

# A Tentative Hypothesis on the Lineage of Emperor Nintoku

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This paper incorporates material from my previous works:

- Observations on the Nihon Shoki from the Perspective of the Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar System” (hereafter cited as “Previous Work ①”).

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- “Considerations on Various Hypotheses Related to the Nihon Shoki” (hereafter cited as “Previous Work ②”).

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In Previous Work ①, I noted that Emperor Ōjin and Emperor Nintoku share the same recorded birth year, raising the possibility that they were either the same person or twins.

In this paper I proceed on the working hypothesis that Emperor Ōjin and Emperor Nintoku are in fact the same person.

Although I cite several diplomatic records, I will not interpret their international-relations implications here. A separate study will address that; this paper refrains from discussing broader international relations.

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## On the Year Entries for Empress Jingū and Emperor Ōjin

In Previous Work ① I argued that the “years of Emperor Ōjin” correspond to the period during which Empress Jingū actually governed. There I suggested that because records for Empress Jingū extend to her 69th year, a discrepancy arose with Ōjin’s 41 years. However, a closer look at the entries for Empress Jingū and Emperor Ōjin in the *Nihon Shoki* suggests another possibility.

Consider these two passages from the *Nihon Shoki*:

### 1. Emperor Ōjin, Year 3

“In the 3rd year … in the 11th month, the Kingdom of Baekje killed King Jinsa to offer apology. Kibi no Kado no Sukune and others then installed Asin as king and returned.”

### 2. Empress Jingū, Year 62

“In the 62nd year, Silla did not pay court. In that very year, Arazumihiko was dispatched to attack Silla.”

First, passage (1) describes the change of Baekje's ruler from King Jinsa to King Asin in **392 CE**.

As for (2), the *Nihon Shoki* adds a marginal note quoting the *Baekje Annals* (百濟記):

“In the year 壬午 (jin-wu), Silla did not honor the august country. The august country sent Sashihiko to subdue them. …” (abridged)

Likely because both accounts describe a campaign against Silla, and because—having set Ōjin Year 3 to **392 CE**—there is another 壬午 year close by (**382 CE**), the compilers appear to have equated Empress Jingū Year 62 with that entry in the *Baekje Annals*.

From (1) we infer that Ōjin's years begin in **390 CE**. Assuming continuity between Ōjin's years and Empress Jingū's years, the compilers likely concluded that Empress Jingū's years extend to **389 CE**, i.e., up to her Year 69. This would explain the numerical gap between the 41 “years of Ōjin” (during which Jingū is presumed to have held actual power) and the 69 years recorded for Jingū's regency.

**Note on the “Sashihiko” dispatch in Jingū Year 62:**

The *Baekje Annals* mention a general 沙至比跪 (*Sashihiko*). Meanwhile, in **Emperor Kinmei Year 23 (562 CE)** the *Nihon Shoki* records consecutive expeditions against Silla and Goguryeo, with the general sent to Goguryeo being 大伴連狹手彦 (*Ōtomo no Muraji Sadeyhiko*), a near-homophone. The Silla and Goguryeo expeditions are recorded in consecutive months (7th and 8th), and given both concern the Korean Peninsula, the forces were likely organized on similar lines. Since **562 CE** is also a 壬午 year (like **382 CE**), the *Baekje Annals*’ 壬午 entry could plausibly refer to events in **562 CE**.

*(Further note: Under the revisions proposed in Previous Work ①, Jingū Year 62 can be aligned with 392 CE. The Samguk Sagi, Silla Annals include “In King Naemul Year 38, summer 5th month, the Wa came and besieged Geumseong,” which corresponds to 393 CE. Since the Nihon Shoki says “in that very year” (卽年) for the Jingū entry, one might object. Yet if “卽年” is read as “and then in the following year,” reconciliation remains possible.)*

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## On the Parent Generation of Emperor Nintoku

If Ōjin and Nintoku are identical, a question arises: both have mothers recorded in the *Nihon Shoki*. Let us review these parental notices.

- Ōjin is recorded as the child of Emperor Chūai and Empress Jingū, the **fourth** son of Chūai.
- Nintoku is recorded as the **fourth** son of Ōjin and Lady Naka-hime (仲姫).

Thus, the parents are listed as different persons. However, note that Nintoku's mother bears the character “仲” (*Naka*) in her name. Emperor Chūai's Yamato-style posthumous name is *Tarashinakatsuhiko* (足仲彦), likewise containing *naka* (仲).

*(Although Chūai's Sino-style posthumous name also contains 仲, those Sino-style names for emperors and Empress Jingū are believed to have been assigned later by Ōminomifune in the mid-8th century; I therefore set aside allusions that rely solely on Sino-style names.)*

If Ōjin's “years” are in fact Jingū's years, then the pairing of Ōjin and Naka-hime as spouses mirrors—gender-reversed—the pairing of Chūai and Jingū. It is plausible the compilers, seeing Nintoku set after Ōjin and seeing “仲” in the maternal line, inferred:

the father must be Ōjin, the mother a person named “Naka-[something],” to which they added the standard female honorific *hime* (姫), producing “Naka-hime.”

The *Nihon Shoki* also says Naka-hime is a granddaughter of Prince Ikiiribiko (五百城入彦王), a son of Emperor Keikō—making her a great-granddaughter of Keikō. Chūai, by contrast, is the grandson of Keikō through Yamato Takeru, thus one generation closer. Since Ōjin is Chūai’s son, Ōjin himself is Keikō’s great-grandson. That generational status may have been projected onto Naka-hime as spouse; and the compilers may have assigned a less well-documented Keikō-line prince as her grandfather.

Looking at ages: Ōjin’s birth is made to coincide with the start of Jingū’s regency; thus Ōjin’s “age” appears as the sum of Jingū’s years and Ōjin’s years. Nintoku, however, has **no** age recorded—an oddity consistent with the idea that, by overwriting Ōjin’s reign years with Nintoku’s, the compilers made age reporting impossible. Notably, both Ōjin and Nintoku are listed as **fourth** sons, further underscoring striking similarities in family structure.

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## Overlapping Accessions

This section addresses the overlap between Ōjin's years and the first half of Nintoku's years.

If the two were the same person, layering Nintoku's reign over Ōjin's—to the point of obscuring the latter—seems unnatural. This suggests an intent to overwrite and erase Ōjin's years within Nintoku's, i.e., a strong desire (from Nintoku's vantage) to treat the “Ōjin period” as if it did not exist.

In Previous Work ① I floated a psychological motive: resentment at being a monarch under maternal tutelage. Yet consider the succession crisis after Emperor Buretsu: the *Nintoku-line* fails in the male line, and a distant relative is called in.

First, they sought to enthrone Iwatsuhiko (倭彦王), a fifth-generation descendant of Emperor Chūai. When that failed, they brought in Prince Odo (男大迹), a fifth-generation descendant of Emperor Ōjin, who ascended as Emperor Keitai.

If blood proximity were the only consideration, selecting Keitai first would have been more natural. This implies there may have been an intention to keep the *Ōjin line* at some distance from the throne. Under that reading, “resentment” alone is not a

sufficient motive for the editorial structure we see.

Turning to the *Nihon Shoki*'s Ōjin and Nintoku books: Ōjin is said to have designated *Uji no Waki-iratsuko* (菟道稚郎子)—a figure not even styled as *ō* (king)—as heir apparent.

- In Ōjin Year 40 (the year before Ōjin's death), the text portrays Ōjin urging Nintoku to accept the young child (Waki-iratsuko) as successor.

If Ōjin is a projection of Empress Jingū's rule, this could be read as a plan to pass the throne to Waki-iratsuko. The end of Ōjin's years is estimated at **411 CE**, a 辛亥 (shin-hai) year.

**Keitai Year 25 (531 CE)** is also 辛亥. The *Nihon Shoki* annotates that year:

“Some texts say: The Emperor died in his 28th year, cyclical sign 甲寅, but here it says 25th year, 辛亥, because we adopt the *Baekje Original Annals*. That text states: ‘In the third month of the year 辛亥, the army advanced to Anra and encamped at Katsuta Castle. In that month, Goguryeo killed its king An. We also heard that the Japanese emperor and the crown prince both died …’ (abridged). Those who collated this later came to know of it.”

Thus the death year of Keitai was aligned to 辛亥 based on the *Baekje Original Annals* reporting the death of Goguryeo's King Anzang in a 辛亥 year—and *also hearing* that both the Japanese emperor and crown prince died. The note ends, however, by inviting “later scholars to clarify the details,” signaling compiler uncertainty.

The phrase “又聞” (“we also heard”) is noteworthy. It may mean: an ominous royal event happened in Goguryeo in a 辛亥 year; in another 辛亥 year the compilers had *heard of* (not directly recorded) a parallel calamity among other monarchs. If so, the allusion could be to **411 CE**, the 辛亥 year in which events befell Japan's ruling figure (Empress Jingū) and her designated heir (Waki-iratsuko).

**Note:** Furthermore, because passages overlapping with those of Emperor Nintoku are found sporadically within the accounts of Emperor Ōjin in both the *Nihon Shoki* and the *Kojiki*, it is presently inferred that Empress Jingū did not formally occupy the imperial throne but instead functioned as the supreme political authority.

*This inference may be further supplemented by the following two points.*

*The first concerns references to Takeuchi no Sukune, who had served as a senior court official since the reign of Emperor Ōjin. His name appears not only in the forty-first year of Emperor Nintoku—which coincides with the year recorded for Emperor Ōjin's death—but also in accounts as late as the fiftieth year of Emperor Nintoku (corresponding, in real chronology, to five years after Emperor Ōjin's death). This suggests that no major change occurred in the structure of power among court officials even after Emperor Nintoku became, both in name and in reality, the supreme authority at court.*

*The second point is that, after the death of Emperor Buretsu, when the male agnatic line of Emperor Nintoku became extinct, Emperor Keitai—identified as a fifth-generation descendant of Emperor Ōjin—was invited to ascend the throne. This indicates that, at the time corresponding to the death of Empress Jingū, which is presumed to have been recorded as Emperor Ōjin's death in 411 CE, the only figure who was excluded was Prince Uji no Wakairatsuko, who directly affected the imperial succession, while the remainder of Emperor Ōjin's lineage was not eliminated.*

*From this, it can be strongly suggested that the children born during the reign of Emperor Ōjin and their lineages were not regarded as politically dangerous.*

*These two points thus serve as corroborative evidence for the inference  
presented above.*

Furthermore, as noted earlier, Nintoku's age is unrecorded, and the ages of his sons who later became emperors—Richū, Hanshō, and Ingyō—are also unrecorded (Richū has two inconsistent figures in annotations, not in the main text, so they cannot be treated as firm).

Given (a) the apparent attempt to overwrite Ōjin's record and (b) the post-Buretsu succession that initially bypassed the Ōjin line (despite Keitai being of Ōjin's line), one can hypothesize that only princes born **after** Empress Jingū's death—i.e., after Nintoku began personal rule—were later recognized as emperors. This could help explain why the *Nihon Shoki* records concerning Emperor Nintoku are disproportionately concentrated in his later years, and why the birth years of his imperial sons were left unrecorded.

One might object that the *Nihon Shoki* says Richū was invested as Crown Prince in Nintoku Year 31, which overlaps Ōjin's years. That contradiction resolves if we suppose

the *record of the investiture year* survived (Year 31) but the person originally invested then was actually **Waki-iratsuko**, not Richū.

**Conclusion of this section:** The *genealogical* pattern suggests an intention to efface the memory of Emperor Ōjin. Yet because, after Emperor Buretsu, there was no male heir in the Nintoku line and the throne passed to Keitai of the Ōjin line, the records of the Ōjin period ultimately remained.

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(Note) In the Annals of Emperor Ōjin, there are references to Prince Uji no Wakiiratsuko in the entries for the fifteenth, sixteenth, and twenty-eighth years. At first sight, this may appear to conflict with the above hypothesis regarding the thirty-first year of Emperor Nintoku, which can be inferred to overlap chronologically with Ōjin's reign. However, in all of these earlier entries, the name of Uji no Wakiiratsuko is consistently preceded by the title "Prince (Taishi)." Yet, according to the entry for Ōjin's fortieth year, Uji no Wakiiratsuko was invested as Crown Prince only at that time. Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that the mentions of "Prince Uji

no Wakiiratsuko” in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and twenty-eighth years originally referred in the source material used by the compilers of the Nihon Shoki not to him personally, but rather to “the child of the supreme ruler”—namely, Emperor Ōjin himself (who later came to be regarded also as Emperor Nintoku).

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*Additional note (from Previous Work ②):*

I previously suggested that Emperor Keitai’s recorded age of 57 may represent his actual age at death. However, the ages given in the Nihon Shoki for Emperors Ankan and Senka suggest that, while the central court counted years in the standard single-year manner, in the provinces age might have been reckoned by a double-year (biennial) system.

This can be understood as follows: if we accept the account in the Nihon Shoki that records Emperor Keitai as having died in his twenty-eighth year (not his twenty-fifth), then his death would have occurred in 534 CE. On the other hand, Emperor Ankan is recorded to have ascended the throne in the same year, 534—a highly unusual case of same-year succession.

This suggests that his enthronement may have taken place because the year had turned according to the double-year calendrical system that he had been accustomed to in his provincial domain prior to accession, rather than reflecting the calendar used by the central court. This perspective may help to explain why such an exceptional same-year succession occurred. (Under that assumption, approximate birth years would be: Keitai around **479 CE**, Ankan around **500 CE**, Senka around **501 CE**.)

*(End)*

## References

*The Nihon Shoki* (compiled by Prince Toneri)

*Samguk Sagi* (compiled by Kim Busik)

## **Revision History**

### Change Log (October 1, 2025)

Revised the text two paragraphs before the conclusion of this section.

Added a note before the “Additional note (from Previous Work ②)”.

### Change Log (January 26, 2026)

Revised the note for 411CE in the section "Overlapping Accessions".