

1.

THE ORIGINS OF JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY ON
THE YAMATO IMPERIAL CLAN

Kirkland (1981) notes that: “The idea that the roots of Japanese history lay in continental Asia, specifically in Korea and Manchuria, is not a new one. As early as 1921, the historian Kida Sadakichi 喜田貞吉 suggested a link between the establishment of three strong kingdoms on the Korean peninsula around the fourth century and the almost simultaneous appearance of the first Japanese state. Two of the three Korean states, Koguryeo and Paekche, were thought to have been founded by elements of a people known as the Puyeo, whose homeland was in south-central Manchuria. Historians and folklorists are quick to note that the Puyeo legends recorded in ancient Chinese texts bore similarities to certain myths and quasi-historical accounts from ancient Japan.”

The Japanese myths, as narrated in *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, are full of arrivals and advents of gods coming down from heaven and gods sending their semidivine relations to various parts of the Japanese islands on missions of conquest. The myths recorded in *Kojiki* and *Nihongi* do not seem to be antihistorical. They rather seem to provide an understandable framework within which the facts could be accommodated, a response to the identity crises of the Yamato rulers.

Egami (1964) calls our attention to the mythology of *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, which recounts that: the gods of heaven descended to the land of Japan (Izumo and Kyūshū) and overcame and ruled the gods of the land who were its original inhabitants; Sosa no wo, before crossing to Izumo 出雲, stayed for a time in Silla; and, in the passage which describes the descent of Ninigi onto the peak of Takachiho 高千穂 at Himuka 日向 in the Tsukushi area, a special mention is made of Korea (i.e., “This place faces towards Kara Kuni” 向韓國). Egami then concludes that it “would be naturally clear to us if we were to regard Korea as the original home of the gods of heaven.”

Kojiki and Nihongi distinguish the deities of heaven 天神 [ama tsu kami] from those of earth 地祇 [kuni tsu kami]. The deities of earth represent the native indigenous groups while the deities of heaven, headed by the Sun Goddess 天照大神, represent the ancestors of the imperial clan who, according to Egami, were the descendants of a nonindigenous invading people.

Egami further examines the legends of Chumong 朱蒙 [Chu-meng or Tsou-mou] regarding the founding of the state of Koguryeo: the founder of the state leaves his native country (Puyeo) and crosses a river to found a state in a new country; he is able to cross the river with the help of a turtle; and the founder of the state is ‘the child of heaven’, having Heaven as his father and the daughter of a river-god as his mother 天孫河伯甥. Egami then makes a comparison between these legends and those of Jimmu, noting various similarities: the founder of the state crosses the sea; a man riding on the back of a turtle appears to serve the founder as his guide; the founder is one of the Children of Heaven 天孫 and his mother is a daughter of a sea goddess.

Szczesniak (1951) asserts that: “the myth of King Su-mu [Chumong] is the same as the myth of Jimmu Tennō’s father. The Tungus aspects of Japanese mythology are certainly . . . early evidence of Tungus culture and migrations of the main body of a prehistoric population in the archipelago situated so near to that part of the continent which was inhabited by Tungus people. . . . The . . . prevalent Tungus elements in the prehistoric population of the Japanese islands are supported by the analysis of the Su-mu [Chumong] myth.”

Egami concludes that “foundation legends derived from the same sources as those of Fuyu and Kao-chu-li [Puyeo and Koguryeo] were brought into Japan by an alien race, ‘the gods of heaven’ - and in particular by the Children of Heaven, or the Imperial line, among them - and that when they moved from Tsukushi along the Inland Sea coast to the Kinki region there occurred the historic event of their founding the state of Japan, and as a result of this event taking place the old foundation legends were adapted to it.” That is, the alien race known as the gods of heaven or the Imperial line possessed traditions derived from the same sources as those of Puyeo and Koguryeo. Egami contends that their route begins at their original home in eastern Manchuria or north Korea and reaches the Kinki region via south Korea and Kyūshū. But Egami places specific emphasis on the possible fact that they crossed directly from the Mimana 任那 area [Kaya] in south Korea.

Egami (1964) emphasizes that the invaders called the gods of heaven came through the Kaya 伽耶 [Mimana] area in south Korea because in both the Korean source on Six Kayas (Karak-Kukki 駕洛國記 of Samguk-yusa 三國遺

事) and the Japanese source on founding legends (Kojiki and Nihongi), the gods descend after receiving the order from a heavenly deity to rule the land; they descend wrapped in some form of cloth; and they descend to a place which has more or less the same name (i.e., Kushifuru 久士布流 or Kushihi in Kojiki and Nihongi, and Kui-chi 龜旨 in Karak-Kukki).¹

The study of the origins of Japanese mythology has evolved as part of the study of the origins of the people. *Obayashi* (1977) discusses various themes of Japanese mythology and makes a particularly detailed comparative study of Japanese mythology on the origins of kingship, focusing on the legend of Jimmu's eastern expedition. This section presents the central portion of *Obayashi's* study of the Japanese kingship myth.

Obayashi begins with the following statement: "Whether it be in the Kojiki or in the Nihon shoki, Japanese mythology unfolds. . . by telling about the origins of the Imperial Family 皇室, the family that ruled Japan. The mythological system is, indeed, persistently focused on the origins of the Imperial Family. Consequently, Japanese mythology bears the character of kingship-origin myth to an extremely pronounced degree."

Obayashi calls attention to the fact that although the term "Japanese mythology" is usually considered to refer to the stories in the "Books on the Age of the Deities" of Kojiki and Nihongi, mythological ideas and motifs are also observed in stories from later periods dealing with the early emperors. Kojiki and Nihongi recount that Ama-terasu's grandson Ninigi descended from heaven to the peak of Takachiho-no-mine 高千穂峰 in Himuka (Hyuga 日向) as the ruler of earth and became the forefather of the Imperial Family, while the ruler of Korea is said to have descended from heaven to the top of a mountain, according to accounts in the Tan'gun 檀君 myth and the foundation myth of the kingdom of Kara 駕洛國. *Obayashi* takes these stories as evidence that Japanese and Korean kingship mythologies bear a close resemblance.

Gardiner (1988) recapitulates the founding myth of Chu-mong's 朱蒙 Koguryeo as told in Old Samguk-sa 舊三國史: "Heaven warns the people of Puyo to move to the east in order to make way for a line of Heaven-descended 天降 rulers . . . Haemosu 解慕漱, the son . . . of Heaven 天之子

¹Egami notes that the word *furu* (pul) as in Kushifuru means *village* in Korean, so that Kushifuru means nothing other than *the village of Kui-chi*, and that the word *Sohori* which refers to the place Kushifuru (Kushihi) is the Korean word for "the capital (Soful), as in the case of the capital of Paekche, so-pu-ri, the capital of Silla, So-pol, and the modern Seoul. Egami further comments: "In all these cases words which are difficult to understand as Japanese are readily and rationally understandable as Korean."

comes down to earth in the old capital of Puyeo [in 59 B.C.] . . . At this point it is worth emphasizing the solar associations of Haemosu. He has close connections with the sun, not only revealed by his name [‘hae’ was an old Korean word for the ‘sun’], but also by activities such as his repeated descent into the world of men, and reascendance into Heaven . . . [A]long the Yalu (Amnok) river . . . Haemosu marries Yu-hwa 柳花 the daughter of the River God 河伯. . . [who is described as] the wife of the Emperor of Heaven’s son 天帝子. . . [and then we get to the story of] the actual birth of Chu-mong 朱蒙 [‘a good marksman’ in the Puyeo tongue], who was to become King Tongmyeong 東明王. . .”² Gardiner further summarizes the material used by Yi Kyu-bo 李奎報: “. . . the Emperor of Heaven sent his Crown Prince down to earth in the former capital of Puyeo. He had the title Haemosu, and came down from Heaven 天降 in a chariot drawn by five dragons, and with more than a hundred followers, all riding on white geese . . . [The Prince] stopped on Mount Ungsim 熊心山 for more than ten days before descending to earth. On his head he wore a crow-feather cap 烏羽冠, and at his waist a sword that flashed like a dragon.” One may take these stories on Heaven-descended rulers as further evidence that the Yamato kingship myth bears close resemblance to the mythology surrounding the founder of Koguryeo who was shared by the Paekche people as a common ancestor.

Obayashi (1977) calls attention to an important difference between the version of the legend of Jimmu’s eastern expedition [from Kyūshū to the Yamato area] in Kojiki and the one in Nihongi. In Nihongi, the principal figure in the eastern expedition from beginning to end is Iharebiko 磐余彦 [Jimmu], while in Kojiki there are two main characters, Jimmu and his elder

²Gardiner notes that: “as for the ‘Old Samguk-sa,’ the work itself has disappeared . . . it must have covered the history of the same three kingdoms as the Samguk-sagi, but almost all we know of it now comes from Yi Kyu-bo, who [discovered it in A.D. 1193 and] was moved by the annals of King Tongmyeong in the older book to compose a poem embodying this material. This poem has survived in chapter three of Yi Kyu-bo’s collected works [Tongguk Yi Sangguk Chip 東國李相國集] where it is provided with . . . quotations . . . taken from the texts of the ‘Annals of King Tongmyeong’ 東明王本紀 in the ‘Old Samguk-sa’ . . . Yi Kyu-bo was surprised to find stories of the founder of Koguryeo repeated in mere summary form in respectable Chinese histories such as the Wei-shu 魏書 . . .” Gardiner further notes that: “in the third century Wei-lüe 魏略, Tongmyeong is the founder, not of Koguryeo but of Puyeo. Evidently at some time in the fourth century, . . . the Koguryeo kings, seeking to enhance their prestige, appropriated what had been a Puyeo origin myth and used it to proclaim the divine origins of their own line.”

brother Itsuse 五瀬. Itsuse is the principal character in the first half of the legend -- the portion dealing with the voyage at sea -- but just after he steps on land and engages in combat with Tomibiko, he is killed. Iharebiko is the principal character in the land fighting, which occurs in the second part of the story, and is successful in his conquest. *Obayashi* summarizes the legend of Jimmu's eastern expedition in the following fashion: "The elder brother, who is the sea figure, and the younger brother, who is the land figure, set out together on a land-seeking trip. The elder brother fails and dies while the younger brother succeeds and founds a kingdom."

Obayashi next turns to the foundation legend of Paekche, whose rulers had their origins in Puyeo and Koguryeo. According to Samguk-sagi, Chumong, the forefather of the Koguryeo kingdom, fled from Northern-Puyeo and took refuge in Cholbon-Puyeo 卒本扶餘, where he married the princess of the domain and had two sons, Biryu 沸流 and Onjo 溫祚. At some point, however, Yuri 類利, the son born to Chumong while he was in northern Puyeo, came from there to seek refuge, and Chumong made the latecomer Yuri his crown prince. As a result, Biryu and Onjo had to leave Cholbon-Puyeo [which had become Koguryeo] with their followers, and they went south in search of a new territory. On reaching Hansan, they climbed Puaak 負兒岳, to the north of present-day Seoul, and looked down on the landscape for a place to settle. Although many people advised against it, Biryu, the elder brother, decided to go to the coastal area and founded a state. Onjo, the younger brother, chose Wirye-seong in inland Ha-nam 河南慰禮城 for his capital and called the country Ship-che 十濟. As it turned out, Biryu, who had gone to live by the sea, proved unable to settle there permanently because the soil was damp and the water contained salt. He thus returned to investigate the situation in Ha-nam, where his younger brother was living. Upon finding that Wirye-seong in Ha-nam was flourishing and that the people there were enjoying a comfortable life, Biryu became so ashamed of his lack of foresight that he committed suicide. Biryu's retainers then formed a union with Onjo followers and the country became Paekche.

Obayashi understands this foundation legend of Paekche in the following fashion: "[T]he elder brother, the sea figure, and the younger brother, the land figure, also set out on a land-seeking trip. While the elder brother fails and dies, the younger brother succeeds, founds a kingdom, and becomes the forefather of a dynasty. This basic structure is identical with that of the legend about Jimmu's eastern expedition."

Obayashi then turns to the resemblances between the legend of Jimmu's expedition and the foundation legend of Koguryeo, "which matches the claim

by the rulers of Paekche that they had their origins in Puyeo and Koguryeo.” Kojiki recalls that when Jimmu passed through the straits of Hayasui-no-to, Sawone-tsu-hiko appeared riding on the back of a tortoise, and served as a pilot to guide the expeditionary forces through the waters. Egami(1964) has already compared this legend to the story about Chumong on the occasion of the founding of Koguryeo -- he was helped in crossing a river by tortoises who made a bridge for him.³ *Obayashi* goes one step further and points out that three animals -- namely, a tortoise, a bear, and a crow -- appear in Jimmu’s story while the same kinds of animals -- that is, beasts, tortoises and birds -- appear in Chumong’s story. He further points out that, of these animals, the tortoise and the crow actively cooperate with Jimmu’s expeditionary forces while the land animal, the bear, has a negative value, and that, in Chumong’s story also, tortoises and birds have positive value while the beasts have negative connotations.

It is told that Chumong, before being born from an egg, was placed in a cage that held four-footed animals who could have trampled the egg and killed him. Further, when Chumong goes on a hunting trip with other princes, he is the only person who bags many deer, and this earns him a bitter reward. *Obayashi* interprets this episode also as evidence of negative associations with land animals in Chumong’s story. The birds hold positive connotations for Chumong because, after Chumong’s departure, his mother 神母 brings him the wheat seeds he has left behind by taking the form of two doves. Hence *Obayashi* concludes: “[T]he structural similarity between the two stories becomes apparent when they are codified.”

Obayashi also calls attention to the fact that Japanese mythology includes an account of a marriage between the heaven and the sea, as does Korean myth. In Korea, an account of how heaven and a river were married and then separated appears in the myth dealing with the marriage between Haemosu and the daughter of Habaek 河伯 (the river deity), who were the parents of Chumong.⁴ Japanese mythology includes an account of a marriage between a

³Egami (1964) notes that, according to Wei lüe and Hou Han-shu (in accounts of Dong-yi 東夷 and Puyeo), the founder of Puyeo, Tong-myeong, when fleeing from his native place, came to a river called Shih-yen shui. As he took his bow and struck at the water, a turtle appeared; by using its back as a bridge, Tong-myeong was able to cross the river. Egami also notes that there is an almost identical story regarding Chumong [Tsou-mou], the founder of Koguryeo, which is an offshoot of Puyeo. He then concludes that “foundation legends derived from the same sources as Fu-yu [Puyeo] and Kao-chu-li [Koguryeo] were brought into Japan by an alien race . . . the alien race known as the gods of heaven, and in particular the Children of Heaven or Imperial line . . .”

mountain and the sea, which appears in the Hyuga myth before the eastern expedition by Jimmu. Specifically, Yama-sachi-biko (Mountain Luck) goes to the sea and marries Toyotama-bime, the daughter of the god of the sea. He does so in his capacity as a child of an Ama-tsu-Kami 天津神 (heavenly deity). Hence, according to Ōbayashi, the difference between this myth and the Haemosu myth is only superficial.

On the basis of this evidence, Ōbayashi reaches the following conclusion: “An examination of the legend concerning Jimmu’s eastern expedition, and the Hyuga myth preceding it, reveals a striking correspondence in structure between the Japanese myths and the kingdom-foundation legends of Koguryeo and Paekche. This provides a clue to the origins of the ruling-class culture in Japan [T]he monarchial culture, which brought the themes dealt with in the kingship myths, came to Japan from Korea, I believe, in the fifth century, when the culture characterized by the ancient burial mounds had already come into existence.”⁵

The KEJ (1983: 2. 203) presents the following statement written by Webb: “[h]istorically, the origin of the [emperor] institution [in Japan] is impossible to describe with precision. Perhaps the continental horse-riding people who are said to have invaded Japan in the late 4th or early 5th century, introducing enormous mounded tombs, established the imperial institution that has survived to the present day. In any case, the huge tombs of the culture are among the oldest material remains associated with the institution.”

⁴Nihongi on Nintoku (NI: 281) refers to Habaek (the river-god) in association with the construction of an embankment and the problem of closing the gaps between the two parts of the construction: “Then the Emperor (Nintoku) had a dream in which he was admonished by a God, saying – ‘There is a man of Musashi named Koha-kubi and man of Kahachi 河内 named Koromo no ko, the Muraji of Mamuta. Let these two men be sacrificed to the Habaek 河伯 [River-God], and thou wilt surely be enabled to close the gaps.’ So he [Nintoku] . . . sacrificed them to the River-God 河神 [Habaek].”^{<1>} Nihongi on Kōgyoku (NII: 174-175) also refers to Habaek: “In accordance with the teachings of the village hafuri 村祝部所教, there have been in some places horses and cattle killed as a sacrifice to the Gods of the various (Shinto) shrines, in others frequent changes of the market-places, or prayers to the Habaek [River-Gods].”^{<2>} These references for the grandfather of Chumong, Habaek (translated into “river-god” by Aston), were noted by Choi (1988: 20).

⁵Ōbayashi adds: “Therefore, I argue that the similarity between some of the kingship myths of ancient Japan and the myths of the Indo-Europeans can be attributed to the fact that Indo-European myths were brought to Japan as part of the ruling-class culture that came into the country by way of the Korean peninsula with the Altaic pastoral culture as an intermediary.”