

Mt. Ojigatake in History

There are several legends and theories explaining how Ojigatake (“mountain of princes”) got its name. The most popular story tells of eight princes from the ancient Korean kingdom of Baekje who lived in the area. Whether any royals ever resided around Ojigatake is unknown, but the historical connection between the Inland Sea area and seventh-century Korea is real.

Baekje was subjugated by Tang China and the rival Korean monarchy of Silla in 663. Many people from the vanquished kingdom fled to Japan, where officers and engineers were recruited from among the refugees to construct Korean-style forts along the shores of the Seto Inland Sea. These strongholds were intended to defend Japan against a possible invasion by the Tang–Silla alliance.

Another possible reason for the name Ojigatake relates to Shugendo, an ancient tradition of mountain asceticism incorporating elements of both Buddhism and Shinto in which devotees practice spiritual discipline in

remote and often inhospitable places, such as mountains. Small shrines called *oji* are located along several prominent Shugendo pilgrimage routes, most notably the Kumano Kodo in Wakayama Prefecture, and traditionally served as rest stops for pilgrims as well as places of worship. The foundations of multiple *oji* shrines have been discovered on and around Ojigatake, suggesting that followers of Shugendo are likely to have used the mountain as a site of spiritual training. These ascetics may have taken refuge in some of the caves along the slopes.