The Yamato Kingdom: The First Unified State in the Japanese Islands
Established by the Paekche People in the Late Fourth Century

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HOMUDA (OUJIN), THE FOUNDER OF THE YAMATO KINGDOM

Most Japanese historians seem to believe that the Yamato kingdom began with King Oujin (Homuda), despite the fact that, according to Kojiki and Nihongi, Oujin was the fifteenth, not the first, king of Yamato kingdom. Why do they believe this? I will now present a well known thesis.

An early twentieth century professor of history at Waseda University, Tsuda Soukichi (1873-1961), argued that the records of Kojiki and Nihongi on the Yamato kings prior to Oujin were nothing but a simple fabrication for the purpose of making the Yamato royal family the rulers of Japanese archipelago since ancient times.1

The first evidence advanced by Tsuda to support his thesis is as follows. In the original text of Kojiki and Nihongi, all thirteen kings between Jinmu the Founder and the fifteenth king Oujin were recorded in (traditional Japanese style) posthumous formulaic titles, none of them individual or unique. From this, Tsuda reasons that posterity manufactured the titles, rendering them uniform. Beginning with Oujin, however, the unique name that was actually used since the time of the princedom was recorded as the posthumous title of each king. From this, Tsuda reasons that the name of each king was authentic. For example, the name of Oujin when he was a prince is Homuda, and the latter became his (traditional
Japanese style) posthumous title. The Chinese-style titles, such as Jinmu or Oujin, though most familiar to the general public these days, are not the ones we see in the original Kojiki and Nihongi. These are the titles that are believed to have been manufactured later by a scholar called Oumi Mihune (721-85).

The second evidence presented by Tsuda is as follows. According to Kojiki and Nihongi, from Jinmu to the fifteenth king Oujin, the pattern of succession was strictly lineal, from father to son. Between Oujin and Tenji, however, the pattern of succession was mostly fraternal, with kingship passing from brother to brother. The practice of father-to-son succession was not firmly established even after Tenji in the late seventh century. Tsuda therefore contended that the records of Kojiki and Nihongi on all kings prior to Oujin were fictitious.

The logic of Tsuda's proposition is very persuasive. There is, indeed, scarcely any substance in the records of Kojiki and Nihongi from the second king up to the ninth king, nor about the thirteenth king. The section on the fourteenth king, Chiuai, in Kojiki and Nihongi consists almost entirely of accounts of the fictitious entity called Empress Jingū. Many post-War Japanese historians believe that Teiki, a chronicle compiled in the early sixth century, had indeed contained records of only 12 kings from Oujin to Keitai. I find that there are four additional pieces of evidence to support the thesis that the Yamato kingdom began with Oujin.

The first supporting piece of evidence is as follows. Tsuda had focused on the fact that both Kojiki and Nihongi record strict father-to-son successions prior to Oujin. More importantly, however, is the fact that the credibility of them is cast into doubt by the peaceful nature of the transitions ascribed to them, so unlike other transitions. Let us look, for example, at the post-Oujin period. There was a bloody feud among brothers when Nintoku succeeded Oujin. There was another bloody feud when the Richiu-Hanzei brothers succeeded Nintoku. There developed very peculiar circumstances when Ingyou succeeded Hanzei. There was another bloody feud when the Ankau-Yūriaku brothers succeeded Ingyou. There developed very peculiar circumstances when the Kenzou-Ninen brothers succeeded Yūriaku-Seinei, and also when Keitai succeeded Ninen-...
of martial strength... The silence of both Kojiki and Nihon shoki regarding Homuda’s aggressiveness seems intentional.” Whatever the cover-up, until this very day, as many as 25,000 Hachiman Shriners all over the Japanese islands continue to worship the deified spirit of Homuda, not Jinmu, as the god of war.

Buretsu. In other words, conflict and bloodshed, mostly between brothers, characterize post-Oujin successions, giving us no reason to suppose that pre-Oujin successions were peaceful. Yet such is the claim, a claim that thus casts into doubt the factuality of the account.

Secondly, according to Nihongi, the 70-year interval between the death of the so-called fourteenth king Chiuai (in 200) and the enthronement of the fifteenth king Oujin (in 270) was ruled by Empress Jingū as regent (201-269). Yet Jingū is commonly acknowledged to be a fictitious figure apparently inspired by the third century Pimihu recorded in the Wajin-den of Wei-shu (of San-guo-zhi compiled by Chen Shou, 233-297). The story of Jingū’s regency makes the thesis that only the post-Oujin kings did actually exist sound more reasonable.

Thirdly, immediately after the compilation of Kojiki in 712, the Yamato court ordered the governors of all provinces to compile surveys of products, animals, plants, and land conditions, etymologies of place names, and written versions of oral traditions. These records were apparently used as a source by Nihongi. Harima Fudoki, one of the few such records extant, is believed to have been compiled between 713 and 715. Harima Fudoki includes so many anecdotes related to Homuda (Oujin) that one readily believes Homuda must have been the founder of the Yamato kingdom. Harima Fudoki is blanketed with a myriad of accounts about Homuda’s activities such as visiting villages and people, going on hunting expeditions, and the naming of places after Homuda’s trifling words and deeds. Other kings are scarcely mentioned in Harima Fudoki.

The fourth supporting piece of evidence is this. According to Kojiki and Nihongi, among all Yamato kings, only Jinmu the official Founder and the so-called fifteenth king Oujin were born in Kyūshū: Jinmu shortly after the imperial ancestor deity Ninigi descended to Kyūshū from heaven, and Homuda immediately after his mother (Empress Jingū) landed on Kyūshū, crossing the sea from Korea. From Kyūshū, Jinmu makes an epic Eastward Expedition, while Oujin makes a miniature expedition eastward with his mother. The fact that only Jinmu the official founder and Oujin the fifteenth king were recorded to have been born in Kyūshū (only to conquer...
unruly elements in the Yamato area) implies that both Jinmu and Oujin represent the one and only founder of the Yamato Kingdom.\(^6\)

**DATING THE FOUNDATION OF THE YAMATO KINGDOM**

According to Nihongi, the Yamato kingdom was established in 660 BC. Neither the Japanese historians nor the general public believe the year of the foundation of the Yamato kingdom recorded in Nihongi to be correct. This raises, of course, the question of when the Yamato kingdom was established.

According to Nihongi, Oujin became king in 270. If one examines both Nihongi and Samguk-sagi, however, one arrives at the conclusion that Oujin became the king in 390. This is the well known 120-year (two sexagenary cycles) difference between the records of Nihongi and those of Samguk-sagi in this period (see Aston 1889, pp. 51-65). For instance, according to Nihongi, Paekche sent crown prince Cheon-ji to the Yamato court in the eighth year of Oujin’s reign (277). The Samguk-sagi records that the crown prince was sent to the Yamato court in 397. According to Nihongi, Paekche King Asin (Ahwa) died in the sixteenth year of Oujin’s reign (285). The Samguk-sagi records that King Asin died in 405. All these records (given the usual two-cycle correction) imply that Oujin became the king in 390.\(^7\)

If the Yamato kingdom was established in 390, how do we trace the roots of the royal family? The correct answer to this question that the ardent Japanese wish to hear goes as follows: “the imperial clan represents a truly ‘native’ ruling force that had emerged as the result of natural socio-political evolution on the Japanese archipelago from the ancient Ice Age.”

**MODEL-BUILDING BY EGAMI, LEDYARD AND HONG**

Observing an “archeological break” including the sudden appearance of horse bones and trappings in the late fourth century, Egami (1948) has contended that some horseriding people from the continent had conquered the Japanese islands and established the Yamato kingdom. Ledyard (1975) has specified the Puyeo people as a plausible candidate for the conquerors on the basis of the chaotic stories of the period.
the Mediterranean, North Africa and far to the east into Asia around 300-400 AD. This period coincides with the great Germanic folk migrations in the west end and the Five Barbarians and Sixteen States period (304-439) in the east end. According to Lamb (1995: 150), such a drought could have devastated the places where agriculture had been carried on with the aid of elaborate irrigation works. It is then possible that such an abrupt change in climate had a serious impact also on the Paekche farmers around the Han River basin.

Due to a long spell of drought following the Little Ice Age, the Kaya farmers on the southern shore of the Korean peninsula could have renewed, by the turn of the 4th century, their emigration effort into the Japanese islands to join their distant cousins, while the more innovative farmers led by the martial rulers of the Paekche State at the Han River basin could have decided to conquer the Mahan in the southwestern quarter of the peninsula (in 369 AD), and then to branch off in the direction of the Japanese islands in the late fourth century.

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between 350 and 380 recorded in Nihongi. By allotting appropriate weight to the post-Oujin records of Kojiki and Nihongi, however, Hong (1988, 1994, 2002) has contended that the Paekche people from the Korean peninsula conquered the Japanese islands.

The essence of my model is as follows. I contend that the Neolithic Jōmon culture (c. 10,000–300 BC) on the Japanese archipelago was the product of Ainu and Malayo-Polynesian people, while the Bronze-Iron Yayoi culture (c. 300 BC-300 AD) was the product of Kaya people from the southern Korean peninsula together with Ainu and Malayo-Polynesian aborigines. The proto-Japanese people, speaking proto-Japanese language, were formed during the Yayoi period. I also regard the early tomb culture (c.300-375) as an extension of the Yayoi culture.

The late tomb culture (c. 375-675) was, however, brought about by the Yamato kingdom, the first unified state on the Japanese islands that was newly established at the end of the fourth century by the Paekche people from the Korean peninsula.9 I postulate that the Paekche people conquered the Japanese islands sometime between 370-390, that Homuda (Oujin) acceded to the throne as the founder of the Yamato kingdom in 390, and that there were some time lags between the commencement of conquest and the burial of conquerors in gigantic tombs with horse trappings.

By the time King Mi-cheon of Koguryeo conquered the Le-lang Commandery in 313, Paekche came to occupy the Dai-fang Commandery. In 369, King Keun Chogo of Paekche conquered the entirety of the Ma-han states in the southwestern peninsula and then, in 371, struck northward into the Pyung-yang area, killing the King Kogug-won of Koguryeo. During the fourth century, before the appearance of the King Kwang-gae-to the Great (391-412) in Koguryeo, Paekche could maintain an offensive posture in armed conflicts with its neighbors. Paekche under the reign of the martial King Keun Chogo (346-75) and his son, Keun Kusu (375-84), reached its peak in military might and territorial expansion. It was during this period that the Paekche people conquered the Japanese islands and established the Yamato Kingdom.