

Mausoleum of Emperor Kanmu

Emperor Kanmu (737–806) was the 50th emperor of Japan according to the traditional order of succession and has come to be regarded as one of the most influential and important figures in Japanese imperial history. His reign lasted from 781 to 806, during which time he presided over the shift of the capital from the massive complex of Heijōkyō (today's Nara) to Heiankyō (today's Kyoto) in 794. Heiankyō literally means the “capital of peace and tranquility.” His accomplishments laid the foundations for the Heian period (794–1185), a golden age of artistic, spiritual, and political development.

Emperor Kanmu had first wanted to build his new capital in Nagaokakyō, an area southwest of Kyoto, because it was much easier to reach to by boat. After ten years, construction at the Nagaokakyō site was stopped abruptly, possibly because some thought that the site was haunted by the vengeful spirit of Kanmu's deceased brother Prince Sawara (750–785) who died on the way to exile on Awaji Island. Kyoto would remain the nation's capital and the seat of imperial power for more than 1,000 years following Kanmu's death.

The mother of Emperor Kanmu is believed to have been a member of the royal family of Baekje, an ancient Korean kingdom. In 2001 Japan's 125th emperor, Emperor Akihito, was the first modern emperor to acknowledge possible Korean ancestry in the imperial lineage when he said, “I, on my part, feel a certain kinship with Korea, given the fact that it is recorded in the *Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihon shoki*) that the mother of Emperor Kanmu was of the line of King Muryong of Baekje.”