The Iron and Rice Trade between Kaya and the Japanese Archipelago

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This study focuses on the role of Tsushima-no-kuni 寺島国 and Iki-no-kuni 一岐国 in the iron and rice trade between the Kaya region of the southern Korean peninsula and the government of Wa on the Japanese archipelago.

In the 3rd century A.D., the states of Anyaguk 安邪国 and Kuyaguk 狼邪国 were regional powers in the Kaya region. Located at the mouth of rivers that provided access to both river and sea, they were advantageously positioned for shipping and trade. While they forged alliances with neighboring states in Kaya, they were also at the fore of the iron trade between Rakurōgun, Taihōgun, and Wa. Kuyaguk especially benefited from the trade, situated as it was along the route between Taihōgun and Wa.

Located between the Kaya region and the Japanese archipelago, Tsushima-no-kuni and Iki-no-kuni had poor agricultural bases, but each was able to survive due to its mediating role in the ongoing trade. Through this mediation, the Japanese archipelago was able to procure iron from Kaya, while Kaya was able to import needed food and other resources. With the spread of unification wars in the 4th century, the demand for iron escalated further. Following the war between the allied armies of Baeje, Kaya and Wa and those of Koguryeo and Silla, Tsushima-no-kuni and Iki-no-kuni also came to serve as military bases for Wa’s invasion of Silla, but remained neutral in the conflict.