Observations on the Nihon Shoki from the Perspective of the Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar System

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Introduction

This paper examines the structure of the Nihon Shoki (Chronicles of Japan) from the perspective of the Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar theory.

The composition is organized as follows:

1. Overview of the Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar Theory
2. The Nihon Shoki and the *Wajinden* in the *Records of Wei*
3. The Nihon Shoki and the Kings of Wa as seen in the *Book of Song*
4. The "Eight Generations without Historical Records"
5. A Consideration of the Yamatai Kingdom
6. Conclusion

(Notes)

1. In this paper, the "Wajinden" refers to the section on the Wa people in the *Records of Wei*, Eastern Barbarians volume, of the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*.
2. Unless otherwise specified, the names of Emperors and Empresses for whom a

main chronicle (*honki*) was established in the Nihon Shoki are rendered using their Chinese-style posthumous names.

3. Unless otherwise specified, dates are expressed in the Western calendar (CE).

4. In this paper, simplified references are appended at the end of each chapter for convenience, while the full reference list is compiled at the end of the paper.

1. Overview of the Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar Theory

The Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar Theory is based on a passage quoted from the *Weilüe* (a lost Chinese historical text) in the annotation to the *Wajinden* in the *Records of Wei*.

The passage states:

"Their customs do not recognize the regular yearly cycle of the four seasons, but simply record the seasons of spring plowing and autumn harvest, which serve as their annual reckoning."

From this, it is inferred that the people of Wa (ancient Japan) counted one year as two — that is, recording one spring and one autumn separately, effectively doubling the

number of years.

This method of reckoning will hereafter be referred to as the "double-year calendar system" (倍暦, *bai-reki*).

Although the theory has not attracted significant academic support due to its limited empirical basis, it has been noted since the Meiji period.

Specifically, William Bramsen, a Danish official stationed in Japan during the Meiji era, referred to it in his 1880 publication *Japanese Chronological Tables*, suggesting that the extraordinary longevity attributed to ancient Japanese emperors could be explained by this calendar method.

In the 1970s and thereafter, historian Takehiko Furuta adopted the theory to support his own historical models, helping it gain a certain degree of recognition, mainly among independent researchers and history enthusiasts.

In this paper, the year 391 CE is taken as the baseline year.

This is based on the record from the stele of King Gwanggaeto (also known as the Gwanggaeto Stele) in Goguryeo, which states:

"In the Sinmyo year [391 CE], Baekje and Silla, formerly subject peoples, paid tribute, but Wa crossed the sea and invaded Baekje and Silla, subjugating them as vassals."

This is compared with the *Nihon Shoki*'s account of Empress Jingū's conquest of the Three Kingdoms of Korea (三韓征伐), aligning the first year of Empress Jingū's reign with 391 CE.

References

- *New Edition: Records of Wei (Wajinden), Later Han, Song, and Sui Histories — Chinese Official Histories of Japan I*, Iwanami Bunko, Blue 401-1.
- *Nihon Shoki (Volume I)*, Kodansha Gakujutsu Bunko 833.
- (Reference) Wikipedia articles: "Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar Theory."

1. Overview of the Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar Hypothesis

The Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar Hypothesis is based on a note cited from the *Weilüe* within the *Wajinden*, which states:

"Their custom is that they do not know the proper reckoning of years and seasons; they merely record the spring plowing and autumn harvest as their annual chronology."

This description suggests that the people of Wa (ancient Japan) counted both spring and autumn activities as separate annual events, effectively treating one solar year as two calendar years. In this paper, we will refer to this system as the "Double-Year

Calendar."

Although this hypothesis has not gained widespread support within the academic community due to a lack of direct empirical evidence, it was first proposed in the early Meiji period by William Bramsen, a Danish scholar stationed in Japan. In his 1880 publication *Japanese Chronological Tables* (the English edition of *Wayō Tairekihi*), he suggested the Double-Year Calendar as an explanation for the unusually long lifespans attributed to ancient Japanese emperors.

Later, during the 1970s, the historian Takehiko Furuta adopted the Double-Year Calendar theory to support his own hypotheses, thereby increasing its recognition, particularly among amateur historians and independent researchers.

In this paper, we adopt 391 CE as the starting point of the Double-Year Calendar, based on the inscription on the stele of King Gwanggaeto the Great of Goguryeo (the Gwanggaeto Stele). The stele states:

"In the sinmyo year (391), Baekje and Silla, formerly vassal states, rebelled, and Wa crossed the sea and attacked Baekje and Silla, making them vassals again."

This description is compared with the *Nihon Shoki*'s account of Empress Jingū's military expedition to the Three Korean Kingdoms, and the year 391 is treated as the first year

of Empress Jingū's rule.

(References)

- *New Edition: Wajinden, Gokanjo Waden, Sōsho Wakokuden, Zuisho Wakokuden – Chinese Official Histories of Japan, Vol. 1*, Iwanami Bunko A-401-1
- *Nihon Shoki* (Vol. 1), Kodansha Gakujutsu Bunko 833
- (Reference) Wikipedia article "Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar Hypothesis"

2. The *Nihon Shoki* and the *Wajinden*

In the *Wajinden*, records of the Wei envoys' visits to Wa (Japan) span the period from the second year of Jingchu (238 CE) to the eighth year of Zhengshi (247 CE).
Relative to the starting point of 391 CE, these dates correspond to 153 and 144 years earlier, respectively.
However, if we assume the use of the Double-Year Calendar at that time, the actual difference would double to approximately 306 and 288 years earlier.

Using the traditional Japanese imperial calendar (Kōki), where 391 CE corresponds to

Kōki 861, subtracting these values places us at Kōki 555 and 573.

This would align with the 51st and 52nd years of Emperor Kaika's reign to the 9th and 10th years of Emperor Sujin's reign.

(Notes)

1. Two values are given because under the Double-Year system, one solar year corresponded to two calendrical years.

2. Emperor Kaika is traditionally recorded to have died in his 60th year of reign (around 242 CE).

There is no direct mention of a "queen" in the *Nihon Shoki* during this period.

However, following the death of Emperor Kaika, an epidemic and internal disorder are recorded in the 5th and 6th years of Emperor Sujin's reign:

- Sujin Year 5: "Plague spread across the country; nearly half of the populace perished."

- Sujin Year 6: "The people were displaced; some rebelled."

In response, it is recorded that Princess Toyosukiirihime was appointed to enshrine the deity Amaterasu-ōmikami.

On the other hand, the final entry of the *Wajinden* for the year 247 states:

"Himiko died. Although they enthroned a male king, the country fell into chaos and thousands were killed. Then, a 13-year-old relative of Himiko named Iyo was made queen and order was restored."

Comparing these records, we observe striking similarities:

Both accounts involve the death of a sovereign, widespread civil disorder, and the emergence of a young female figure as a new religious or political leader.

Supplement (Added in August 2025)

In this paper, I have followed the currently transmitted text of the *Wei Zhi Woren Zhuan* (Records of Wei: Account of the Wa People) and adopted the year *Jingchu* 2 (238 CE). However, the prevailing view is that this was a clerical error and should be *Jingchu* 3 (239 CE). In that case, the arrival of the Wei envoy in Japan would correspond to 239 CE, or Kōki 557, which is the 53rd to 54th year of Emperor Kaika's reign.

(References)

- *New Edition: Wajinden, Gokanjo Waden, Sōsho Wakokuden, Zuisho Wakokuden – Chinese Official Histories of Japan, Vol. 1*, Iwanami Bunko A-401-1

- *Nihon Shoki* (Vol. 1), Iwanami Bunko Yellow Series 4-1

3. The *Nihon Shoki* and the Five Kings of Wa as Seen from the *Book of Song*

(A) Records of Wa Envoys in the *Book of Song*

The *Book of Song* (with the earliest record in the *Book of Jin*) mentions envoys sent from Wa (Japan) in the following years:

Western Year	Notes
413 CE	Recorded in the *Book of Jin*
421 CE	Recorded in the *Book of Song*
425 CE	"
430 CE	"
438 CE	"
443 CE	"
451 CE	"
460 CE	"
462 CE	"

477 CE	"
478 CE	"

Including the 413 CE record from the *Book of Jin*, there are a total of 11 years with recorded missions.

(Additionally, the *Southern Qi Shu* and the *Illustrated Roll of Tributary Nations* suggest an envoy in 479 CE.)

Among these, missions where the king's name is explicitly recorded are as follows:

King of Wa	**Years of Mission**
San (讃)	421 CE, 425 CE
Chin (珍)	438 CE
Sai (済)	443 CE, 451 CE
Kō (興)	462 CE
Bu (武)	478 CE (and possibly 479 CE)

(References)

- *New Edition: Wajinden, Gokanjo Waden, Sōsho Wakokuden, Zuisho Wakokuden*

– *Chinese Official Histories of Japan, Vol. 1*, Iwanami Bunko A-401-1

- (Reference) Wikipedia entries: "Five Kings of Wa"

- **(B) Identification of the Five Kings of Wa**
- **B-1. Application Based on the Chronicle Years of the *Nihon Shoki***
- As discussed earlier, this paper assumes 391 CE as the first year of Empress Jingū's reign.
  It is generally agreed that the historical reliability of the *Nihon Shoki* becomes solid from the reign of Emperor Keitai onward.
  Thus, if we tentatively apply the *Nihon Shoki*'s chronology straightforwardly from Empress Jingū to Emperor Keitai, the reigns would align as follows:

Emperor/Empress	Years of Reign	Accession	Death	Envoy Missions of the Five Kings
Empress Jingū	69 years	201 CE	269 CE	—
Emperor Ōjin	41 years	270 CE	310 CE	—
Emperor Nintoku	87 years	313 CE	399 CE	—
Emperor Richū	6 years	400 CE	405 CE	—
Emperor Hanzei	5 years	406 CE	410 CE	—
Emperor Ingyō	42 years	411 CE	453 CE	San 421, 425 / Chin 438 / Sai 443, 451
Emperor Ankō	3 years	453 CE	456 CE	—
Emperor Yūryaku	23 years	456 CE	479 CE	Kō 462 / Bu 478 (479?)
Emperor Seinei	5 years	480 CE	484 CE	—

Emperor Kenzo	3 years	485 CE	487 CE	—
Emperor Ninken	10 years	488 CE	498 CE	—
Emperor Buretsu	8 years	498 CE	506 CE	—
Emperor Keitai	25 years	507 CE	531 CE	—

- It is clear that the timeline is inconsistent.
  Even assuming the use of the double-year calendar (Spring-Autumn system) and that Empress Jingū's first year was 391 CE, the span between 391 CE and 507 CE (the accession of Emperor Keitai) is only about 107 years, while the sum of reign lengths is about 307 years.
  Even if halved (under the double-year calendar assumption), it exceeds the expected span.
- **B-2. Handling of Empress Jingū's Reign Years**
- In the *Nihon Shoki*, it is stated that during the period when Empress Jingū conducted political affairs, no other emperor reigned, and that she ruled through a regency (*shōsei*).
  However, Empress Jingū is described as a male-line descendant (four generations removed) of Emperor Kaika.
  In contrast, the *Nihon Shoki* records the accessions of female rulers such as Empress Suiko and Empress Saimei (who later reascended as Empress Kōgyoku) and Empress Jitō.
- Given this, it seems plausible that Empress Jingū, in fact, assumed practical political power as the regent for the infant Emperor Ōjin.
  The *Nihon Shoki* describes the events of the conquest of the Three Han (Korea) and the subsequent birth of Emperor Ōjin as taking place in the first year of Empress Jingū's regency (391 CE).
  Thus, it is conceivable that the first year of Empress Jingū's reign should be regarded simultaneously as the first year of Emperor Ōjin's nominal reign.
- Assuming the use of the double-year calendar and designating 391 CE as the first year of Emperor Ōjin, the revised reign periods become as follows:

Emperor/Empress	Reign Years	Actual Years (under Double-Year Calendar)	Accession (Assumed)	Death (Assumed)	Envoy Missions
Emperor Ōjin	41 years	20 years	391 CE	411 CE	—
Emperor Nintoku	87 years	43 years	413 CE	455 CE	San 421, 425 / Chin 438 / Sai 443, 451
Emperor Richū	6 years	3 years	456 CE	459 CE	—
Emperor Hanzei	5 years	2.5 years	460 CE	462 CE	Kō 462
Emperor Ingyō	42 years	21 years	463 CE	484 CE	Bu 478 (479?)
Emperor Ankō	3 years	1.5 years	484 CE	486 CE	—
Emperor Yūryaku	23 years	11.5 years	486 CE	498 CE	—
Emperor Seinei	5 years	2.5 years	499 CE	502 CE	—
Emperor Kenzo	3 years	1.5 years	503 CE	504 CE	—
Emperor Ninken	10 years	5 years	505 CE	510 CE	—
Emperor Buretsu	8 years	4 years	510 CE	514 CE	—
Emperor Keitai	25 years	—	507 CE	531 CE	—

- Even with this adjustment, the total number of years still does not fully match the actual historical span.

B-3. Relationship between Emperor Ōjin and Emperor Nintoku

The relationship between Emperor Ōjin and Emperor Nintoku, as recorded in the *Nihon Shoki* and *Kojiki*, suggests the following points:

- Both Emperor Ōjin (in the *Nihon Shoki*) and Emperor Nintoku (in the *Kojiki*) are associated with anecdotes regarding the place name "Karuno" (枯野).
- In both texts, the episodes involving Kamunagahime (カミナガヒメ) are resolved amicably.
- In the *Kojiki*, the song sung by Emperor Ōjin during his journey to Yoshino resembles the format of a *Daijōsai* (great thanksgiving festival) hymn appropriate for Emperor Nintoku's accession ceremony.
- Many of the anecdotes associated with Emperor Ōjin depict him during his youth, whereas those associated with Emperor Nintoku depict him as a fully grown adult.

Based on these points, scholars such as Takashi Naoki (直木孝次郎) have proposed the possibility that Emperor Ōjin and Emperor Nintoku were actually the same individual.

However, even accepting this hypothesis, the chronological discrepancies noted earlier cannot be resolved simply by identifying them as the same person.

Instead, attention must be paid to the structure of the reign periods:

It is possible that the earlier portion of Emperor Nintoku's reign overlaps with the reign attributed to Emperor Ōjin — that is, they were recorded separately but actually represented a single continuous rule.

If we reconstruct the reign periods on this assumption, the chronology aligns as follows:

Emperor	Reign Years	Actual Years (Double-Year Calendar)	Accession Year (Assumed)	Death Year (Assumed)	Diplomatic Missions
Emperor Ōjin	41 years	20 years	391 CE	411 CE	—
Emperor Nintoku	87 years	43 years	391 (or 413?) CE	434 CE	San 421, 425
Emperor Richū	6 years	3 years	434 CE	437 CE	—
Emperor Hanzei	5 years	2.5 years	438 CE	440 CE	Chin 438

Emperor Ingyō	42 years	21 years	441 CE	462 CE	Sai 443, 451
Emperor Ankō	3 years	1.5 years	462 CE	464 CE	Kō 462
Emperor Yūryaku	23 years (modified later)	16 years	464 CE	479 CE	—
Emperor Seinei	5 years	2.5 years	480 CE	484 CE	Bu 478 (479?)
Emperor Kenzo	3 years	1.5 years	485 CE	487 CE	—
Emperor Ninken	10 years	5 years	488 CE	498 CE	—
Emperor Buretsu	8 years	4 years	498 CE	506 CE	—
Emperor Keitai	25 years	—	507 CE	531 CE	—

Although a chronological gap remains between Emperor Buretsu's death and Emperor

Keitai's accession, the overall consistency of the reconstructed timeline greatly improves compared to prior interpretations.

B-4. Correction for the End of the Double-Year Calendar and Archaeological Evidence

Comparing the chronological tables constructed in section B-1 and B-3, a discrepancy of about 14 years arises concerning the death year of Emperor Buretsu.

Given that this paper hypothesizes the existence of a Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar, and that historical credibility becomes firm starting from Emperor Keitai onward, this gap suggests that a revision from the double-year calendar to a normal solar-year calendar likely took place.

If we assume this change occurred, we need to find the approximate point where it happened.

A 14-year discrepancy under a double-year calendar corresponds to a 21-year shift when recalculated.

If we subtract 21 years from the death year of Emperor Buretsu (496 CE based on the original double-year timeline), we reach 471 CE.

Thus, it is reasonable to suppose that the calendar reform occurred around 471 CE, during the 15th year of Emperor Yūryaku's reign.

Moreover, this 471 CE date coincides with the inscription year found on the Inariyama Kofun iron sword, which records the Ten Heavenly Stems and Twelve Earthly Branches for the first time.

This supports the interpretation that the sword commemorates the calendar reform, further reinforcing the hypothesis.

Based on this assumption, the corrected chronological table appears as follows:

Emperor	Reign Years	Actual Years (Corrected)	Accession Year	Death Year	Diplomatic Missions
Emperor Ōjin	41 years	20 years	391 CE	411 CE	—
Emperor Nintoku	87 years	43 years	391? (413?) CE	434 CE	San 421, 425
Emperor Richū	6 years	3 years	434 CE	437 CE	—
Emperor Hanzei	5 years	2.5 years	438 CE	440 CE	Chin 438
Emperor	42 years	21 years	441 CE	462 CE	Sai 443, 451

Ingyō					
Emperor Ankō	3 years	1.5 years	462 CE	464 CE	Kō 462
Emperor Yūryaku	23 years (7 years double-year + 9 years solar-year)	16 years	464 CE	479 CE	—
Emperor Seinei	5 years	—	480 CE	484 CE	—
Emperor Kenzo	3 years	—	485 CE	487 CE	—
Emperor Ninken	10 years	—	488 CE	498 CE	—
Emperor Buretsu	8 years	—	498 CE	506 CE	—
Emperor Keitai	25 years	—	507 CE	531 CE	—

Through this adjustment, the previous chronological inconsistencies are resolved.

B-5. Identification of the Five Kings of Wa

Based on the corrected chronological table presented in B-4, it is possible to associate the Five Kings of Wa as follows:

Title in Chinese Records	Corresponding Emperor
King San (讃)	Emperor Nintoku
King Chin (珍)	Emperor Hanzei
King Sai (済)	Emperor Ingyō
King Kō (興)	Emperor Ankō
King Bu (武)	Emperor Yūryaku

However, according to the *Book of Song*, it is written that "after the death of King San, his younger brother Chin ascended the throne."

In contrast, according to the *Nihon Shoki*, Emperor Nintoku and Emperor Hanzei are described as parent and child, not brothers, which presents a discrepancy.

Nevertheless, Emperor Hanzei was actually the younger brother of the preceding Emperor Richū.

Thus, if the Chinese side received the information that "the previous king (Richū) has

died, and his younger brother (Hanzei) has ascended," but mistakenly thought the "previous king" was San (Nintoku), then the discrepancy can be explained.

In other words, if the Chinese court misunderstood the Japanese transmission, the inconsistency between the two sources can be resolved.

Therefore, the identification of the Five Kings of Wa proposed here:

- King San = Emperor Nintoku
- King Chin = Emperor Hanzei
- King Sai = Emperor Ingyō
- King Kō = Emperor Ankō
- King Bu = Emperor Yūryaku

is highly plausible.

Furthermore, if we include diplomatic missions not attributed to any named king, the correspondence with the reign periods becomes even clearer:

Emperor	Corrected Reign Period	Diplomatic Missions (Year)
Emperor Ōjin	391–411 CE	—

Emperor Nintoku	391?(413)–434 CE	San 421, 425 (also 413, 430 CE)
Emperor Richū	434–437 CE	—
Emperor Hanzei	438–440 CE	Chin 438
Emperor Ingyō	441–462 CE	Sai 443, 451 (also 460 CE)
Emperor Ankō	462–464 CE	Kō 462
Emperor Yūryaku	464–479 CE	Bu 478 (also 477 CE)
Emperor Seinei	480–484 CE	—
Emperor Kenzo	485–487 CE	—
Emperor Ninken	488–498 CE	—
Emperor Buretsu	498–506 CE	—
Emperor Keitai	507–531 CE	—

It is evident that most diplomatic missions were sent shortly after the accession of a new emperor.

Only Emperor Yūryaku dispatched missions later during his reign, likely because, at the time of his accession, he needed first to stabilize internal affairs following a dynastic upheaval.

B-6. About the Chronicles of Empress Jingū and Emperor Ōjin

As seen in the preceding sections, the identification of the Five Kings of Wa can now be reconstructed systematically.

However, as the analysis shows, the annals of Empress Jingū and Emperor Ōjin overlap significantly with the early years of Emperor Nintoku's reign.

Thus, the question arises: What exactly are the historical layers represented by the records of Empress Jingū and Emperor Ōjin?

(1) On the "Regency" Period of Empress Jingū

The *Nihon Shoki* states that Empress Jingū governed for 69 years after Emperor Chūai's death, and that she died at the age of 101.

Special attention should be paid to the record labeled "Empress Jingū, Year 52," which reads:

"She (Near the end of her life) spoke to her grandson, King Makurakawa (枕流王), saying: 'The noble country across the eastern sea is a realm granted by Heaven. Thus, it was decreed that the western seas be partitioned and given to us. By this, our country shall be firmly established for eternity.'"

(*Paraphrased*)

However, King Makurakawa (枕流王, "Makurakawa-ō") and his supposed grandfather Geunchogo of Baekje (近肖古王) are recorded in Korean sources as having died before 391 CE — that is, before the supposed beginning of Empress Jingū's reign according to this chronology.

If we assume that Empress Jingū's actual death occurred around 411 CE (the same year as Emperor Ōjin's death), this would imply that the events attributed to her 52nd year correspond to when she was about 25 years old.

Moreover, there is a strong possibility that "Makurakawa" is a misreading — a scribal error caused by misinterpreting a gloss for the character "to mourn" (弔む, *tomu*) rather than an actual proper name.

Thus, it can be inferred that the "Year 52" event may not record a diplomatic encounter at that time but instead preserves a memory of mourning over an earlier death (such as King Makurakawa's death around 385 CE).

Therefore, it is plausible that the annual records attributed to Empress Jingū are in fact based on her personal age (years lived), and not an actual period of regency.

Additionally, the structure of the records suggests that Chinese diplomatic histories, such as the *Wajinden* and other records, were back-calculated and inserted based on

presumed year-matching, rather than real-time contemporaneous events.

This mechanical, retrospective assignment of records likely explains why Empress Jingū's "reign" appears unnaturally extended and confused.

(2) On the Years Attributed to Emperor Ōjin

From the above, it can be inferred that Empress Jingū died around 411 CE, and that the political period attributed to Emperor Ōjin (391–411 CE) overlaps with the actual rule of Empress Jingū.

That is, Emperor Ōjin may have been nominally enthroned while Empress Jingū served as his regent, and it was only after her death that he fully assumed sovereign authority — later transitioning into the reign of Emperor Nintoku.

Moreover, given that Empress Jingū's record counts 69 years while her age at death is listed as 101 years, it is likely that approximately 32 years' worth of governance records were transferred and reassigned to Emperor Ōjin's chronicle.

- The first 9 years of that period (in real years, about 4.5 years) could have been still recorded under Empress Jingū's name because Emperor Ōjin was too young to appear in political affairs.
- The remaining 32 years were gradually transitioned into Emperor Ōjin's own

records.

Additionally, Emperor Ōjin is called "Tainai Tenno" (胎中天皇), meaning "Emperor in the Womb," which is traditionally explained as a reference to his being born posthumously.

However, it is possible that the title originally referred to a monarch who was under the protective regency of his mother — thus still metaphorically “in the womb” politically.

(*Note: While it is highly probable that Emperor Ōjin and Emperor Nintoku share the same chronological frame, whether they were identical individuals or twin brothers remains uncertain.*)

(*Note: The gap between the end of Emperor Ōjin’s reign and the beginning of Emperor Nintoku’s reign might correspond to a mourning period for Empress Jingū.*)

(*Note: Although Emperor Keitai is described as a fifth-generation descendant of Emperor Ōjin, given that Emperor Ōjin’s effective reign covered more than 20 years, there is no inconsistency even if the generational counting was compressed.*)

References

- *New Edition: Records of Wei (Wajinden), Later Han, Song, and Sui Histories — Chinese Official Histories of Japan I*, Iwanami Bunko, Blue 401-1.

- *Nihon Shoki* (Vol. 1), Iwanami Bunko Yellow Series 4-1
- *Kojiki (Middle Volume),* Kodansha Gakujutsu Bunko 208
- (Reference) Wikipedia articles: "Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar Theory."

4. The Eight Reigns without Records (Kesshi Hachidai)

The period from Emperor Kaika (9th Emperor) and earlier in the *Nihon Shoki* has very sparse records, and this is often cited as a reason to doubt the historical existence of the "Eight Reigns without Records" (Kesshi Hachidai).

However, as discussed in Section 2, the period described in the *Wajinden* corresponds to the reigns spanning from Emperor Kaika to Emperor Sujin.

This correspondence provides strong circumstantial support for the historical existence of Emperor Kaika.

Thus, it becomes necessary to examine the pre-*Wajinden* period of Japanese history in greater detail.

A. About King Suishō and the Mission to the Later Han

The *Book of the Later Han* (*Hou Hanshu*) records that in 107 CE:

"In the first year of Yongchu (永初元年) of Emperor An, the King of Wa, Suishō (帥升) and others, sent envoys and offered tribute of 160 people, requesting an audience."

In the chronology of this paper, the base year is 391 CE (the first year of Empress Jingū's reign), corresponding to Kōki 861 (the Imperial Year).

Subtracting 284 years (the difference between 391 and 107) and considering the Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar (which would double the effective years), it equates to 568 years earlier in Kōki terms, placing it around Kōki 293.

At that time, the reigning emperor would have been Emperor Kōan (孝安天皇), the sixth emperor.

The native (Yamato) style name of Emperor Kōan is recorded as:

Yamato Tarashihiko Kunioshihito no Sumeramikoto (やまとたらしひこくにおしひとのすめらみこと)

From this, it is highly probable that Emperor Kōan's personal name (imina) was "Oshihito" (押人).

Traditionally, "Suishō" (帥升) has been read as the king's name.

However, various derivative sources quoting the *Hou Hanshu*, such as the *Kanyuan* (翰苑) and the *Tongdian* (通典), present the name as "師升" (Shishō), suggesting that "帥" might have been a scribal error for "師".

Assuming it was originally "師升" ("Shishō"), and further noting that the suffix "等" (meaning "and others") may have been part of the name, the sequence "王帥升等" could phonetically approximate "Oshihito" (*Wo-shi-si-to*).

Moreover, "王" (king) in Wu Chinese pronunciation would have sounded close to "wo," strengthening this interpretation.

Therefore, it is plausible to interpret "王帥升等" (Wang Suishō-tō) as a phonetic transcription of "Oshihito."

Based on the above, while it remains speculative whether Emperor Kōan himself dispatched envoys to the Later Han, the phonetic correspondence between the names is remarkably close, and thus this possibility cannot be dismissed.

B. About the Inariyama Burial Mound Sword

The Inariyama Burial Mound in Saitama Prefecture yielded an iron sword inscribed with the name "Ōhiko" (意冨比垝), described as the ancestor of the sword's maker, "Owake" (乎獲居).

This "Ōhiko" is generally believed to refer to Ōhiko no Mikoto, a son of Emperor Kōgen (孝元天皇, 8th Emperor), who, according to the *Nihon Shoki*, was dispatched northward during the reign of Emperor Sujin (崇神天皇).

Given this connection, there is a strong possibility that Emperor Kōgen's existence is also supported by archaeological evidence.

Therefore, while direct documentary evidence is sparse for the so-called Eight Reigns without Records, circumstantial support for the existence of Emperors Kōan, Kōgen, and Kaika can be inferred from external historical records (*Hou Hanshu*) and material evidence (the Inariyama Sword inscription).

C. Consideration on the Background of the Lack of Records for the Eight Reigns

The near-total absence of records for the so-called Eight Reigns without Records (Kesshi Hachidai) conversely highlights that from the reign of the tenth emperor, Emperor Sujin, onward, historical records were maintained. One notable feature of this later period, as discussed in Chapter 2, is the diplomatic exchange with the Wei dynasty of China.

Compared to the earlier instance when the King of Na and others from the Wa state paid tribute to the Later Han dynasty (57 CE), a significant difference during the Wei

period is that Chinese envoys actually visited Japan.

According to the *Wajinden*, the envoy from the Daifang Commandery "always resided at Ito-koku (Ito Country)."

This suggests the presence of a permanent facility where Wei officials were stationed.

Given that these envoys were Chinese officials, it is conceivable that this period saw the introduction of Chinese writing (kanji) to Japan.

Of course, it is possible that records concerning earlier times had existed in texts such as the *Tennōki* and *Kokki*, which were later lost when the main Soga lineage was destroyed during the Isshi Incident (645 CE).

However, it may be more appropriate to view the absence of detailed records for the reigns prior to Emperor Kaika (the ninth emperor) not as an intentional omission, but rather as the result of a lack of methods or capabilities for detailed record-keeping at the time.

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5. Consideration on Yamatai-koku

In Section 2, we noted that the internal turmoil in Wa following the death of Himiko, as recorded in the *Wajinden*, bears a strong resemblance to the events described in the *Nihon Shoki* during the 5th and 6th years of Emperor Sujin's reign. However, as also pointed out, the *Nihon Shoki* does not directly mention a queen figure corresponding to Himiko. Therefore, this section aims to explore that discrepancy.

A. The Concept of a "Queen's Country"

First, while the *Nihon Shoki* does not describe a country ruled by a queen, the *Wajinden* explicitly portrays Yamatai-koku as such. Here lies a major contradiction. Yet, given the parallelism between the internal disorder following Himiko's death and the disturbances recorded in the *Nihon Shoki*, it seems plausible that there was some misunderstanding or miscommunication between Japan and China (to be discussed further in sections A and C).

Consider the case of Amaterasu-Ōmikami, the Sun Goddess regarded as the supreme deity of the Japanese imperial line. She is a female deity associated with the sun.

From this, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

- The envoys from Wa explained to the Chinese court that their land revered a supreme female solar deity.
- However, the Chinese, lacking familiarity with the polis-like structure of Wa and operating under their own imperial ideology (where the emperor was the Son of Heaven and sovereign ruler), likely misunderstood.
- They inferred that the supreme female figure described by the envoys was the ruler herself—thus interpreting Wa as being ruled by a "queen."

Summary of Perceptions:

- Japanese perspective: Yamatai-koku worshiped Amaterasu-Ōmikami as its supreme deity.
- Chinese perspective: Yamatai-koku had a supreme sovereign who was a woman (a queen).

Thus, it is quite conceivable that the "queen" Himiko recorded in the *Wajinden* may not

have existed as an actual female ruler.

This kind of misinterpretation is not unprecedented. For instance, during the Asuka period, despite diplomatic exchanges between Japan and the Sui dynasty, the *Book of Sui* records the ruler of Wa as "Ame Tarishihiko" (阿毎多利思比孤), a male figure, and further mentions that "the king's wife is called Kimi (雞彌)."

This suggests that even in later centuries, misunderstandings regarding the gender of foreign rulers could occur within Chinese official histories.

B. The Identity of Himiko

The *Wajinden* records diplomatic interactions beginning in 238 CE, corresponding to the reign of Emperor Kaika in Japan.

Two main possibilities regarding the origin of the name "Himiko" are proposed:

B-1. Derivation from the Personal Name (Imina) of Emperor Kaika

Emperor Kaika's traditional Yamato-style posthumous name is:

"Waka Yamato-neko Hiko Ōhihino Sumeramikoto" (稚日本根子彦大日日天皇).

From this, it is inferred that his personal name (imina) was "Ōhihi" (大日日).

Thus:

- The presence of the "Hi" (日 = Sun) element.
- Plus, if the Japanese envoy referred to their sovereign using an honorific like "Hi no Miko" (Sun Prince/Princess),
- Then it is possible that the phrase "Ōhihi (no) Miko" could have been phonetically transcribed by Chinese scribes as "Himiko."

B-2. Possibility of an Honorific Title "Hi no Miko" (Sun Child)

Another theory suggests that the title "Hi no Miko" (日御子, Child of the Sun) may have been in use.

This would align with the mythological tradition that the Japanese emperor ruled the earth under the divine mandate of Amaterasu-Ōmikami.

In this case, "Hi no Miko" could have been transcribed phonetically as "Himiko" by the Chinese envoys.

It remains uncertain which of these two possibilities is more accurate.

Given that the emperor's divine legitimacy derived from descent from Amaterasu-

Ōmikami, the "Sun Child" theory (B-2) may seem more plausible.

However:

- If "Hi no Miko" were a general title for the sovereign, then subsequent rulers (e.g., Emperor Sujin) would also have been called Himiko.
- Yet, the *Wajinden* records the death of Himiko and the succession of a new ruler, implying that "Himiko" referred to a specific individual rather than a permanent title.
- Moreover, it is unclear whether "Hi no Miko" was an officially used title at the time.

Thus, definitive conclusions cannot be drawn.

C. The Journey of the Chinese Envoys

The *Wajinden* provides detailed accounts of the journey through Wa up to Ito-koku (伊都国).

- Travel distances and customs are meticulously recorded up to this point.
- However, beyond Ito-koku, only vague references based on the number of days

traveled are provided, and the description of local polities becomes fragmentary.

Supporting evidence from the *Book of Sui* states that:

"The barbarians (Wa people) did not know distances in ri (miles) and measured only by days."

Moreover, in the *Wajinden*:

- Other kingdoms are described using the term "至" (meaning "to arrive at"), implying arrival by guidance.
- In contrast, Ito-koku is described using "到" (meaning "to reach," indicating a final destination).

Additionally, it is explicitly stated that:

"The envoys from the commandery (Daifang-gun) always stayed at Ito-koku."

These facts, combined with the highly localized cultural details (reflecting Kyushu practices) and the absence of direct descriptions of Himiko's palace, suggest that:

- The Chinese envoys likely never traveled beyond Ito-koku into the heartland of Yamatai.
- Their information about Yamatai-koku was likely based on secondhand accounts

collected in Ito-koku.

D. Description of Yamatai-koku

In the extant *Wajinden*, Yamatai-koku is written as "邪馬壹国" (Yamai-koku).

However, other records quoting from the *Wajinden*, such as the *Book of the Later Han*, record it as "邪馬臺国" (Yamatai-koku).

It is therefore considered that the character 壹（壱, one) is a transcription or copying error for 臺（台, platform), and this paper adopts the view that the original name was Yamatai-koku.

Similarly, the article stating that after the death of Himiko, a 13-year-old niece (宗女, "sōjo") named Iyo (壱与) succeeded her, should originally have read "台与" (Toyō).

The reading "Toyō" matches the name of Toyosukiiri-hime (豊鍬入姫命), a princess recorded in the *Nihon Shoki* during the reign of Emperor Sujin (崇神天皇).

Toyosukiiri-hime was appointed to serve as the first priestess (斎宮) enshrining the sun goddess Amaterasu, and being a daughter of Emperor Sujin, she would have been a descendant (宗女) of Emperor Kaika, whom this paper identifies with Himiko.

Thus, the term "宗女" (sōjo) in the *Wajinden* is consistent with this interpretation.

Furthermore, if we phoneticize "邪馬臺国" (Yamatai-koku) as "Yamato-koku," it corresponds directly to the Yamato region (大和国) in the Nara Basin.
Therefore, it is highly plausible that Yamatai-koku represents either a precursor to or an early stage of the Yamato polity centered in the Nara Basin.

(*Note: Regarding the directional error of "south" in the Wajinden, it is considered that misrecording, information control, geographical misconceptions by Chinese authorities, or confusion between sunrise direction and noon-sun direction could have contributed. Due to a lack of definitive evidence, however, the exact cause remains unclear.*)

E. About the Era Names on Sankakubuchi Shinjukyo Mirrors

The Sankakubuchi Shinjukyo (mirrors with triangular-rimmed divine-beast motifs) are bronze mirrors unearthed mainly from the Kinki region of Japan, and their designs show a strong influence from Chinese culture.
Among them, some mirrors bear inscriptions of Chinese era names (nianhao), and notably, some are inscribed with "景初四年" (Keisho 4th Year).

However, historically, the Chinese Wei dynasty's *Keisho* era only lasted until its third year (239–241 CE), and there was no fourth year.

To explain this discrepancy, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- Mirrors originally bearing inscriptions of the *Keisho* 3rd Year were sent from Wei to Japan.
- When the Japanese (Wa) copied these mirrors, they were operating under a Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar system, counting one year as two years.
- Consequently, when replicating the mirror, they mistakenly progressed from "Keisho 3rd Year" to "Keisho 4th Year" due to their calendrical calculation method.

Thus, although the "Keisho 4th Year" inscription does not match the Chinese historical era, it could be seen as reflecting the calendrical system used in Wa at the time.

Under this interpretation, the Sankakubuchi Shinjukyo mirrors with a "Keisho 4th Year" inscription are not mere forgeries, but important evidence illustrating the calendrical practices of ancient Japan.

F. About the Existence of the Ichidai-sotsu

According to the *Wajinden*, an official called "Ichidai-sotsu" (一大率) was stationed at the country of Ito (伊都国), tasked with supervising the surrounding regions.

The record states that the local polities feared this position, suggesting that it wielded military power and served as a sort of military inspector or overseer, directly managing the security and governance of the area.

From this, we can infer a structure wherein the central authority (i.e., Yamatai-koku) attempted to control the Kyushu region by placing an overseer at Ito.
In other words, a permanent facility for Wei envoys and related officials likely existed at Ito, serving as a base from which to monitor and manage regional affairs in Kyushu.

This interpretation suggests that Ito played an essential role both diplomatically and militarily during the period described in the *Wajinden*.

G. About Yamato-totohi-momosohime and the Hashihaka Kofun

Yamato-totohi-momosohime, according to the *Nihon Shoki*, was a daughter of Emperor Kōrei (the 7th emperor). It is recorded that she delivered divine oracles during the 7th year of Emperor Sujin's reign and passed away in the 10th year, after which she was buried in a kofun (ancient burial mound) at the site now associated with the Hashihaka Kofun.

Some theories have proposed identifying her with Queen Himiko of Yamatai-koku.
However, a careful examination of the *Nihon Shoki* suggests that Yamato-totohi-

momosohime only performed divine acts after the 6th year of Emperor Sujin, when Toyosukiiri-hime (豊鍬入姫命) had already begun the worship of Amaterasu-Ōmikami. There are no indications that Yamato-totohi-momosohime engaged in direct governance or rulership before this, making it questionable to equate her with Himiko.

Moreover, the Hashihaka Kofun, where she is said to be buried, is located within the Makimuku archaeological site and is thought to have been constructed around the mid-3rd century.

Its enormous size—ranked 11th largest among kofun nationwide—is exceptional for the tomb of a single imperial princess.

Based on these considerations, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

- During the 5th century, the era of the Five Kings of Wa, Chinese historical texts such as the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Wei Zhi*) or the *Wei Lue* were introduced into the Japanese archipelago.

- At the time, the Wa state still employed a Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar, and the discrepancies between Chinese and Japanese chronologies were understood.

- People of the Wa interpreted the record in the *Wei Zhi* describing Himiko's

death in 247 CE and the construction of a large tomb as referring to Yamato-totohi-momosohime, who had died in the same year (247 CE).

- Thus, they identified her tomb—the Hashihaka Kofun—with Himiko's burial mound.
- This historical interpretation formed during the 5th century was later incorporated into the *Nihon Shoki* during its compilation in the early 8th century.

Furthermore, it should be noted that Pei Songzhi (372–451 CE), who annotated the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, was a contemporary of the Five Kings of Wa era (421–478/479 CE).

Given the strong interest in the Three Kingdoms period during that time, it is not implausible that knowledge of the *Wei Zhi* or related materials had reached Wa.

Accordingly, this study proposes that the Hashihaka Kofun was originally the true imperial tomb of either Emperor Kaika (the 9th emperor) or Emperor Sujin (the 10th emperor), but due to reinterpretations of historical records made during the 5th century, it came to be mistakenly identified as the tomb of Queen Himiko.

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6. Conclusion

Based on the above considerations, it has become clear that the chronological structure of the *Nihon Shoki* rests on two fundamental characteristics:

- Until the 14th year of Emperor Yūryaku (470 CE), a Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar system was in use.
- The early reign years of Emperor Nintoku include the periods attributed to Empress Jingū and Emperor Ōjin.

By recognizing these two points, many of the discrepancies previously noted between the *Nihon Shoki* and Chinese historical records such as the *Wajinden* and the *Book of*

Song can be resolved. In particular, issues such as the identification of the Five Kings of Wa, the true location of Yamatai-koku, and the question of the Eight Reigns without Records can be explained with much greater consistency.

Moreover, the compilation of the *Nihon Shoki* appears not to have involved deliberate falsification but rather a mechanical editing process in which past records were organized without recognizing the existence of the double-year calendar. Therefore, this hypothesis differs from the theory proposed by Tsuda Sōkichi, which emphasized intentional alterations, and instead highlights a structural misunderstanding during compilation.

Additionally, the correspondence between the year inscribed on the Inariyama sword (471 CE) and the timing of the calendar change, as well as the relationship between the "Keisho 4" inscription on the Sankakubuchi Shinjukyo mirrors and the Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar, lend further plausibility to this hypothesis.

Accordingly, future research on early Japanese history must begin by correctly reinterpreting the chronological structure of the *Nihon Shoki*, and reassessing key issues such as the Yamatai-koku debate, the problem of the Eight Reigns without Records, and the identification of the Five Kings of Wa.

The hypothesis presented here remains one possible interpretation and will require further examination and discussion. Nevertheless, because it demands a fundamental reconsideration of how primary sources are read, its significance should not be underestimated.

(End)

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Revision History

・Section 2: Supplemented with a note on the widely accepted theory that "Jingchu 2" is a clerical error for "Jingchu 3" (239 CE), and adjusted the year calculation accordingly. (Added August 2025)