

# Considerations on Various Hypotheses Related to the Nihon Shoki

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### List of Preliminary Works (Zenodo DOIs)

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

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15306170

- "春秋二倍暦から見る日本書紀 (Observations on the Nihon Shoki from the Perspective of the Spring-Autumn Double-Year Calendar System, Japanese Version) "

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15306422

- "A Consideration of the Wa Civil War (倭国大乱の一考察)"

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15420999

- "倭国大乱の一考察 (A Consideration of the Wa Civil War)"

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15421073

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## Introduction

This paper reexamines the meaning and validity of the numerical records found in the Nihon Shoki and presents several hypotheses based on this reconsideration. As indicated in prior research:

- The chronology in the Nihon Shoki prior to CE 470 is assumed to have used a "double-year" calendar system (where one year is counted twice, for spring and autumn).
- Both Emperor Nintoku and Emperor Ōjin are regarded as being born in 391, with the reign of Emperor Ōjin regarded not as his own but effectively as the regency period of Empress Jingū—thus, the first year of Emperor Nintoku's reign is treated as CE 391.

Based on these two premises, it becomes possible to align the chronology of Japanese sources with external Chinese historical records.

From this, it is inferred that the numerical records in the Nihon Shoki are not merely legends or fabrications, but are highly likely to be based on some kind of historical reality or documentation. In the following sections, I will present hypothetical analyses

for the key figures and emperors, presupposing the existence of underlying evidence for these numbers and traditions.

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## 1. On Takeuchi no Sukune

Takeuchi no Sukune is described in the Nihon Shoki as serving as a high-ranking minister from the 25th year of Emperor Keikō to the 50th year of Emperor Nintoku—a span of 267 years if counted simply, or 158 years if the reigns of Empress Jingū and Emperor Ōjin are included in the first half of Nintoku's reign. Even when calculated using the double-year system, the span is still around 79 years, which is too long to represent the lifespan of a single individual.

Thus, it is reasonable to consider that "Takeuchi no Sukune" was not a single person, but a title or clan representative, with the name "Sukune" functioning as either a surname or an office. It is highly likely that the original source documents at the time of compilation omitted the actual names and passed down only the title.

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## 2. On Yamato Takeru

Yamato Takeru (also known as Prince Ousu; in the Kojiki, as Yamatotakeru no Mikoto) is recorded as a son of the 12th Emperor Keikō and as the father of the 14th Emperor Chūai.

However, Chūai is said to have been born in the 17th year of the 13th Emperor Seimu, while his father Yamato Takeru is recorded as having died in the 41st year of Emperor Keikō at the age of 30. This results in a chronological inconsistency: Chūai is said to have been born more than 35 years after his father's death by the year notation in the Nihon Shoki, and even after correction using the double-year system, there is still a gap of over 15 years.

Additionally, in the 51st year of Emperor Keikō (10 years after the death of Yamato Takeru), the Nihon Shoki includes detailed accounts about Takeru's wife and children, which again raises questions about the consistency of the timeframes.

Moreover, while the Nihon Shoki records Emperor Keikō as having died at the age of 106 in his 60th year of reign, it also notes that he became Crown Prince at the age of 21 in the 37th year of Emperor Suinin. Calculating from this, Keikō would have been 143 at

his death, meaning there are two different ages recorded for the same person. This suggests considerable confusion in the chronology concerning Keikō and his relationship to Yamato Takeru.

Notably, in the Hitachi no Kuni Fudoki (gazetteer), Yamato Takeru is referred to as "Emperor Yamatotake," and given his genealogical status as father of Emperor Chūai, it is possible that he was posthumously honored as an emperor at an early stage.

(\*Posthumous emperor: someone not included in the official imperial lineage but who was granted the imperial title later due to political or genealogical reasons.)

In summary, the tradition that "Emperor Keikō died at the age of 106" as recorded in the imperial annals may originally have been a record concerning Yamato Takeru, later subsumed under Keikō's account. If we consider the record that Yamato Takeru died at age 30 in the 41st year of Keikō as correct, this would correspond to the 57th year of Emperor Seimu and resolve the chronological contradiction with Chūai's birth.

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### 3. On Emperor Keitai

The 26th Emperor Keitai has no birth year given, but is said to have died at age 82 in his 25th year of reign. In the first year of Keitai, it is noted that his predecessor, the 25th Emperor Buretsu, died at age 57 and that Keitai succeeded him, yet Buretsu's own annals do not mention his age at death.

Thus, the only record of Buretsu's age at death is found in the account of Keitai's accession. If we take the age at death of Keitai in his 25th year and work backwards, it would mean Keitai ascended the throne at age 57—the same age Buretsu is said to have died. This coincidence seems somewhat unnatural, suggesting that the "died at age 57" figure may originally have belonged to Keitai and was confused with Buretsu.

In the Kojiki, Emperor Keitai is said to have died at age 43, but given that the ages recorded in the Nihon Shoki appear to have some underlying basis, it is more reasonable to regard Keitai's age at death as 57.

*(Note)*

Since Emperor Keitai ascended to the throne from a local ruling lineage, it is possible that the method of age calculation in his region



still followed the double-year (Spring–Autumn) calendar system. In that case, Emperor Keitai would have been fifty-seven years old in double-year reckoning at the time of his accession, corresponding to a birth year of 479 CE.

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## 4. On Emperor Jinmu

*Note: As this section deals with an era for which external sources are lacking, the hypotheses presented are highly tentative and subject to future revision.*

### (1) On "Hatsukunishirasu Sumeramikoto"

The first Emperor Jinmu is given the alternate title "Shigi Tennō" (始馭天下之天皇) in the Nihon Shoki, said to be read as "Hatsukunishirasu Sumeramikoto." However, the 10th Emperor Sujin is also titled "Gochoku no Tennō" (御肇國天皇), also to be read as "Hatsukunishirasu Sumeramikoto."

Since this appellation means "the first emperor to rule the country," it would imply there are two "first emperors." However, the reading "Hatsukunishirasu Sumeramikoto" only became established in the medieval period (Kamakura era and later), and it is unclear whether this reading existed at the time of the Nihon Shoki's compilation.

For Emperor Sujin, the characters "御肇國" clearly mean "the first to govern the country," indicating that he was the first emperor to rule the nation. For Emperor Jinmu, the term "天下" (all under heaven) is ambiguous in scope, suggesting he may have been the first ruler of a primordial Yamato state prior to the formation of a centralized

government. In this case, the epithet "Shigi Tennō" (始馭天下之天皇) would be more appropriately read as "Ame no shita hajimete shirasimeshi Sumeramikoto" ("the emperor who first gained dominion on earth").

Alternatively, the inclusion of "Shigi" ("beginning to rule") before "Tenka" may reflect an era when classical Chinese was imperfectly understood, with the term interpreted as "the emperor who first began to rule under heaven." Thus, "Shigi Tenka no Tennō" might be better understood as "Ame no shita shiroshi hajime shi Sumeramikoto"—that is, "the emperor who began unifying Japan."

## **(2) Jinmu's Accession and the Descent of the Heavenly Grandchild**

Jinmu's accession year is given as 660 BCE in the "Jinmu Epoch," but if we assume the chronology in the Nihon Shoki was based on some record and apply a double-year correction, his accession would be around 40 BCE.

Assuming he acceded at age 52, this places his birth around 65 BCE, considering the double-year calendar.

According to the tradition, Jinmu is a great-grandson of Ninigi-no-mikoto, the grandson of Amaterasu, who descended from heaven (the so-called "descent of the heavenly grandchild" (*tenson kōrin*)). There is no indication of an extended period between Ninigi's descent and his marriage to Konohanasakuya-hime, nor between their union and the birth of Jinmu's grandfather, Hikohohodemi no Mikoto. Thus, it is plausible that the "descent" occurred only about half a century before Jinmu's birth.

Looking at China, there is the "fengshan" (封禪) ritual, wherein emperors, upon achieving peace throughout "all under heaven," would report this to heaven at Mount Tai in modern Shandong province. Only a few emperors have performed this ritual. The Han dynasty Emperor Wu, for example, did so in 110 BCE.

Considering the immigration from the continent to Japan in the Yayoi period, it is possible there was a sea route from Shandong to southern Kyushu, and the heavenly descent myth may reflect a migration by a group from the Mount Tai area.

In the *Chronicle of Emperor Jinmu* within the *Nihon Shoki*, it is recorded that at the time of the Eastern Expedition (43 BCE), 1,792,470 years had passed since the descent of the heavenly deities (*Tenson kōrin*). If the figure "1,790,000 years" is read as "179 years," this implies that the heavenly descent occurred 179 years prior to the Eastern

Expedition. When interpreted through the double-year (Spring–Autumn) calendar system, this corresponds to an event around 132 BCE (or approximately that year, considering rounding).

Assuming this, Emperor Jinmu's birth year can be estimated to around 65 BCE. The generational span would thus be roughly thirty-three years, which is somewhat long but not implausibly so. Alternatively, if the record refers instead to the birth of the figure corresponding to Ninigi-no-Mikoto, the span between generations would be about twenty-two years—again, a reasonable value. Under this latter assumption, it is also possible to interpret that the myth of the heavenly descent may have originated from, or been influenced by, knowledge of the *fengshan* ritual (imperial sacrifice at Mount Tai), or from traditions related to it.

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## 5. On the "Chinese-style" Posthumous Titles (Kanpō-shi)

The Chinese-style posthumous titles (kanpō-shi) were conferred en masse by Ōmi no Mifune around 762 CE.

With respect to these titles, the following three points—discussed in my previous works—should be considered:

- For Emperor Kōan (the sixth emperor), who is compared with the Wa king Suishō, who sent envoys to the Later Han Emperor An, the title "Kōan" seems to have been modeled after the Chinese emperor's posthumous name.
- For Empress Jingū and Emperor Ōjin, whose reigns are shown to overlap, the titles "Jingū" and "Ōjin" both include the character for "god" ("神").
- For Emperor Ankō (the twentieth emperor), denied as King Kō of Wa, the title includes the syllable "Kō," matching the pronunciation.

These points suggest that Ōmi no Mifune may have referenced materials created during an era when the double-year system was still remembered in order to assign these titles.

At the same time, it is also possible that, by the mid-8th century, there was already some understanding or reinterpretation of the chronological structure of the Nihon Shoki.

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## Conclusion

All the hypotheses presented in this paper are reconstructed from the perspective that the numbers and traditions in the Nihon Shoki have some historical foundation. The apparent contradictions in the chronologies and genealogies of the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki derive from the transmission of original sources, the structure of lineages, and editorial circumstances. Verification through archaeology, comparative philology, and comparison with foreign sources is needed. Particularly for the period before Emperor Jinmu, further research may necessitate flexible revision and reevaluation.

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## References

- Nihon Shoki
- Kojiki
- Hitachi no Kuni Fudoki



## Revision History

Additions and revisions as of **November 7, 2025**

(1) Unified the chronological notation from “BC/AD” to “BCE/CE.”

### (2) **Section 4: Emperor Jinmu**

- Corrected “BC 39–40” to “40 BCE.”
- Replaced “BC” notation with “紀元前 (Before the Common Era).”
- Added a new analysis in subsection (2) *Tenson Kōrin*, considering the chronological

data recorded in the *Chronicle of Emperor Jinmu* of the *Nihon Shoki*.

### (3) **Section 3: Emperor Keitai**

- Added a supplementary note at the end discussing the hypothesis that Emperor

Keitai was fifty-seven years old at accession (see reference below).

- Reference: *A Tentative Hypothesis on the Lineage of Emperor Nintoku*. DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.17221407

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