

Trade between Japan and Asia

The period in which the Munakata family established Okinoshima as a site of worship in the late fourth century coincided with a period of increased exchange between Japan and the Asian continent. Buddhism, the Chinese writing system, silk and horses were among the important cultural influences and commodities introduced to the Japanese archipelago as a result of this early exchange. Many objects from China were brought to Japan through Korean intermediaries. Five hundred years of trade with China and the Korean Peninsula are reflected in the many artifacts found on Okinoshima.

The Silk Road

The Yamato court (300–710) that dominated much of Japan, tasked the Munakata family with conducting rituals on Okinoshima on their behalf. This relationship is detailed in the two oldest written chronicles of Japan, the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, compiled in the early eighth century. The votive objects found on Okinoshima indicate the island's importance among travelers seeking protection on the high seas. Of the roughly 80,000 artifacts discovered, some originate from China and Korea, with pieces from as far away as Persia. These are thought to have arrived in Japan via the Silk Road.

Trade with Asia

Wars between the Korean kingdoms and Chinese Tang dynasty forces often disrupted trade between Japan and the mainland in the seventh and eighth centuries. Delegates were still sent to China after the eighth century, but by the ninth century, the instability of China's Five Dynasties period brought an end to official trade and the 500-year-old practice of making offerings on Okinoshima.