He accepted the existence of the gods in  
 Japanese mythology as reality and  
 asserted that the emperor was the spiritual  
 and religious focal point of the Japanese  
 people. These two scholars provided  
 ideological support for the emperor  
 system during the era of Japanese  
 imperialism. Their claims evolved into  
 nationalist historiography and political  
 ideology in modern Japan, consistently  
 highlighting the divinity and distinct  
 identity of the Japanese royal family (Park  
 Hyungsook 2016).

On the other hand, proponents of the  
 external migration theory include Egami  
 Namio [에가미 나미오 江上波夫]. Egami  
 argued that a horse-riding Buyeo tribe  
 from the Korean Peninsula conquered the  
 existing agrarian society, ruled southern  
 Korea, and established the Japanese royal  
 family after migrating to the Japanese  
 archipelago from the Byeonhan [변한 弁韓]  
 region. He suggested that between the late  
 4th century and early 7th century, this  
 horse-riding group, equipped with  
 advanced military technology, replaced  
 the existing Yayoi culture and assumed a  
 dominant position (Egami Namio 1967).

Likewise, Jon Carter Covell claimed  
 that the royal Buyeo lineage from Korea's  
 Gaya kingdom conquered Wae (ancient

Bear [웅족 熊族] and Tiger tribes [호족 虎族]. The  
 Ninigi's descent myth in Japan follows a similar  
 mythological structure.

Japan) and maintained Korean political and cultural dominance over Japan for 700 years. He particularly argued that the conquerors who occupied Wae in 369 CE were warrior groups with shamanistic origins from the Gimhae region in Korea (Covell and Covell 2006). William E. Griffis critiqued Japan's 19th-century *Imna Government of Korea* theory [임나일본부설 任那日本府說] and the Policy for Conquering Korea [*Seikanron* 정한론 征韓論], while demonstrating that ancient Korea was superior to Japan. He also advocated for maintaining friendly relations between Korea and Japan (Griffis 1976). Additionally, according to the research of Yano Takayoshi [야노 다카요시 矢野尊義], powerful clans from the Gaya region migrated to Japan in the late 3rd century, settling in the Nara region and laying the foundation of the early Japanese royal family. He argued that they introduced Korea's advanced rice farming techniques and harvest rituals to Japan, which played a crucial role in strengthening the religious foundation of Japanese royal authority (Yano Takayoshi 2009).

## II. TWO THEORIES OF JAPANESE IMPERIAL FAMILY: JOMON VS. YAYOI PEOPLE

There are two major theories explaining the origins of the Japanese imperial family.

One theory argues that they are the indigenous Jomon lineage of the archipelago, and the other suggests that they are the Yayoi [야요이 彌生] lineage of migrants. These theories are based on two classifications of Japan's ancient peoples. One group, the Jomon people, lived on the Japanese archipelago from around 14,000 BCE to 300 BCE, and some believe them to be the ancestors of the imperial family. This theory emphasizes that the imperial family did not descend from external migrants but from the native peoples of the Japanese archipelago. The theory associates the Ainu [아이누 アイヌ], an indigenous group in Hokkaido [북해도 北海道] and the Tohoku region [동북지방 東北地方], as direct descendants of the Jomon people.

However, the physiognomy of the Jomon people is of the southern origin. Because the Ainu are of northern origin mixed with Russian influences, there is no direct relation between the two. Additionally, the Ainu are not exclusive to the Japanese archipelago, as they also live in the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin in Russia, and linguistically, the Ainu language has no connection to Japanese. Recent DNA research on Jomon skeletal remains has revealed that the Jomon people share genetic similarities with people from Southeast Asia, such as Laos and

Malaysia, rather than with the Ainu.<sup>3</sup> This indicates that the Ainu are not directly related to the ancient indigenous Jomon people of Japan. Then, are the Southeast Asian Jomon people truly the indigenous people of Japan, and is there a direct connection to the Japanese imperial family? To answer this, we must understand the process of cultural and civilizational transmission between the Jomon and Yayoi people.

### III. THE CULTURAL AND CIVILIZATIONAL TRANSMISSION IN THE YAYOI PERIOD

Before examining the Japanese imperial family, it is necessary to understand the process and flow of civilizational and cultural transmission between Korea and Japan. Japan's ancient history can be divided into two major periods: the Jomon period and the Yayoi period. The Yayoi

period is particularly significant as the time when rice cultivation began, and the use of bronze tools marked the onset of a more advanced civilization.<sup>4</sup> The main force behind this period consisted of people from Gojoseon [고조선 古朝鮮] who crossed over to the Japanese archipelago from southern China<sup>5</sup> and the Korean Peninsula (Robbeets et al., 2021).

During this period, the population of Yayoi people increased as they advanced into the Japanese archipelago. Two key aspects of this cultural transmission were rice farming and burial customs from the Korean Peninsula. A representative archaeological site from this period is the Yoshinogari site [요시노가리 유적 吉野ヶ里遺跡]<sup>6</sup> in northern Kyushu [규슈 九州]. The rice farming and burial customs of the Yayoi period were transmitted from the southwestern Korean Peninsula to the Japanese archipelago through the Yoshinogari region in northern Kyushu.

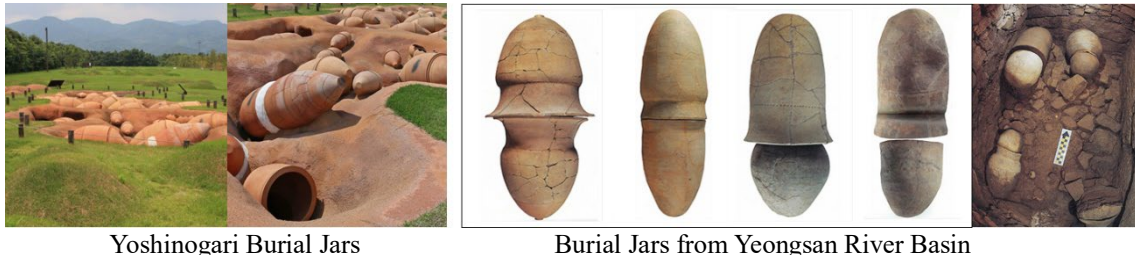
<sup>3</sup> Japan viewed the Ainu, who are of mixed Russian descent, as Jomon people. However, recent research shows a different view. According to Kim Cheong-jung (2018), "The Japanese Asahi Newspaper reported on the 12<sup>th</sup> (July 2018) that a genome (genetic information) analysis of Jomon human remains from about 2,500 years ago found that the genome arrangement was similar to that of ancient human bones excavated from Southeast Asian sites about 8,000 years ago."

<sup>4</sup> "The Yayoi period from the 3rd century BC to the 3rd century AD is a period in Japan when rice farming began and sedentary culture took root, which can be considered the origin of Japanese culture." (Introduction to the Yoshinogari Site, Yoshinogari Historical Park).

<sup>5</sup> Dongyi [동이 東夷] in the *Encyclopedia of Korean National Culture* [한국민족문화대백과사전] states: "These groups, distributed from the Shandong Peninsula to the Huaihe [회사 淮泗] River Basin, which includes present-day Jiangsu [江蘇省] and Anhui [安徽省] Provinces, began to appear in history during the Yin Dynasty when they started to interact with the Han Chinese." Based on this description, China here can be seen as part of the Dongyi territory.

<sup>6</sup> The Yoshinogari site is located across three villages: Kanzaki Town [神崎町], Mitagawa Town [三田川町], and Higashisefuri Village [東背振村] in Kanzaki County, Saga Prefecture [佐下縣]. (Introduction to the Yoshinogari Site, Yoshinogari Historical Park).

**Figure 1.** Burial Jars at Yoshinogari in Kyushu and the Burial Jars from the Yeongsan River Basin in Jeollanam-do



One of the characteristic burial practices found at the Yoshinogari site is the jar burial [옹관묘 甕棺墓].<sup>7</sup> This burial style is widely found in central and southern Korea, especially in the Yeongsan River [영산강 榮山江] region of Jeollanam-do in southwestern Korea. The jar burials at Yoshinogari are identical in form to those excavated from the Yeongsan River region, and the burial

goods found at the site provide evidence of the migration of the Gojoseon people from the Korean Peninsula<sup>8</sup> and the development of the burial customs.

Artifacts found in the jar burials include representative relics of the Gojoseon period, such as pottery, slender bronze daggers [세형동검 細形銅劍]<sup>9</sup>, bronze mirrors<sup>10</sup>, and comma-shaped jade beads

<sup>7</sup> The Encyclopedia of Korean National Culture describes that jar burials [독무덤 甕棺墓] use potteries such as large jars [독甕] or urns [항아리 壺] as coffins, rather than wooden or stone coffins. These burial methods were widely used worldwide, across time periods. They were used in Korea, China, and Japan from prehistoric times.

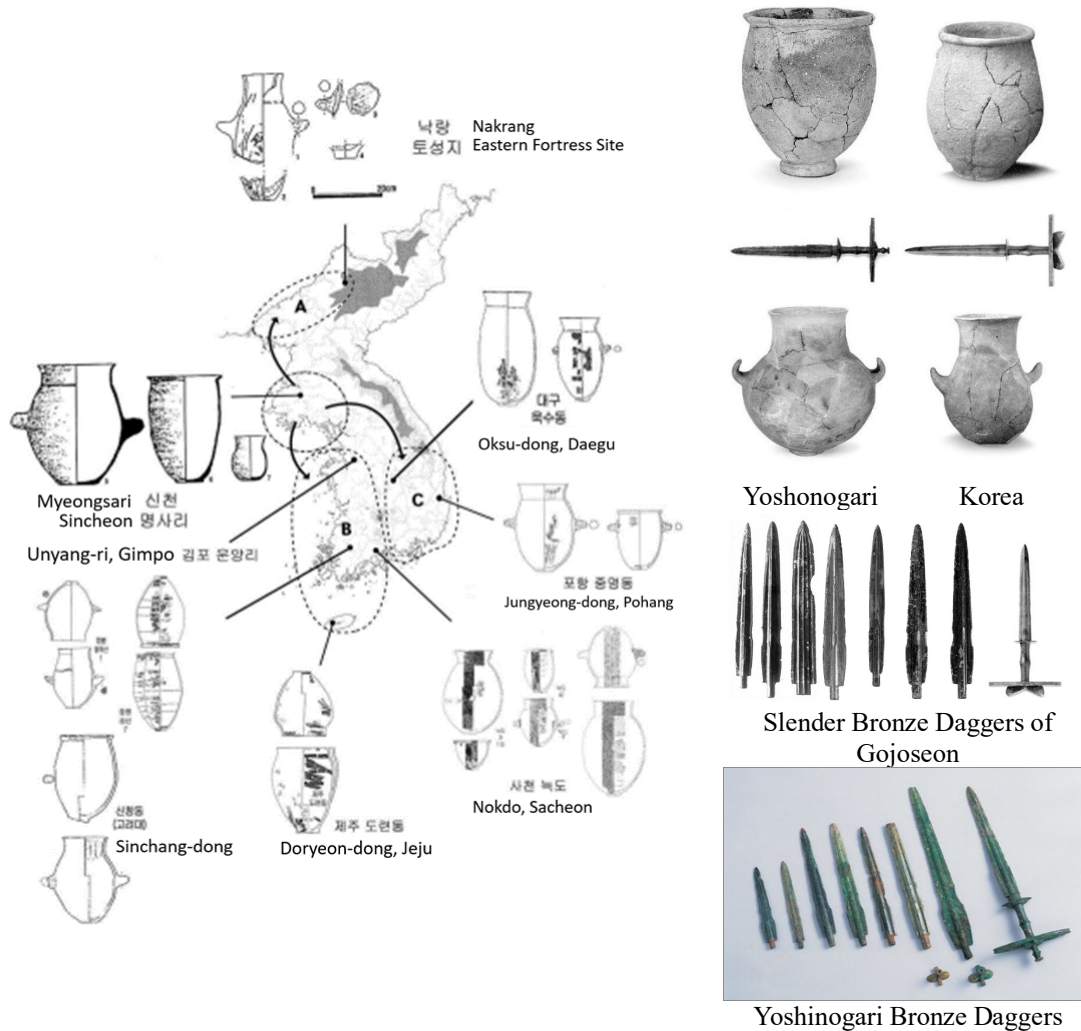
<sup>8</sup> *Samguk Yusa, The Legends and History of Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea* [삼국유사 三國遺事] (Volume 1, the Strange Things [기이 紀異] section, under the heading of “72 Nations”) states: “According to *Tongjian, Comprehensive Statutes* [통전 通典], ‘the remnants of Joseon were divided into 70 or more nations, occupying an area of 100 *li* in each direction.’” *Hou Han Shu, Book of Later Han* [후한서 後漢書] adds: “The Western Han Dynasty first established four commanderies in the former territories of Joseon, and later two. As laws became increasingly complicated, these areas split into 78 nations, each consisting of about 10,000 households.” Mahan [마한 馬韓] was located in the west and called all 54 of its small settlements nations. Jinhan [진한 辰韓] was located in the east and called each of its 12 small settlements nations,

while Byeonhan [변한 辰韓] was located in the south and also called each of its 12 small settlements “nations”. In *Samguk Yusa*, Gojoseon is recorded as having been divided into Samhan (three Han’s, 삼한 三韓).

<sup>9</sup> The slender bronze dagger is a key artifact of the Bronze Age and early Iron Age of Korea, primarily found across the Korean peninsula, mostly in the Pyongyang area south of the Cheongcheon River. Hence it is also called the Korean-style bronze dagger. It has also been excavated from the jar burials of the Yayoi period in the Primorsky Krai region of Russia and the Kyushu region of Japan. It is often excavated together with Bronze Mirror with Fine Linear Design [잔무늬거울 精文式細文鏡]. The culture of Gojoseon and Wiman Joseon [위만조선 衛滿朝鮮], which had Pyongyang as its center, is recognized to have been based on the culture of slender bronze daggers (National Institute of Korean History, “The Slender Bronze Dagger,” History Net).

<sup>10</sup> Kyodo News reported on the 27th that a “Bronze Mirror with Fine Linear Design [다뉴세문경 =잔무늬거울],” made in Korea and brought to Japan,

**Figure 2.** The Transmission of Jar Burials in the Korean Peninsula (Lee Chun-seon, 2011) and Artifacts between the Yoshinogari Site and Korean Peninsula Sites (National Museum of Korea Exhibition, 2008, provided by Hankyoreh and Plus Korea)



[곡옥 曲玉]<sup>11</sup>. These artifacts provide evidence that the northern culture of the Korean Peninsula was transmitted to the Japanese archipelago (Figure 2). Supporting this claim, Lee Chun-seon

(2011) argued that jar burials were transmitted from the Daedong River in Pyongyang, down along the west coast, to the southern coast of Korea, from which

was unearthed from a mid-Yayoi period jar burial at the Satodabaru Site in Nagasaki Prefecture, Japan. (Lee Ki-hwan, April 2001).

<sup>11</sup> They are decorative burial goods, which date back to prehistoric times. Also found in the Hongshan Culture, they are rooted in northern cultural origins.

**Figure 3.** The Transmission Routes of Yayoi Culture from the Korean Peninsula

exchanges were made with the Yayoi group in Japan. Lee Jeong-eun (2019) identified the Songguk-ri culture [송국리 문화 松菊里文化] as the origin of Yayoi culture. Likewise, Choi Seong-rak [최성락], in an interview (*Great Journey in Korean Language*, KBS, 2004) testified that the styles of Yayoi sites were derived from the Songguk-ri style in Buyeo-gun, Chungcheongnam-do, which is connected to the Jangcheon-ri site in Jeollanam-do and eventually linked to the Yayoi sites in Japan. In 2008, the National Museum of Korea held a joint special exhibition with the Board of Education of Saga Prefecture in Kitakyushu, Japan, titled “Yoshinogari: Ancient Korea within Japan” (Sim Jong-won, 2007). The artifacts and styles displayed at this exhibition were found to be of the same lineage as Gojoseon, which serves as direct evidence that a significant

number of Gojoseon people migrated and settled in the Japanese archipelago during the Yayoi period.

Although the size of the pottery differs, the shape and form are identical. When examining the form of the bronze dagger, it is identical to the slender bronze dagger of Gojoseon except for the lack of a handle. This indicates that the Yayoi people who crossed the sea were, in fact, Gojoseon people, and they brought with them rice farming and jar burial customs. Additionally, the skeletal remains found at the Doigahama site [土井ヶ浜遺跡], another Yayoi period site, were all buried facing the direction of the southern Korean Peninsula. This intentional burial orientation attests that the deceased were originally from the southern Korean



Peninsula.<sup>12</sup> This Yayoi culture was transmitted from Kyushu to Honshu [本州]. It is noteworthy that the name Kyushu, written as “九州” in Chinese characters, is deeply connected to the Dongyi [동이 東夷] people.<sup>13</sup> In particular, the jar burial styles found in the Naju region of Jeollanam-do are almost identical to those found in Yoshinogari. Geographically, this region corresponds to the ancient Byeonhan [변한 弁韓] area, indicating that Yayoi culture and civilization spread from the coastal areas of Byeonhan through the Yoshinogari region in Kyushu and into Honshu, Japan. The cultural transmission route can be seen as in Figure 3.

An important aspect to note regarding this transmission route is the presence of Kara-tsu [가라쓰 唐津] and Mount Kaya [가야산 可也山], both of which have Gaya-related place names.<sup>14</sup> These Gaya-related names seem to be connected to the migration and settlement of Gaya people during the Kofun period following the Yayoi era. Located in the southern part of

the Korean Peninsula, Gaya [가야 加耶]<sup>15</sup> had the geographical advantage of easy transportation and movement to the Japanese archipelago. This is reflected in stories such as Myoken’s Advent [묘견도래 妙見渡來], which tells of Myoken, a deity of the North Star, crossing the sea on a turtle to reach the Japanese archipelago. Gaya-related place names appear not only in Kyushu but throughout the Japanese archipelago, and they seem to be linked to Kofun-period archaeological sites. Additionally, the recent article in *Nature* magazine supporting the theory that “agricultural culture was established around the Liao River [요하 遼河] by the people of the Korean Peninsula and spread from here” (Robbeets et al., 2021) further substantiates the fact that Japan’s culture and civilization were transmitted via the Korean Peninsula.<sup>16</sup> Even Japanese scholars do not dispute the claim that Yayoi culture originated from the Korean Peninsula (Ayumi Ishimaru 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Matsushita Takahiro, Director of the Tohigahama Human Museum (*Great Journey in Korean Language*, KBS, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> The Dongyi people are strongly associated with the number 9, as seen in the Gu’i Tribe [구이족 九夷族, the nine constituent tribes of Dongyi, hence used as an alias to Dongyi], the Nine Hwan Tribe [구환족 九桓族], and the Dark Lady of Nine Heavens [구천현녀 九天玄女]. The ideological background of the Dongyi people has a deep connection to this number.

<sup>14</sup> Although 唐津 is read as Dangjin [당진] in Korean, it is pronounced as Karatsu (からつし) in Japanese, indicating it is a Gaya-related place name. Similarly, Kayasan (可也山: かやさん) nearby is pronounced Kayasan rather than using the typical

Yama (やま) for mountains [山], showing the influence of Korean Idu-style writing.

<sup>15</sup> [Translator’s Note] Gaya was an ancient confederation of 12 small states during the period of the Three Kingdoms of Korea. In 562 CE, it was eventually defeated and incorporated into the Silla dynasty.

<sup>16</sup> In the world’s most prominent science journal *Nature*, a major research paper (Robbeets et al., 2021) was published identifying the origin of the Transeurasian languages (also known as the Altaic language family) in the millet-cultivating West Liao River area. This research explains the cultural and agricultural connections from the Liao River Basin to the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese archipelago.



**Figure 4.** Wave-patterned bronze ware from Daeseong-dong [대성동 大成洞] and Nara Prefecture [나라현 奈良県]; and Heel-Shaped pottery from Gaya and Sueki pottery



Daeseong-dong

Nara Prefecture

Gaya Pottery

Sueki Pottery

#### IV. Artifacts and Relics of the Kofun Period and the Horse-Riding People of Gaya

The discovery of Gaya-related place names in the Yoshinogari site, which was a key route for Yayoi cultural transmission, suggests a strong connection between the Kofun period in Japan and Gaya. Representative grave goods of Gaya, such as the wave-patterned bronze ware of Geumgwang Gaya [금관가야 金官加耶] and the heel-shaped pottery [굽다리 토기]<sup>17</sup> of Ara Gaya [아라가야 阿羅伽倻], have been unearthed in large quantities from Japanese Kofun-period burial sites (see Figure 4 for their similarities).

In the case of heel-shaped pottery, there is a wide consensus in academia that it originated from Gaya. However, for wave-patterned bronze wares, their origins are attributed to Wae, with some claiming that their design was derived from a modified version of the Suijigai

[스지이가이 스이즈가이], a type of shell found in Okinawa (Agency for Cultural Affairs, n.d.). However, this claim is based solely on morphological similarities, and no substantial reasoning or evidence has been provided to support it.

The author believes that wave-patterned bronze wares originated in Gaya. This assertion is supported by the fact that from the Yayoi period onward, bronze-working techniques were transmitted from the Korean Peninsula to the Japanese archipelago. During the Kofun period, Wae lacked not only ironworking technology but also the raw material for iron, which was imported from Byeonhan [변한 弁韓]. Furthermore, considering the large quantities of iron ingots unearthed in southern Korea, it is difficult to conclusively classify wave-patterned bronze wares as being of Wa origin.

Moreover, wave-patterned bronze wares have been excavated from the Daeseong-dong burial mounds, a central Gaya archaeological site. This, combined with the consistent discovery of other

<sup>17</sup> The heel-shaped pottery [화염문투창고배 火焰文透窓高杯], excavated from Dohang-ri, Haman County, Gyeongnam, is a representative artifact of

Ara Gaya. In Japan, this type of pottery is called Sueki pottery [스에키토기 須惠器].

Gaya artifacts in burial mounds across Japan, strongly suggests that these wares are of Gaya origin. Rather than being mere objects of cultural exchange, they appear to be the result of migration. Artifacts often symbolize the unique identity of the buried individual, further supporting this interpretation. Thus, it is more reasonable to view these artifacts as evidence of Gaya people's expansion into the Japanese archipelago during the Kofun period.

In addition, the representative burial style of the Kofun period in Japan is the keyhole-shaped tomb [전방후원분 前方後圓墳].<sup>18</sup> More than 10 tombs of this same shape have been discovered also in the Jeolla region—the southwestern part—of Korea. Some argue that these are Wae-style [외계 倭系] tombs due to the fact that keyhole-shaped tombs in Japan are earlier in date.<sup>19</sup> In academia, it is argued that these types of tombs are of Wae origin because they are most frequently excavated in the Japanese archipelago and

predate similar structures in other regions. Japanese scholars believe that these tombs evolved from Yayoi-period moat-shaped burial mounds into the keyhole-shaped tombs.

However, the discovery of the moat-circled tombs [주구묘 周溝墓],<sup>20</sup> known to be the prototypes of keyhole-shaped tombs, in Boryeong, Chungcheongnam-do in 1996 and in Seongnam-ri, Gochang, Jeollabuk-do in 1999, proves that the origin of the keyhole-shaped tombs lies on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>21</sup>

The discovery of these moat-circled tombs serves as crucial evidence in explaining the origins and development of keyhole-shaped tombs, as well as their earlier form, the keyhole-shaped square tomb.<sup>22</sup> Notably, the moat-circled tomb in Gwanchang-ri, Boryeong, which dates back to the 4th century BCE, is the oldest moat tomb discovered in Korea and predates Japan's Yayoi period by

<sup>18</sup> Keyhole-shaped tombs, also known as janggo tombs or janggu (hourglass)-shaped tombs, feature a trapezoidal front and a round rear, resembling a keyhole.

<sup>19</sup> The keyhole-style tomb is a type of burial system called Heavenly Round and Earthly Square [천원지방 天圓地方], also found in the Hongshan Culture (4500–3000 BCE), indicating connections between Manchuria, the Korean Peninsula, and Japan through the spread of Gojoseon-related burial practices.

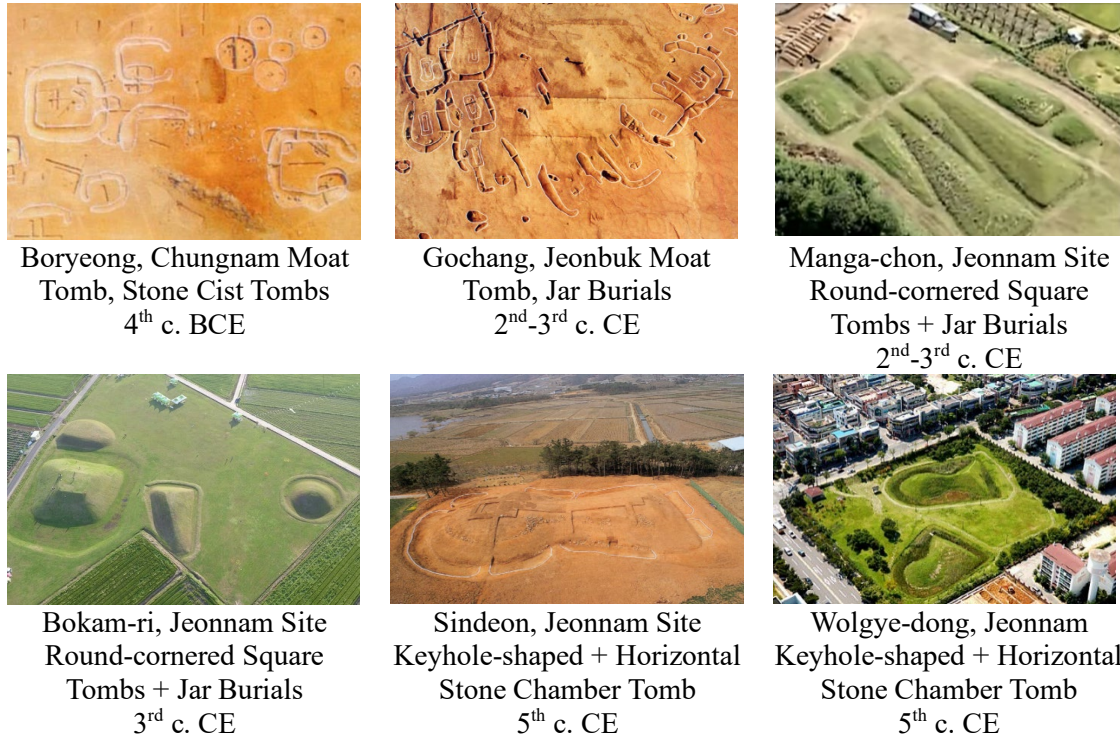
<sup>20</sup> Moat-circled tombs and large mound tombs [분구묘 墳丘墓] are representative burial styles of Mahan [마한 馬韓]. Excavations in Seongnam-ri, Mandong, Yejiri, Gwangdae-ri, and Namsan-ri show that Mahan society was kinship-based, as demonstrated by the arrangement and contents of

the tombs, which gradually evolved into large mound tombs (Choi, Wan-gyu, "Kofun," *Digital Gochang Cultural Encyclopedia*).

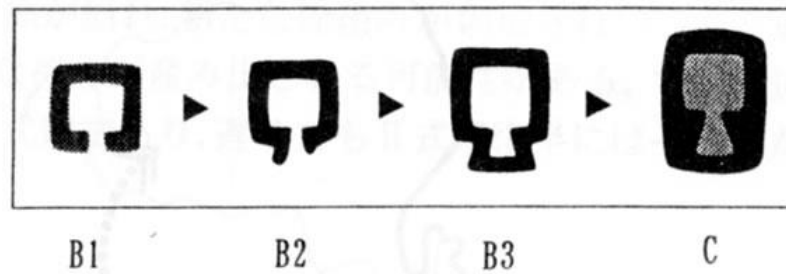
<sup>21</sup> The excavation of the Seongnam-ri III site revealed 15 moat-circled tombs (including 10 earthen pit tombs and 7 jar coffin burials within or near the ditches), 3 jar coffin burials, 17 pit features (circular/elliptical), 3 additional pit features (surrounding the ditch tombs), 5 unknown features, and 32 civilian graves. Excavated artifacts include dual-rimmed vessels, short-necked jars, jar coffins, heel-shaped pottery, perforated rim pottery and iron products (Mahan-Baekje Cultural Research Institute, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Keyhole-shaped square tombs [전방후방분 前方後方墳], with both front and rear portions rectangular, emerged during the late Yayoi period.

**Figure 5.** Round-Cornered Square Tombs [원방각묘 圓方角墓] and Rectangular-Shaped Tombs [전방후방분 前方後方墳] on the Korean Peninsula



**Figure 6.** Formation of Rectangular-Shaped Tombs (Reprinted from Aoyama 2016)



approximately one century.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, jar burials and circular or rectangular-shaped tombs discovered at

the Mangachon site in Hampyeong-gun [함평군 만가촌 유적]<sup>24</sup> and the Bokam-ri site

<sup>23</sup> According to the *Encyclopedia of Korean National Culture* (c.v. “Boryeong Gwanchang-ri Site [保寧寬倉里遺蹟]”), the construction of the moat-circled tombs occurred after the late 4th century BCE, primarily during the 3rd–2nd centuries BCE, as indicated by the discovery of

bean-shaped pottery [두형토기 豆形土器], clay-belted pottery [덧띠토기 粘土帶土器], and black burnished pottery [검은간토기 黑色磨研土器].

<sup>24</sup> The first excavation of the Mankachon Kofun Cluster revealed that the tombs, which date to the 2nd–3rd centuries CE, were among the earliest

in Naju [나주 복암리 유적]<sup>25</sup> show intermediate forms between moat-circled tombs and keyhole-shaped tombs. These excavations illustrate the developmental spread from moat-circled tombs on the Korean Peninsula to keyhole-shaped tombs in Japan during the Kofun period. Even Japanese academic circles acknowledge that burial practices evolved from square-shaped moat tombs [방형주구묘 方形周溝墓] into keyhole-shaped tombs.<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, the burial method based on the concept of “round-cornered square” [원방각 圓方角] reflects the burial style derived from the heavenly round, earthly square [천원지방 天圓地方] concept, a traditional burial practice of the Korean people for thousands of years. A representative example is the Chamseongdan [참성단 塹星壇] at Manisan Mountain [마니산] in Ganghwa Island, which was known to have been built during the Dangun Joseon period. *The Veritable Annals of King Sejong* records the following about this site:

At the summit is Chamseongdan, built of stone. The altar is 10 feet high, square at the top and round at the bottom [상방하원 上方下圓], with each of the four sides of the upper platform measuring 6 *cheok* and 6 *chon*, and the base of each side measuring 15 *cheok*.<sup>27</sup> It is said to be the stone altar where Dangun Joseon [단군조선 檀君朝鮮] performed rituals for Heaven.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, numerous iron helmets and iron armor have been excavated from keyhole-shaped tombs in the Japanese archipelago. These artifacts exhibit the same forms as iron helmets and armor found at Goryeong Jisandong and Goheung Gilduri, both of which are Gaya archaeological sites, and they share many common features with other relics. The academic debate continues over whether their origins lie in Wae or Gaya. However, it is clear that the people associated with these tombs were genealogically part of the same group and possessed highly advanced ironworking skills, enabling them to freely produce and utilize such large quantities of iron tools. If so, were

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large tombs in the Jeonnam region, featuring a trapezoidal floor plan (Korean Archaeological Association, 2001; *Mystery of the Large Ongwan in Naju*, KBS, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Layered jar coffin burials, dating to the 3rd century CE, were discovered (*Mystery of the Large Ongwan in Naju*, KBS, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Japanese academics argue that large mound tombs, or square-shaped moat tombs with protrusions, evolved into keyhole-shaped tombs due to environmental influences, supporting the theory of their native Japanese origin (Aoyama Hiroki).

<sup>27</sup> [Translator’s note] *Cheok* [척] and *chon* [촌] are traditional East Asian units of length. One *cheok* is approximately 30.3 cm (0.994 feet) and 10 *chon* equal 1 *cheok*. Therefore, 6 *cheok* 6 *chon* is approximately 2 meters (6’ 7”), and 15 *cheok* is approximately 4.5 meters (14’ 11”).

<sup>28</sup> *The Veritable Annals of King Sejong* 『세종실록 世宗實錄』Geographical Records Section [지리지 地理志]. Under the heading of 京畿 富平 都護府 江華 都護府 [경기 부평 도호부 강화 도호부]: “塹星壇, 壘石築之, 壇高十尺, 上方下圓。壇上四面, 各六尺六寸, 下廣各十五尺。世傳朝鮮檀君祭天石壇。”



**Figure 7.** (Left) Gaya Iron Helmet and Armor; (Center & Right) Wae Iron Helmet, Armor, and Iron Artifacts Excavated from Keyhole-Shaped Tombs in Japan



these forces truly the Wae people with an independent culture in the Japanese archipelago? There is significant evidence suggesting otherwise, as outlined below.

First, the Japanese archipelago did not possess the technology to produce or process iron. During that time, this ironworking technology was monopolized by Gaya, and large quantities of iron were produced in the Byeonhan region of Gaya, even for export. This is documented in *Sanguo Zhi, The Records of the Three Kingdoms* [삼국지 三國志], particularly in the account of Byeonjin [변진 弁辰]. Additionally, iron ingots, which are the core raw material for processing and smelting iron, have been unearthed in large quantities in the Gaya region, further supporting this claim.

Second, there is no explanation for the horse armor, horse headgear, or horse bones found in the Kofun tombs of the

Japanese archipelago. The *Sanguo Zhi, Records of the Three Kingdoms*, the section on Wae records that “they [the Wae people] have no oxen or horses.” In contrast, the Byeonjin section notes that “they ride oxen and horses.” Furthermore, bronze cauldrons and horse-riding ornaments, which are symbolic of the horse-riding people, were excavated from the Daeseong-dong Kofun cluster in Gimhae. This demonstrates that Gaya possessed both the iron culture and the characteristics of the horse-riding people, necessary to explain all the Kofun-period artifacts excavated from the region.

Much evidence has been discovered. The *Records of the Three Kingdoms* states:

In Wae, there are no oxen, horses, tigers, leopards, sheep, or magpies. Their weapons are spears, shields, and wooden bows.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Sanguo Zhi* 『삼국지(三國志)』 Treatises of Wei 「魏志」 Vol. 30 卷 30 : 魏志 烏丸鮮卑東夷 (倭), 其地無牛馬虎豹羊鷓. 兵用矛·盾·木弓.

**Figure 9.** (Left) Wae envoys in *The Portraits of Tributary States of the Liang Dynasty*, and (Right) Its Reproduction in *Tang Yan Liben Wanghuitu, The Painting of the Gathering of Kings by Yan Liben of the Tang Dynasty* [唐閩立本王會圖]



In Byeonjin, they ride oxen and horses ... The country produces iron, and the Han [한 韓], Hui [회 濊], and Wae people come to trade for it.<sup>30</sup>

These historical records clearly indicate that Wae and Gaya were entirely different entities. Gaya had iron and horses, whereas the Japanese archipelago not only lacked horses, but their warfare was still reliant on wooden bows. This shows that the iron helmets, armor, and horse-related artifacts from Kofun therein bear no relation to the indigenous Wae.

Moreover, the fact that the horse-riding people, who were the owners of these tombs, traveled to the Japanese archipelago by boat is well illustrated by the Takehara Kofun [竹原古墳] in Fukuoka City, Kyushu. The tomb's mural depicts people transporting horses by boat (Figure

8). This suggests that the tomb's occupants were horse-riding people who crossed the sea to the Japanese archipelago with their horses.

In addition, large quantities of ring-pommel swords [환두대도 環頭大刀], iron horse armor, iron horse headgear, iron armor, and horse bones have been excavated from Japanese Kofun tombs. This indicates that these tomb occupants were horse-riding people who migrated from the Korean Peninsula and ruled over the Japanese archipelago during the Kofun period.

These facts also demonstrate how baseless the “Imna is Gaya” theory [임나가야설 任那加耶說] is. This theory claims that it was Wae who advanced into and governed the southern Korean Peninsula. The Wae then lacked both oxen,

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 「魏志」Records of Wei 卷 30: “烏丸鮮卑東夷韓(弁辰)乘駕牛馬 ... 國出鐵, 韓濊倭皆從取之.”

a symbol of agricultural production, and horses, a symbol of horse-riding people in that era. Neither was originated in the Japanese archipelago. Additionally, the economic and cultural status of the Wae people is well illustrated in *Liang Zhigong Tu, The Portraits of Tributary States of the Liang Dynasty* [양직공도 梁職貢圖].<sup>31</sup> In the portrait of the Wae envoys, they are depicted wearing crudely made clothes, simply tied together without visible stitching, and appear barefoot when greeting the Chinese emperor (see Figure 9), giving us further insight into the cultural level of the Wae people at that time. This graphic depiction matches the description of the Wae in *Jinshu, The Book of Jin* [진서 晉書]:

Men wore garments that were wide in breadth, simply tying the sides together without any stitching. Women wore something like a single-layered garment, with a hole cut in the center for their head to pass through. Both men and women walked around barefoot with their hair loose.<sup>32</sup>

If the ruling class possessed iron and horse-riding culture, the descriptions in historical records of the Wae people represent the appearance of the subjugated class. Judging by their appearance, they can be identified as the southern Jomon people, the indigenous people of the

Japanese archipelago. The reality of the Wae people during that time, however, does not match the implications of the Imna-Gaya Theory. According to the theory, the southern area of the Korean peninsula (that is, the Gaya area) into which Wae advanced was called Imna [Mimana in Japanese, 任那 임나], and that the Wae were more powerful than Gaya, establishing a Japanese Government [日本府 일본부] therein. The existing evidence, however, suggest that such claims would only stem from ignorance of the basic process of cultural transmission between Korea and Japan and the correlation between the iron and horse-riding artifacts.

Contrary to the claims of the Gaya-Imna Theory, these archeological evidences demonstrate that the rulers of the Kofun period were Gaya horse-riding peoples who expanded into the Japanese archipelago with their iron culture. Consistent with these evidences is the Horse-rider Theory or Horse-rider Invasion Theory [기마민족도래설 騎馬民族渡來說]. It posits that northeast Eurasian mounted nomads dominated the southern part of the Korean Peninsula and that while using the Byeonhan region as a base, they further expanded into the Japanese archipelago, founding the Yamato court from the late 4th to the 5th

<sup>31</sup> *Encyclopedia of Korean National Culture* 『한국민족문화대백과사전』, “양직공도 梁職貢圖”, an illustrated record depicting the procession of foreign envoys during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Liang [梁] Dynasty in China, dated between 526 and 536. It also explains foreign emissaries dispatched to Liang.

<sup>32</sup> *The Book of Jin* 『진서(晉書)』. Vol. 97. 卷 97 Chronicles of Dongyi. 「東夷列傳」第 67 東夷 (倭) 其男子衣以橫幅, 但結束相連, 略無縫綴. 婦人衣如單被, 穿其中央以貫頭, 而皆被髮徒跣. 其地溫暖, 俗種禾稻紵麻而蠶桑織績.



century. This theory has been widely supported by many scholars, such as Egami Namio [江上波夫], Jon Carter Covell, William Elliot Griffis, Kim Seok-hyeong [김석형], Cho Hee-seung [조희승], and Choi Jae-seok [최재석].

If we examine the origins and history of the Gaya horse-riding peoples, it becomes clear that the ruling Kim clan [김씨 金氏] under King Suro [김수로왕 金首露王], the founder of Gaya, was closely related to the Xiongnu [흉노 匈奴], a northern nomadic people. The *Epitaph of King Munmu of Silla* states that the Kim clan's ancestors were descendants of Kim Il-je [김일제 金日磾], a Marquis of Du of the Xiongnu. The *Samguk Sagi, The History of Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea* records that the Silla and Gaya shared the same origins. In addition, the *Epitaph of Lady Kim of the Tang Dynasty* also records Kim Il-je as the ancestor of the Kim clan.

The Marquis of Du [투후 秬侯] (Kim Il-je) was a descendant of Sacred Heaven [제천 祭天], passing down through seven generations. His 15<sup>th</sup> ancestor, King Seonghan, is described as having descended from heaven.<sup>33</sup>

The distant ancestor's name was Il-je. He served in the Xiongnu [흉노 匈奴] court before surrendering to the Western Han [서한 西漢] and served under Emperor Wu.<sup>34</sup>

King Suro, the founder of South Gaya, and Kim Yu-shin, have the same family name with Silla.<sup>35</sup>

After the surrender of the Xin [신 新] dynasty established by Wang Mang [왕망 王莽],<sup>36</sup> a descendant of Kim Il-je, to Emperor Guangwu of the Later Han Dynasty, the Kim clan descendants dispersed and migrated southward to the southern Korean Peninsula. They are the Xiongnu horse-riding people who founded Gaya. This is evidenced by the widespread discovery of the Hwacheon [Huachuan in Chinese, 貨泉 貨泉] coins, a marker of the Xin Dynasty in the 1st century. The distribution of these coins (Figure 10) indicates that their influence extended not only to southern Korea but also to Jeju Island, Tsushima Island, and northern Kyushu.

These artifacts provide evidence that the descendants of the Xin Dynasty settled in the southern Korean Peninsula after its fall, and their distributions are indicative of the extent of the territorial influence of Gaya. This marks the establishment of a

<sup>33</sup> *Epitaph of King Munmu of Silla* 『신라 문무왕릉비(文武王陵碑)』: “秬侯祭天之胤 傳七葉以○○焉. 十五代祖星漢王 降質圖穹.”

<sup>34</sup> *Epitaph of Lady Kim of the Tang Dynasty* 『대당고김씨부인묘명 (大唐故金氏夫人墓銘)』: “遠祖諱日磾自龍庭歸命西漢仕武帝.”

<sup>35</sup> *Samguk Sagi* 『삼국사기(三國史記)』Vol. 41. 卷第四十一 Biography No. 1. 「列傳」第一: “金庾信則南加耶始祖首露, 與新羅同姓也.”

<sup>36</sup> In *The Book of Han* (『漢書』, Volume 68, "Guoguang Kim Il-je Biography" (傳), it is mentioned that Kim Il-je's descendants held prominent positions during the Xin Dynasty under Wang Mang.

**Figure 10.** Hwacheon Coins and Their Distribution (Provided by Lee Jin-a)



**Figure 11.** (Left) Northern Horse-riding People’s Artifacts and (Right) Artifacts Excavated from the Daeseong-dong Tombs of Gaya



**Figure 12.** Keyhole-Shaped Tombs that Flourished in the Japanese Archipelago



horse-riding monarchy in the Korean Peninsula, with the Six Gaya states founded in the 1st century. The influence of these states gradually expanded, eventually reaching the Japanese archipelago. As a result of their expansion, Japan transitioned from the agricultural Yayoi period to the Kofun period. The key players of the Kofun period were the iron-using, horse-riding people of Gaya. They first occupied the Kyushu region and later advanced into Honshu, probably because of the expansion of Baekje [백제 百濟] into the Japanese archipelago and the subsequent shift in power dynamics.

Initially, Kyushu served as the center for Gaya migrants. As they advanced into Honshu, the tombs also appear to have evolved from the Saitobaru Kofun [西都原古墳群] to large-scale Kofun like the Nintoku-tenno burial mound [인덕천왕릉 仁德天皇陵] in Osaka. These artifacts and historical records render support to Kim Seok-hyeong’s theory that Gaya and Baekje established branch states [분국 分國] in the Japanese archipelago, a theory known as the Theory of Branch States on the Japanese Archipelago [일본열도분국설 日本列島分國說].

Particularly noteworthy is that Jon Carter Covell, in her book *The Korean Horse-riding People and Wae* (2006), identifies Empress Jingu [신공황후 神功皇后] as a Korean shaman and princess.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, William Elliot Griffis asserts that the ancient kings of Japan were of Korean descent.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, Jared Mason Diamond, famous for his book *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, claims that the ancient Japanese were actually Koreans who migrated from the Korean Peninsula (Diamond, 2019).

Furthermore, the former Japanese Emperor Akihito officially admitted that his ancestor, Emperor Kanmu's mother, Takano no Niigasa, was a descendant of King Muryeong of the Baekje dynasty.<sup>39</sup> This statement by the Japanese royal family itself acknowledges that the Imperial lineage is descended from migrants [渡来人 Toraijin in Japanese] and that the Japanese Emperor's roots are linked to a horse-riding people.

However, while they openly acknowledge the maternal connection to Baekje, they do not mention the paternal lineage. As has been discussed several times, the paternal lineage is likely connected to Gaya. To explore this further, it is necessary to examine the records in

Japan's ancient texts, the *Kojiki, Records of Ancient Matters of Japan* [고사기 古事記] and *Nihon Shoki, The Chronicles of Japan* [일본서기 日本書紀].

## V. The Myth of the Descent of the Heavenly Grandson and the Saitobaru Kofun Cluster

By analyzing the founding myth of the Japanese imperial family recorded in Japan's ancient texts, *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, we can uncover their true origins. The *Kojiki* recounts the Myth of the Descent of Ninigi no Mikoto [邇邇芸命, 天津彦彦火瓊瓊杵尊, ににぎのみこと], who is regarded as the founder of the Japanese imperial family. The story is as follows:

(Ninigi says) this land looks towards Karaguni [한국 韓国] and proceeds along the original path to the cape of Kasasa [笠沙]. This is a land where the morning sun shines brightly, and the setting sun does as well. Therefore, this is truly a good land.<sup>40</sup>

Ninigi expressed joy that the place of his descent faced Karaguni [韓国], which refers to Gaya at that time. In Japanese,

<sup>37</sup> "In 369, a group of people led by Empress Jinu, a Korean shaman and princess, left Gimhae near Busan in Korea" (Covell 2006: 55).

<sup>38</sup> "The founders of all the dynasties that ruled Korea, including Gaya, were from the Buyeo tribe. These same people were also the majority of Korean migrants who contributed greatly to Japanese culture." William Elliot Griffis, *Corea, the Hermit Nation*, quoted in Covell (2006: 150).

<sup>39</sup> "私自身に関しては、垣武天皇の生母が百済の武寧ムリョン) 王の子孫だということが続日本紀に記録されており、韓国との縁を感じている" (Emperor Akihito, press conference, December 2001).

<sup>40</sup> *Kojiki* 『古事記』 "此地者 向韓國 有真之道通笠紗之御前 又此地者 朝日之直刺國 夕日之日照國也 故 此地甚吉地也."

Kara (から) is often written as “韓” or “唐,” both referring to Gaya. Therefore, Karaguni here is Gaya.

In addition, the *Nihon Shoki* and the *Kojiki* record the place where Ninigi descended as follows:

At this time, Taka no Mikura no Kami [Exalted Divine Creator 高皇產靈尊] covered Ninigi with the sacred blanket [Mitamafuton 眞床追衾] and sent him down to earth. Ninigi descended from the heavenly throne [Iwanomiya 天磐座], parting the eight-fold clouds as he came to the summit of Mount Takachiho [高千穗峯] in Hyuga [日向, literally meaning ‘facing the sun’].<sup>41</sup>

Ninigi descended to Kushifurutake Peak [久士布流多氣] in Mount Takachiho of Hyuga Province, a place facing Karakuni (Korea).<sup>42</sup>

Noteworthy is the level of similarity between Ninigi’s descent myth and that of King Suro, the founder of Gaya. The *Nihon Shoki* states that Ninigi descended covered in a sacred blanket, which parallels the myth of King Suro, the founder of Gaya.<sup>43</sup> The place of descent is recorded as Takachiho, and the *Kojiki* specifies it as Kushifurutake [久士布流多氣],

which corresponds to Gujibong [구지봉 龜旨峰] to which the King Suro was said to have descended. In fact, this location is a place in the Kirishima region of southern Kyushu, with a nearby mountain named Mount Karakunidake [한국악 韓國岳]. Thus, the myth of Ninigi’s descent symbolizes the migration of the Gaya royal family to southern Kyushu. Ninigi can be identified as a Gaya royal descendant who migrated to southern Kyushu. Guji-bong is a peak located in Gusan-dong, Gimhae, associated with Kim Suro of Geumgwan Gaya [金官加耶 금관가야]. Furthermore, the Guji-ga [‘Turtle Song’ 구지가 龜旨歌],<sup>44</sup> a legendary song used to facilitate the descent of King Suro, references a turtle [龜 구], which was the totem symbol of Gaya. Like this, the myth of Ninigi’s descent reflects the migration story of Gaya’s royal lineage to the Kirishima region in southern Kyushu.

Furthermore, the myth states that Ninigi brought with him rice seeds and the Three Sacred Treasures [신기삼종 神器三種]. The rice seeds symbolize the introduction of rice cultivation to the Japanese archipelago.<sup>45</sup> The Three Sacred

<sup>41</sup> *Nihon Shoki* 『日本書紀』于時, 高皇產靈尊, 以眞床追衾, 覆於皇孫天津彥彥火瓊瓊杵尊使降之。皇孫乃離天磐座[天磐座, 此云阿麻能以簸矩羅], 且排分天八重雲, 稜威之道別道別而, 天降於日向襲之高千穗峯矣。

<sup>42</sup> *Kojiki* 『古事記』天降坐于竺紫日向之高千穗之久士布流多氣。

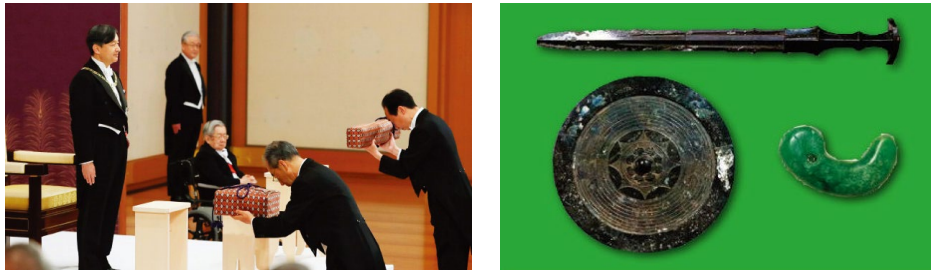
<sup>43</sup> *Encyclopedia of Korean National Culture* 『한국민족문화대백과사전』. 일본 [Japan]. “Ninigi descended wrapped in a sacred blanket [Mitamafuton], which is similar to the legend of Suro from Gaya. Based on this similarity, some

argue that the ‘Descent of Ninigi’ myth reflects the migration of the Gaya people to Kyushu, while others link it to the conquests of mounted nomads.”

<sup>44</sup> *Encyclopedia of Korean National Culture*, Turtle Song [구지가 龜旨歌]: “Turtle, turtle, show your head. If you don’t, we will roast and eat you” 龜何龜何 首其現也 若不現也 燐灼而喫也,” they sang while dancing.

<sup>45</sup> The one who brought the rice seeds was Amaterasu Omikami, the Goddess of the Sun [天照大神], a myth originating from the solar

**Figure 13.** On May 1, 2019, Emperor Naruhito Received the Three Sacred Treasures as Proof of His Imperial Succession. (Source: *Weekly Dong-A*, May 10, 2019)



**Figure 14.** (Left) Iron Helmet from Jisan-dong, Goryeong Gaya, and (Right) the Iron Helmet from the Saitobaru Kofun Cluster in Kyushu



Treasures—a bronze sword, a bronze mirror, and a comma-shaped bead—correspond closely to the Three Heavenly Seals [천부삼인 天符三印, Bronze sword, mirror and eight-headed bells] in the founding myth of Gojoseon.<sup>46</sup> It indicates that Nigini and his followers migrated from the Korean Peninsula. The Three Sacred Treasures continue to be passed down as symbolic artifacts during the enthronement ceremonies of new emperors in Japan (Figure 13).

To the east of Kirishima, the setting for the descent myth of Ninigi, there exists the Saitobaru Kofun Cluster, known as the birthplace of the Japanese imperial family.

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mythology of Gojoseon. *Encyclopedia of Korean National Culture* states that “the myth of Dangun is a mixture of solar mythology and totemism.”

An iron helmet was excavated from there. As seen in Figure 14, it is identical to the iron helmet excavated from Goryeong Gaya sites [고령 가야 高靈加耶].

Furthermore, the burial style in this area is also keyhole-shaped tombs which, as previously mentioned, originated from the square-shaped moat tombs of the Korean Peninsula (Figure 15). These iron helmets, armors, and keyhole-shaped tombs appear consistently in the tombs of Japanese emperors in other areas as well. This indicates that the burial style originating from the Korean Peninsula, along with Gaya’s iron armor artifacts,

<sup>46</sup> There are various interpretations of the Three Heavenly Seals, but they are generally understood as the dagger, the mirror, and the eight-headed bell (Kim Yang-dong 2021).



**Figure 15.** The Transmission of Keyhole-Shaped Tombs



Square-Shaped Moat Tombs in Boryeong, Korea (4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE)

Circular or Rectangular Tombs in Naju, Korea (3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE)

Keyhole-Shaped Tombs in Saitobaru, Japan (4<sup>th</sup> c. CE)

**Figure 16.** Boat-Shaped Pottery and Bronze Mirrors Excavated from (Left) Geumgwan Gaya and (Right) the Saitobaru Kofun Cluster

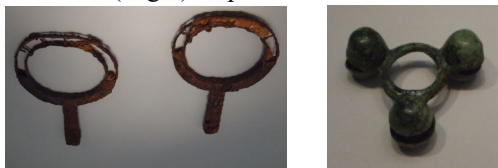


**Figure 17.** Horse-Related Artifacts Excavated from Gaya and Japanese Kofun



6<sup>th</sup>-century Tamakayama Tomb, Horse Tack Artifacts from (Left) the Nara National Museum and (Right) Hapcheon Museum

Gilded Bronze Horse Saddle Artifacts from (Left) Jisan-dong, Goryeong and (Right) Saitobaru Kofun Cluster



Stirrups from Jisan-dong, Goryeong

Bronze Bell from Haman (5-6<sup>th</sup> c.)



Stirrups and Bronze Bell from Chazuka Kofun

were directly passed on to the Japanese imperial family.

Also unearthed in the Saitobaru Kofun Cluster are boat-shaped pottery and bronze mirrors. They are, again, identical to those excavated from the Gaya region in Gimhae (Figure 16). The boat-shaped

pottery signifies that they were a maritime power. The similarity between Gaya and Japan during the Kofun period can be also seen in many other artifacts such as horse-related equipment (Figure 17) and jewelry ornaments (Figure 18). All these artifacts unearthed from Gaya and Kofun-period

**Figure 18.** Ornaments & Jewelry Artifacts Excavated from Gaya and Japanese Kofun



Gold Earrings, Tomb No. 28, Okcheon, Haman



Gold Earrings, Shitakitakato Kofun, Kyushu



Jade Necklaces & Comma-Shaped Jade, Goryeong Jisan-dong Tomb



Saitobaru Kofun, Kyushu



Jade Necklaces, Gimhae Daeseong-dong Tomb & Hapcheon, Okjeon Tomb



Saitobaru Kofun, Kyushu



House-Shaped Pottery, Gimhae Museum



Nyutabaru Kofun, Kyushu

Japan are so strikingly similar that it is impossible to deny the cultural connection between them.

The historical documents and archeological evidence clearly indicate that the protagonists of the Heavenly Descent Myth were Gaya royal family members who migrated from southern Korea to the Japanese archipelago, who became the origin of the Japanese imperial family. The knowledge of the Korean origin of the Japanese imperial family persisted long in Japan, even into the 14th century. For example, a prominent Japanese political leader, Kitabatake Chikafusa (1293-1354, 北畠親房) wrote, in *Jinno Shotoki*, *The True*

*Lineage of the Divine Emperors* [신황정통기 神皇正統記], that ancient Japan shared kinship with the Three Han [삼한 三韓] dynasties of the Korean Peninsula. Regretfully, all the related documents were known to have been burned, probably to conceal the truth.<sup>47</sup>

Despite this, the surviving evidence from mythological stories and archeological excavations speak clearly to the truth. The structure and contents of Ninigi's Heavenly Descent myth is too similar to those of the descent myth of Hwanung [환웅 桓雄] of Gojoseon. In Hwanung's myth, the Hwanung tribe descended from Heaven to impart advanced civilization to the indigenous

<sup>47</sup> In the 14th century, a prominent Japanese political leader named Kitabatake Chikafusa [北畠親房] wrote in *Shin Koshotoki* [新皇正統記] that "in ancient times, Japan was of the same race as

the Three Han's (Samhan), but during the reign of Emperor Kanmu (r. 781–806 CE), all the related books were burned" (Seo Jong-cheol 2007).



Bear and Tiger tribes, who had not yet been civilized. Additionally, the Heavenly Seals that Hwanung brought with him are conceptually identical with Ninigi's Three Sacred Treasures. Like this, the Heavenly Descent Myth of Ninigi is modeled after myth of Hwanung, symbolizing the migration of advanced, civilization-bearing migrants. Moreover, the similarity in tomb styles and artifacts between Gaya and the Kofun-period Japan strongly implies that the origin of the Japanese imperial family should have connections to Gaya.

#### IV. THE GENEALOGY OF THE GIMHAE KIM CLAN AND THE MIGRATION OF MYOKEN TO JAPAN

If the Japanese imperial family began with the descendants of King Suro of Gaya, traces of this migration should be found in historical records. King Suro is the

founding ancestor of the Gimhae Kim clan.<sup>48</sup> In *The Genealogy of the Gimhae Kim Clan*, King Suro and Queen Heo Hwangok [허황옥 許黃玉] are recorded to have 12 children—ten sons and two daughters.

Queen Heo bore ten sons and two daughters. Seven of the sons left their wives and children and each became a Buddha at Chilbulam [칠불암 七佛庵, Temples of Seven Buddhas]. One son was King Geochilgun (居柒君), and one daughter married Crown Prince Seok Talhae [昔太子, i.e., Seok Talhae 석탈해 昔脫解].<sup>49</sup>

The eldest son became King Geodeung [거등왕 居登王], while the second and third sons took their mother's surname, Heo.<sup>50</sup> The first daughter is recorded as having married Seok Talhae. This leaves seven sons and one daughter unaccounted for. Where did they go?

The genealogy mentions that the seven sons devoted themselves to Buddhism and became Buddhas, but their later activities are unknown. According to

<sup>48</sup> [Translator's Note] In Korean naming conventions, Bon-Gwan [본관本貫] is used to refer to a clan's place of origin or ancestral seat, indicating the geographical area from which a particular family or clan originally hails. It is used to distinguish between different families that share the same surname but have different ancestral roots. For example, Gimhae Kim refers to the Kim clan whose ancestral seat is Gimhae, whereas Andong Kim refers to the Kim clan whose ancestral origin is Andong.

<sup>49</sup> *The Genealogy of the Gimhae Kim Clan* 『김해김씨 세보 金海金氏世譜』 后誕十子二女 七子離妻子皆化佛竝于七佛庵 一子曰居柒君 一女昔太子妃.

<sup>50</sup> *The Royal Genealogy of the Gimhae Kim Clan* 『김해김씨 선원보략 金海金氏 璿源譜略』: "King Suro and Queen Heo had 10 sons. The eldest was Crown Prince (King Geodeung 거등왕 居登王), two sons took the Queen's surname Heo, the seven others left this world to the Heaven [염세상계 厭世上界], and one son, Geochil, was called as King Geochil [거칠군 居漆君]. Seeing that this mundane world [塵世 진세] was in decline, Seon [선 仙], son of King Geodeung, departed riding on clouds along [乘雲離去] with a divine woman [신녀 神女].

**Figure 19.** The Legend of the Seven Kuma Passed Down in the Area of Ninigi's Heavenly Descent



Tazaki Hiroyuki [田崎弘行], a local officer in the Kirishima region where Ninigi is said to have descended, there were place names associated with seven Kuma [隈, 熊] individuals in the region where the place of Ninigi's descent such as Karakunidake [韓國岳 가야산] and Kushifurutake [久士布流多氣 구지봉] are located.<sup>51</sup> This suggests that, while the seven princes were recorded as becoming Buddhas at Chilbulam [七佛庵, literally Temple of Seven Buddhas], they may have actually migrated to southern Kyushu and settled in seven different locations. This could have evolved into the Heavenly Descent Myth

of Ninigi, the founding figure of the Japanese imperial family. In ancient times, Kuma [熊] was pronounced as Kam (Gam) or Kamui (Gamui), similar to Kami [神 かみ], the Japanese word for god or deity.<sup>52</sup> This suggests that the seven princes who settled in this area became the ancestral deities of the Japanese imperial family, serving as the protagonists of the Heavenly Descent Myth.

The whereabouts of the remaining princess can be examined in *The Genealogy of the Founding Ancestors of the Gimhae Kim Clan*, in which the entry under the heading of King Geodeung

<sup>51</sup> STB Sangsaeng TV interview with Tazaki Hiroyuki (田崎弘行): “In Kokubu Hayato, Kirishima City, there used to be a region known as the 'Seven Kumas' (隈: pronounced 'Kuma,' also written 熊).”

<sup>52</sup> *Encyclopedia of Korean National Culture* 『한국민족문화대백과사전』: Ungnyeo [웅녀 熊女 Bear Woman], in northeast Siberia, the term for a shaman was Kam or Gam. In ancient Turkey, Mongolia, Silla, the Ainu people, and Japan, Kam

or Kamui was used to refer to a deity. The word "bear" [熊] thus held the meaning of “god” and came to symbolize the Earth God because of its association with the beginning of agriculture and the bear's regenerative nature. Since in agricultural societies, the Earth God symbolizes the earth that has productive power, often depicted as female, embodying the characteristics of a Goddess of Mother Earth [지모신 地母神].

includes a record about a shaman woman [神女 hereafter “Sinnyeo” according to its Korean pronunciation] who attended the funeral of King Suro. She is recorded to have left with Seongyeon, the son of King Geodeung, riding away on a cloud.

King Geodeung (the second king of Gaya), whose name was Deung. Ascended the throne in the Gyeongjin year of the Jian'an era [that is, 200 CE] and appointed his grandson as the crown prince. In the Gimi year [199 CE], his son Seongyeon [선견 仙見] witnessed the chaotic world and the sorrowful funeral [of King Suro], and departed, riding away on a cloud together with Sinnyeo [신녀 神女]. The king lamented and climbed the Seokdoam [石道巖, Seokdo Cliff] of the river in the capital, where he called out to his son and carved his image. A popular tale refers to this as Choseondae [조선대 草仙臺, Choseon Terrace].<sup>53</sup>

Their destination is unknown. What stands out is that King Geodeung was only lamenting for his departing son. This suggests that Sinnyeo did not abduct Prince Seongyeon but was likely a member of the Gaya royal family herself, having attended King Suro's funeral. For some reason, she and Prince Seongyeon left Gaya together. This Sinnyeo could be the unaccounted-for princess. Interestingly, a divine figure named Myoken [妙見, Myoken in Korean] is known

in Kyushu, Japan, and shares the same character 見 as Seongyeon [선견 仙見]. Myoken is said to have crossed the sea to Japan, riding on a turtle, the symbol of King Suro (Figure 20).<sup>54</sup>

The typical Myoken faith is associated with the North Star and the Big Dipper. According to its origins, it is said that in the 9th year of Emperor Tenmu [천무천황 天武天皇, 680 CE], during the Shiroku era, the Myoken deity crossed the sea from Mingzhou [명주 明州, modern-day Ningbo, China] riding on the back of a turtle and a snake. The deity is believed to have appeared in the forms of Mokushin Kengyo [목심검교 目深檢校, literally meaning “supervisor with deep eyes”], Sujo Taro [수장차랑 手長次郎, “the second son with long arms”], and Sokuso Saburo [족속삼랑 足初三郎, “the third son with fast feet”]. Another interpretation associates the faith with the arrival of Crown Prince Imseong [임성태자 琳聖太子], the third son of King Seongmyeong [성명왕 聖明王] of Baekje (Yatsushiro Myoken Festival, n.d.).

In Japan, the Yatsushiro Myoken Festival [8 대묘견제 八代妙見祭] is the most representative festival related to the Myoken faith. It has been recognized as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. Centered around the Yatsushiro Shrine in Kumamoto Prefecture, this festival is known as an event where local residents

poor and fulfill wishes. Often depicted differently, she is sometimes portrayed as a bodhisattva and at other times as a heavenly maiden riding on a dragon in the clouds. In Japan, Myoken is portrayed as a goddess riding on a turtle, which links her closely with King Suro (Lee Jong-gi 2006, Choi Jong-cheol 2006, Kim Hyang-soo 1996).

<sup>53</sup> *The Genealogy of the Founding Ancestors of the Gimhae Kim Clan* 『김해김씨 시조선원세계』 Under the heading of 子居登王 (자, 거등왕), “諱登建安庚辰立以世孫冊封太子己卯子諱仙見塵世哀葬與神女乘雲離去 王歎遂登都江石島巖招仙銘影子是以俗傳.”

<sup>54</sup> Myoken is a bodhisattva deified from the Big Dipper, who is believed to guard the land, save the

**Figure 20.** The Migration of Myoken to Japan on a Turtle



Statue of Myoken Riding a Turtle  
(Lee Jong-gi 2006)



Myoken Festival Celebrating the Advent of Myoken Riding a Turtle

**Figure 21.** Myoken Shrine in Yatsushiro and the Turtle Decoration Symbolizing King Suro



Myoken Origin Monument



Turtle Tile Ornament on the Eaves

come together to pray for peace at both national and regional levels. Myoken is depicted in various forms, most notably in Japan as a bodhisattva riding a turtle.

In my opinion, Myoken may have been transmitted in the image of Seongyeon [선견 仙見], the sister of Geodeungwang's son. This is supported by the presence of numerous turtle-related symbols in Yatsushiro, aligning with the

association of turtles as a symbol of King Kim Suro. Based on this, it can be inferred that Sinnyeo is Myoken.

In Japan, there is a festival commemorating Myoken's arrival, called the Myoken [妙見] Matsuri [祭・祭り まつり].<sup>55</sup> The term "Matsuri" [祭り, まつり, 마쯔리] comes from the Korean word "to welcome" [맞이하다→맞으리→마쯔리]. It provides evidence that she was of Korean

<sup>55</sup> A similar example is the Wasso ['왓소' in Korean meaning "have arrived"] Festival in Osaka, which

also celebrates the arrival of people from the Korean Peninsula to Japan .



**Figure 22.** Double Fish Emblems at (Left) the Inari Shrine in Yatsushiro, (Center) the Temple of King Suro in Gimhae, and (Right) Ayodhya (formerly Ayutthaya) in India



origin. Additionally, the Myoken Shrine is located in Yatsushiro, Kumamoto [熊本], and its eaves are adorned with turtle decorations, symbolically linking the shrine to King Suro (Figure 21).

Furthermore, at the Inari Shrine in Yatsushiro, there is a double fish emblem, a symbol of Queen Heo Hwang-ok of King Suro. Myoken was also perceived as a Bodhisattva in Buddhism.<sup>56</sup> Note that the double fish emblem was also a symbol of Ayuta [阿踰陀國] of India, the kingdom from which Queen Heo Hwang-ok originally came (Figure 22). These symbolic connections from India to Gaya to Japan clearly show that Myoken was connected to both King Suro and Queen Heo Hwang-ok. Judging based on the sequence of events in *The Royal Genealogy of the Gimhae Kim Clan*, it can be inferred that the seven princes left and settled in the Japanese archipelago first,

followed by Myoken and Prince Seongyeon.

## VII. THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG SINNYEO, HIMIKO, AND EMPRESS JINGU

We have explored how Myoken was Sinnyeo, the shaman woman mentioned in the Gimhae Kim Clan genealogies. Interestingly, Myoken shares common traits with Himiko [卑彌呼], the first queen of Yamataikoku [야마대국 邪馬台國], and Empress Jingu [신공황후 神功皇后]. The key similarity is that all three were shaman women. According to Chinese historical records, Himiko served the “Way of Spirits” [鬼神道], indicating that she was a shaman. Additionally, at the Hachiman Shrine [八幡宮神社] on Tsushima Island and

<sup>56</sup> *Northeast Asian History Network* 『동북아역사넷』. "Buddhism was introduced to Japan through the Baekje dynasty during the reign of King Seongmyeong [聖明王] in 552 (some argue it was in 538), when he sent Buddha statues and scriptures to Emperor Kinmei [欽明天皇]. However, this introduction was at a national level aimed at the upper echelons of society, whereas Buddhism was likely already known and practiced by

common people, especially among immigrants from the Korean Peninsula who brought their Buddhist faith with them." (From East Asian History Education: Chapter 2, Population Movements and Cultural Exchange, Ancient State Buddhism and the Spread of State Buddhism Across East Asia (4th–6th century), the Reception of Buddhism in the Japanese Archipelago).

**Figure 23.** Straw Ropes at Hachiman Shrine on Tsushima Island (Left), Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine in Kamakura (Center), and the Korean Straw Rope (Right)



at the Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine [鶴岡八幡宮] in Kamakura [鎌倉市], golden straw ropes [금줄], a symbol of Korean shamanism, are hung in the shrines (Figure 23). This signifies that Empress Jingu was a shaman woman. Furthermore, the fact that Empress Jingu’s historical site is located on Tsushima Island [대마도] suggests that the “Imna” [임나 任那] she supposedly conquered may actually be Tsushima Island.<sup>57</sup> The following records clearly demonstrate that each of these three figures was a shaman woman:

In the Gimi year (199), Seongyeon, the son of King Geodeung, witnessed the chaotic world and the sorrowful funeral (of King Suro), and departed, riding away on a cloud together with *Sinnyeo*, a shaman woman.<sup>58</sup>

There was a woman named Himiko, who, despite her age, did not marry and *served the Way of Spirits*. She bewitched the people *with strange magic*. As a result, the people jointly decided to make her their queen.<sup>59</sup>

Empress (Jingu) summoned Takenouchi no Sukune and ordered him to *offer a sword and a mirror and pray to the gods of heaven and earth* for the opening of the waterways. Then, thunder and lightning struck, breaking the rocks and allowing the water to flow.<sup>60</sup>

Secondly, Sinnyeo (i.e., Myoken) left Gaya in 199 CE. According to Chinese records<sup>61</sup> and *Samguk Sagi, The History of Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea*, Himiko was a figure from the late 2nd to early 3rd century. This timeline can be

<sup>57</sup> *Nihon Shoki* 『일본서기 日本書紀』, Sushin 65th Year Entry: “Imna was located about 2,000 *li* north of Chikushi Province and southwest of Gyerim (Silla)” 任那者 去築紫國 二千餘里 北阻海以在鷄林之西南

<sup>58</sup> *The Genealogy of the Founding Ancestors of the Gimhae Kim Clan* 『김해김씨 시조선원세계』 Under the heading of 子居登王: “己卯子諱仙見塵世哀葬與神女乘雲離去.”

<sup>59</sup> *The Book of Later Han* 『후한서 後漢書』 Vol. 115 卷 115 Chronicles of Dongyi 「동이열전」 On Wae

75<sup>th</sup> 第 75 倭: “有一女子名曰卑彌呼, 年長不嫁, 事鬼神道, 能以妖惑衆, 於是共立爲王.”

<sup>60</sup> *Nihon Shoki* 『日本書紀』 Kinanataashihim 氣長足姬尊 Empress Jingu 神功皇后: “皇后召武內宿禰捧劍鏡令禱祈神祇 而求通溝 則當時 雷電霹靂 蹴裂其磐令通水.”

<sup>61</sup> Emperor Huan [환제 桓帝] was the 11th emperor of the Eastern Han Dynasty, reigning from 146 to 167, and Emperor Ling [영제 靈帝] was the 12th emperor, reigning from 167 to 189. It is recorded that the disturbance in Wae occurred during their reigns, after which Himiko became the queen.

cross-verified through the *Book of the Later Han* and *Samguk Sagi*. If we translate the sexagenary cycle system to the records, it becomes clear that Sinnyeo, Himiko, and Empress Jingu were all active in the 2nd–3rd century.

During the reign of Emperors Huan [146–168 CE] and Ling [168–189 CE], chaos erupted in the Wae Kingdom, and the people fought among themselves. For a long time, there was no ruler. A woman named Himiko, who, despite her age, did not marry and served the Way of Spirits, bewitched the people with strange magic. As a result, the people jointly made her their queen.<sup>62</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> year of King Adalla Isageum [173 CE], during the summer in May, Queen Himiko of Wae sent an envoy to pay a visit.<sup>63</sup>

The records in the *Book of Han* and the *Samguk Sagi* align. During the reign of Emperor Ling (167–189 CE), Himiko became the queen of Wae and sent an envoy to Silla around 173 CE. If Himiko is the same person as Empress Jingu, then the interpretation of the timeline using the sexagenary cycle system in *Nihon Shoki* is incorrect.

Thirdly, all three figures had male helpers. Sinnyeo had Prince Seongyeon, Himiko had her younger brother, and Empress Jingu had Takenouchi no Sukune as their assistants. Thus, all three figures share the same character setup.

The country originally had male rulers, but after 70–80 years, chaos erupted in Wa, and the people fought each other for many years. Finally, the people jointly made a woman their queen, named Himiko. She served the Way of Spirits and bewitched the people. Although already old, she had no husband. Her *younger brother* helped her govern the country.<sup>64</sup>

The Heavenly Deity taught, “Let Takenouchi no Sukune deliberate, and send Chikumano Nagaohiko as the messenger. Then, your wish will be granted.”<sup>65</sup>

These historical records strongly suggest that Sinnyeo, Himiko, and Empress Jingu were the same person. Jon Carter Covell (2006), who studied Gaya and the Japanese imperial family, also argued that Empress Jingu was a princess of Gaya and a shaman woman<sup>66</sup>.<sup>67</sup> In other words, she was Myoken, the

<sup>62</sup> *The Book of Later Han* 『후한서 後漢書』Vol. 115. 卷115 Chronicles of Dongyi 「동이열전」On Wae 75<sup>th</sup> 第 75 倭: 桓靈間, 倭國大亂, 更相攻伐, 歷年無主。有一女子名曰卑彌呼, 年長不嫁, 事鬼神道, 能以妖惑衆, 於是共立爲王。

<sup>63</sup> *Samguk Sagi, History of Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea* 『삼국사기 三國史記』Chronicles of Silla 「新羅本紀」: “阿達羅尼師今, 二十年 夏五月 倭女王卑彌乎 遣使來聘。”

<sup>64</sup> *Sanguo Zhi, Records of the Three Kingdoms* 『三國志』 Treatises of Wei 魏志 卷 30 魏志 :

“烏丸鮮卑東夷 倭, 其國本亦以男子爲王, 住七八十年, 倭國亂, 相攻伐歷年, 乃共立一女子爲王, 名曰卑彌呼, 事鬼道, 能惑衆, 年已長大, 無夫婿, 有男弟佐治國。”

<sup>65</sup> *Nihon Shoki* 『日本書紀』(二百四十七年四月) “氣長足姬尊 神功皇后, 便天神誨之曰 令武內宿禰行議 因以千熊長彥爲使者 當如所願。”

<sup>66</sup> The term Sinnyeo [神女] is synonymous with Himiko.

<sup>67</sup> “In 369, a group of people led by the Korean shaman princess Jingu [神功皇后] left Gimhae, near



daughter of King Suro. Furthermore, the *Encyclopedia of Japanese History* also identifies that Himiko and Empress Jingu were the same person.<sup>68</sup>

Given these facts, if Myoken migrated from Gaya to the Japanese archipelago and became Empress Jingu, the region she conquered later could not be Gaya, but rather the Japanese archipelago. Scholars should therefore stop identifying Imna as being located in the southern Korean Peninsula and instead look for its location on Tsushima Island or in the Kyushu region. In fact, there are numerous place names in Kyushu and Honshu related to Kara (唐, 韓, 加良, 可也), Tara (多羅, 多良, 太良), and Anra (安羅, 安良, 安樂).<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, Chinese records state that Himiko lived alone, never married, and died without descendants. However, the *Nihon Shoki* portrays Empress Jingu as a pregnant woman, suggesting that the Japanese imperial line continued unbroken. This alteration seems to have been made to create the narrative that the imperial line never ended. It also links Empress Jingu to Emperor Ojin [응신

応神],<sup>70</sup> believed to have Baekje origins. The author of the *Nihon Shoki* likely created this narrative to connect the Gaya and Baekje royal lines into a single history.

If Empress Jingu and Himiko are the same person, the current academic interpretation of the sexagenary years, which dates Empress Jingu to the 4th century, is entirely incorrect. For the sexagenary years used there were artificially fabricated so as to align the timeline with the reign of King Geunchogo [근초고왕 近肖古王] of Baekje in the *Samguk Sagi, The History of Three Kingdoms of Ancient Korea*.<sup>71</sup> Early records in the *Nihon Shoki* were often fabricated to piece together the histories of Gaya, Baekje, and Silla,<sup>72</sup> all of which expanded into the Japanese archipelago.

## VIII. THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN EMPEROR SHOWA AND EGAMI NAMIO

There is a report article related to the theory that the Japanese imperial family

Busan, Korea, under the special spiritual mandate of the shaman” (Covell and Covell 2006: 55).

<sup>68</sup> *Encyclopedia of Japanese History* 『日本史大辞典』 “The enthronement of Emperor Jimmu (the first emperor) was set at 660 BCE, thus making the early emperors’ lifespans seem unnaturally long. The reign of Empress Jingu is considered to correspond to Himiko in Weizhi, *Records of Wei* (The Chronicles of the Wae People section), but the dates have been moved forward by about 120 years.”

<sup>69</sup> Cho Hee-seung (2020) records numerous Gaya-related place names in the Japanese archipelago.

<sup>70</sup> Kim Seong-ho (1990) argues that Emperor Ojin, the first deity of Buyeo Shrine, was the last king of Biryu Backjae [비류백제 沸流百濟].

<sup>71</sup> In the Empress Jingu record of *Nihon Shoki* it is written as ‘King Chogo.’ However, this was moved up by 120 years to correspond to the time of King Geunchogo.

<sup>72</sup> Susano [素戔鳴], believed to have originated from Silla, was the ancestor of Emperor Jimmu, who is said to have ascended the throne in 711 BCE. However, Silla did not exist before that time. Ninigi, a Gaya descendant, precedes Jimmu, further messing up the timeline.

originates from the Korean Peninsula. Below is an excerpt from an interview conducted by JP NEWS in 2010 with Oda Nobuo, a researcher of ancient histories of Japan and Korea (Kim Hyun-geun, 2010). During the interview, Oda recounts a conversation between Egami Namio, a professor at the University of Tokyo, and Emperor Showa [昭和天皇], which took place after Egami received the Emperor's Award, Japan's highest academic honor, for his Horse-rider Conquest Dynasty Theory.

JP NEWS: What is the relationship between ancient Japan's ruling class and the current emperors?

ODA: Let me give you one example. In 1989, during the current Heisei Emperor's enthronement ceremony, there was a moment when the emperor went up to the altar and reported to the gods that he had become emperor. This ceremony lasted about 30 minutes. However, no cameras were allowed to enter that space. Why? Because he spoke in Korean. He probably recited phrases with endings like '-eun [은],'-neun[는]' [subject particles in Korean].

JP NEWS: Is there a more specific example?

ODA: Yes. After the war, when Professor Egami Namio introduced the Horse-rider Migration Theory, which stirred the Japanese historical community, he went to meet Emperor Showa (Hirohito). At that time, he said, "I apologize. I said strange things, such as suggesting that Your Majesty came from the Korean Peninsula."

To this, Emperor Showa replied, "No, it's fine. We are also originally from Korea." Egami later said that this statement was the most shocking moment of his life.

JP NEWS: Did you hear this directly from Professor Egami Namio?

ODA: "Yes, Egami Namio told this directly to Professor Kim Yong-un [김용운] from Korea, who then relayed it to me. So I am certain. There are also other pieces of evidence that the Japanese imperial family came from the Korean Peninsula.

First, the Korean word "어머니" (eo-meo-ni) for 'mother' is "okaasan" (お母さん) in Japanese, but in the imperial family, they say "o-mo" (おも). Doesn't "omo" sound like "eo-meo-ni"? Second, members of the imperial family traditionally do not use chopsticks much; they use spoons instead. Lastly, they do not sit in the traditional Japanese seiza [정좌 正座] posture. Instead, they sit cross-legged [양반다리], similar to the way Koreans do."

This content is cross-verified by Professor Kim Yong-un, in which he recounts what he heard directly from Professor Egami about Egami's dialogue with the Emperor Showa (Kim Yong-un, *YouTube*):

"I (Egami Namio) denied the theory of the emperor's inviolable sanctity. Personally, I am very sorry, but as a scholar, I could not help but present the findings of my research in good conscience. I apologize." He then bowed his head.

Upon hearing this, Emperor Showa smiled and said, "I, too, am a scholar."

... “As a scholar, I also have a conscience. Furthermore, I believe in your Horse-rider Conquest Dynasty Theory.”

Emperor Showa continued. “There are three reasons why I believe in your theory. First, when the Japanese people in general eat rice cakes, they pound them. However, in the imperial palace, we eat ‘Sirutteok’ [시루떡], steamed rice cakes, just like in Korea.” He then said, “Second, while Japanese people drink tea after their meals, in the imperial court, we drink ‘Sungnyung’ [송녕].”<sup>73</sup> This is also a Korean custom. “Third, Japanese people generally do not eat garlic—not even as medicine, and it is not used in everyday meals. But we do eat garlic. With just these three reasons, I believe in the Horse-rider Conquest Dynasty Theory without any doubt. There is nothing for you to feel sorry about.”

## IX. CONCLUSION

From the Yayoi period, people from the Korean Peninsula began migrating to the Japanese archipelago, with the key players being the Gojoseon people. During the Kofun period, the Gaya horse-riding people, who possessed iron culture, expanded into Japan. Numerous iron and horse-related artifacts were excavated from tombs in the Japanese archipelago, yet no evidence has been found to suggest that these originated in Japan. Instead,

they can be easily traced back to the iron culture of the Byeonhan region and the Gaya horse-riding people, who were connected to the Xiongnu. Thus, the beginning of the Kofun period in Japan was initiated by the migration of the Gaya royal family. This conclusion is supported by analysis of iron artifacts, horse-related artifacts, Gaya-related place names, and various historical sources, including the *Kojiki*, *Nihon Shoki*, and the genealogies of the Gimhae Kim Clan.

The Japanese imperial family originated from the Gaya royal family, who migrated to the Japanese archipelago in the 2nd–3rd centuries and initiated the Kofun period in Japan. This study has demonstrated ample evidence and historical documents that support this claim. Moreover, it has been shown that Myoken, Himiko, and Empress Jingu were the same person, and that she was a member of the Gaya royal family. It implies that the military campaigns of Empress Jingu could not take place in southern Korea, but rather within the Japanese archipelago. Numerous Gaya-related place names, artifacts, and relics exist throughout Japan, suggesting that the places Empress Jingu conquered should be identified in the Japanese archipelago, not on the Korean Peninsula.

These facts disprove the Imna-Gaya Theory, which claims that Wae advanced into southern Korea. It is based on a lack

<sup>73</sup> [Translator’s Note]: Sungnyung is a traditional Korean drink made from the crispy, scorched rice that remains at the bottom of the pot after cooking rice. It is created by adding water to the pot after

the rice has been served and letting the water boil with the scorched rice, extracting a subtle, nutty flavor from the browned rice.

of understanding of the basic cultural and civilizational transmission processes between Korea and Japan, as well as the iron and horse-riding culture of the Kofun period. Moreover, it is a preposterous proposal, reversing the reality of Gaya's expansion into Japan. It is unfortunate that there are still scholars who advocate for this theory, which was crafted by Japanese imperialist historians as part of the Imperial Japanese Colonialist Historiography.

One incident highlights the historical reality of the connection between the Japanese imperial family and the Gimhae Kim Clan. In 1915, the Japanese colonial government invoked a secret directive of the Governor-General's Office and banned the publication of the Gimhae Kim Clan Genealogy, which traces its origins to King Suro of Gaya. The reason given was that the genealogy posed a threat to Japan's national security and public order. Why would the genealogy of a Korean family be considered such a threat to Japan? This incident paradoxically proves the deep connection between the Japanese imperial family and King Suro of the Gimhae Kim Clan. If this fact that the Japanese imperial family, once revered as gods, was actually descended from the people of Joseon, who were subjects of Japan at the time became widely known, it would be a major issue, undermining the legitimacy of the Japanese imperial family. Sadly, the history of Gaya has been heavily distorted by colonialist historiography, and it is crucial to correct these misconceptions. Rectifying the history of Gaya is essential

to establishing a proper understanding of both Gaya's history and the historical relationship between Korea and Japan.

### Key Words

Korea, Gaya, Shaman, Nippon, Emperor of Japan, Tenno, Wae, Himiko, Jingu

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