

Regarding the Nomination of the “Mozu-Furuichi” Ancient Tumulus Cluster  
for Inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List

September 28, 2018

Statement on behalf of 13 associations with an interest in Japan's imperial tombs  
The Osaka Historical Association, Kyoto Historical Science Association,  
Kodaigakukenkyukai(古代学研究会), The Historical Society of Japan,  
Japanese Local History Research Association, The Nara Society for Historical Studies,  
The Japanese Archaeological Association, The Japanese Society for Historical Studies,  
The Japanese Historical Council,  
Japanese Association for Preservation of Cultural Properties,  
Association of Historical Science (REKISHIKAGAKU KYOGIKAI),  
The Historical Science Society of Japan, History Educationalist Conference of Japan

Of the many imperial tombs under the purview of the Imperial Household Agency, those constructed between the 3rd and 7th centuries are of particular interest. In the modern era, they have been maintained as the tombs of the Japanese imperial family and as sites for religious rites. Over and above that, though, they are important sites of historical and cultural heritage for all Japanese people, and we, the members of thirteen associations, have pressed for the tombs to be conserved and opened to the public in view of this fact. As a result of our combined efforts over the past forty or so years since the 1970s, the Imperial Household Agency now publishes details of maintenance work and surveys of the tombs. Our associations have also liaised with the Imperial Household Agency to provide scientific information to the public and engage relevant organisations.

On 31st January 2018, the Japanese government nominated the 5th century “Mozu-Furuichi” ancient tumulus cluster for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage list. The nomination is due to be reviewed by the specialist body, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), and an on-site survey is scheduled for September this year. We certainly believe the “Mozu-Furuichi” ancient tumulus cluster merits World Heritage Site status, and we have high hopes for the new designation since global recognition would provide further impetus for conserving and opening the tombs to the public. We would, therefore, like to acknowledge the great efforts made by the various bodies and individuals involved in the nomination. However, we believe there are two unresolved issues.

First is the issue of conserving the tombs and rendering them accessible to the public. The main heritage site of the “Mozu-Furuichi” ancient tumulus cluster consists of imperial tombs that fall under the purview of the Imperial Household Agency. As a general rule, these tombs are not open to the public. In addition, the tombs are not preserved uniformly; rather, some fall within the purview of the Agency while some fall outside it. In 2013, we proposed that the Imperial Household Agency and Agency for Cultural Affairs work together with local government to develop uniform conservation measures and make progress with opening the tombs to the public. We can only hope that the relevant organisations will continue their

efforts to make this heritage site more accessible to the public, while bearing in mind that the site comprises imperial tombs.

The second issue is that of nomenclature. We may take as an example the largest keyhole-shaped tomb in Japan, which is situated within the Mozu cluster. The Imperial Household Agency uses the name “Nintoku tennō Mozu no mimihara no naka no misasagi,” while the name for the same site used in the nomination for World Heritage status is “Nintoku tennōryō kofun.” However, it has long been doubted whether this truly was the final resting place for the great king known to history as Emperor Nintoku. Since the emperor's name is yet to be established definitively by academics, the application of the specific name to the tomb may lead to misunderstanding. It has been suggested that “Daisen kofun” or “Daisen-ryō kofun” be used as the academic referent for the tomb (with “Daisen” written 大山 or 大仙). It is now common practice for textbooks to give “Daisen kofun” alongside “Nintoku tennōryō kofun.” In short, while it may be convenient to use the name “Nintoku tennōryō kofun,” we are concerned lest this leads people to believe that there is proof that Emperor Nintoku rests in this tomb.

Finally, we would like to express our support for the inclusion of the “Mozu-Furuichi” ancient tumulus cluster in the World Heritage list, and to articulate our view that it is a heritage site of value to all humankind.

Recommendations of the thirteen societies:

1. That the heritage site be properly conserved and maintained, and made more accessible to the public.
2. That the heritage site be named appropriately, based on academic reasoning.