Relations between Wa and Korea in the Yayoi Period:
The Transfer of Bronze Implements Made in Japan to Korea

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During the latter half of Middle Yayoi, that is, after the end of the Mumon pottery period in the Korean Peninsula, long bronze weapons – halberds (mao) and dagger-axes (ge) – and small bronze mirrors made in northern Kyushu in Wa made their way to Korean territory (southern part of the Korean Peninsula), where they were buried in the graves of the most powerful people. This paper discusses the sort of relations that existed between Wa and Korea when this took place.

Until now, it has been believed that some of the long bronze weapons and small bronze mirrors excavated in Korea were not made in Japan, but were made in Korea. These weapons are narrow bronze halberds which had been made longer, medium to narrow bronze dagger-axes and early period small bronze mirrors. This paper first looks at whether these items were made in Wa or Korea.

The practice of making bronze weapons longer and bigger in Wa society was based on making bronze weapons into ritual items for a specific purpose (key implements for communal rituals). With mirrors (Chinese mirrors and small bronze mirrors) too, size and quantity played a significant role in sustaining social and regional relationships. But because in Korean society, both bronze weapons and mirrors were used as symbols of the status and authority of those with power, there was no need to make weapons longer and bigger or to imitate Chinese mirrors. In Wa, the pattern bands of small bronze mirrors were initially closest to their prototypes, after which they continued to change. However, the mirrors excavated in Korea were imitations that were made somewhat later than the initial period. It follows, therefore, that all of the narrow bronze halberds (and all bronze halberds and dagger-axes from the medium-narrow size up) and small bronze mirrors were made in Wa.

Although they were taken to Korea and given to leaders in accordance with Wa rationale for their usage and distribution, once there they were buried with the dead according to their own methods. The objective was to maintain and develop relations and trade between Wa and Korea. These bronze weapons were given to those in positions of power concerning iron and the production of iron implements with the specific purpose of obtaining iron implements and materials, and were buried as the possessions of those in power in accordance with Korean rationale.

Keywords: Yayoi period, Pre-Three Kingdoms period, long weapons made by bronze, small bronze mirror