



# A Preliminary Study on the International Spread of the Culture of Yu the Great

Wu Jianping <sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup> Zhejiang Yuexiu University, Shaoxing, 213000, China.

Email: 29017128@qq.com

**Abstract:** Yu the Great is a flood control hero and the founding king of the Xia Dynasty. The Culture of Yu the Great is the source of Chinese culture, which has been passed down and developed for thousands of years and has a profound influence both domestically and internationally. With the further expansion of the influence of Chinese classic culture, the international spread of the culture of Yu the Great has also attracted increasing attention. The recognition of the culture of Yu the Great by Japan in East Asia can be traced back to a thousand years ago. In recent years, researches on cultural relics of Yu the Great have become elaborate. Descendants of Yu the Great in South Korea have thrived for generations. The English speaking world has also conducted research on the culture of Yu the Great. The paper gathers the wisdom of scholars at home and abroad to commemorate virtues of Yu the Great, which is of great significance.

**Keywords:** Yu the Great, culture, spread, interpretation

## Introduction

Yu the Great is a legendary flood control hero, revered as the founding king of the Xia Dynasty. He is a spiritual symbol of the Chinese nation. Zhouyi<sup>i</sup>, Shijing<sup>ii</sup>, *Chunqiu*<sup>iii</sup>, Shangshu<sup>iv</sup>, *Zuozhuan*<sup>v</sup>, and *Hanshu*<sup>vi</sup> all have descriptions of Yu the Great. The story of Yu the Great controlling floods for thirteen years and passing through his home three times without entering has forged the fundamental spirit of the Chinese nation. Yu the Great cut down trees as signposts along mountain ranges, divided the Nine Provinces by mountains and rivers, and established the Xia Dynasty, laying the foundation for the great image of an ancient country. Confucius once said, “I have no bad opinions about Yu the Great.” The sentence expressed his high praise for Yu the Great. With the spread of Confucian culture in East Asia and even the world, the mythological story of Yu the Great controlling floods and governance and administration of state affairs has also been widely spread.

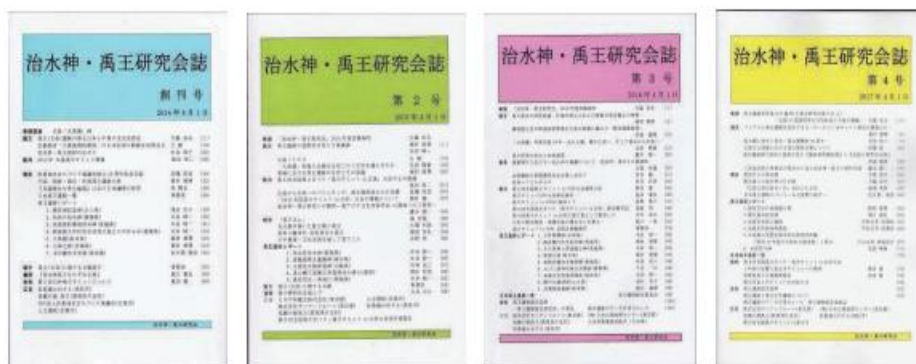
## The Spread of the Culture of Yu the Great in East Asia

The story of Yu the Great controlling floods is recorded in Japanese books such as *Kojiki* (712 AD), *Nihon Shoki* (720 AD), *Sangō Shiki* (about 797 AD), *Shoryoshu* (about 800-860 AD), *Uneasiness* (about 1330 AD), *Taikōki* (1625 AD), etc. Inoue Enryō<sup>vii</sup> (1858-1919), Kunichi Shiratori<sup>viii</sup> (1865-1942), and Shizuka Shirakawa<sup>ix</sup> (1910-2006) have all made contributions to the study of Yu the Great. The era name “Heisei” of Japan is from *Shangshu · Yu the Great*.

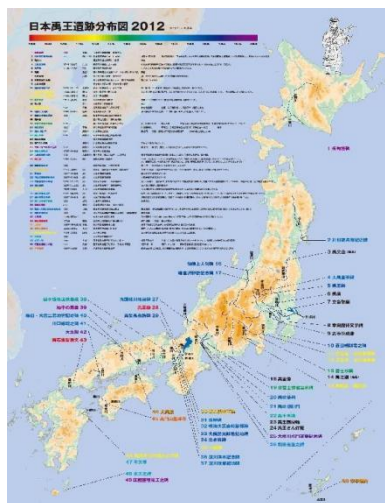
In 2003, Japan once again sparked a wave of research on Yu the Great, attaching great importance to the investigation and data compilation of cultural relics of Yu the Great. Based on the study of mythology and the belief in flood control, combined with the study of water conservancy history and regional history, Japan has promoted disaster prevention and revitalization of regional economy and culture.

In 2013, Japan established the “the God of Flood Control · Research Association of Yu the Great”, with over 130 members. The association publishes bulletins (2-3 issues) and journals (1 issue) every year, which are rich in content. It has been committed to disseminating the latest research results on the culture of Yu the Great and has been at the forefront of academic research on the culture of Yu the Great in Japan. The association also frequently organizes members to visit relics of Yu the Great in Asia, and participate in activities to worship Yu the Great. Members regard promoting the spirit of Yu the Great as their own responsibility and have achieved fruitful results.

(the Journal has been updated to the 11th issue)



The association has been editing the “Distribution Map of Relics of Yu the Great in Japan” since 2012, updated annually. As of 2023, 165 relics of Yu the Great have been discovered in Japan. The earliest one which is called Wen Ming Dong Di Stele has been recognized as a “Natural Disaster Inheritance Stele” by the Japan National Institute of Land and Geography, indicating that the culture relics of Yu the Great in Japan have become an important geological disaster cultural heritage.



(The first distribution map of the relics of Yu the Great in Japan, 2012) (Natural Disaster Inheritance Stele. 1726)

At the same time, specialized books such as *The Journey to Find the God of Flood Control — Yu the Great* (2013), *The Rediscover of Yu the Great — The Successors* (2013), *Yu the Great and the Japanese — The East Asia Connected by the God of Flood Control* (2014), *The Regional History of Yu the Great Controlling Floods* (2019) and *The Chronicle of Yu the Great in Japan* (2023) have also been published. The frequent researches on Yu the Great have had a certain impact in Japan, with its unique features that cannot be ignored.



The “National Summit of Yu the Great in Japan” has been held for 7 sessions so far. The summit was held in major cities in Japan with representative relics of Yu the Great, and has received strong support from Japanese Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, and various county and city governments. It not only promotes research and exchange on the culture of Yu the Great, but also drives the integrated development of local cultural tourism and other industries. At present, there are pastries and wines named after Yu the Great which are of great significance for exploring the inheritance value of regional culture, reflecting the connotation of regional culture, showcasing advantages of regional culture, vigorously promoting regional cultural traditions and essence, increasing regional cultural confidence, and achieving regional cultural revitalization.



(Yu the Great wine)



(Yu the Great wine)



(Yu the Great pastry)

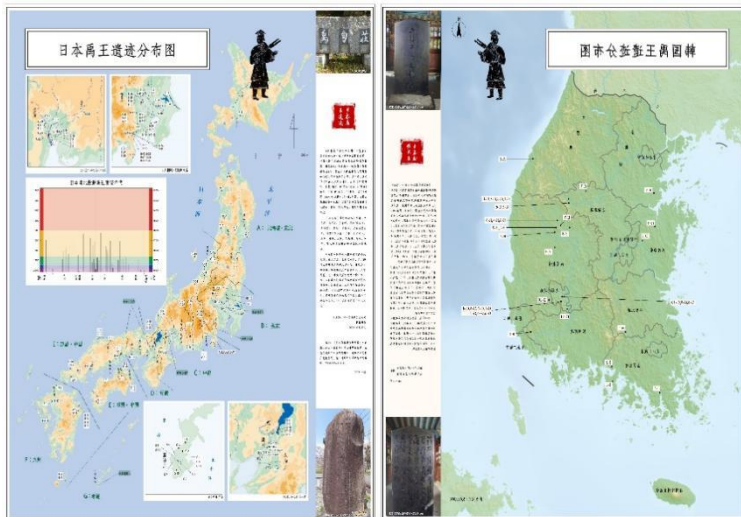


(Yu the Great amulet)

In Korea, Yu the Great is also believed to be the “God of Flood Control”, and is mentioned in the founding myths of the country in *The Ancient Records of Dangun* and *The History of Kui Garden*. The Stele of Yu the Great located on Liuxiang Mountain in Kangwon-do can fully prove the influence of Yu the Great in Korea. According to *Danyang Yu the Great Family Genealogy*, the Danyang Yu the Great family are descendants of Yu the Great. Yu Xuan, the ancestor of the family, migrated from China to Danyang on the Korean Peninsula in the early years of Goryeo and settled there. In 1014, Yu Xuan passed the imperial examination and was appointed as the head of the Imperial Household Department. He was later promoted to the position of Prime Minister. At present, the family, descendants of Yu the Great, has become a prominent clan in Korea with a population of over 400,000.

Since 1993, the family has visited China multiple times to search for their roots and ancestors. Since 1995, they participated in the public worship of the Mausoleum of Yu the Great and academic seminars on the culture of Yu the Great held in Shaoxing. There are a large number of talented individuals in the family and they are very active. There are many influential publications such as the *Yu the Great Family Treasure Map*, *Danyang Yu the Great Family Story*, and *Danyang Yu the Great Family Name Encyclopedia*.

In April 2022, Shaoxing, where the Mausoleum of Yu the Great is located, released the important components of the *Relics of Yu the Great in East Asia*, namely the *Distribution Map of Relics of Yu the Great in Japan* and the *Distribution Map of Relics of Yu the Great in Korean*. The dissemination, exchange, and mutual learning of the culture of Yu the Great in East Asia are increasingly receiving attention from the academic community.

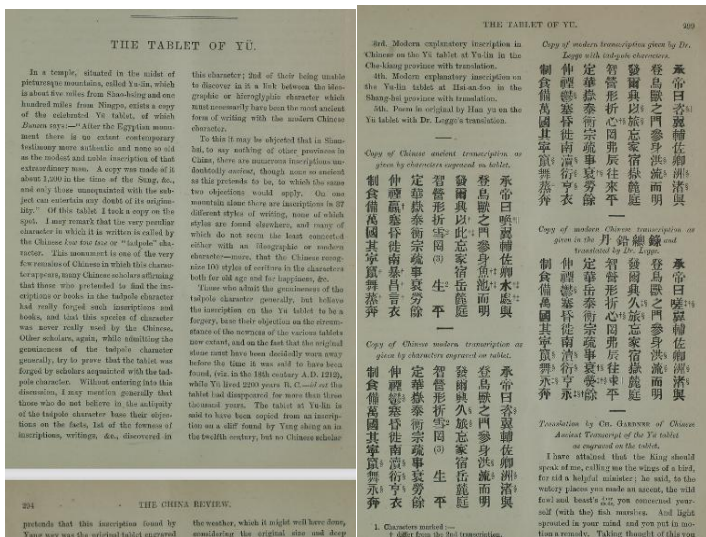


### Interpretation of the Culture of Yu the Great in the English World

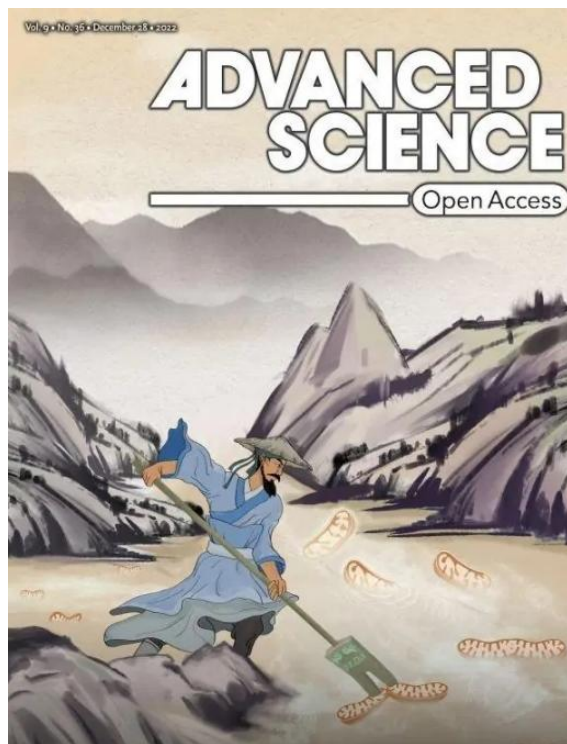
The world is full of interest and curiosity towards ancient and civilized China. The culture of Yu the Great spread to the English speaking world as early as the 17th century.

James Legge, a renowned British sinologist, served as the principal of Ying Wa College in Hong Kong and a missionary of the London Missionary Society. He was the first person to systematically study and translate ancient Chinese classics. From 1861 to 1886, he translated all major Chinese classics such as *the Four Books and Five Classics*, totaling 28 volumes. The myth of Yu the Great is also included.

C. T. Gardner, a British diplomat, who came to China in 1861, published an English article titled “The Tablet of YU” in 1874, which was over ten pages long and conducted a detailed and in-depth study of the steles in relics of Yu the Great in China. He also wrote the book named *The Missionary Question in China*, which has a significant influence in the field of Sinology.



On December 29, 2022, the back cover of *Advanced Science* (Vol. 9, Issue 36) published a picture of “Yu the Great Flood Control” with strong Chinese style, in order to highlight the article “A Mitochondrial Fusion Factor Specific to Germ Cells Regulates the Maintenance and Differentiation of Germ Stem Progenitor Cells” jointly researched by Sun Yonghua’s team from the Institute of Hydrobiology, Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chen Zhenxia’s team from Huazhong Agricultural University.



**Prospects for the International Spread of the Culture of Yu the Great**

Yu the Great not only belonged to China, but also to East Asia and the world. The culture of Yu the Great is the backbone of Chinese civilization that has lasted for five thousand years and is the essence of the inheritance and development of Chinese culture. To promote the better integration of Chinese culture into the world, the culture of Yu the Great, as a landmark culture of the origin of Chinese civilization, can best showcase the spiritual identity and cultural essence of Chinese civilization, and should undertake the historical mission of the new era.

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<sup>i</sup> The source of great truths.

<sup>ii</sup> The first collection of Chinese poetry.

<sup>iii</sup> The first chronological history book in China.

<sup>iv</sup> The first compilation of historical documents in China

<sup>v</sup> A detailed chronological history book based on Chunqiu in China.

<sup>vi</sup> The first biographical history book in China.

<sup>vii</sup> A famous Japanese philosopher and educator.

<sup>viii</sup> A Japanese historian.

<sup>ix</sup> A Japanese sinologist.