In the Kofun period, ranging from the mid-third to seventh centuries, a homogeneous bloc was established with its core based on the political power arising in the central Kinki region, covering a wide area of the Japanese Archipelago. At the same time, differences emerged between the inside and outside worlds, which created clear boundaries. The southern Kyūshū region was on the southern border with the outside world: the Southern Islands. Recent excavations have been laying the foundations for the archaeological analysis of the process of establishing these boundaries.

This study starts with a review of archaeological findings on the Tanegashima Hirota site, the most important archaeological site for the study of the Southern Islands in the period contemporary with the Kofun period in the Japanese Archipelago, and then examines similarities and differences between the southern Kyūshū region during the Kofun period and the contemporary Southern Islands. This is followed by a review of shell goods produced in the Southern Islands to analyze the connection between the Kofun culture and the Southern Islands culture. Based on the results of these analyses, this article eventually aims to reconsider the relationships between the two cultures from the viewpoint of developing a sense of ethnic identity.

Key words: Kofun period, Ōsumi Strait, Tanegashima Hirota site, shell goods produced in the Southern Islands, formation of ethnic group