



Reassessing the the Mimana Nihon-fu Theory: Evolution of a Contested Historical Narrative

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Abstract

This article examines the controversy surrounding the Mimana Nihon-fu (Imna Ilbonbu) theory, which claims that the Yamato court established a colonial outpost on the Korean Peninsula to rule three southern states (Baekje, Silla, and Gaya) from the 3rd to 6th century. The Mimana Nihon Fu theory traces its origins in the Nihon Shoki, often associated with the legend of Empress Jingū's conquest of the Korean peninsula. The theory gained prominence during the early 20th century, where it served as justification for Japan's colonization of Korea. Later, the theory was formalized with Suematsu Yasukazu's *The Rise and Fall of Mimana* (published in 1949), which presented the Yamato rule of Gaya as a historical fact. In recent decades, however, an increasing number of Korean and Japanese scholars have challenged the validity of the theory. This article analyzes secondary sources to examine how interpretations of the Mimana Nihon-fu theory evolved, revealing how political ideologies have shaped, and often distorted, the understanding of early Korea-Japan relations. It reviews the major evidence cited in support of the theory, such as the contested readings of the Gwanggaeto Stele, the Seven-branched Sword, and archaeological comparisons between Gaya and Yamato tombs. Archeological evidence, including ironworking and pottery, from Gaya, Baekje, and the Japanese archipelago suggest technological and cultural transmission from the Korean peninsula to Japan, meaning that there was a mutual exchange between the two regions rather than conquest. Thus, this article concludes that the Mimana Nihon-fu theory lacks credible historical and archaeological evidence and that the early development of states in Korea and Japan was interconnected rather than hierarchical.

Introduction

On August 15, 1945, Japanese emperor Hirohito's voice crackled through radios, announcing an unconditional surrender to the Allied Powers. After Japan's surrender in World War II, its pride as a nation descended from gods and sacred imperial line was shattered. Four years later in 1949, Japanese historian Suematsu Yasukazu published the nostalgic monograph *The Rise and Fall of Mimana*. In it, he claimed that ancient Japan ruled the southern Korean peninsula via a colonial office named Nihon-fu. This wistful trend continued throughout the 1960s. For example, in 1966 the Japanese government introduced a national holiday to commemorate Emperor Jimmu's founding of the Japanese empire. Turning to the present day, such imperialistic views still remain and are actively promoted by some Japanese politicians. In April 2001, the Japanese government approved a history textbook written by the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, which endorsed the Mimana Nihon-fu theory, to be taught in schools.¹

The Mimana Nihon-fu theory was inspired by the ancient interactions between the Korean peninsula and Japanese archipelago. Between the fourth and sixth centuries, four

distinct states existed in the Korean peninsula: Goguryeo, Baekje, Silla, and Gaya. These four states were constantly competing for territory and influence, with Goguryeo emerging as the dominant force by the late fourth century. Due to Goguryeo's southward expansion, Baekje, Silla, and Gaya formed alliances with each other. In particular, Baekje and Gaya formed a close trade and military relationship with powerful clans on the Japanese archipelago to exert pressure on their mutual rival Goguryeo. In a similar manner, the Japanese archipelago experienced a time of tribal warfare and consolidation of power within its territory during the Kofun period (c. 250 to 538 CE). Regarding affairs in the Korean peninsula, the Wa (an ancient name used to describe powerful political entities on the Japanese archipelago) aided Baekje and Gaya by dispatching soldiers, while Baekje acted as a transmitter of advanced culture and technology from China, and Gaya transmitted its advanced metallurgical and ceramic technology to the Japanese archipelago.

By the early twentieth century, some scholars proposed a more extreme theory to describe the early interactions of the Korean peninsula and Japanese archipelago. Namely, the Mimana Nihon-fu theory (Imna Ilbonbu in Korean) emerged, which claims that Japan established a colonial administrative office on the southern Korean peninsula, specifically in Gaya, from the fourth to sixth centuries AD. The Mimana Nihon-fu theory is not widely accepted in current academic discourse. Recent scholarship tends to shift its focus from proving or disproving the existence of the Nihon-fu to exploring the Wa people, including the Japanese merchants, envoys, and pirates, who were active in the Gaya region.² However, due to the absence of conclusive evidence from this period, scholars remain divided on the precise nature of ancient Korean and Japanese relations and the role of Wa people in the Korean peninsula. Since the 1980s, research regarding the Mimana Nihon-fu theory has largely relied on archaeological evidence. Hamada Kosaku, a Japanese archaeologist who participated in the surveys of the Nakdong river basin region, stated that it was impossible to prove the existence of Mimana Nihon-fu through archaeology.³ Although the archaeological remains related to the Mimana Nihon-fu theory are limited and inconclusive, this article explains and critiques the arguments put forth by proponents of the theory.

In addition to exploring scholarly debates surrounding the Mimana Nihon-fu theory, this article also analyzes evidence related to tomb culture, material goods, and the spread of ideologies. Through the analysis of this evidence, this article will explain how the Mimana Nihon-fu theory lacks sufficient evidence. Instead, it argues that exchange, migration, and the flow of knowledge from the Korean peninsula to the Japanese archipelago characterize the early interactions of these areas. By examining the validity of the Mimana Nihon-fu theory, this article points to the dangers of historical revisionism—the challenging of traditional interpretations of history—as the theory was developed and sustained through tendentious readings of historical evidence to serve political goals.

Origins of the Mimana Nihon-fu Theory

The Mimana Nihon-fu theory gained prominence during the height of Japan's imperial expansion, especially in the late Meiji and early Shōwa periods to justify imperial Japan's colonization of Korea.⁴ This theory was further developed by Japanese historian and geographer Ōmori Kogoro, whose 1911 article “A Brief History of the Rise and Fall of the Mimana Nihon-fu,”

claimed that the administrative office (Nihon-fu) dates back to the reign of Emperor Sujin. According to Ōmori, Japan's influence in Korea originated from the reign of Emperor Sujin in the first century BCE, during which time he alleges that officials from the Korean state Ofukara requested that Japan dispatch a general to the area. Ōmori then elaborates that the Gaya region had been governed through a line of Japanese administrators. Ōmori also attributed Empress Jingū to the theory. He claimed that she led a successful military campaign in Korea, in which she conquered the six Gaya polities (which made up the Gaya Confederacy), installed Japanese administrators in each of the polities, and subordinated Baekje and Goguryeo.⁵ Throughout the late 19th to early 20th centuries, Japanese scholars adopted similar perspectives on the Mimana Nihon-fu theory. Notably, Yoshida Tōgo asserted that in the first year of the legendary Emperor Suinin's reign (29 CE), Daegaya was formally incorporated into Japan and was renamed as Mimana (Imna).⁶ Naka Michiyo expanded upon these views by detailing that Empress Jingū dispatched the generals Kozen-betsu and Noka-betsu to conquer Silla as well as the Gaya Confederacy.⁷

The fundamental basis of the Mimana Nihon-fu theory is the Japanese legend of Empress Jingū's conquest of the Korean peninsula. According to the *Kojiki*, the oldest written record of Japan, Empress Jingū became divinely possessed by the deity Amaterasu Ōmikami (the Japanese sun goddess in Shinto mythology) and stated that there is a land to the west full of riches, waiting to be conquered. As Empress Jingū led her army across the sea, all the fish of the sea bore the ships on their backs. On the way, an auspicious wind blew the ships swiftly across the sea and arrived at Shiragi (Silla). Witnessing this sight, the king of Silla was so overwhelmed by Empress Jingū's divine presence that he surrendered without resistance. In addition, Empress Jingū subjugated Kudara (Baekche) under direct imperial control of Japan.⁸ However, it is important to note that the *Kojiki* is not entirely factual. From the legend of Izanagi and Izanami creating the Japanese archipelago to Emperor Keikō allegedly living 143 years, the *Kojiki* contains numerous myths that are often perceived by scholars as having little historical validity. The cause of the inclusion of myths and exaggerations can be attributed to the purpose of the book. The *Kojiki* was commissioned by the Yamato court (c. 250-710 CE) to legitimize their authority by claiming their divine lineage from the sun goddess Amaterasu.⁹

Japanese scholars have also used the *Nihon Shoki*, "The Chronicles of Japan," to support the Mimana Nihon-fu theory. The *Nihon Shoki* details that in the sixth century, Silla gradually conquered each of the Gaya polities. In response to this, the Yamato court sent troops to the Korean peninsula, where it established the Mimana Nihon-fu, or a Japanese military government based in Mimana (Gaya).¹⁰ Similar to the *Kojiki*, the *Nihon Shoki* was compiled to organize various legends and historical accounts. Thus, some accounts in the *Nihon Shoki* are myths or fabricated accounts.¹¹ Both the *Nihon Shoki* and *Kojiki* were compiled in order to legitimize the Yamato court's claim to legitimacy and used to advance its political agenda. Myths such as the Mimana Nihon-fu illustrated a powerful Yamato court, whose influence extended beyond the Japanese archipelago. Through these chronicles, the Yamato court sought to consolidate its power and head off rival political claims. Simultaneously, the compilation of these chronicles was intertwined with international affairs. The compilation of chronicles asserting cultural dominance in classical Chinese reflected the Yamato court's ambition to position Japan at an equivalent level as the prosperous Tang dynasty of China. While the fabrication of myths and accounts to achieve this ambition served the interests of the ruling Yamato elite, it

fundamentally distorted the history of its relationship with its neighboring states in the Korean peninsula.

One of the central problems with the Mimana Nihon-fu theory is the term “Nihon” (Japan) itself. Early Chinese and Korean records consistently referred to the Japanese archipelago and its people as Wa.¹² The term “Nihon” (日本) first appears in the Chinese *Old Book of Tang*, and is believed to have replaced the term Yamato roughly between 665 and 703 CE.¹³ This shows that during the 4th to 6th centuries, when the supposed Mimana Nihon-fu was said to exist, Japan was not even referred to as Nihon. Using the term Mimana Nihon-fu therefore is anachronistic and further weakens its credibility as a valid theory.

The Controversial Inscriptions of the Gwanggaeto Stele

Another piece of evidence that proponents of the Mimana Nihon-fu theory present is the controversial inscription on the Gwanggaeto Stele. The Gwanggaeto Stele was created in 414 CE by King Jangsu of Goguryeo to commemorate his father King Gwanggaeto the Great, primarily celebrating his successful military campaigns.¹⁴ The Gwanggaeto Stele gained attention by scholars in the late nineteenth century, when farmers who were cultivating the land found it and reported it to the magistrate of Huaijen District. A few years later, Sakai Kagenobu, an army officer of the Japanese General Staff Office investigating the conditions in China and Manchuria, brought a copy of the tracing back to Japan. Fascinated by the inscriptions on the stele, the members of the General Staff Office conducted research and in 1889 published their findings. The authors concluded that there indeed existed a Mimana Nihon-fu that governed the southern region of the Korean peninsula, citing the ambiguous and faded lines eight and nine of the stele that mention a Wa invasion on Silla in 391 CE. The General Staff and Japanese scholars have interpreted the “Wa” to be the Yamato court, asserting that the Japanese government had sent official military expeditions to Korea. In addition, these lines were interpreted to suggest that the Korean states Baekje and Silla had been subordinate states of Goguryeo, but in 391 CE the Wa subjugated Baekje and Silla.¹⁵

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Japan had ambitions of expanding into the Asian mainland by controlling Korea and Manchuria. Thus, the General Staff Office’s interpretation of lines eight and nine reflected a bias for the Mimana Nihon-fu theory so that it corroborated the accounts of the Mimana Nihon-fu in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*. They hoped to prove that the Korean peninsula had been Japanese territory since ancient times.¹⁶ However, political motives have obscured the possibility of different interpretations of lines eight and nine. For example, Korean historian Park Kwang-min interpreted these lines differently. According to Park, Baekje and Silla had originally been tributary states of Goguryeo. Since 391 CE, every time the Wa (referring to Japanese pirates) crossed the sea, they were repelled by Goguryeo; taking advantage of the Wa’s attack on Silla, Baekje conquered the eastern region of Silla. Therefore, Park argues that King Gwanggaeto personally led an army and attacked Baekje.¹⁷ Besides, in the inscriptions of the Gwanggaeto Stele, the Wa (Japanese people) are referred to in derogatory terms such as 倭賊 (meaning Wa brigands) and 倭寇 (meaning Wa pirates).¹⁸ These derogatory terms all suggest that the Goguryeo viewed the Wa in a lowly manner. If Japan truly conquered Gaya and Baekje and established a colonial office in the Korean peninsula, it would be unlikely that the Wa are mentioned merely as “Wagu,” which

translates to dwarf barbarians. Therefore, taking into consideration the purpose of the Gwanggaeto Stele, which was to celebrate the achievements of King Gwanggaeto the Great and demonstrate the power of Goguryeo, as well as the rhetoric used in the inscriptions, the inscriptions on the Gwanggaeto Stele do not support existence of the Mimana Nihon-fu.

New Evidence: the Keyhole-shaped Tombs in the Yeongsan River Basin

More recent evidence put forth by supporters of the Mimana Nihon-fu theory are the keyhole tombs located near the Yeongsan River (southwestern Korea) that were discovered in the late twentieth century. These tombs immediately attracted attention of Korean and Japanese scholars due to their striking resemblance to the Japanese keyhole structure and stone chambers. Such resemblance seemed to potentially serve as evidence for the Mimana Nihon-fu theory. In the Yeongsan River basin, a cluster of twelve keyhole-shaped tombs, a tomb type otherwise unique to Japan, has been identified. Furthermore, with the exception of the Jangdong Tomb No. 1, most are pit-style stone chamber tombs, which are seen as structurally connected to northern Kyushu traditions.¹⁹ While the tombs certainly show some Wa influence, they also show a mixture of Baekje and Gaya features. For instance, in the Goheung Andong Tomb, gilt-bronze shoes and a gilt-bronze crown of Baekje style and Gaya style pottery and weapons were excavated.²⁰

There are some possible explanations offered by Korean scholars for the appearance of keyhole tombs during the fifth and sixth centuries in the Yeongsan River basin. The first interpretation sees the occupants of the keyhole-shaped tombs as indigenous chieftains not yet subordinated to Baekje. Japanese historian Toshiaki Tanada accepts Wa involvement in the tombs but holds that their construction was initiated by local chiefs who frequently traveled to Wa, maintained ties with pro-Wa groups, and used these tombs as a visible political statement of resistance to Baekje incorporation and showing their alliance with Wa.²¹ Korean historian Yeon Min-su further develops this idea by arguing that in the early sixth century, under Baekje's twenty-two *damno* system, a system of royal-appointed local governors, Baekje exerted indirect control over the Yeongsan basin through local powers. Thus, he sees the keyhole-shaped tombs as evidence of local elites adopting Japanese cultural elements as a means of resisting full Baekje incorporation.²² Overall, Yeon's interpretation holds that until the fifth century, the Yeongsan River basin was only loosely tied to Baekje and the Wa influenced the construction of keyhole-shaped tombs. However, this interpretation has some contradictions, such as the presence of Baekje prestige goods such as gilt-bronze crowns within the tombs while simultaneously resisting its control.

Another interpretation of the keyhole-shaped tombs is that they were built by Wa immigrants who settled in the southern Korean peninsula. Japanese archaeologist Azuma Ushio most actively advanced this interpretation, suggesting that during the fifth century multiple Kyushu groups migrated collectively into the region, where both Wa immigrants and local Koreans constructed the keyhole-shaped tombs.²³ Korean historian Hong Bo-sik also argued that the tombs' stone chamber structures, mound forms, and siting, closely resemble Kyushu practices, and therefore the occupants were Wa settlers from northern Kyushu who established themselves in the Yeongsan River basin.²⁴ Unlike Azuma, however, Hong suggested that these Wa included individuals who had migrated earlier to Kyushu from Yeongsan and later returned,

and that they were eventually absorbed into Baekje's sphere of control.²⁵ However, there is no documentary evidence or settlement remains to confirm such large-scale Wa migration. Moreover, the differences between Japanese and Yeongsan keyhole tombs, the large quantities of Baekje prestige goods buried in them, and the locally produced pottery style all suggest that Wa immigration and mobilization for tomb construction is unlikely.²⁶

Although there are multiple interpretations to the emergence of the keyhole-shaped tombs in Korea, they are understood as products of intensive trade networks and cultural exchange between Korea and Japan in the fifth and sixth centuries.²⁷ During this time period, Baekje sustained stable diplomatic and exchange relations with Wa, shown through the frequent dispatch of Baekje royals and envoys, as well as military alliances between Baekje and Wa.²⁸ Overall, it is more plausible to regard the tombs as outcomes of state level exchanges between Baekje and Wa.

The politicization of archaeological evidence is a common phenomenon in revisionist history. It also serves as a tool to promote nationalism or certain political agendas. During this time, neither Korea nor Japan existed as unified nation-states. Instead, each region consisted of various regional polities such as Baekje, Gaya, and Yamato. The artifacts uncovered in the Yeongsan River basin should be understood within the context of trade and interaction between people in the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago. To retroactively impose modern-day nationalistic perspectives on this evidence reduces the complex interactions between the two regions into a narrative of simple conquest.

The Seven-branched Sword

Proponents of the Mimana Nihon-fu theory have long used the seven-branched sword (chiljido in Korean and shichishi no katana in Japanese) as evidence for the theory. Since its discovery in the Isonokami Shrine in 1873, Japanese scholars have long believed that the seven-branched sword was gifted from Baekje to the king of Wa. Many interpreted the sword as proof of Baekje's tributary status, often associating the sword with an account of the *Nihon Shoki* detailing Empress Jingū's 52nd reign year.²⁹

However, recent scholarship, especially in Korea, offers a compelling reinterpretation of the inscriptions of the seven-branched sword. Korean scholar Hong Sung-Hwa details a new reading of the inscriptions. The first adage that she challenges is the reading of the date of production, which was commonly believed to be 369 CE. The reason for the date being 369 CE was due to the first four characters 泰四年 being interpreted as the 4th year of Taihe ("Taihe" denotes the era name of Emperor Fèi, who ruled the Eastern Jin dynasty of China), and 4th year of Emperor Fei's reign was the year 369 CE. However, this reading is likely inaccurate as the era name Taihe is written as 太和, and never as 泰和. Through photo analysis of the inscriptions, Hong interprets this character as Bong (奉), and the production month as November rather than May. By correlating the sexagenary cycle (byeong-o year) with the 4th year of King Jeonji's reign, Hong determined that the seven-branched sword was crafted in November 16, 408 CE.³⁰ Since there was no Chinese dynasty or era name referred to as Bong, Hong claims that Bong was the era name of King Jeonji of Baekje. This indicates that Baekje was an autonomous state during the time of production of the seven-branched sword.³¹

Moreover, the inscription on the sword refers to the Japanese ruler as 侯王, which is a title indicative of an inferior rank. The final characters of the inscription are 傳示後世, translating to “to be passed down to later generations,” implying that Baekje was at a superior position, and not a subordinate state to Japan.³² While it cannot certainly be proven that Wa was a subordinate to Baekje due to the unreadable and unclear inscriptions that have multiple possible interpretations, it is reasonable to conclude that Baekje was not a tributary state of Japan.

Post-War Scholarship and the Emergence of Alternative Theories

The Horserider theory was first introduced by Japanese historian Egami Namio in 1948. Egami posits that a sudden cultural transformation occurred in Japan between the early and late Kofun period, which he attributes to the invasion of horseriding warriors from the Asian mainland. Due to this invasion, Egami argues that the peaceful and conservative Yayoi culture was replaced by a more radical one that actively adopted foreign customs.³³ He supports his claim with archaeological evidence, stating that finds of horse trappings, bits, harness fittings, and other equestrian artifacts in some Kofun burials signal that horseriders were politically dominant.³⁴ However, historian William Wayne Farris notes that equestrian artifacts were neither widespread nor introduced in a sudden manner. In fact, only about one percent of Kofun-period tombs contain horse-related objects, and the majority of these are concentrated in the Kinai region, which was where Yamato influence was the greatest.³⁵ The general consensus among scholars is that the Horserider theory is not plausible.

After Korea's independence from Japan in 1945, opposition to the traditional interpretations of the Mimana Nihon-fu theory began to emerge, particularly among Korean scholars seeking to escape from lasting imperial influences. A key figure in this trend was Kim Seok-hyeong, who proposed the Bungguknon, or the Korean satellite theory. Kim's theory contrasted drastically with the traditional ideas of earlier Japanese scholars, as he proposed that Koreans migrated to the Japanese archipelago as early as the third century BCE. There, they established satellite polities, which remained autonomous until the fifth century CE, when they were absorbed into the Yamato government. Thus, Kim asserted that the Nihon Fu was not a Japanese colonial office in Korea, but rather refers to a governing system created by the Yamato to manage the Korean settlements within Japan.³⁶ While intriguing due to the complete reversal of the traditional colonial views, the theory is generally rejected among scholars. Moreover, some scholars argue that the theory was a product of Kim Il-sung and North Korean academia's efforts to reinforce its “Juche” ideology by portraying Korea as historically autonomous and exceptional.³⁷

Cultural Exchange between the Korean Peninsula and Japanese Archipelago

Transfer of Iron Technology

As early as 300 BC, the Korean peninsula was a pathway for the introduction of iron in the Japanese archipelago, shown through Chinese cast-iron ax blades entering Japan via the Korean peninsula.³⁸ Historian William Wayne Farris notes that the three periods of iron production in the Korean peninsula correlates to the development of iron technology in the

Japanese archipelago. The first period, roughly from 400 BC to 100 BC, saw the gradual introduction of iron products from the north to south. In the second period, lasting from 100 BC to 300 AD, Korean iron technology expanded tremendously. During this time, the Korean peninsula began exporting ironworks to China and Japan. The third period, beginning from 300 AD, began mass manufacturing iron tools, armors, and weapons.³⁹ Iron tools, such as the cast-iron ax, that made its way via the Korean peninsula were instrumental in ancient Japanese state formation.

During the Kofun Period, lasting from 300 to 700 AD, which mirrors the third period of Korean iron technology, iron imports into the Japanese archipelago increased, evidenced through the excavation of iron swords, armor, helmets, and arrowheads in kofuns (tombs).⁴⁰ Moreover, Farris asserts that due to ancient Japan's reliance on the Korean peninsula, especially Gaya, state formation between the two regions inevitably affected each other.⁴¹ This may serve as an explanation for Wa inhabitants in the southern Korean peninsula during the fourth to sixth centuries, as the Wa sought to gain iron weapons and armor to gain more power in the Japanese archipelago. An aberration to this pattern of technological transmission from the Korean peninsula to the Japanese archipelago is the excavation of Japanese style armor in the keyhole-shaped tombs discussed earlier. Many ancient armors found in Gaya tombs, such as the horizontal plate armor excavated from Jisan-dong Tomb No. 32 (one of the keyhole-shaped tombs found in southern Korea) have origins in the Japanese Archipelago. This suggests the active trade and interaction that occurred between the two regions.⁴²

Influence of Gaya on Japanese Pottery

Gaya had a flourishing pottery culture that ultimately found its way to the Japanese archipelago. The most common types of Gaya pottery are the reddish-brown earthenware and grayish-blue stoneware. First, the reddish-brown earthenware was likely used for practical purposes and daily usage, such as boiling liquids and storing food. Moreover, the reddish-brown pottery was likely produced at lower temperatures in unsealed kilns, which shows that this type was a remnant of Bronze Age pottery.⁴³ In the fourth century, a more advanced form of pottery type, the grayish-blue stoneware, developed. The grayish-blue stoneware was primarily used for burial goods and were vitrified through firing in higher temperatures in closed kilns, indicating Gaya's advanced pottery culture.⁴⁴

In some areas of the Japanese archipelago, a new pottery type called sue ware emerged simultaneously as the later stage of Gaya pottery. Sue ware is known for its firmness and blue and charcoal color, and marks a significant development in Japan's pottery history. The advancements of sue ware is believed to have been influenced by the Toraijins, or immigrants from mainland Asia to the Japanese archipelago, who introduced pottery technology of Gaya.⁴⁵ Surveys have found early sue ware kilns in Osaka and Nara, which were areas where royal power was concentrated in western Japan. Archaeological findings from Suemura, the largest site for sue ware production in Osaka, have suggested that the Japanese sue ware was influenced heavily by Gaya pottery, as seen through the decorative styles.⁴⁶ The development of sue ware serves as evidence for the transmission of culture from the Asian mainland to the Japanese archipelago, which was a major pattern during this time.

The Spread of Buddhism via the Korean Peninsula

Korean monks from the Three Kingdoms played a crucial role in spreading Buddhism to the Japanese archipelago, and may have influenced state formation of Japan. Most evidence for the spread of Buddhism in the Japanese archipelago is depicted in the *Nihon Shoki* and the *Samguk Sagi*. While this article previously explained the limitations of the *Nihon Shoki* due to its fabrications of figures and accounts, scholars generally agree that the *Nihon Shoki* became historically more reliable from the fifth century. Thus, it is appropriate to use the *Nihon Shoki* to show the spread of Buddhism in Japan. The *Nihon Shoki* describes the first official introduction of Buddhism, describing that in 552 CE, King Seong of Baekje sent an envoy carrying a bronze image of Sakyamuni Buddha, pennants, sutras, and shastras to Emperor Kinmei.⁴⁷ During this time, the Three Kingdoms of Korea were at war. Consequently Baekje may have sought to form an alliance with the Wa by introducing religion from the Asian mainland, while the Japanese court influenced by the Soga clan likely sought to take advantage of this opportunity and import advanced Baekje culture. This shows how states in the Korean peninsula, particularly Baekje and Gaya, actively transmitted culture to the Japanese archipelago and mutually benefitted each other in doing so.

Conclusion

The Mimana Nihon-fu theory emerged during the post-World War II era and was actively used by radical Japanese right-wing politicians to justify the colonization of Korea and the atrocities that followed the occupation. Proponents of the theory cite the accounts of Empress Jingū's military expedition to the Korean peninsula in the *Nihon Shoki*, but fail to consider that the *Nihon Shoki* contains fabricated myths, especially in the early periods, that undermine the historical reliability of the evidence. Furthermore, proponents of the theory use the ambiguous inscriptions of the Gwanggaeto Stele tend to ignore other possible interpretations of the faded characters. Moreover, proponents ignore archaeological evidence such as the keyhole-shaped tombs in the Yeongsan River basin and the Seven-branched sword that may suggest trade and cultural interaction between the Korean peninsula and Japanese archipelago. Thus, the Mimana Nihon-fu theory lacks concrete evidence and is a narrow perspective that diminishes the complex relationship and flourishing trade that existed between the two regions.

The Mimana Nihon-fu theory is significant not only due to the distortion of history but also because it epitomizes the ongoing controversy of historical revisionism to serve political purposes. As Friedrich Nietzsche warned in his 1874 essay, when history is viewed as "monumental," it can be easily exploited as a tool for propaganda and power by selectively glorifying certain narratives while ignoring others. The Mimana Nihon-fu theory functioned in this way, offering a misleading interpretation of ancient Korea-Japan relations to legitimize colonial ambitions. Refuting the Mimana Nihon-fu theory matters beyond Korea and Japan as it demonstrates how history can be mobilized to satisfy modern political agendas.

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