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The Comma at the End of the Silk Road:  
*Magatama* and the Development  
of an Early Eastern Eurasian Ornamental Motif

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The Comma at the End of the Silk Road:  
*Magatama* and the Development of an Early  
Eastern Eurasian Ornamental Motif

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ABSTRACT

Scholars remain divided concerning the origin and meaning of the ancient, curved or comma-shaped jade ornaments known in Japanese as *magatama* 勾玉/ 曲玉 and in Korean as *gogok* 곡옥 or *kobŭnok* 굽은옥. *Magatama* are found in elite Japanese tombs dating mostly between the late Jōmon 縄文 and Kofun 古墳 periods (c. 1000 BCE–600 CE), and consist of jadeite quarried in Japan’s Itoigawa region, while *gogok/kobŭnok* appear in Korea mostly in sites from the Three Kingdoms (*Samguk* 삼국) period, especially between the fourth and sixth centuries CE, and typically are composed of what appears to be Japanese jadeite. Nonetheless, some Japanese researchers have argued for their continental (Chinese and/or Mongolian) origin — in terms of design if not physical provenance — while some Korean researchers insist that they were the product of (Korean) peninsular influence. In the meantime, some European scholars see *magatama* as part of an “elite-exchange system” or “North Asian–Peninsular cultural flow” that linked material and ritual culture across ancient Eastern Eurasia from early China through Scythian nomadic polities of Central and Northeast Asia and Korean kingdoms to the Japanese archipelago. Solving this riddle entails thinking about both early China and early Japan as distinct but connected zones of a much larger Eastern Eurasian pre-modern cultural arena. In other words, a history of *magatama* — however tentative or speculative it must be — can provide a kind of micro-history of Eastern Eurasian cultural exchange.

The vast land mass of Eurasia was a vehicle by which tides and eddies of information swept back and forth in antiquity, not only through migration and trade, but often simply through a complex network of contacts passing seemingly at random with increasing modifications over time and distance.<sup>1</sup>

From earliest times, jade has been a prestigious and cross-culturally exchanged resource in Eastern Eurasia.<sup>2</sup> The pioneering Sinologist Berthold Laufer (1874–1934)<sup>3</sup> may have been the first Western scholar to register curiosity about the apparent similarity between ancient comma-shaped jadeite<sup>4</sup> ornaments known in Japanese as *magatama* 勾玉/ 曲玉 and in Korean as *gogok* 곡옥 or *kobŭnok* 곱은옥 (Fig. 1), on the one hand, and the comma-shaped nephrite ornaments from early China (Fig. 2) that they resemble, on the other hand:

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1 Martha L. Carter, “China and the Mysterious Occident: The Queen Mother of the West and Nanā,” *Rivista degli studi orientali* (new series) 79/1–4 (2006): 97.

2 Andrew Sherratt, “The Trans-Eurasian Exchange: The Prehistory of Chinese Relations with the West,” in *Contact and Exchange in the Ancient World*, ed. Victor H. Mair (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 38–40.

3 Berthold Laufer, “Appendix II: The Nephrite Question of Japan,” in Berthold Laufer, *Jade: A Study in Chinese Archaeology and Religion* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1912), 351.

4 Jadeite or  $\text{NaAlSi}_2\text{O}_6$  — widely used in ancient Japan, Burma, Britain, and Mesoamerica — is one of two mineral deposits known by the nonscientific term “jade” (Chinese *yù* 玉, Korean *ok*, Japanese *tama/gyoku*). The other is nephrite or  $\text{Ca}_2(\text{Mg, Fe})_5\text{Si}_8\text{O}_{22}(\text{OH})_2$ , which is more abundant than jadeite and accounts for most of the “jade” worked in China as well as in New Zealand, Alaska, and British Columbia. See Gina L. Barnes, “Understanding Chinese Jade in a World Context,” *Journal of the British Academy* 6 (2018): 1–3.



Fig. 1<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 2<sup>6</sup>

In 1912, Laufer despairingly wrote that “such a coincidence of types cannot be brought forward,” but he was more right than he apparently knew. More than a century later, it turns out that, both materially and conceptually, the production and meaning of Japanese *magatama* appear to have been related to ancient China, albeit not quite directly. Like commas punctuating an extended sentence, *magatama* and their analogs and precursors may be found in a long sequence that links the iconography of early Chinese royal ideology, Iron Age Central Asian nomads, and ancient Korean shamanism to the rise of civilization in the Japanese archipelago. Thus, solving Laufer’s riddle entails thinking about both early China and early Japan as distinct but connected zones of a much larger Eastern Eurasian pre-modern cultural arena. In other words, a history of *magatama* — however tentative or speculative it must be — can provide a kind of micro-history of Eastern Eurasian cultural exchange.

Before the origins of *magatama* designs can be explored, a word or two about *magatama* materials and their natural distribution is in order. What routinely is called “jade” usually turns out to be one of two mineral substances, each known by the nonscientific term “jade” (Chinese *yù* 玉, Korean *ok*, Japanese *tama* or *gyoku*). Jadeite or  $\text{NaAlSi}_2\text{O}_6$  — widely used in ancient Japan, Burma, Britain, and

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<sup>5</sup> *Magatama* (Sacred Jewel) Amulet [Japan], 710–794. Place: Corning Museum of Glass.

[http://library.artstor.org.berea.idm.oclc.org/asset/AWSS35953\\_35953\\_39620771](http://library.artstor.org.berea.idm.oclc.org/asset/AWSS35953_35953_39620771).

<sup>6</sup> *Magatama* (supposedly from China), ca. 380. Personal Gear, Jewelry, Bead. Place: Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. [http://library.artstor.org.berea.idm.oclc.org/asset/AHARVARDIG\\_10313859537](http://library.artstor.org.berea.idm.oclc.org/asset/AHARVARDIG_10313859537).

Mesoamerica — is one of these, and nephrite or  $\text{Ca}_2(\text{Mg, Fe})_5\text{Si}_8\text{O}_{22}(\text{OH})_2$  — which is more abundant than jadeite and accounts for most of the “jade” worked in China as well as in New Zealand, Alaska, and British Columbia — is the other.<sup>7</sup> But regardless of whether early artisans chose jadeite or nephrite as their medium, such “jade” is uniquely difficult to work and hence has been a popular cross-cultural choice of material for ritual objects and other prestige goods.<sup>8</sup> Only communities that were sufficiently stratified and affluent enough to support the development of sophisticated artisanal skills and the investment of significant labor hours could afford to produce jade items: “For example, 8 hours of sawing [jadeite or nephrite] using a stone knife and sand will cut a groove only 11-mm deep, and 1 hour of drilling using a hollow bamboo with sand and water will cut only 10 mm below the surface.”<sup>9</sup> This helped to boost demand for jade items across prehistoric East and Southeast Asia. This, in turn, makes traffic in jade a useful phenomenon to examine when considering cross-cultural exchanges in antiquity. The distribution of ancient jade objects across east and southeast Eurasia suggests that prehistoric jade trade routes may have developed in parallel with the spread of agriculture (Fig. 3) throughout the region, including early human settlement of what now is Japan (Fig. 4):

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<sup>7</sup> See Gina L. Barnes, “Understanding Chinese Jade in a World Context,” *Journal of the British Academy* 6 (2018): 1–3.

<sup>8</sup> Graeme Barker, *Companion Encyclopedia of Archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 378.

<sup>9</sup> H.-C. Hung, Y. Iizuka, P. Bellwood, K. D. Nguyen, B. Bellina, P. Silapanth, E. Dizon, R. A. Santiago, I. Datan, and J. H. Manton, “Ancient Jades Map 3000 Years of Prehistoric Exchange in Southeast Asia,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA* 104 (2007): 19749.

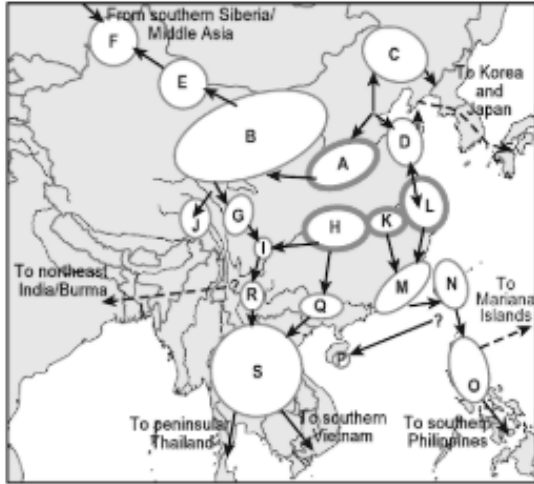


Fig. 3<sup>10</sup>

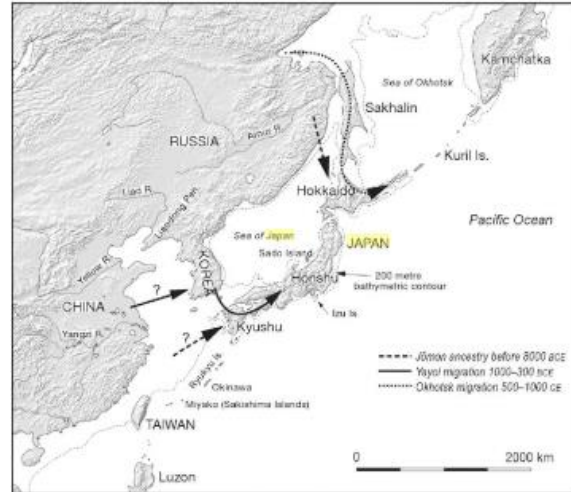


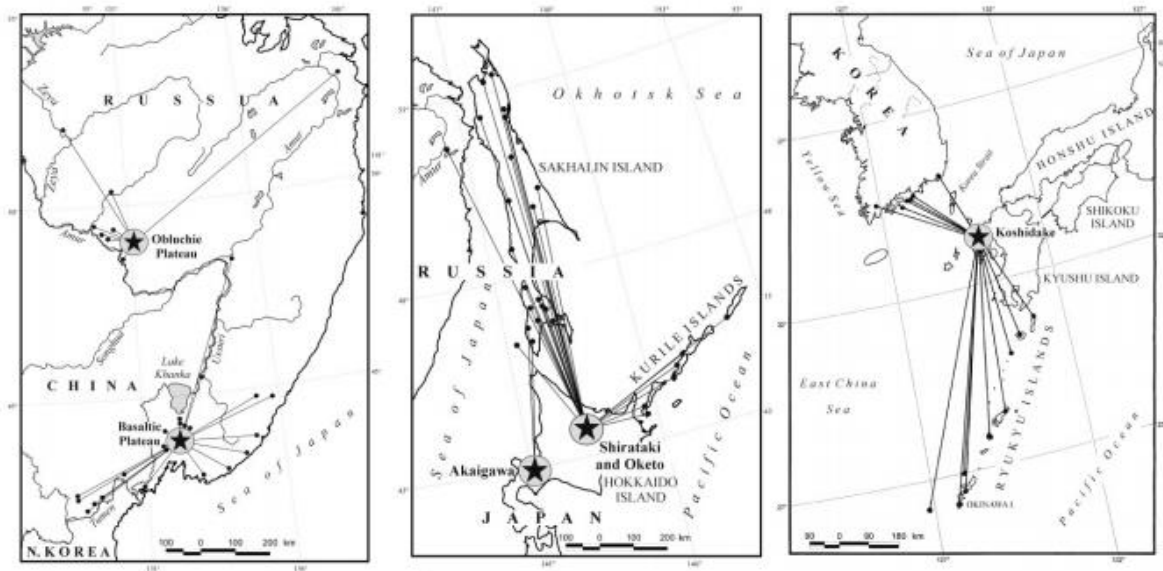
Fig. 4<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, evidence of “the existence of large-scale obsidian exchange networks in the prehistory of Northeast Asia ... testifies to long-distance migrations or contacts in the Upper Palaeolithic and Neolithic, beginning at least at ca. 25,500 BP,”<sup>12</sup> which suggests that jade, too, might have been a familiar commodity on the far-flung trade routes of prehistoric Northeast Asia (Fig. 5).

<sup>10</sup> Fig. 26.3 in Zhang Chi and Hung Hsiao-chun, “Eastern Asia: Archaeology,” in *The Global Prehistory of Human Migration*, ed. Peter Bellwood (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 213.

<sup>11</sup> Fig. 27.1 in Hirofumi Matsumura and Marc Oxenham, “Eastern Asia and Japan: Human Biology,” in *The Global Prehistory of Human Migration*, ed. Peter Bellwood (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 218.

<sup>12</sup> Yaroslav V. Kuzmin. “Long-Distance Obsidian Transport in Prehistoric Northeast Asia,” *Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association* 32 (2012): 3.

Fig. 5<sup>13</sup>

Was Laufer correct in hypothesizing an ancient Chinese origin for *magatama*? The Chinese have long regarded jade as symbolic or productive of longevity and immortality.<sup>14</sup> Jade (nephrite) items appear in what now are coastal Chinese sites as early as 3500 BCE,<sup>15</sup> and Elizabeth Childs-Johnson has dated the “Jade Age” in China to approximately 4000–2000 BCE, with its “second peak in working true jade” occurring from the late Warring States period (c. 481–221 BCE) through the Hàn 漢 dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE).<sup>16</sup> But early China — defined geographically by the borders of the Yellow River valley — was jade-poor, with its major sources of jade located in the Yangzi River delta region and what now is the province of Inner Mongolia, both of which were viewed as culturally marginal, if not “non-Chinese”

<sup>13</sup> Figs. 3–5 in Kuzmin, 4.

<sup>14</sup> See Valerie Hector, “Chinese Bead Curtains, Past and Present,” *Beads* 25 (2013): 42; Valerie Hansen, *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 119; and Xiaolong Wu, *Material Culture, Power, and Identity in Ancient China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 91.

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Childs-Johnson, *Enduring Art of Jade Age China: Chinese Jades of Late Neolithic Through Han Periods, Volume I* (New York: Throckmorton Fine Art, 2001), 13.

<sup>16</sup> Childs-Johnson, 16.



by Chinese elites at least as early as the Western Zhōu 周 dynasty (c. 1046–771 BCE).<sup>17</sup> As early as 5000 BCE, at least some of the jade that eventually was valued by early Chinese elites was quarried and worked in Scythian kingdom of Khotan (Yútián 于闐, modern Xīnjiāng 新疆),<sup>18</sup> which also was the source of the jade items found in the tomb of Shāng 商 dynasty general and queen Fù Hǎo 婦好 (c. 1200 BCE).<sup>19</sup> Another ancient source of jade was Fēngtián 豐田, Tái wān 台灣, where nephrite has been quarried and worked since 2500 BCE<sup>20</sup> and distributed to other regions in East and Southeast Asia since 500 BCE.<sup>21</sup>

Not only was jade a familiar commodity in Neolithic East and Northeast Asia, but so were comma-shaped ornaments — some made of jade, and others wrought from ceramics or other materials (Fig. 6). Hongshan culture (*Hóngshān wénhuà* 红山文化, c. 4700–2900 BCE) sites in what is now northeastern China (Inner Mongolia to Liáoníng 辽宁) include not only many jade (nephrite) items, but particularly jade pendants with comma motifs (Fig. 7), often zoomorphic (Fig. 8) if not embryonic (Fig. 9) in form.

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17 See Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, “Mapping a ‘Spiritual’ Landscape: Representation of Terrestrial Space in the *Shanhaijing*,” in *Political Frontiers, Ethnic Boundaries, and Human Geographies in Chinese History*, ed. Nicola Di Cosmo and Don J. Wyatt (London: Routledge, 2005), 52.

18 Frances Wood, *The Silk Road: Two Thousand Years in the Heart of Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 151.

19 Liu Xinru, “Migration and Settlement of the Yuezhi-Kushan: Interaction and Interdependence of Nomadic and Sedentary Societies,” *Journal of World History* 12/2 (2001): 265.

20 Hung Hsiao-chun, “Cultural Interactions in Mainland and Island Southeast Asia and Beyond, 2000 BC–AD 200,” in *Handbook of East and Southeast Asian Archaeology*, ed. Junko Habu, Peter V. Lape and John W. Olsen (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2017), 634.

21 Hung Hsiao-chun, Yoshiyuki Iizuka, and Mary Jane Louise A. Bolunia. “Greenstone Jewellery Workshops in the Tabon Caves Complex of the Philippines,” in *The Archaeology of Portable Art: Southeast Asian, Pacific, and Australian Perspectives*, ed. M. C. Langley, D. Wright, M. Lister and S. K. May (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 68.

Fig. 6<sup>22</sup>Fig. 7<sup>23</sup>Fig. 8<sup>24</sup>Fig. 9<sup>25</sup>

The “larval” Hongshan jades (Fig. 10) may have influenced the development of the “fetal” jades found in late Shāng sites (c. 1200 BCE; Fig. 11), and both of these jade motifs resemble early graphs for two terms meaning “dragon” — *qú* 虯 (Fig. 12) and *lóng* 龍 (Fig. 13).

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22 After Fig. 37.2 in Hung Hsiao-chun, “Cultural Interactions in Mainland and Island Southeast Asia and Beyond, 2000 BC–AD 200,” 636. The comma-shaped clay items on top were found in a Neolithic site in Nagsabaran, northern Luzon, the Philippines, while those on the bottom were recovered from a Neolithic site in Thac Lac in Ha Tinh province, Viet Nam.

23 Neolithic period, Hongshan culture, fourth millenium B.C. Pendant with human face. Sculpture. Place: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Boston, Massachusetts, USA, Charles Bain Hoyt Fund, 1988.286, <http://www.mfa.org/>.  
[http://library.artstor.org.berea.idm.oclc.org/asset/AMICO\\_BOSTON\\_103832406](http://library.artstor.org.berea.idm.oclc.org/asset/AMICO_BOSTON_103832406).

24 Jade dragon from Hongshan, Inner Mongolia, China. Dating to between 4500 and 3000 BCE, it is the earliest known depiction of a dragon. National Museum of China, Beijing <https://www.ancient.eu/image/7342/>

25 Ornament in the shape of a pig-dragon (3600–2000 BCE). Place: Liaoning Provincial Museum, Shenyang, PRC. [http://library.artstor.org.berea.idm.oclc.org/asset/HUNT\\_56000](http://library.artstor.org.berea.idm.oclc.org/asset/HUNT_56000).

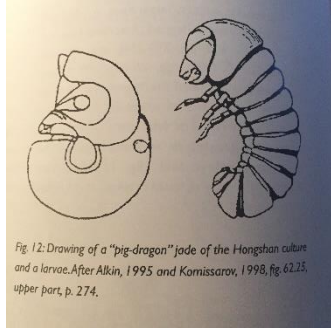


Fig. 10<sup>26</sup>

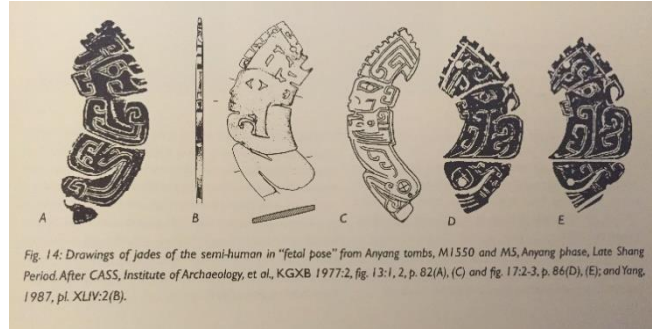


Fig. 11<sup>27</sup>

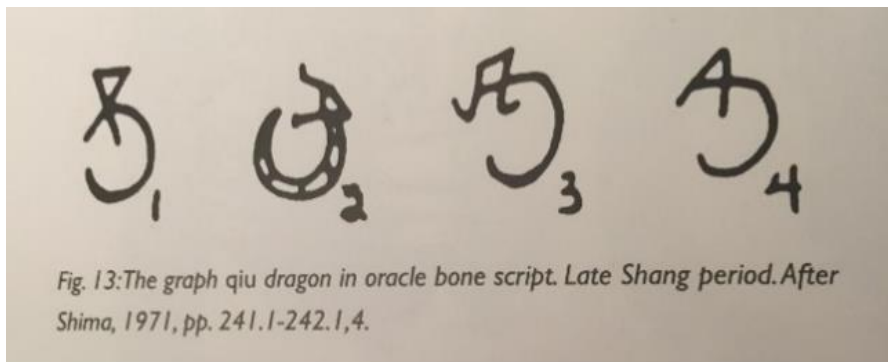


Fig. 12<sup>28</sup>



Fig. 13<sup>29</sup>

26 Elizabeth Childs-Johnson, *Enduring Art of Jade Age China: Chinese Jades of Late Neolithic Through Han Periods, Volume II* (New York: Throckmorton Fine Art, 2002), 22, fig. 12.

27 Childs-Johnson, *Enduring Art of Jade Age China, Volume II*, 23, fig. 14.

28 Childs-Johnson, *Enduring Art of Jade Age China, Volume II*, 22, fig. 13.

29 See graph J2533 at Richard Sears, *Chinese Etymology*,

<http://www.internationalscientific.org/CharacterEtymology.aspx?submitButton1=Etymology&characterInput=%E9%BE%8D>.

3.4.1 Late Western Zhou (8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.): Guo state Cemetery, Sanmenxia, west Henan

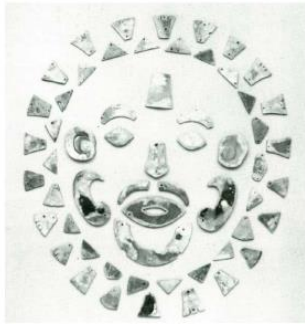


Fig. 3.53 (above) Burial mask, Zhangjiapo cemetery M303, Western Zhou  
After *Zhangjiapo Xi Zhou yuqi*, color pl. 207.

Fig. 3.54 (right) Components of a burial mask, Zhangjiapo cemetery M157, Western Zhou  
After *Zhangjiapo Xi Zhou yuqi*, color pls. 8, 9, 12.  
Top: length: 5.8cm, width: 3.6cm, thickness: 0.6cm  
Middle: length: 5.8cm, width: 3.6cm, thickness: 0.6cm  
Bottom: length: 5.1cm, width: 3.8cm, thickness: 0.6cm

Fig. 14<sup>30,31</sup>

Western Zhōu “burial masks” (Fig. 14) include comma-shaped jade components that resemble both Hongshan pendants and *magatama*, which raises the possibility that such jade forms may perhaps be more detailed originals of more versions found in later Korean and Japanese sites — originals that may have been mediated by later developments in the art of the Liáoníng region, such as the gold tigers and leopards produced there between the seventh and fifth centuries BCE (Fig. 15):



Fig. 15<sup>32</sup>

30 Qian Yang, “The Circulation of Jades in Early China (Late Neolithic-Eastern Zhou, ca. 4500–221 B.C.)” (M.A. thesis, University of Washington, 2014), 71. See also Childs-Johnson, 120, no. 27. Childs-Johnson interprets the piercings in these jade pieces as evidence that they were originally attached to wooden funeral masks, as was the case with the masks associated with Shāng dynasty rulers.

31 Yang, 75.

32 After figs. 15 and 16 in Emma C. Bunker, “Gold in the Ancient Chinese World: A Cultural Puzzle,” *Artibus Asiae* 53/1–2 (1993): 40–41.

It always is unwise to disregard or discount cultural connections between early China and its nomadic neighbors, however. Comma-shaped motifs are found in association with representations of power across a huge swath of Central and Northeast Asia as early as 600s BCE.<sup>33</sup> This area of Scythian cultural presence and influence extended from what now are Ukraine and Georgia in the west to what now are Mongolia, northeast China (Manchuria), and North Korea in the east (Fig. 16):

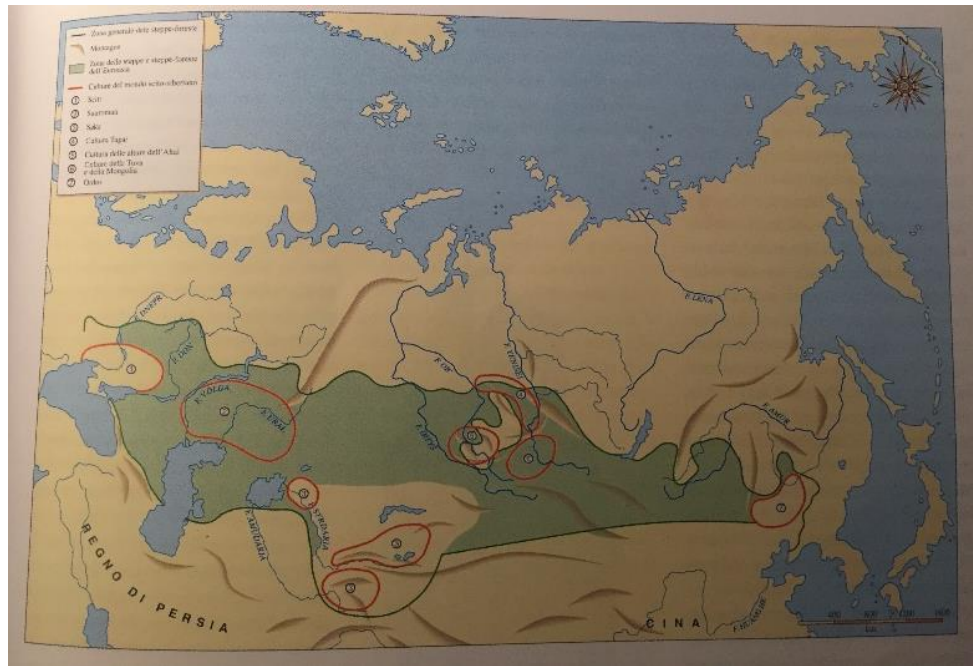


Fig. 16<sup>34</sup>

Comma-shaped pendants and brooches found in fifth-third century BCE Scythian tombs in Pazyryk, Siberia (Figs. 17 and 18), may be stylized versions of the teeth of predator animals such as tigers and bears.<sup>35</sup> In the case of the pendant seen in Fig. 18, an actual bear tooth is incorporated into the

33 Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Gyeongju: The Capital of Golden Silla* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 71.

34 Chiara Silvi Antonini and Karl Bajpakov, *Altyn adam = l'uomo d'oro : la cultura delle steppe del Kazakhstan dall'età del bronzo alle grandi migrazioni* (Rome: Bagatto libri, 1999), 63.

35 The persistence of tiger symbolism in East Asia far surpasses the duration of the animal's existence in East Asian habitats. While bears still may be found in wilderness areas of East and Northeast Asia, tigers became extinct in the region in prehistoric times, although their range extended from the Indian subcontinent to northeast Siberia during the Late

design. Unlike the nephrite or jadeite items found in early Chinese sites, comma-shaped items found in Scythian tombs in what now are Siberia (Figs. 17 and 18) and Kazakhstan (Figs. 19 and 20) tend to be made of, or with, gold:

Fig. 17<sup>36</sup>Fig. 18<sup>37</sup>Fig. 19<sup>38</sup>Fig. 20<sup>39</sup>

Much like the “jade road” and “obsidian road” trading networks mentioned earlier in this essay, in prehistoric and ancient times there also existed a “gold road” that connected Bactria (a territory corresponding to parts of modern Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan), renowned for its hordes of gold coins and other gold objects, to the Central Asian steppes and the Korean peninsula.<sup>40</sup> As Frank L.

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Pleistocene (c. 126,000–11,700 years ago) and early to mid-Holocene (from 11,650 years ago up to about 6,000 years ago). See David M. Cooper, *et al*, “Predicted Pleistocene–Holocene Range Shifts of the Tiger (*Panthera tigris*),” *Diversity and Distributions* (September 2016): 1–13.

<sup>36</sup> Pazyryk: Felt hanging fr. Scythian princely tomb, Kurgen 5 det: horseman. Fifth-third century BC. Place: Gosudarstvennyi Ermitazh (Russia). [http://library.artstor.org.berea.idm.oclc.org/asset/ARTSTOR\\_103\\_41822001378247](http://library.artstor.org.berea.idm.oclc.org/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822001378247). The red arrow indicates the location of the comma-shaped ornament in the hanging.

<sup>37</sup> Antonini and Bajpakov, 170, fig. 255.

<sup>38</sup> Antonini and Bajpakov, 205, fig. 415. This fifth-third century BCE item comes from the Zalauli site in the Almaty region of Kazakhstan.

<sup>39</sup> Antonini and Bajpakov, 202, fig. 404. This fifth-third century BCE item comes from the Zalauli site in the Almaty region of Kazakhstan.

<sup>40</sup> See Frank L. Holt, *Lost World of the Golden King: In Search of Ancient Afghanistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 1.

Holt puts it, “globalism was born in Bactria,”<sup>41</sup> and it was the commodity of gold that helped to catalyze early globalizing developments across Eurasia. However, as is well known, most early Chinese elites differed from their counterparts in West and Central Eurasia by prizing most highly not gold, but jade, even though they were consumers of gold, a metal not mined in China proper until the Táng 唐 dynasty (618–907 CE).<sup>42</sup> Until then, the ancient Chinese relied on the Bactrians and other West Eurasian societies for sourcing gold, just as they relied upon jade-producing regions in areas that were peripheral to classical Chinese cultural zones. The convergence of China’s trade in gold and jade with the prehistoric and ancient Chinese love of comma-shaped ornaments — a taste that may have originated wholly in China, or may have been influenced by Scythian cultures, or may have been the product of Sino-Scythian interactions in prehistory — appears to have led to the production of comma-shaped pendants in the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago early in the Common Era. Staffan Rosén argues that these pendants — *magatama* — “constitute another tangible evidence of the longstanding existence of the north–south axis in the North Asian–Peninsular cultural flow during the millennium here under discussion ... the northeastern cultural–religious complex, which found its perhaps most refined expression in the Silla culture of the fifth and sixth centuries.”<sup>43</sup>

As early as the eighth century BCE, comma-shaped beads and pendants (*gogok* 곡옥, *qūyù* 曲玉) began to appear in elite tombs on the Korean peninsula.<sup>44</sup> By the first century CE, comma-shaped beads and pendants were customary grave goods interred in tombs of Samhan 三韓 (Proto-Three Kingdoms, c. 100s BCE–300s CE) rulers in the Korean peninsula (Fig. 21).<sup>45</sup> Nearly contemporary tombs dated to the Yayoi 弥生 period (c. 1000 BCE–300 CE) in Japan are filled with similar objects (Fig. 22).

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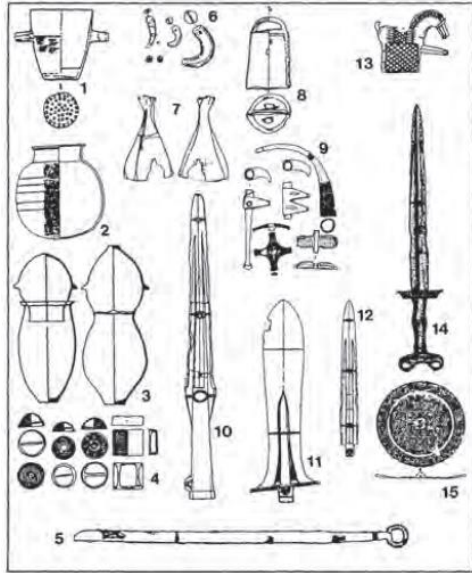
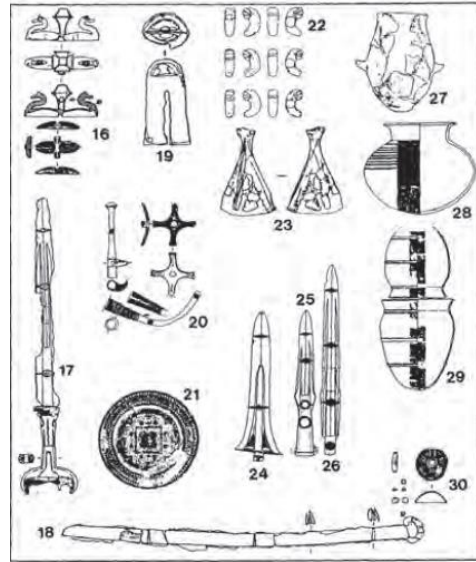
41 Holt, 2.

42 Bunker, 27.

43 Staffan Rosén, “Korea and the Silk Roads,” *The Silk Road* 6/2 (Winter/Spring 2009): 5, 6.

44 Yoko Nishimura, “The Evolution of Curved Beads (*Magatama* 勾玉/曲玉) in Jōmon Period Japan and the Development of Individual Ownership,” *Asian Perspectives* 57/1 (2018): 115.

45 Gina L. Barnes, *Archaeology of East Asia: The Rise of Civilization in China, Korea and Japan* (Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2015), 328.

Fig. 21<sup>46</sup>Fig. 22<sup>47</sup>

In the kingdom of Silla 신라 (Xīnlúo 新羅, 57 BCE–935 CE), in particular, royal tomb finds reveal a decided preference on the part of southeastern Korean elites for comma-shaped ornaments (Fig. 23), which formed part of both shamanic headgear and the crowns and girdles (Fig. 24) worn by Silla rulers.<sup>48</sup> The connections between shamanism, possibly of Scythian or other Central Asian origin, Korean rulership, and comma-shaped ornaments manifest in a particularly striking way in a pair of gold-ensheathed jade *gogok* recovered from the tomb of a Baekje 백제 (Bǎiji 百濟, 18 BCE–660 CE) ruler (Fig. 25), which strongly resemble the Scythian bear's-tooth ornament seen in Fig. 18 above.

<sup>46</sup> After fig. 13.12 in Gina L. Barnes, *Archaeology of East Asia*, 328.

<sup>47</sup> After fig. 13.12 in Barnes, *Archaeology of East Asia*, 328.

<sup>48</sup> See Rosén, 5; Kenneth B. Lee, *Korea and East Asia: The Story of a Phoenix* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 27;





Fig. 23<sup>49</sup>

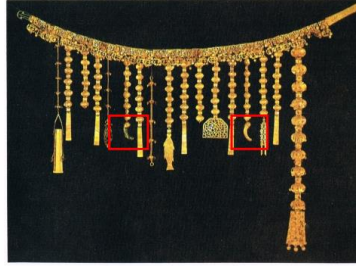


Fig. 24<sup>50</sup>



Fig. 25<sup>51</sup>

As was the case in early China, elite Silla political and religious culture does not appear to have made a very clear distinction between the executive and shamanic functions of its rulers.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps, as Arthur M. Hocart has argued, “there never were any gods without kings, or kings without gods ... [since] the earliest known religion is a belief in the divinity of kings.”<sup>53</sup> In Silla, however, queens were as likely as kings to wield the politico-religious power associated with comma-shaped treasures of jade or gold; female rulers seem to have enjoyed equality with, if not greater status than, male rulers, at least prior to the Silla state’s Confucianization under Chinese influence late in its history.<sup>54</sup>

Be that as it may, by the time that comma-shaped ornaments or *magatama* began to appear in the Japanese islands, it seems that all of the pieces of their complex and considerable Eurasian heritage were in place:

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49 Fifth c., Image: 2013. Comma-shaped Jades. [South Korea, North Gyeongsang Province; Silla (57 BCE – 935 CE); National Museum of Korea, Gyeongju] [http://library.artstor.org.berea.idm.oclc.org/asset/AWSS35953\\_35953\\_33241836](http://library.artstor.org.berea.idm.oclc.org/asset/AWSS35953_35953_33241836).

50 Angela Jean Haugen, “Mounded Tomb Cultures of Three Kingdoms Period Korea and Yamato Japan: A Study of Golden Regalia and Cultural Interactions” (M.A. thesis, Ohio State University 2010), 62.

51 *Baekje Sculpture and Crafts* (Baekje Cultural Development Institute, 1992), 178.

52 See Gilles Boileau, “Wu and Shaman,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65/2 (2002): 350–351, and Richard W. I. Guisso and Chai-shin Yu, *Shamanism: The Spirit World of Korea* (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1988), 52–59.

53 *Kingship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 7.

54 Sarah Milledge Nelson, *Shamans, Queens, and Figurines: The Development of Gender Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2016), 79–82, 84.

- a deep symbolic association of both comma-shaped forms and jade materials with power in multiple forms — animal, vital, royal, and supernatural
- an extensive and longstanding Eurasian trade network that connected Central Asian steppe cultures with both jade- and gold-producing regions across Asia and emergent societies in peninsular and insular East Asia
- an institution of shamanic rulership that emphasized female authority in Silla Korea — arguably, the most significant early cultural influence on emerging polities in Japan during the late Yayoi and Kofun 古墳 periods (c. 300–538 CE)

That early regimes in the Japanese archipelago would become associated with jade artifacts is not surprising. Jadeite was quarried and worked in the Itoi 糸魚 River basin of coastal northwestern Honshū 本州 (more or less parallel with Silla territory) in what now is Niigata 新潟 prefecture as early as 3000 BCE, during the early Jōmon 縄文 period (c. 4000–2500 BCE).<sup>55</sup> This is the chronological point at which *magatama* — comma-shaped jadeite beads or pendants — begin to appear in the Japanese archaeological record. However, they do so in ways that differ from their later, more significant role in early Japanese culture: they are found in residential sites, not in elite tombs, and they are few in number, both in terms of how many might be found in a particular domestic site as well as in terms of how many such sites include *magatama*. What *magatama* meant to early Jōmon people is unknown; what is clear is that *magatama* were rare and few at this time, and were not differentiated from ordinary household life. Nishimura Yoko 西村陽子 argues that the sudden burgeoning of *magatama* in late Jōmon (c. 1500–900 BCE) tombs is best explained as the result of a shift in their meaning from quotidian, if scarce, domestic items to abundant and individualized markers of social status suitable for offering as grave goods.<sup>56</sup> This shift in meaning, in turn, may have been the result of newfound affluence that owed its origin to a sudden infusion of migrants and material culture from the Korean peninsula near the end of the Jōmon period: “The abundance and the presence of these body ornaments in individual graves

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<sup>55</sup> Ilona Bausch, “Jade, Amber, Obsidian and Serpentinite: The Social Context of Exotic Stone Exchange Networks in Central Japan during the Late Middle Jōmon Period” (Ph.D. thesis, Durham University, 2003), 49.

<sup>56</sup> Nishimura, 145–146.

indicate that the Late Jōmon inhabitants of northern Japan enjoyed a relatively comfortable material culture.<sup>57</sup> *Magatama* and the jadeite required to produce them became so popular and available, in fact, that some jadeite quarries in what now is Niigata prefecture appear to have hoarded their supply in order to increase demand for their product, which seems to have greatly enriched the local elites, who then were able to assemble massive ritual structures of wood and stone near the production site.<sup>58</sup> Other *magatama*-producing regions, such as Izumo 出雲, in what now is Shimane 島根 prefecture at the opposite extreme of the western Honshū coast from Niigata, enjoyed a monopoly on *magatama* and other precious artifacts of worked stone and glass well into the Nara 奈良 period (710–784 CE), becoming a major center of *kami* 神 (Shintō 神道 deity) worship and thus political power in the process.<sup>59</sup> Elite tombs from the Middle Yayoi through the Kofun period contain a great many *magatama* alongside artifacts of both Korean and Chinese origin, such as ritual swords and mirrors associated with Daoist traditions in mainland East Asia (Fig. 26), all of which eventually became symbols of the unifying Yamato 大和 polity that emerged in what now is Nara 奈良 prefecture in central Honshū around the end of the Kofun period.<sup>60</sup>

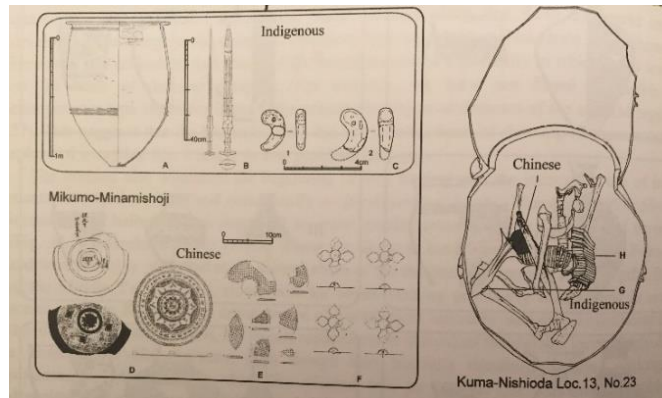
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57 Nishimura, 146. On the infusion of Korean peninsular culture and people into the Japanese islands, beginning around 900 BCE, and its consequences, see Keiji Imamura, *Prehistoric Japan: New Perspectives on Insular East Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 209–211, and Edwin O. Reischauer and John K. Fairbank, *East Asia: The Great Tradition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), 471.

58 Bausch, 58.

59 On Izumo's *magatama* monopoly, see Richard Torrance, "The Infrastructure of the Gods: Izumo in the Yayoi and Kofun Periods," *Japan Review* 29 (2016): 29. On Izumo's politico-religious significance as a Shintō center, see Michiko Y. Aoki, "Records of the Customs and Land of Izumo," in *Religions of Japan in Practice*, ed. George J. Tanabe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 113–116.

60 Mark J. Hudson, "Rice, Bronze, and Chieftains: An Archaeology of Yayoi Ritual," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 19/2–3 (June–September 1992): 172.

Fig. 26<sup>61</sup>

By the Kofun period, elite tombs began to contain both *magatama* strung on necklaces (Fig. 27) and *haniwa* 埴輪 (terracotta figurines) depicted wearing such necklaces (Fig. 28):

Fig. 27<sup>62</sup>Fig. 28<sup>63</sup>


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61 Koji Mizoguchi, "The Yayoi and Kofun Periods of Japan," in *Handbook of East and Southeast Asian Archaeology*, ed. Junko Habu, Peter V. Lape, and John W. Olsen (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2017), 572, fig. 34.7. Note the jadeite *magatama* alongside early Hàn 漢 dynasty *jiàn* 鑑 (bronze mirrors) and *bi* 璧 (nephrite disks) in this Middle Yayoi 弥生 (c. 100 BCE–100 CE) jar burial site. Mizoguchi identifies the sword found in this tomb as "indigenous," but other scholars argue for its Korean origin.

62 ca. seventh century. Necklace with Claw-Shaped Beads (*Magatama*). Jewelry. Place: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <http://www.metmuseum.org>. [http://library.artstor.org/berea.idm.oclc.org/asset/SS7731421\\_7731421\\_11278775](http://library.artstor.org/berea.idm.oclc.org/asset/SS7731421_7731421_11278775).

63 Nishimura, 117, fig. 3.

Gina L. Barnes hypothesizes that “the sudden exuberant production of *magatama* ... in the early Kofun period”<sup>64</sup> is related to the symbolic association, well-established in early China, between tigers’ teeth and the Daoist deity known as *Xīwángmǔ* 西王母 (“Queen Mother of the West”). Like jade, *Xīwángmǔ* was connected to both immortality and regions west of China. In fact, there is strong evidence for the theory that *Xīwángmǔ* was a Chinese amalgam of mixed Western Eurasian heritage: (Shakyamuni Buddha (from what now is India, the divine queen *Nanā/Nanania* (from what are now Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq), and the mother goddess *Cybele* (from what is now Turkey). Brought to China from the western terminus of the Silk Roads just prior to the Common Era, it seems that these disparate figures were integrated with the cult of a female directional deity that dated back to *Shāng* times and was revived during the Warring States period.<sup>65</sup> Notably, *Nanā/Nanania* not only was a divine queen, but she also was associated with feline predators (particularly lions) and lunar crescent motifs that look rather like *magatama* (see Fig. 29).<sup>66</sup> By the late *Hàn* dynasty, *Xīwángmǔ* also was associated with lunar symbolism and was paired with a solar male counterpart, *Dōngwánggōng* 東王公 (King Father of the East), although she remained the primary deity in this pairing.<sup>67</sup>

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64 Gina L. Barnes, “A Hypothesis for Early Kofun Rulership,” *Japan Review* 27 (2014): 15.

65 See Carter, 107–109, 116–122, and 125–126, and Elfriede R. Knauer, “The Queen Mother of the West: A Study of the Influence of Western Prototypes on the Iconography of the Taoist Deity,” in *Contact and Exchange in the Ancient World*, ed. Victor H. Mair (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006), 62–63.

66 Carter, 123. Carter speculates that *Nanā/Nanania*’s lunar crescent motif was borrowed from the cult of *Artemis*, the Greek goddess of the moon, wild animals, and hunting.

67 Knauer, 63.

Fig. 29<sup>68</sup>Fig. 30<sup>69</sup>

Like the queens of Silla, *Xīwángmǔ* represented a fusion of sacred and political authority in the person of a shamanic female ruler. According to chapter two of the *Shānhǎijīng* 山海經 (*Classic of Mountains and Seas*, a kind of mythological tour of Chinese geography compiled early on in the Hàn dynasty), she is even said to reside on “Jade Mountain” (Yùshān 玉山), elsewhere identified as Mount Kunlun (Kūnlún Shān 崑崙山)<sup>70</sup>:

Another 350 *lǐ* 里 [approximately 175 kilometers] to the west is a mountain called Jade Mountain. This is the place where the Queen Mother of the West dwells.... Her appearance is like that of a human, with a leopard’s tail and tigers’ teeth.... She wears a *shèng* 胜 headdress.<sup>71</sup>

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68 Fig. 15 in Carter, 123. This second-century CE depiction of the goddess Nanā/Nanania was engraved on a Parthian clay jar found at Assur, Iraq.

69 From fig. 1.3 in Nicholas Zufferey, “Traces of the Silk Road in Han-Dynasty Iconography: Questions and Hypotheses,” in *The Journey of Maps of Images on the Silk Road*, eds. Philippe Forêt and Andreas Kaplony (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 21.

70 Yoshikawa Tadao 吉川忠夫, “Xiwang mu,” in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), II: 1119–1120.

71 Qtd. in Suzanne E. Cahill, *Transcendence and Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 15–16.

Late Hàn dynasty depictions of Xīwángmǔ (Fig. 30) typically include a *shèng* headdress<sup>72</sup> atop her head, which closely resembles the headgear worn by *magatama*-bedecked *haniwa* “shamans” such as the one seen in Fig. 28 above, as well as on the Parthian/Scythian goddess Nanā/Nanania in Fig. 29. The *magatama* themselves already bear a striking resemblance to the tigers’ teeth with which Xīwángmǔ was associated in Chinese lore, not to mention the lunar crescents seen in the iconography of Western mother goddesses.

When the first Chinese chronicler to describe Japan, the Western Jìn 晉 dynasty official Chén Shòu 陳壽 (233–297), discussed the islands’ “ruler,” he did so using terminology and imagery that is redolent of both Xīwángmǔ and Daoism. In the *Wōrén zhuán* 倭人傳 (*Account of the Dwarfs*) section of his *Wèizhì* 魏志 (*Records of Wèi*), Chén famously describes a woman called Bēimíhū 卑彌呼 (Japanese *Himiko* or *Pimiko*, c. 170–248 CE), who he says ruled the land of *Wō* 倭 (J. *Wa*) using “magic and sorcery [*guǐdào* 鬼道, J. *kidō*].”<sup>73</sup> By the third century CE, the Chinese had already been curious about the Japanese archipelago for some time. In 219 BCE, the emperor Qín Shǐhuáng is said to have sent the *fāngshì* 方士 (occult specialist) Xú Fú 徐福 in search of *shényào* 神藥 (“divine medicine”),<sup>74</sup> in pursuit of which he is thought to have explored the fabled eastern islands inhabited by Daoist immortals. There is no evidence, however, that either of Xú Fú’s two recorded voyages resulted in contact with Japan, much less discovery of immortality elixirs.<sup>75</sup> There is, however, evidence which suggests that at least some aspects of Daoist traditions — deity cults, apotropaic practices, even liturgical and scriptural texts — arrived in Japan as “stowaways” (that is, as haphazardly, episodically transmitted items of cultural exchange) closer to the time of Himiko/Pimiko if not Xú Fú.<sup>76</sup> Some have speculated that the distinctive

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72 Knauer argues that what appears to be a headdress, labeled as *shèng*, is actually a vestige of the high-backed throne on which Western prototypes of this mother goddess, such as Cybele and Nanā/Nanania, are depicted as sitting. See Knauer, 75.

73 Trans. Ryusaku Tsunoda, in *Japan in the Chinese Dynastic Histories: Later Han through Ming Dynasties*, ed. Ryusaku Tsunoda and Carrington C. Goodrich (South Pasadena, CA: P. D. and Ione Perkins, 1951), 13.

74 See *Shǐjì* 史記, ch. 6 (*Qínshǐhuáng běnjì* 秦始皇本紀), sec. 45. A similar episode in ch. 118 (*Huáinán héngshān lièzhuàn* 淮南衡山列傳), sec. 19, describes the object of Xú Fú’s quest as “divine alien things” (*shényìwù* 神異物).

75 J. Edward Kidder, Jr., “The Earliest Societies in Japan,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan, volume 1: Ancient Japan*, ed. Delmer M. Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 82.

76 Michael Como, “Daoist Deities in Ancient Japan: Household Deities, Jade Women and Popular Religious Practice,” in

royal tomb mounds after which Japan's Kofun period is named were introduced in conjunction with Chinese contacts during this era, while more cautious researchers conclude that all that really can be said about the third century in Japan is that it was a period of "pivotal importance ... in Japanese religious history."<sup>77</sup>

Be that as it may, Chén Shòu's use of the phrase *guǐdào* to describe the ideological apparatus of an exotic female ruler is intriguing. Like *fāngshì* and *wū* 巫 ("shaman," but probably better understood as "spirit-medium"), *guǐdào* is not a neutral term; rather, it is an epithet — a term used "to express mild disapproval of people unlike oneself ... varieties of religious operative that well-born authors despise."<sup>78</sup> This epithet, for which the standard English translation now is "Ghost Daoism,"<sup>79</sup> combines two notoriously nebulous terms: *guǐ* 鬼 (which usually denotes a disembodied human spirit, often vengeful or malevolent)<sup>80</sup> and *dào* 道 (which runs the semantic gamut from mere roadway to concepts as grandiose as a religious tradition or the cosmic source of all being and meaning). By the late Hàn dynasty, *guǐdào* seems to have become a catch-all term used to describe ideas, images, institutions, and practices related to the pursuit of immortality through both architectural and ritual manipulation of symbolic imagery and space in elite tombs, as seen in the famous T-shaped silk banner found in Mǎwángduī 馬王堆 Hàn Tomb No. 1 as well as in numerous examples of late Hàn mortuary art and architecture.<sup>81</sup> By

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*Daoism in Japan: Chinese Traditions and Their Influence on Japanese Religious Culture*, ed. Jeffrey L. Richey (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 26–27.

77 See Ishino Hironobu 石野博信, "Rites and Rituals of the Kofun Period," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 19/2–3 (June–September 1992): 212–213, and Hudson, "Rice, Bronze, and Chieftains," 174–175.

78 Nathan Sivin, review of Fabrizio Pregadio, *Great Clarity: Daoism and Alchemy in Early Medieval China*, in *Journal of Chinese Studies* 48 (2008): 495.

79 This may be due to the influence of fifth-century compilers of tales involving "anomalies" (*zhiguài* 志怪), who used *guǐdào* to describe the realm of troublesome "hungry ghosts" (*èguǐ* 餓鬼), where unfortunate, disembodied spirits were thought to wander unhappily between Buddhist rebirths.

80 Miura Kunio 三浦國雄, "gui," in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), I: 458. See also Donald Harper, "A Chinese Demonography of the Third Century B.C.," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45/2 (Dec. 1985): 459–498.

81 For both a summary of previous scholarship on this banner and a new interpretation of it, see Eugene Y. Wang, "Ascend to Heaven or Stay in the Tomb? Paintings in Mawangdui Tomb 1 and the Virtual Ritual of Revival in Second-Century B.C.E.



the third century CE, *guǐdào* appears to have taken on a more precise sectarian and political meaning, denoting the Daoist sect known variously as the Celestial Masters (Tiānshī Dào 天師道) or Way of the Five Pecks of Rice (Wǔdǒumǐ Dào 五斗米道) — the Sìchuān 四川-based religio-political movement led by male members of the Zhāng 張 family, who themselves seem to have used *guǐdào* to describe “popular” (*sú* 俗) or “perverse” (*yín* 淫) occult activity, said to be carried out by women and blamed for causing epidemics.<sup>82</sup> Chén Shòu, however, attributes the Zhāngs’ supernatural power to the *guǐdào* taught to founding theocrat Zhāng Lǔ 張魯 (d. 216 CE) by his mother.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps there is some confusion here in the sources, and it is unclear whether these meanings were exclusive of one another, even for one group of users. Nonetheless, it is fascinating to ponder how and why this particular epithet — used both by the Chinese imperial state to describe a subversive ideology and by proponents of that ideology to describe their own subversives — happen to come to the mind of Chén Shòu when the occasion arose for him to describe the topsy-turvy heterotopia of Wō/Wa, where a mysterious woman was said to rule over a primitive paradise using supernatural means. Barnes argues for a connection between *guǐdào* and Xīwángmǔ as a partial explanation of why both the Chinese and the Japanese chose to represent Bēimíhū/Himiko/Pimiko as a mystical, vaguely-Daoist theocrat.<sup>84</sup> Chén also mentions that Bēimíhū/Himiko/Pimiko received one hundred Chinese-made “deity-beast mirrors” (*shénshòujìng* 神獸鏡, J. *shinjūkyō*), presumably in order to cement the tributary relationship between China and what someday would become Japan. Among extant mirrors discovered in Kofun period sites as well as in

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China,” in *Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought*, ed. P. J. Ivanhoe and Amy Olberding (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 37–84. On *guǐdào* as an Eastern Hàn religious movement, see Jiāng Shēng 姜生, *Hàn dìguó de yíchǎn: Hàn guǐ kǎo* 漢帝國的遺產：漢鬼考 (Beijing: Kēxué chūbǎn shè 科学出版社, 2016).

82 See Miura, 459; Christine Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face: Scripture, Ritual, and Iconographic Exchange in Medieval China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008), 66 n. 30; and Thomas E. Smith, *Declarations of the Perfected, Part One: Setting Scripts and Images into Motion* (St. Petersburg, FL: Three Pines Press, 2013), 52 n. 130.

83 “以鬼道教民自號師君 By means of *guǐdào*, he instructed the people, styling himself “Teacher and Lord.” See section 1 of the *Zhāng Lǔ zhuán* 張魯傳 in the *Wèizhì* as well as section 1 of the *Líu’èrmù zhuán* 劉二牧傳 in the *Shǔshū* 蜀書, which describes Zhāng’s mother.

84 Gina L. Barnes, *State Formation in Japan: Emergence of a 4th-Century Ruling Elite* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 178, 191–192.

contemporaneous Chinese caches, *Xīwángmǔ* is a consistent and prominent decorative motif.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the appeal of Daoist ideas, institutions, and practices to both Chinese and Japanese during the third century appears to have been strongly related to concerns about illness, in particular the epidemic diseases that tend to accompany cross-cultural exchanges — disequilibrating episodes that everywhere and always tend to enhance the power of regimes or those who would supplant them.<sup>86</sup>

The earliest Japanese chronicle, *Kojiki* 古事記 (*Record of Ancient Matters*, c. 712 CE), does not mention Himiko/Pimiko or discuss any connection between *Xīwángmǔ* and Japanese rulers. It does, however, list mirrors and *magatama* among the sacred objects used to entice the *kami* to inhabit a special tree.<sup>87</sup> By the medieval period, at which time esoteric Buddhism had supplanted *kami* worship (not quite yet transformed into Shintō at that point) as Japan's premier religious tradition, a *magatama* (alongside a mirror and a sword) was understood not only as a sacred emblem of imperial power, but also as Japan's manifestation of the “wish-fulfilling jewel” (J. *hōju* 宝珠, literally “precious bead”) of Buddhist lore as well as a kind of Daoist visual parable about the relationship between *yīn* 陰 and *yáng* 陽:

[T]he Tendai 天台 monk Jihen 慈遍 (fl. fourteenth century) ... wrote ... that there is a direct connection between the [imperial] regalia, the wish-fulfilling jewel, and Buddha relics.... The jewel [*yasakani no magatama* 八尺瓊勾玉, one of the three items in the imperial regalia] ... constitutes an object that accords with the intentions of the original *kami*. In its *yang* aspect, it rains myriad gems from the sky without exhaustion, and is a transformation of the relics of Buddha of old. In its *yin* aspect, it is a “sea jewel” said to be possessed by dragon kings. The wish-fulfilling jewel, in other words, unites *yin* and *yang* and is thus identical with the one mind of heaven and earth and, uniting the

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85 Barnes, “A Hypothesis for Early Kofun Rulership,” 12–13.

86 On Daoism, healing, and the epidemiological aspects of Sino-Japanese contacts, see Como, “Daoist Deities in Ancient Japan,” 26–27, and Miura, I: 459. On the role of disease in shaping culture and history more generally, see William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1976).

87 See Eugene R. Swanger and K. Peter Takayama, “A Preliminary Examination of the ‘Omamori’ Phenomenon,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 40/2 (1981): 238, and Donald L. Philippi, trans., *Kojiki* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1969), 83.

powers of the inner and outer shrine of Ise 伊勢 [to the sun goddess and imperial ancestor, Amaterasu 天照], is only passed down to the descendants of the royal line.<sup>88</sup>

Still later, the ascetic, healer, worshiper of Mt. Fuji 富士山, and syncretic religious teacher Kakugyō 角行 (1541–1646) taught that human sexual intercourse united

the sun and the moon, resulting in the creation of a sacred jewel (*magatama*), which is at once a child and the female cosmic deity Sengen 浅間 Bosatsu (bodhisattva), the representation of Mt. Fuji. He also celebrated menstruation, which had a cosmic significance in connection with lunar cycles, and ... expressly told women that they should not refrain from attending meetings of his devotees because of menstruation.<sup>89</sup>

The Japanese conflation of *magatama* with female power, the spirits of nature, and exotic antiquity may have found its culmination in the contemporary commercialization of Himiko/Pimiko. As described by Laura Miller, the ancient Japanese shaman-queen has become a popular culture icon, used to brand and market enterprises and products as diverse as the Jade Garden Himiko's Garden café and shop near the Hashihaka Kofun 箸墓古墳 (a third century CE burial mound in Nara prefecture that is popularly regarded as the tomb of Himiko/Pimiko), *magatama* (produced in Niigata, naturally) sold at Shintō shrines as *omamori* 御守 (amulets — see Fig. 31), female diviners who claim to be Himiko/Pimiko reborn, and even *manga* 漫画 (comic books) that depict Himiko/Pimiko wearing *magatama* and something like a *sheng* headdress, looking for all the world like a cross between a *haniwa*

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88 Brian O. Ruppert, “Pearl in the Shrine: A Genealogy of the Buddhist Jewel of the Japanese Sovereign,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29/1–2 (Spring 2002): 22. According to Daniel Clarence Holtom's 1928 account, the *yasakani no magatama* was the only original item among the imperial regalia that still was extant at the time of the Shōwa 昭和 emperor's enthronement in 1926. See Holtom, *The Japanese Enthronement Ceremonies, with an Account of the Imperial Regalia* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1996), 55.

89 Helen Hardacre, “Conflict between Shugendō and the New Religions of Bakumatsu Japan,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 21/2–3 (June–September 1994): 161.

shamaness and Xīwángmǔ (Figs. 32 and 33).<sup>90</sup> Perhaps most bizarre is the character of Toga Himiko 渡我被身子, who appears in Horikoshi Kōhei 堀越 耕平’s *manga* series *Boku no Hirō Akademia* 僕のヒーローアカデミア (My Hero Academia) and its *anime* アニメ (animated cartoon) adaptation (Fig. 34).<sup>91</sup> Although this Himiko is a villain rather than a heroine, her abilities include a vaguely Daoist shape-shifting power, and she wears a sort of necklace composed of tooth-like knives that is somewhat reminiscent of *magatama* necklaces and invokes the terrifying aspect of Artemis and other possible prototypes for the mother goddess imagery that reached early Japan from China via Daoist traditions.

Fig. 31<sup>92</sup>Fig. 32<sup>93</sup>Fig. 33<sup>94</sup>Fig. 34<sup>95</sup>

“The meaning of objects,” remarks Barnes, “can change through time in different social

90 “Searching for Charisma: Queen Himiko,” in *Diva Nation: Female Icons from Japanese Cultural History*, ed. Laura Miller and Rebecca Copeland (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 71–72.

91 “Himiko Toga,” *My Hero Academia Wiki*, [https://bokunoheroacademia.fandom.com/wiki/Himiko\\_Toga](https://bokunoheroacademia.fandom.com/wiki/Himiko_Toga).

92 Contemporary Japanese depiction of Tomanari/Tama no oya no Mikoto 玉祖命 or Ame no Akarutama 天明玉命, deity of jade, engaged in *magatama* production. <https://yaoyoro.net/玉祖命.html>.

93 Fig. 13 in Miller, “Searching for Charisma: Queen Himiko,” 52.

94 Cover of an historical *manga* depicting Himiko/Pimiko with *magatama* necklace, Chinese mirror, and stylized headdress. Photo from the collection of the author.

95 [https://bokunoheroacademia.fandom.com/wiki/Himiko\\_Toga?file=Himiko\\_Toga\\_Villain\\_Costume\\_Profile.png](https://bokunoheroacademia.fandom.com/wiki/Himiko_Toga?file=Himiko_Toga_Villain_Costume_Profile.png)

contexts."<sup>96</sup> Consider the following set of images (Fig. 35), each of which is familiar to contemporary Japanese audiences:



Fig. 35

The *magatama* could easily be a schematic representation of a Scythian bear's-tooth pendant, or a Hongshan jade, or a *gogok* from a Silla shaman's or queen's diadem. The *mitsudomoe* — three *magatama* swimming in a spiral, if you will — could be interpreted as an iconographic depiction of the Daoist *Sānqīng* 三清 ("Three Pure Ones" who function as a kind of cosmological trinity),<sup>97</sup> or as a Japanese cousin of the Celtic triskelion motif.<sup>98</sup> And while the *taikyoku* or *futatsudomoe* is easily recognized as a classical Chinese depiction of cosmic balance, in its contrasting halves one might also glimpse a pair of twinned *magatama*. None of these identifications is necessarily mistaken, but each requires a specific cultural and historical context in which to make sense of what one sees (or thinks that one sees). If one regards a given motif or object as the pure product of only one cultural and historical context, then it becomes impossible to see within it possibilities that belong to other such contexts. But if one disregards these multiple contexts, one runs the risk of blinding oneself to the very

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96 Barnes, "A Hypothesis for Early Kofun Rulership," 15.

97 See Joseph Adler, syllabus for Religious Studies 472 (Daoism), Kenyon College, <https://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Fac/Adler/Reln472/Purities.htm>.

98 See Marie E. P. Koenig, "Celtic Coins: A New Interpretation," *Archaeology* 19/1 (January 1966): 25–27.

real and complicated tableau that leads from both early China and ancient Central Asian steppe cultures through the Korean peninsula into the Japanese archipelago, culminating in the stunningly multivalent objects known as *magatama*. And even this way of visualizing the story told by these stones simplifies the facts, for seeing both early China and early Japan as distinct but connected zones of a much larger Eastern Eurasian pre-modern cultural arena necessarily entails connections to regions and institutions outside of Eastern Eurasia proper: the jade-producing areas of Southeast Asia and Turkestan, the shamanic traditions of Siberian nomads, and perhaps even the Celtic migrations from Central Asia in prehistoric times. In other words, a history of *magatama* — however tentative or speculative it must be — can provide a kind of micro-history of Eastern Eurasian cultural exchange.

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