

Ancient Diplomacy: Exchange with the Continent

Akita Fort's proximity to the Sea of Japan made it a center for international diplomatic exchange. At the time, diplomatic relations between the Yamato and kingdoms on the Asian mainland were maintained by large delegations that traveled to and from the continent laden with gifts.

Akita Fort was the entry point for delegations visiting from Balhae (Japanese: Bokkai), an ancient kingdom that controlled most of Manchuria, Outer Manchuria, and the northern part of the Korean peninsula. Balhae officials landed in Dewa Province and likely rested at Akita Fort during six trips between 727 and 795. They then traveled south to Nara to meet with representatives of the Yamato court.

Archaeological excavations at Akita Fort have uncovered clues as to where diplomatic visitors may have stayed. The remains of pour-flush toilets, the latest in sanitation technology at the time, were found just east of the fort. Organic remains in the drainage ditch contained the eggs of a type of tapeworm found only in pork. Pork was not eaten in Japan at the time, but it was present in cuisine from the mainland, suggesting that foreign officials likely lodged at the temple that once stood in the area. The toilets were built during a spike in diplomatic relations in the eighth

century and were removed in the ninth century after Balhae stopped sending envoys, further supporting this theory.