

---

# SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS

Number 210

April, 2011

---

## Turkic “Balbal” in Japan

by  
Mark A. Riddle

Victor H. Mair, Editor  
*Sino-Platonic Papers*  
Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations  
University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6305 USA  
vmair@sas.upenn.edu  
www.sino-platonic.org

# SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS

FOUNDED 1986

*Editor-in-Chief*  
VICTOR H. MAIR

*Associate Editors*  
PAULA ROBERTS                      MARK SWOFFORD

*ISSN*  
2157-9679 (print)                      2157-9687 (online)

SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS is an occasional series dedicated to making available to specialists and the interested public the results of research that, because of its unconventional or controversial nature, might otherwise go unpublished. The editor-in-chief actively encourages younger, not yet well established, scholars and independent authors to submit manuscripts for consideration. Contributions in any of the major scholarly languages of the world, including romanized modern standard Mandarin (MSM) and Japanese, are acceptable. In special circumstances, papers written in one of the Sinitic topolects (*fangyan*) may be considered for publication.

Although the chief focus of *Sino-Platonic Papers* is on the intercultural relations of China with other peoples, challenging and creative studies on a wide variety of philological subjects will be entertained. This series is **not** the place for safe, sober, and stodgy presentations. *Sino-Platonic Papers* prefers lively work that, while taking reasonable risks to advance the field, capitalizes on brilliant new insights into the development of civilization.

Submissions are regularly sent out to be refereed, and extensive editorial suggestions for revision may be offered.

*Sino-Platonic Papers* emphasizes substance over form. We do, however, strongly recommend that prospective authors consult our style guidelines at [www.sino-platonic.org/stylesheet.doc](http://www.sino-platonic.org/stylesheet.doc). Manuscripts should be submitted as electronic files, preferably in Microsoft Word format. You may wish to use our sample document template, available here: [www.sino-platonic.org/spp.dot](http://www.sino-platonic.org/spp.dot).

Beginning with issue no. 171, *Sino-Platonic Papers* has been published electronically on the Web at [www.sino-platonic.org](http://www.sino-platonic.org). Issues 1–170, however, will continue to be sold as paper copies until our stock runs out, after which they too will be made available on the Web.

Please note: When the editor goes on an expedition or research trip, all operations (including filling orders) may temporarily cease for up to three months at a time. In such circumstances, those who wish to purchase various issues of *SPP* are requested to wait patiently until he returns. If issues are urgently needed while the editor is away, they may be requested through Interlibrary Loan. You should also check our Web site at [www.sino-platonic.org](http://www.sino-platonic.org), as back issues are regularly rereleased for free as PDF editions.

*Sino-Platonic Papers* is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 543 Howard Street, 5th Floor, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

# Turkic “Balbal” in Japan<sup>1</sup>

By Mark A. Riddle

Pleasant Grove, Utah

## Introduction

At the Rakan-ji Temple in Houjou-chou, Kasai City, in western Hyougo Prefecture, are some unusual stone sculptures. The entire collection is called the “*Go-hyaku Rakan*,” (‘five hundred *arhat*’ — an *arhat* is an advanced disciple of Buddha), and *some* of the sculptures at Rakan-ji are very much like Buddhist statuary seen elsewhere throughout Japan.<sup>2</sup> But *others* are very unusual — they are not typical “Rakan;” they are not like the stone images of Jizou found everywhere in Japan;<sup>3</sup> and they are unlike the *douso-jin* stone sculptures of Japan.<sup>4</sup> They are very unlike the

---

<sup>1</sup> Some of the evidence cited in this essay was previously presented by the author at the meeting of the Western Conference of the Association for Asian Studies in Boise, Idaho, September 18, 1999. The author acknowledges the encouragement and assistance provided in early 1999 by colleagues of the on-line East Asian Archaeology Network — Judith Lerner and David Montgomery of Utah, Jeannine Davis-Kimball of California, Mary M. Flad of New York, and especially to Enno Giele of Taiwan, all of whom advised me on references for *balbal*. Special thanks is also due to Prof. Victor Mair of the University of Pennsylvania for a critical reading of this paper. But none of these colleagues is in any way responsible for its contents.

<sup>2</sup> There are other “*Rakan*” temples in Japan; see, e.g., <http://www.flickr.com/photos/53347418@N00/607639842/> (in Hiroshima Prefecture); <http://wikimapia.org/14010748/500-Statues-of-Rakan-of-the-Kita-in-Temple> (in Saitama Prefecture); for more examples, and the cultural background, see: <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/rakan-arhat-lohan.shtml>.

<sup>3</sup> For *Jizou*, see: [http://www.google.com/images?hl=en&noj=1&q=jizo+statues&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=univ&ei=z4y7TL6sNoHmsQPQ\\_4imDw&sa=X&oi=image\\_result\\_group&ct=title&resnum=7&ved=0CFUQsAQwBg&biw=1024&bih=578](http://www.google.com/images?hl=en&noj=1&q=jizo+statues&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=univ&ei=z4y7TL6sNoHmsQPQ_4imDw&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ct=title&resnum=7&ved=0CFUQsAQwBg&biw=1024&bih=578).

*tolharubang* (‘grandfather figures’) found on Cheju Island, Korea, and the very similar figures of Hayato-zuka, in Aira-gun, Kumamoto Prefecture.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Japanese photographer–author Wakasugi Kei judged the unusual “*rakan*” sculptures of Houjou-chou to be unlike anything else seen anywhere in Japan, unlike any *rakan* statuery found anywhere else in the world, and questioned whether they were really *rakan* at all — and in that, he was right.<sup>6</sup> So, what are they? Actually, the unusual “*rakan*” sculptures of Houjou-chou are very similar to, indeed quite the same as, Turkic *balbal* found in Central Asia.<sup>7</sup> The purpose of this essay is three-fold: (1) to present the evidence supporting this identification of the unusual stone sculptures of the Rakan-ji of Houjou-chou as Turkic “*balbal*”; (2) to offer additional evidence that shows the presence of ethnically non-Japanese people in the Kibi/Harima area of early Japan; and (3) to explore the implications of this evidence.

## What are “Turkic Balbal”?

“Balbal” have been described by archaeologists as “stylized anthropomorphic statues over graves [which serve] as a marker for the movement of Turkic-speaking peoples from east to west — from southern Siberia and eastern Central Asia across the Eurasian steppe all the way to Azerbaijan” and Iran.<sup>8</sup> They are said to commemorate fallen warriors or their slain enemies,<sup>9</sup> but

---

<sup>4</sup> For *douso-jin*, see Michael Czaja, *Gods of Myth and Stone* (NY: Weatherhill, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> See images at: <http://www.pbase.com/image/23591239>.

<sup>6</sup> WAKASUGI Kei, *Sekibutsu Hyakkei* (Tokyo: Koufuu-sha Shouten, 1977), p.181

<sup>7</sup> Caveat: the present author follows convention in speaking of *balbal* generically as “Turkic.” But, as shown below, *balbal* have an origin in pre-history that long antedates the appearance of Turkish peoples on the historical stage, and the people who created the *balbal* of Houjou-chou, Japan, were not necessarily Turkic — they may have been Scythian, Sogdian, Khotanese, or some other “Iranian” people of Central Asian provenance. The author is indebted to Prof. Victor H. Mair for this insight.

<sup>8</sup> Philip L. Kohl and Gocha R. Tsetskhladze, “Nationalism and Archaeology in the Caucasus,” in Kohl and Clare Fawcett, eds., *Nationalism, Politics and the Practice of Archaeology* (Cambridge, 1995), p.153

<sup>9</sup> See image at <http://www.lonelyplanetimages.com/images/57440>; note that this *balbal* displays the gesture that

*balbal* are mute, and the evidence that they commemorate “slain enemies” may be limited to a single source: tenth-century Ahmad ibn Fadlan’s account of the Rus.<sup>10</sup>

There seems to be no doubt that *balbal* do mark the westward movement of Turkic peoples, but the assumption that the *balbal* concept has a Turkic *origin* is contradicted by important evidence. Prof. Victor Mair has suggested that *balbal* may be traceable to prehistoric stelae with similar features found in late Neolithic Europe and to similar figures found in the Ukraine, dated a millennium or two later.<sup>11</sup> Evidence in support of Mair’s conjecture may be seen in a *menhir* stele dated second–first millennium B.C., found at Fivizzano, Italy, which shows a dagger shaped and positioned very much like those on anthropomorphic stelae dated much later.<sup>12</sup>

The best evidence for a non-Turkic origin of the *balbal* forms is found in the “standing stones” of Hakkari, in southeast Turkey, discovered in 1998 and dated to 1500–1000 B.C. Archaeologists immediately connected these with the seventh-century B.C. Scythian stelae of the steppes north of the Black Sea and to the *balbal* of the Central Asian steppes on the basis of

---

permits the precise identification of the Houjou sculptures as *balbal*.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Vladimir N. Basilov, *Nomads of Eurasia* (Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County Academy of Sciences, 1989), p. 64; ibn Fadlan’s account, however, refers to wooden statues. For a contrary view of the meaning of *balbal*, which, along with other scholars, I reject, see *Encyclopedia of World Art* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1959–1968), hereafter cited as “EWA,” s.v. “Turkic Art,” pp. 443–444 and 446. The “stones” mentioned in the one Chinese chronicle cited are not described as worked, and *balbal* never number in the hundreds or thousands in any one location. Csanad Balint (*Die Archäologie der Steppe*, [Vienna: Bohlau, 1989], p. 266) observes, of *balbal*: “Die Gesichter zeigen individuelle Merkmale, daher sind wohl ganz bestimmte Personen dargestellt,” (“the faces show individual characteristics, so are surely representations of specific individuals”). This is true especially of details such as beards and moustaches — a feature likely to be depicted if they represent the deceased, but unlikely if they represent slain enemies.

<sup>11</sup> Victor H. Mair, e-mail to the author, January 23 and 25, 2001, citing Konrad Spindler and J. P. Mallory. For illustrated description of these anthropomorphic stelae of the western Mediterranean (southern France and northern Italy) and of the north Pontic region, see J. P. Mallory and Douglas Q. Adams, eds., *Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture* (1997), s.v. “Stelae.”

<sup>12</sup> This may be seen in *EWA*, IV: plate 450.

evidence such as incised depictions of yurt-style tents, weapons, etc.<sup>13</sup> Since the old Turkic tribes first appeared on the historical scene in the middle of the sixth century A.D., "Turkic" *balbal* are Turkic by adoption rather than origin.

Although they probably had a connection with even earlier forms, scholars agree the ancient *balbal* now found in Central Asia have been traced to an origin "in the Altai sometime between the 5th and 6th Centuries," from which they spread throughout the Turkic tribes. They "usually depicted a male warrior holding a vessel. The face was carved either in relief or in outline; sometimes both means were combined." They often showed moustaches, beards, hair, earrings, clothing, belts, and weapons. *Balbal* "in varying degrees of skill of execution continued to be put up by the Turkic-speaking nomads of Tuva [Siberia], Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and other regions of Central Asia as late as the 11th century."<sup>14</sup>

Describing the *balbal* of Central Asia, Russian archaeologist Gregoire Frumkin emphasized: "The schematic presentation is usually the same: a big head (frequently with a triangular face), tiny arms, the right arm bent at the waist, with a cup in the right hand, and the left hand resting on a sword."<sup>15</sup> We shall see below that many of the so-called "*rakan*" figures of Houjou-chou have these same features.

### The "Go-hyaku Rakan" of Rakan-ji, Houjou-chou, Kasai, Hyougo Prefecture

The present author visited the Houjou Rakan-ji in August, 1999, and noted that there were about twenty-five clearly Buddhist images, typical of *nyourai* and *bosatsu* figures seen all over Japan,

---

<sup>13</sup> "The Standing Stones of Hakkari," Turkish Airlines *Skylife*, <http://www.turkishairlines.com/skylife/12-20/hakkari.htm>, accessed by the author on 02/06/01; illustrated, printed copy in the possession of the author. See also Veli Sevin, "Mystery Stelae," *Archaeology* 53:4 (July–August 2000), pp. 46ff; *Archaeology Abstracts*, on-line at: <http://www.archaeology.org/0007/abstracts/stela.html>. For more illustrations, see Antonio Sagona, *The Heritage of Eastern Turkey* (Victoria, Australia: Macmillan Art, 2006), pp. 68–71. Note the similar shape and placement of the daggers on the Italian *menhir* (note 10) and Hakkari *balbal*.

<sup>14</sup> Basilov (1989), pp. 59–61

<sup>15</sup> Gregoire Frumkin, *Archaeology in Soviet Central Asia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), p. 47

placed apart from "the others," with some of these dated to 1765. "The others," about 380 in number, appear very different even at first glance; they are obviously older, more weather-worn, and of a style very different from anything else the author has ever observed in Japan.<sup>16</sup> These stone figures are small, ranging from just 40 to over 120 cm, with an average height of about 85 cm. The author's inspection in 1999 yielded the following observations:

- The entire stone is sculpted but shows the human figure from just the waist up or, proportionately, from about the knees up, with legs not shown.
- Some twenty-five figures have conical head-gear of the Central Asian kind, also seen on *haniwa* (clay figurines) at Himezuka and other *kofun* (burial mounds) in Chiba Prefecture.<sup>17</sup>
- Some have quite prominent noses; others have prominent brows.
- Almost all have two hands or forearms clearly visible; of these, most show the right hand higher on the chest than the left (we will see later that this gesture is a key to their identity).
- Some have hands in front of chest, palms-together — the prayer gesture.
- Some hold objects of uncertain identification.
- Many statues have been broken, then patched; all have been placed close together in neat rows.
- Facial expressions are impassive, in an over-all static pose. (This no doubt has permitted the identification of them as "Buddhist," but elsewhere in Japan *rakan* statues are facially expressive.)

## The Judgment of an Expert

Japanese photographer–author Wakasugi Kei published two full-length studies of Japan's stone Buddhist sculptures, in 1963 and 1977. He judged the unusual "*rakan*" sculptures of Houjou-

---

<sup>16</sup> In Rakan-ji temple literature, a few are inscribed with dates corresponding to 1610 or 1612, but all seem much older than that.

<sup>17</sup> See at: <http://archaeology.jp/sites/2007/ningyo/001.htm>.

chou to be unlike anything else seen anywhere in Japan, unlike any *rakan* statuary found anywhere else in the world, and questioned whether they were really *rakan*, or even Buddhist, at all. He cited five specific reasons for this view:<sup>18</sup>

- (1) First, the Houjou figures lack the expressions of “uninhibited flexibility” (*honpou jizai*) of the typical *rakan* figure.
- (2) Whereas typical *rakan* are tonsured (bald), many of the Houjou sculptures have hair or headgear, and their arm gestures and the objects they are holding are inexplicable (*setsumei no tsukanu*).
- (3) Although some of the Houjou figures appear elderly, there are also some which seem to portray the young, even children.<sup>19</sup>
- (4) Whereas *rakan* figures are male, some of the Houjou sculptures seem to portray women.<sup>20</sup>
- (5) Although typical *rakan* sculptures have no markings or inscriptions (*shuji*), some of the Houjou figures seem to have symbols inscribed on forehead or chest.<sup>21</sup>

But if the “500 Rakan” of Houjou are not *rakan*, then what are they? One key piece of evidence — a ritual gesture depicted on many of the Houjou figures — provides a convincing answer.

## The Link — A Ritual Gesture

The present author has compared scores of images of Central Asian *balbal* from many sources, in

---

<sup>18</sup> See note 5 above.

<sup>19</sup> Some figures seem to be more primitive than, and/or to lack the rigid solemnity of, others, to the point of seeming comical or childish.

<sup>20</sup> For two examples of Central Asian *balbal* that portray women, see Milos Hrbas and Edgar Knobloch, *The Art of Central Asia* (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1965), plates 28 and 29.

<sup>21</sup> Some Central Asian *balbal* are inscribed on the forehead with Turkic runes; see photo at Basilov (1989), p. 57. This yields a testable hypothesis: some Houjou inscriptions are still legible as Turkic runes.

four languages, including book-length studies in both Russian<sup>22</sup> and Chinese,<sup>23</sup> with the unusual “*rakan*” figures of Houjou and concludes that there is ample reason for the identification of the Houjou figures as *balbal*. Among the host of similarities obvious from even a cursory inspection, one key commonality ensures that the Houjou figures can be identified as Turkic *balbal*: a specific ritual gesture. Many of our Houjou *balbal* show the left arm flexed forming an obtuse angle and resting on a sword or belt, with the right arm flexed at an acute angle and holding a cup, or other object, with both forearms roughly parallel diagonally across the chest.<sup>24</sup> The same gesture is found on Central Asian *balbal*,<sup>25</sup> on the Scythian *balbal* of the Ukraine, dated 600 B.C. to 300 A.D.,<sup>26</sup> and on the “Standing Stones” of Hakkari, Turkey. Such a precise correspondence can be neither accidental nor a result of a natural archetype — it is conclusive evidence of an historical connection.

Interestingly, perhaps the oldest known example of this ritual gesture is to be found on a stone statue dated ca.1490 B.C. of King Idrimi of Alalakh, the capital of a Hurrian state on the Orontes River near Antioch, Turkey.<sup>27</sup> This statue of the king seated on his throne further problematizes the question of the origin and provenance of the *balbal* form, but it provides

---

<sup>22</sup> Vladimir D. Kubaryev, *Kamyennyye Izvayaniya Altaya* [Stone Sculptures of the Altai] (Novosibirsk, 1997), with over a hundred illustrations (pp. 39ff.).

<sup>23</sup> See WANG Bo and QI Xiao-shan, *Research on the Grassland Stone Figures along the Silk Road* (Urumqi: Xinjiang People’s Publishing House, 1995), with scores of illustrations — photos and drawings.

<sup>24</sup> Personal observation and notes of the author; in one of the commercially reproduced photographs of the Houjou *balbal* obtained by the author at Rakan-ji in August, 1999, two of four foreground figures show this gesture.

<sup>25</sup> See Wang and Qi (1995), illustrations #002-A-2, 009-A-9, 012-A-12, 022-A-22, 059-B-36, etc. See Kubaryev (1997), pp. 55, 57, 59, 63, 65, 67, 71, 101, etc. See also *EWA*, XIV: plates 217 and 218 for examples of Central Asian *balbal* showing this gesture.

<sup>26</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurgan\\_stelae](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurgan_stelae), where five of thirteen drawings of Scythian *balbal* show this gesture.

<sup>27</sup> This statue, now in the British Museum, may be seen at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idrimi>. It is also found in the *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Tyndale, 1980), I:30.

support for our assertion that the pose described is a ritual gesture, of central significance wherever it appears, including on our Japanese *balbal*.

### Other Identifying Features of *Balbal*: Vessels, Belts and Helmets

The Central Asian *balbal* still found “all over Mongolia, southern Siberia and Kazakhstan” have been described as “cut to portray a man’s head and trunk. They wear earrings, carry a sword or dagger in their belt, and clasp a chalice.”<sup>28</sup> Among the many chalice-clasping *balbal* is a remarkable figure found on the Barlyk steppe of Tuva, Russia, which grasps a *vessel* at the waist with both hands.<sup>29</sup> Miniature vessels, most often made of silver, were extensively known throughout the Turkic world and have been found in *kurgan* burials in the Altai, Tuva, and the Minusinsk Basin. They are often represented on *balbal* in these same areas.<sup>30</sup> In addition to the large vessel held by both hands, as seen on the Barlyk steppe *balbal*, there are two other forms commonly seen — a smaller vessel of similar shape,<sup>31</sup> and a shallow libation cup<sup>32</sup> much like the almost-flat sake-sipping cup still used in Japan today. Both of these latter two forms are held in the right hand. The latter form, the libation cup, is seen held in the right hand by two horsemen on an eighth-century painted wooden panel found at a temple in Dandan-Oilik, near Khotan, in Xinjiang. This presentation, or holding, of a cup in the right hand, is regarded as part of a religious ceremony because the cups are similar in shape to those seen in seventh-century libation scenes of western Turkestan.<sup>33</sup> Some of the Houjou *balbal* of Japan seem to be holding a vessel in the right hand.

---

<sup>28</sup> John Lawton, “The Cradle of the Turks,” *Saudi ARAMCO World*, 45:2 (March-April 1994):2–11, pp. 4–5

<sup>29</sup> Basilov (1989), pp. 54, 56; based on a thirteenth-century account written by William of Rubruck, cited by Basilov (ibid., p. 65), this may be a late Kipchak Turk *balbal*. This specific *balbal* may also be viewed at: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=50823295419>.

<sup>30</sup> EWA, s.v. “Turkic Art,” p. 441

<sup>31</sup> The smaller vessel may be seen, e.g., at Wang and Qi (1995), #002-A-2, #013-A-13, etc.

<sup>32</sup> See the *balbal* photo linked in note 4, above; also Wang and Qi, #097-C-26, etc.

<sup>33</sup> T. T. Rice, *Ancient Arts of Central Asia* (NY: Praeger, 1965), p. 206 and plate 196; one interesting aspect of the

The Barlyk steppe figure also appears to be wearing a belt from which small objects of some kind are suspended. We know that a richly adorned belt was an indispensable item of attire for any member of the Turkic aristocracy, and various items of jewelry were worn suspended from the belt by strips of leather, including “lyre” plaques — bronze, with a heart-shaped opening.<sup>34</sup> The heart-shaped plaque motif marks as Turkic in origin or inspiration gold girdles with heart-shaped pendants found in Korean tombs and recognized by Korean archaeologists as originating in the art of nomads of the northern steppe.<sup>35</sup> As British art historian Roderick Whitfield has observed, the ancient Korean custom of wearing belts with small implements attached has its origins in the northern nomadic tradition.<sup>36</sup> Belts with attached items seem to be represented in the “Standing Stones” of Hakkari, Turkey, in the Scythian *balbal* of the Pontic steppe, and in our Japanese *balbal*, as well.<sup>37</sup>

Many of the Japanese *balbal* appear to be wearing on their heads a shape-fitting helmet. The anonymous author(s) of the Wikipedia article “Kurgan Stelae,” citing Russian-language sources, say(s) of *balbal* headgear: “In some cases the male hat undoubtedly represents a small helmet,” and compares these to the medieval Russian *misyurka*, a flexible iron skullcap which

---

wooden panels of Dandan-Oilik is that a falcon (diving bird) is shown with the horsemen. Rice interprets this as a bird swooping down from heaven to accept the offering. But a falconry pose is depicted on a *balbal* from Semirechiye (Frumkin, 1970, plate X), and birds are occasionally part of a *balbal* assembly (see Wang and Qi, #017-A-17). Csanad Balint mentions falcons held in the right hand (*Die Archäologie der Steppe* [Vienna: Bohlau, 1989], p. 266).

<sup>34</sup> EWA, s.v. “Turkic Art,” pp. 441–442

<sup>35</sup> KIM Won-yong, *Art and Archaeology of Ancient Korea* (Seoul, 1986), pp. 355–356 and plate 5–8; in Ch. II-5, Kim identifies many Korean artifacts (mirrors, belt hooks, crowns, earrings, etc.) showing Siberian steppe, Scythian, Roman, Sarmatian, etc., influences.

<sup>36</sup> Roderick Whitfield, ed., *Treasures from Korea* (London: British Museum, 1984), p. 97. Whitfield also cites a glass ewer from a Korean tomb which matches examples from Syria of the fourth–fifth centuries and a faceted glass cup of a type made in fourth–sixth-century Iran as evidence that Kaya, Korea (in the south of the peninsula, near Busan), must have had “direct contacts with Western Asia” (*ibid.*, pp. 65, 92–93).

<sup>37</sup> The warrior’s belt with weapons and ornamental objects attached is a theme of the “deer stones” of southern Siberia, which preceded the *balbal*; see Karl Jettmar, *Art of the Steppes* (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 168.

protected only the upper part of the head. This appears to be precisely what is depicted on many of the *balbal* of Houjou-chou.

Most often the headgear of Central Asian *balbal* is "a small cap shaped like a truncated cone," a form which has survived to modern times in places such as Afghanistan. "Much less frequent are tall, conical hats of a type that is known to have been widespread in Scythian times.... Some of the stone figures have tall hats with the tip bent forward; this type of headgear was common in Central Asia before the Turkic period."<sup>38</sup> The tall, conical hat is found among both the stone *balbal* of Houjou-chou, in western Japan, and the *haniwa* (clay figurines) of Himezuka and other places in Chiba Prefecture, in eastern Japan.

### Implications of This Evidence

All this evidence reinforces the conclusion of Japanese archaeologist Okauchi Mitsuzane that "a relationship existed among East Asian countries at the beginning of the 5th century... There was an international route of cultural diffusion from northern China, through [the Korean peninsula] to the country of Japan."<sup>39</sup> Okauchi cites, for example, the similarities between burial goods found in the famous Mound 126 of the Niizawa Senzuka *kofun* of Nara Prefecture and those found in tombs of similar date in northern China. It is likely that these goods were brought to Japan by those with whom they were interred, but they could conceivably have been brought to Japan as items of trade or tribute, as international prestige goods.

But it is *not* conceivable that crude stone grave markers could have come to Japan as international prestige goods. The evidence of "Turkic" *balbal* in Japan indicates the presence of communities of Central Asian immigrants in proto-historic Japan, groups large enough to permit the social cohesion and identity maintenance necessary to enable them to continue traditional funerary customs, and close enough in time to their Central Asian origins to remember and

---

<sup>38</sup> EWA, s.v. "Turkic Art," p. 445

<sup>39</sup> OKAUCHI Mitsuzane, "Mounded Tombs in East Asia from the Third to the Seventh Centuries," in Richard J. Pearson, ed., *Windows on the Japanese Past* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 1986):127–148, p. 130

practice the *balbal* custom. The implication is clear — the existence of “Turkic” *balbal* in Japan means Central Asian (possibly Turkic) warriors were present in pre-historic and or proto-historic Japan.

## The Central Asian Connection to Japan — More Evidence

In a previous essay we noted the considerable evidence that exists linking Japan with Central Asia.<sup>40</sup>

Still another of the many such links suggested by scholars is the *hossu*, a flywhisk made of horsehair. In Central Asia one of the insignia of a ruler was a flywhisk made of a yak’s tail, and this object found its way into Buddhist ceremonies as a symbol of mastery of esoteric knowledge. The *shintai* (‘locus of divine presence’) of the Japanese deity Hachiman, favored by medieval samurai, is sometimes a *hossu*, indicating a possible Central Asian connection for Hachiman.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps, then, it is no mere coincidence that the crest of Hachiman is the *mitsudomoe*, equivalent to the Indo-European *triskelion* so prominent in the Celtic art of Late Iron Age Europe.<sup>42</sup>

An additional parallel between the Indo-Europeans and Japan is seen in the use of the colors red and white. The two colors betoken the Indo-European king because he combines the roles of warrior (whose color is red) and priest (whose color is white).<sup>43</sup> In Japan, Shinto shrine ropes are often woven to show alternating strands of red and white, but the colors red and white

---

<sup>40</sup> “Japan and Inner Asia: Some Connections” [October 2010]

<sup>41</sup> Catharina Blomberg, *The Heart of the Warrior: Origins and Religious Background of the Samurai System in Feudal Japan* (Kent, England: Japan Library, 1994), p. 24; for another, similar parallel, see W. G. Aston’s comparison (*Shinto*, 1905, p. 215) of the *nusa* (a pom-pom-like wand used for ritual purification) of Shinto with Homer’s *stemma theoio*, tufted wool attached to a wand (*skeptron*).

<sup>42</sup> For the crest of Hachiman, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hachiman>. For *mitsudomoe*, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitsudomoe>. For *triskelion*, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triskelion>.

<sup>43</sup> Geo Weidengren, “The Sacral Kingship of Iran,” in *The Sacral Kingship (Studies in the History of Religions 4; Leiden, 1959):242–257*, p. 254, citing Dumézil.

have been particularly associated with the emperor, from the time of Emperor Shoumu (r.724-756), who ordered high officials in his capital, Nara, to paint their houses either red or white,<sup>44</sup> to the red and white *obi* (sash) worn by the Crown Princess in 2001, given to her by the Emperor as she prepared to give birth to a possible heir to the throne.<sup>45</sup> The two trees that stand before the Sentou Palace at the Kyouto Imperial Palace (*Go-sho*) are a red plum and a white plum.<sup>46</sup> Like medieval England, medieval Japan saw a civil war with opposing parties fighting under either red or white colors.<sup>47</sup> How did these ancient Indo-European symbols come to Japan? Could they have been brought by immigrants, perhaps by mercenaries with close ties to the imperial household?

## Aliens in Old Japan

*Oya ga mitakeiya* [mitakereba],  
*Houjou no nishi no*  
*Gohyaku Rakan no*  
*Dou* [堂] *ni gozare.*

“If you want to see your parents, you may go to the temple of the Five Hundred  
Arhats [in Houjou].”

---

<sup>44</sup> Joan Piggott, *Emergence of Japanese Kingship* (Stanford Univ., 1997), p. 244

<sup>45</sup> *Japan Times*, October 27, 2001; [www.japantimes.com/cgi-bin/getarticle.p15?nn20011027a8.htm](http://www.japantimes.com/cgi-bin/getarticle.p15?nn20011027a8.htm) , accessed by author on 11/28/01

<sup>46</sup> Personal observation of the author, notes and photos in his possession.

<sup>47</sup> The Minamoto fought under white colors and the Taira under a red banner, 1180–85 (INAGAKI Shisei, “Flags and Banners,” *Encyclopedia of Japan* [Kodansha, 1983], II:288). In a story told in the *Heike Monogatari*, a Buddhist abbot in Kumano decided which side to join by pitting seven white cocks against seven red ones; when the red cocks lost, he decided to go over to the Minamoto (retold by Hartmund Rotermund, in *Die Yamabushi* [Hamburg, 1968], p. 166).

These are the words of an old *uta* (poem, song) of the Houjou area of Hyougo Prefecture, according to the author's Japanese informant, Shou Masae of Kyouto, who describes the Rakan Temple's stone figures as "faces of foreigners, not Japanese. Their makers must have been immigrants or refugees."<sup>48</sup>

Documentary evidence exists for the presence of ethnically non-Japanese peoples in this part of "Harima," the name by which this part of western Japan was anciently known. The eighth-century official court gazetteer *Harima no Kuni no Fuudo-ki* says of the Ohokafuchi area of Kamusaki (just north of modern-day Kasai): "There are about thirty families there whose customs differ [from ours]."<sup>49</sup> Harima was one of five provinces to which ethnically non-Japanese *Emishi* peoples from eastern Japan were forcibly relocated in the time of "Emperor" Keikou (280-316 A.D., revised chronology), according to the *Nihon Shoki* (official court history of 720 A.D.).<sup>50</sup> According to the eighth-century gazetteer of Hizen (modern-day Saga and Nagasaki Prefectures), inhabitants of islands there had non-Japanese facial features, spoke a non-Japanese language and were "highly skilled at shooting on horseback," which was originally a skill developed in and spread from Central Asia.<sup>51</sup>

One possible key to the identity of these aliens in old Japan is the story of Kibi-tsu Hiko ('Prince of Kibi,' an old name for the Harima-Bizen area), and Kibi-tsu Kasha (a.k.a. 'Ura'), "a prince (or *oni*, demon) of some foreign land" who had been exiled to Japan "on account of his misdeeds." He built a castle near what is now Okayama, "and from this stronghold would descend upon and plunder any ships passing through the Inland Sea..." The hero prince subdues the villain pirate prince by magically changing himself into a hawk and then a cormorant in

---

<sup>48</sup> SHOU Masae, letter to the author, April 8, 1993; the translation is his also.

<sup>49</sup> AOKI Michiko Y., *Records of Wind and Earth: A Translation of Fudoki* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Association for Asian Studies, Inc., 1997), p. 216

<sup>50</sup> W. G. Aston, trans., *Nihongi* (1896; multiple repr.), I:211-12

<sup>51</sup> Aoki (1997), p. 265

response to Ura's becoming a pheasant and then a carp.<sup>52</sup> In local Japanese legend, Ura is tall, with big eyes and red hair.<sup>53</sup>

Japanese ethnologist and comparative folklorist Oobayashi Taryou has pointed out the close parallels of the legend of the prince and pirate of Kibi with the Korean legend of Chongwang-lang and Hapaek, who compete with each other by transforming themselves into various animals. We must add to Oobayashi's comparison the observation that the basis for both Korean and Japanese myths is the shape-shifting chase motif, the prototype for which is the Celtic legend of Ceridwen and Gwion.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

It is commonplace to acknowledge Japan's important historical ties with China and Korea, but an accumulating body of evidence now clearly reveals the cultural links between Japan and Central, and even West, Asia. This essay has focused on one piece of the puzzle of Japanese origins — stone statuary wondered about by Japanese for generations and publicly identified by the present author in 1999 as "Turkic *balbal*" that are unexpectedly similar in so many ways to their counterparts still extant on the steppe lands of Central Asia.

---

<sup>52</sup> OOBAYASI Taryou, "Ancient Myths of Korea and Japan," *Acta Asiatica* 61 (1991):68–82, p. 74.

<sup>53</sup> FUJII Shun, *Kibi-tsu Jinja* (Okayama: Nihon Bunkyou, 1973), p. 68; for an account in English, see Michael Gorman, *The Quest for Kibi and the True Origins of Japan* (Orchid Press, 1999), pp. 76–78.

<sup>54</sup> For which see Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, rev. ed., (NY: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1966), p. 28.

Since June 2006, all new issues of *Sino-Platonic Papers* have been published electronically on the Web and are accessible to readers at no charge. Back issues are also being released periodically in e-editions, also free. For a complete catalog of *Sino-Platonic Papers*, with links to free issues, visit the *SPP* Web site.

[www.sino-platonic.org](http://www.sino-platonic.org)