The Evolution of Japanese Culture: Religion's Transformation in the Ancient Eastern Provinces†

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Keywords: settlement sites (*shūraku iseki* 集落遺跡), clan (*shizoku* 氏族), ink-inscribed pottery (*bokusho doki* 墨書土器), transgressions (*tsumi* 罪), Buddhism (*bukkyō* 仏教), intergroup networks (*shūdan kan nettowāku* 集団間ネットワーク)

Author's Statement

Joseph Henrich has argued, from the perspective of cultural evolution, that the formation of a distinctive psychological orientation in Western Europe was closely connected with the world religion of Christianity. Was this phenomenon limited to Western Europe alone? What was the case in the geographically distant Japanese archipelago at the eastern edge of Asia? This paper examines the conditions there from the fifth through the eleventh centuries. Adopting analytical perspectives similar to Henrich's—namely, the transformation of ancient clans, the presence of a literate stratum, and contact with a world religion—it analyzes archaeological evidence from excavated ancient settlements to clarify one aspect of the formation of Japanese culture.

Introduction

Humans have created diverse cultures and societies across the globe as groups form and expand. Over the course of this long history, they have repeatedly made cultural choices in response to changing circumstances, eventually giving rise to the complex societies of today. In recent years, it has been argued that religion was closely involved in these processes of cultural and social transformation.

From the perspective of cultural evolution, Joseph Henrich argues that, from the ninth century onward, the diffusion of Christian doctrine in Western Europe led to the

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formation of a distinctive psychological orientation that emphasizes individual rights and responsibilities and universal law. He describes this process as follows. First, from the late eighth to the early ninth century, during the reign of Charlemagne, the Carolingian Frankish kingdom adopted a form of state closely allied with the Christian Church. As Christian doctrine spread, marriage norms based on monogamy and the prohibition of consanguineous marriage—what Henrich terms the Marriage and Family Program (MFP)—became entrenched. As a result, in territories under Frankish rule, ancient clans grounded in kinship were dismantled, and major transformations occurred in clan structures. Second, with the dissolution of ancient clans, human groups became more fluid, market economies developed, and cities emerged and flourished as voluntary associations. Third, the spread of the Bible following the Reformation in the sixteenth century rapidly increased the literate population and promoted the development of the corpus callosum in the human brain. Through this process of cultural evolution from the ninth century onward, Henrich argues, Western Europe's distinctive psychology—characterized by an emphasis on individual rights and responsibilities and universal law—was formed.[1]

Was this situation unique to Western Europe alone? Or was the situation entirely different in the far-removed Japanese archipelago of East Asia? Unfortunately, there has been almost no historical research that analyzes the relationship between cultural formation and religion in the Japanese archipelago from the perspective of cultural evolution. This article primarily considers archaeological evidence to do so, looking back to antiquity and adopting perspectives similar to Henrich's—namely, the stability and fluidity of human groups, the presence of a literate stratum, and the relationship between local religious beliefs/practices and world religions.

This undertaking is not limited to a simple comparison between Japanese and European cultures. Rather, it also seeks to elucidate and test the mechanisms by which humanity has formed adaptive cultures in response to environmental and social change. In what follows, I aim to present one pattern of cultural formation in East Asia.

1. Analytical Perspectives Based on Group Size, Group Character, and Intergroup Networks

Group Size and Character

An important indicator for considering the relationship between cultural formation and religion is the size and character of human groups, as well as the configuration of networks between groups. Robin Dunbar has pointed out that "there is a natural

[1] Henrich, *The WEIRDest People in the World*.

progression from informal religions in small-scale societies to formal religions in large-scale societies involved."[2]

When human groups are classified by size and character, the most natural and fundamental form is the clan or kinship group bound by blood ties. Formed through biological reproduction between males and females and strongly united by altruistic behavior within the kin group, such groups can be regarded as the basic unit of human society. At the opposite extreme are large, artificial, and ideational groups—such as states and cities—bound together by shared religions, values, or ideologies. Religion plays a particularly significant role in the formation of ancient states,[3] and the relationship between the Carolingian Frankish kingdom and Christianity highlighted by Henrich fits squarely within this pattern.

Between these two extremes lies the settlement (village). While settlements are grounded in clans and kinship groups, as multiple kin groups come together and grow in scale, they acquire aspects of artificial and ideational groups that share religion and values. In archaeology, settlement sites provide the most basic data for understanding the size and character of human groups. Moreover, in considering what binds individuals together to form groups, it is also necessary to examine the influence of the natural environment on human subsistence and production.

Intergroup Networks

Large-scale societies cannot form without networks connecting different human groups, and how these networks are structured fundamentally determines what kind of society emerges. It has been argued that, in the ancient Japanese archipelago, the polity of Wa 倭 functioned as a network of allied chieftains during the early stage of state formation. In this network, the political entity centered in the Kinki 近畿 region—the Yamato kingship—and its paramount leader integrated and coordinated the groups organized by local chieftains.[4]

With respect to the directionality of such intergroup networks, one may distinguish between networks characterized by unidirectional, dominating, and prescriptive control, and those characterized by bidirectional, freer interactions between groups. The selected form appears to be influenced by natural and geopolitical conditions. In the polity of Wa, the chieftain alliance network gradually underwent organizational development: by the fifth century, the title of "Great King who rules all under Heaven" (*ame no shita shiroshimesu ōkimi* 治天下大王) and an early bureaucratic system known as *hitosei* 人制

[2] Dunbar, *How Religion Evolved and Why It Endures*, p. 191.
[3] Torrey, *Evolving Brains, Emerging Gods*.
[4] Mizoguchi, "Okinoshima saishi no kinō to hen'yō."

had been established,[5] and by the latter half of the seventh century, a *ritsuryō* 律令 state centered on the emperor (*tennō* 天皇) had come into being. Within the archipelago, this marked a transition to a dominating and prescriptive network with the imperial court at its apex. This transformation corresponded to changes in the East Asian international order following the establishment of the powerful unified Tang 唐 empire on the Chinese continent in 618, after which regional politics came under strong Tang influence.

How, then, did religion act upon human group size and character, and intergroup networks, to form "culture" as a set of norms governing human behavior? To explore this question, this study examines the case of the southern Kantō 関東 region—specifically, the area from the former provinces of Kazusa 上総 and Shimōsa 下総 (present-day northern Chiba Prefecture). Since the late twentieth century, large-scale excavations associated with land development have been conducted successively in this region, clarifying the relationships among settlements, government offices, and temples. At the same time, a substantial accumulation of written materials—most notably ink-inscribed pottery—has advanced our understanding of ancient regional structures.

2. Settlements and Buddhist Networks in the Ancient Eastern Provinces

State Formation and Buddhism

In the latter half of the seventh century, the Yamato kingship introduced the Tang dynasty's legal system, known as the *ritsuryō* codes, initiating a new phase of state formation. The title of the ruler shifted from *ōkimi* to *tennō*. A wooden tablet excavated from the north–south ditch (SD05) at the Asukaike 飛鳥池 site in Nara Prefecture bears the inscription "天皇聚□〔露カ〕弘寅□," and based on associated wooden tablets, its date falls within the reign of Emperor Tenmu 天武.[6] This indicates that by the 670s, during Tenmu's reign, the title *tennō* was already in use. By the early eighth century, the country name "Nihon" (日本) had been established,[7] and a *ritsuryō* state encompassing the Japanese archipelago had taken shape. The ancient *ritsuryō* state adopted Buddhism to spiritually protect the state (*chingo kokka* 鎮護国家). From the late seventh through the eighth century, temples serving as centers of Buddhist beliefs and practices were constructed inside the capital and elsewhere. From the late seventh to the early eighth century, district officials (*gunji* 郡司) established ritual spaces and early district temples adjacent to district offices (*gūke* 郡家), conducted lectures on the *Golden Light Sutra* (*Konkōmyōkyō* 金光明経), which preached the merits of protecting the state, and performed rites of releasing living beings (*hōjō* 放生) based on the *Sutra of the Merits of the*

[5] Tanaka, "Wa go-ō to rettō shihai."
[6] Nara Bunkazai Kenkyūjo, *Asuka/Fujiwara-kyū hakkutsu chōsa shutsudo mokkan gaihō (13)*.
[7] Ōtsu, *Tennō no rekishi 10*.

Former Vows of Master of Medicine, Beryl Radiance Tathāgata (Yakushi rurikō nyorai hongan kudoku-kyō 薬師瑠璃光如来本願功徳経; below, *Medicine Master Sutra*), praying for the peace and stability of the state. By the mid-eighth century, the *ritsuryō* government further advanced policies of state protection through Buddhism by constructing provincial temples for monks (*kokubun sōji* 国分僧寺) and nuns (*kokubun niji* 国分尼寺) adjacent to provincial capitals. Early district temples and provincial temples across Japan were closely integrated with state administration and functioned as bases for protecting both the state and local communities from the likes of natural disasters and warfare through Buddhist beliefs and practices.[8]

Interregional Networks in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries

Analyses of settlement and temple sites suggest that from the mid-eighth century—when provincial temples came into existence—through the ninth century (from the Nara period into the early Heian period), Shimōsa Provincial Temple and early district temples were linked by networks along which monks, nuns, and local officials traveled in the Kantō region's Shimōsa Province (present-day northern Chiba).[9] These inter-temple connections can be confirmed through the distribution of round eaves tiles (*nokimarugawara* 軒丸瓦) of the same lineage. The eaves tiles with a palmette motif (*hōssōge-mon nokimarugawara* 宝相華文軒丸瓦) and flat eaves tiles with a mirroring arabesque motif (*kinsei karakusa-mon nokihiragawara* 均整唐草文軒平瓦) used at Shimōsa Provincial Temple are also found at a small former temple at the site of Ōtsukamae 大塚前 temple in Inba 印幡/印旛 District and at Ryūshōin 龍正院, an early district temple in Katori 香取 District. Conversely, the Yamada-dera 山田寺 style (single-petaled, eight-lobed lotus; *tanben hachiyō rengemon* 単弁八葉蓮華文) *nokimarugawara* used at Ryūkakuji 龍角寺, an early district temple in Hanyū 埴生 District, are also found at the site of Yōkaichiba-Ōdera 八日市場大寺 in Sōsa 迊嵯/匝瑳 District.[10] Roof tiles of the same lineage are thought to have been produced either by the same group of artisans possessing specific molds or by groups sharing those molds, suggesting mutual assistance and cooperation between temples in construction and repair. At the Tsunodadai 角田台 site (Inba District), settlement excavations have yielded ceramic bowls used by monks for alms (*gahatsu* 瓦鉢) inscribed in ink with *senbutsu* 千仏 and *hachi* 鉢, ink-inscribed pottery bearing the character *tera* 寺 (temple), and ink-inscribed pottery bearing the name "Mononobe no Kuromaro 物部黒麻呂 of Sōsa District." These date to the first half of the ninth century.[11] Given the alms bowls, it can be concluded that monks visited this settlement. Moreover, the inscription of the name of "Mononobe

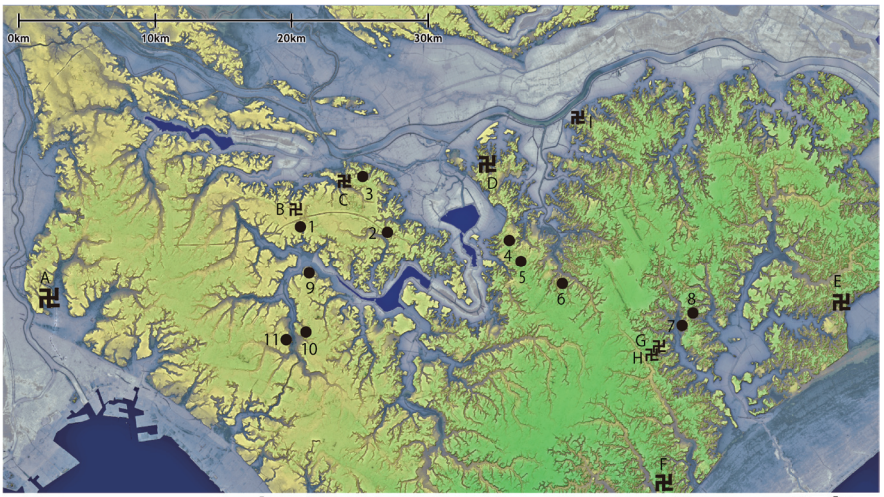
[8] Sasō, "Gunga shūhen no keikan to sono shinkō-teki haikei."
[9] Sasō, "Ritsuryōki no saishi, girei to kanga, jiin, shūraku."
[10] Yamaji, "Yōkaichiba Daiji haiji."
[11] Chiba-ken Kyōiku Shinkō Zaidan, *Chiba Nyūtaun maizō bunkazai chōsa hōkokusho XVIII*.

no Kuromaro" appears on the body of a Jōsō 常総-type *haji* ware jar (*hajikigame* 土師器甕) from the first half of the ninth century. The full inscription reads as follows:

> 迊嵯郡物部黒万呂〔代奉カ〕　女〔神奉カ〕／〔公申御益方代カ〕／〔麻　田部官万呂方代カ〕／〔无似道カ〕

Although many characters remain difficult to decipher and much of the content is unclear, the inscription appears to indicate that an individual named Mononobe no Kuromaro, whose home district was Sōsa District at the eastern edge of Shimōsa Province, visited the Tsunodadai settlement located in Inba District in central Shimōsa and inscribed his own name on a Jōsō-type *haji* ware jar produced in southern Hitachi Province to northeastern Shimōsa.

From these circumstances, it is possible to posit the existence of a network linking Shimōsa Provincial Temple and early district temples, as well as an interregional network within Shimōsa Province connecting Inba and Sōsa districts. The Tsunodadai case shows that Buddhist monks moved within this network. In settlements within this network, from the latter half of the eighth through the ninth century, small-scale Buddhist facilities resembling temples or halls, along with Buddhist implements and ink-inscribed pottery related to Buddhism, begin to appear. **Figure 1** illustrates the inter-temple and intra-settlement networks centered on Shimōsa Provincial Temple during this period.[12]



A. Shimōsa Provincial Temple. B. The Ōtsukamae site. C. The site of Kioroshi Bessho. D. Ryūkakuji. E. The site of Yōkaichiba-Ōdera. F. The site of Shingyōji. G. The site of Koganedai. H. The site of Yamada. I. The site of Ryūshōin.
1. The Narukamiyama site and the Nishine site. 2. The Tsunodadai site. 3. The Magome site. 4. The Yamaguchi site. 5. The Gonbu site. 6. The Kunō-takano site. 7. The Shōzaku site. 8. The Ōtsukadai site. 9. The Mukaisakai site. 10. The Murakami Komenouchi site. 11. The Shirahatamae site.

Fig 1. Locations of sites associated with Buddhist proselytization networks in the Hokusō 北総 region

[12] Sasō, "Ritsuryōki no saishi, girei to kanga, jiin, shūraku"; and materials for my presentation given at the "Kamigaku" カミ学 research meeting held at Kokugakuin University on 15 Feburary 2025.

Routes from Shimōsa Provincial Temple to Ryūkakuji and Ryūshōin

Traveling eastward from Shimōsa Provincial Temple across the Shimōsa Plateau leads to the Ōtsukamae site, located in Inba District at the boundary between the water systems of Lake Tega 手賀 and Lake Inba. Excavations here have identified a building with an unenclosed, eaves-protected veranda on all four sides (*shimen-bisashi* 四面庇) thought to have served as the central Buddha hall. The base ridge tiles (*irakamune* 甍棟) appear to have been the palmette motif and mirror arabesque motif ones used at Shimōsa Provincial Temple.[13] Although small in scale, the structure likely possessed the outward appearance of a Buddhist hall belonging to a temple connected to the provincial temple. The *shimen-bisashi* structure, which provided a large covered space, would have made it possible to hold Buddhist rituals such as repentance rites (*keka hōe* 悔過法会).

Proceeding east from the Ōtsukamae site leads to the site of Kioroshi Bessho 木下別所, an early Inba district temple. This is a fully developed temple site with three platform buildings, using single-petaled, eight-lobed lotus *nokimarugawara* of the same lineage as those at Ryūkakuji, an early district temple founded in the latter half of the seventh century. Ryūkakuji is located to the east of Kioroshi Bessho, on the other side of what appear to have been waters that in antiquity connected to the "Sea of Katori" (*Katori no umi* 香取の海; Kasumigaura 霞ケ浦/Kitaura 北浦 and the Kinugawa 鬼怒川 River).

From Ryūkakuji, crossing the lowlands of the Nekona 根木名 River to the northeast leads to Ryūshōin 龍正院, an early Katori district temple. At both the Ryūshōin site and the Ryūshōin kiln site, single-petaled, eight-leaf lotus *nokimarugawara* from the latter half of the seventh century have been found, along with the eave tiles featuring the palmette and mirroring arabesque motifs also found at Shimōsa Provincial Temple. Tile artisans from Ryūshōin may have been dispatched to participate in the construction of Shimōsa Provincial Temple.[14]

Buddhist-related artifacts have been found at multiple settlement sites along the route from Shimōsa Provincial Temple to Ryūshōin. At the Magome 馬込 site, a settlement located east of the Kioroshi Bessho site between it and Ryūkakuji, two tile pagodas (*gatō* 瓦塔), reconstructable as seven-tiered structures, and a ceramic bowl used by monks for alms have been excavated. Between the Ōtsukamae site, the Kioroshi Bessho site, and Ryūkakuji lies the Tsunodadai site, where "Mononobe no Kuromaro of Sōsa District" ink-inscribed pottery and alms bowls have been recovered.

From the Ōtsukamae Site to the Shirahatamae Site

By traveling south from the Ōtsukamae site, crossing Lake Inba, and following the

[13] Imaizumi, "Ōtsukamae haiji."
[14] Suda, "Ryūshōin ato, Ryūshōin kawara kama ato."

Shinkawa 新川 River upstream, one reaches the Shirahatamae 白幡前 site. Here, from the late eighth to the first half of the ninth century, there existed a small-scale temple complex centered on a *shimen-bisashi* building (serving as the main Buddha hall) and enshrining tile pagodas and a tile miniature hall (*gadō* 瓦堂). Alms bowls and ritual ewers (*jōhei* 浄瓶), possessions of monks, have also been recovered. These finds indicate the presence of resident monks and suggest that Buddhist rituals were able to be performed in the Buddha hall.

Buddhist-related artifacts from the same period as this small temple have been recovered from multiple archaeological sites located between the Ōtsukamae and Shirahatamae sites. From the Narukamiyama 鳴神山 site, a settlement south of the Ōtsukamae site, excavations yielded ink-inscribed pottery bearing the phrase "Hata-dera" 幡寺・波田寺, as well as an alms bowl marked with *butsu* 佛 (buddha). Nearby, from the Nishine 西根 site—situated along the former course of a small stream in the neighboring valley—pottery inscribed in ink with *butsu* has also been recovered. South of Lake Inba lies the Mukaisakai 向境 site, another settlement from which artifacts such as ink-inscribed pottery reading *tera* 寺 (temple) and *sanbō* 三宝 (Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha), together with alms bowls and three-color censers (*sansai kasha* 三彩火舎), have been excavated. Further upstream along the Shinkawa River lies the Murakami Kominouchi 村上込内 site, a key settlement site from which a tile pagoda has been recovered. Excavations in the upper reaches of the Shinkawa River have revealed a cluster of settlements centered on the Shirahatamae site, including the Idomukai 井戸向 site to its north, where a bronze seated image of a *nyorai* 如来 has been found. Farther north, from the Hokkaidō 北海道 site, ink-inscribed pottery reading Shōkōji 勝光寺 has been recovered.

Taken together, the distribution of these Buddhist-related artifacts suggests that monks traveled between the Ōtsukamae temple and the small-scale temple at Shirahatamae, visiting intervening settlements along the way to disseminate Buddhist beliefs and practices and to proselytize.

From Ryūkakuji to the Site of Yōkaichiba-Ōdera

Settlement sites yielding Buddhist-related structures and artifacts dating from the latter half of the eighth to the ninth century are also distributed along the route connecting Ryūkakuji and the site of Yōkaichiba-Ōdera. Following the Nekona River—which flows east of Ryūkakuji—southward, one arrives at the Kōzu 公津 sites. Among them are the Gōbu 郷部 and Yamaguchi 山口 sites, settlements in which small-scale temples once stood featuring a *shimen-bisashi* building as their central Buddha hall. Continuing southward along a tributary of the river leads to the settlement site of Kunō-takano 久能高野, from which ink-inscribed pottery bearing the inscription Sōdenji 桑田寺 has been recovered,

indicating that Buddhist beliefs and practices had entered the settlement.[15] Proceeding even farther south to the uppermost reaches and then heading east, one quickly reaches the drainage basin of the Takaya 高谷 River, which flows into the Pacific Ocean. Located on the plateau in the Takaya River basin is the Obaraku 小原子 archaeological complex, including the Shōzaku 庄作 settlement site, from which ink-inscribed pottery reading *butsushu* 佛酒, as well as alms bowls and tile pagodas, have been recovered. From the Ōtsukadai 大塚台 settlement site to the northeast, ink-inscribed pottery marked Baheiji 馬閉寺 and *butsu* 佛, along with alms bowls and three-colored censers, has also been excavated.[16] In each case, the presence of alms bowls indicates that monks visited these settlements. From the Ōtsukadai settlement, traveling eastward across the broad lowlands of the Kuriyama 栗山 River basin and then proceeding east along a tributary of the Kuriyama-gawa, one eventually reaches the site of Yōkaichiba-Ōdera.

Networks of Monks and Government Officials

As seen in the foregoing examples, in Shimōsa Province (present-day northern Chiba Prefecture), networks linked Shimōsa Provincial Temple with district-level early temples, and there is no doubt that monks visited the settlements that lay between them. Within some of these settlements, small-scale temples equipped with *shimen-bisashi* Buddha halls, as well as tile pagodas and tile miniature halls, were constructed, serving as bases from which monks performed repentance and other Buddhist rites while proselytizing in order to secure donations and other benefits. This pattern aligns with the monastic activities described in proselytization texts of the period—most notably the "Tōdaiji fuju monkō" 東大寺諷誦文稿 and the *Nihon ryōiki* 日本霊異記—which were compiled from the late eighth to early ninth century. In other words, the routes linking Shimōsa Provincial Temple to early district temples appear to have operated as Buddhist proselytization networks connecting settlements.[17]

Furthermore, fittings from *katai* 銙帯 (belts of Tang-dynasty style used by government officials under the *ritsuryō* system) have been excavated in considerable numbers from these settlement sites. Since provincial temples were located adjacent to provincial capitals and early district temples were situated beside district offices, the same networks likely served as routes for government officials traveling between provincial capitals and district offices. Monks' dissemination of Buddhist scriptures and government officials' *ritsuryō* documents-based administrative work likely contributed to the expansion of a literate stratum within settlements. In the next section, I examine this literacy in ancient

[15] Inba Gunshi Bunkazai Sentā, *Chiba-ken Inba-gun Tomisato-machi Kunō iseki-gun hakkutsu chōsa hōkokusho*.
[16] Chiba-ken Kyōiku Shinkō Zaidan, *Shutoken chūō renraku jidōsha-dō maizō bunkazai chōsa hōkokusho 38*.
[17] Sasō, *Shinbutsu to murakeikan no kōkogaku*.

settlements by analyzing ink-inscribed pottery.

3. Individual Religious Beliefs and Practices and the Character for "Transgression" on Ink-Inscribed Pottery

Development of Individual Religious Beliefs and Practices

Within settlements located along Buddhist proselytization networks in Shimōsa, not only are ink-inscribed vessels bearing inscriptions such as *tera*, *butsu*, and temple names found, but also ink-inscribed pottery believed to have contained food or other offerings dedicated to the likes of deities, accompanied by the donor's personal name, place of residence, and date. Included within this category are vessels depicting what appear to be human or Buddhist figure faces in ink. Representative examples from western Inba District are presented in Table 1 and **Figure 2**.[18] Almost all settlement sites where this type of vessel has been recovered have also yielded Buddhist-related artifacts. The exceptions—Kamiya 上谷 site and Gongen'ushiro 権現後 site—lack Buddhist objects yet are adjacent to the Mukaisakai and Hokkaidō sites, which have produced such artifacts. (Table 1)

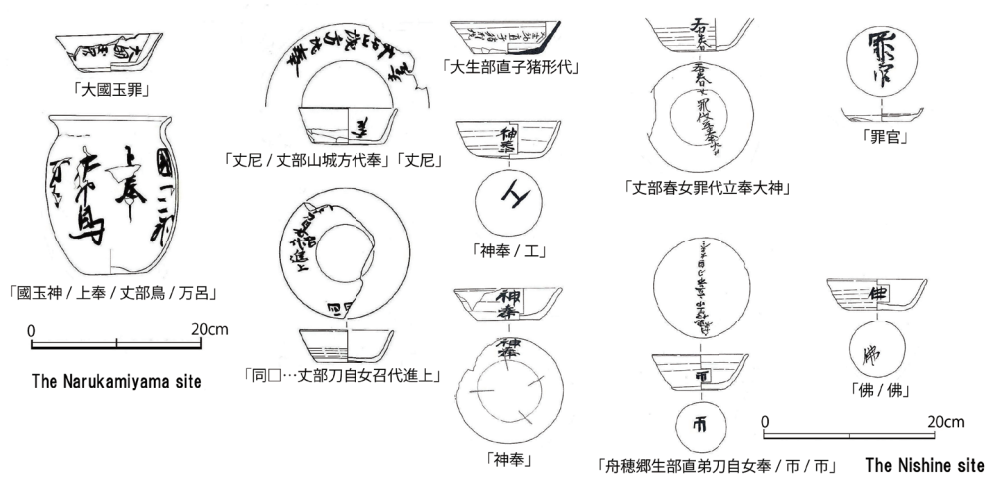


Fig 2. Measured drawings of ink-inscribed pottery from the western Inba District

A key feature of offering ink-inscribed vessels is the explicit recording of personal names, often accompanied by characters such as "召代," "方代," or "形代," which can be interpreted as indicating a dedicatory substitute in place of oneself.[19] In some examples, the date and the deity receiving the offering are also included. Personal names attested

[18] Based on Sasō, "Ritsuryōki no saishi, girei to kanga, jiin, shūraku."
[19] Hirakawa, *Bokushodoki no kenkyū*.

Table 1. List of artifacts related to Buddhism and religious artifacts in the Western Part of Inba District, Shimōsa Province
(S refers to *sue* ware, and H refers to *haji* ware. The Arabic numerals attached to the artifact names indicate the number of items of the same type that were excavated.)
pottery from the western Inba District

	Human-faced ink-inscribed pottery	Offering ink-inscribed pottery	Ink-inscribed pottery related to Buddhism	Artifacts related to Buddhism	Date range of religious artifacts
The Kitashita site (adjacent to provincial temple in Shimōsa Province)	H-jar 3, H-cup 13	H-cup「阿豆古刀自女身替」, H-cup「財田部□成女」	H-cup. Ink-inscribed pottery 1 with Buddhist figure face		Mid-eighth century to ninth century
The Narukamiyama site		H-jar「國玉神上奉丈部鳥万呂」, H-cup「大國玉罪」, H-cup「同□…(丈部)刀自女召代進上」, H-cup「丈尼/丈尼/丈部山城方代奉」, H-cup「弘仁九年九月(廿)」	H-cup「波田寺」, H-cup「幡寺」	Tile pagoda, 1 H-ceramic bowl「佛」, H-ceramic bowl 1	End of eighth century to mid-ninth century
The Nishine site		S-cup「大生部直猪形代」, H-cup「丈部春女罪代立奉大神」, H-cup「市・舟穂郷生部直弟刀自女奉」, H-cup「神奉・工」, H-cup「神奉」, H-cup「罪官」	H-cup「佛・佛」		Late eighth century to mid-ninth century
The Kamiya site	H-cup with a human face incised using a spatula 1, H-jar「(Human face) / 下総國印播郡村神郷丈部廣刀自咩召代進上 / 延暦十年十月廿二日」, H-cup「廣友進召代　弘仁十二年二月 / (Human face)」, H-jar「下総 / 村神 / □□ / (human face ?)」	H-cup「丈部千総石女進上 / □」, H-cup「物部真依□ / 延暦十年十一月七」, H-cup「丈部稲依身召代二月十五日」, H-cup「丈部真里刀自女身召代 / 二月十五日」, H-cup「丈部阿(公)身召代二月十五日 / 西」, H-cup「丈部麻□女身召代二月□(日) / 西」, H-cup「野家立馬子 / 召代進 / 承和二年十八日進」			End of eighth century to mid-ninth century
The Mukaisakai site			H-cup「寺」7, H-cup「三寶」	S-ceramic bowl 1/S-plate 1, Alms bowls and three-color censers 1	Late eighth century to mid-ninth century
The Shirahatamae Site	H-small jar「(Human face)/丈部人足召代」		S-lid「佛」, H-cup「佛」, H-cup「寺/奉」, H-cup「大寺」	two or more sets of tile pagoda, a set of tile miniature halls, H-ceramic bowl「佛」, H-ceramic bowl 1, S-ritual ewer 1, S-water ewer 1	Late eighth century to mid-ninth century
The Idomukai site			H-cup「寺/寺杯」	a bronze seated image of a *nyorai*, H-cup lamp plate「佛」	End of eighth century to early ninth century
The Hokkaido site	H-cup「(Human face)/承和五年二月十」	H-cup「丈部乙刀自女形代」	H-cup「勝光寺」, H-cup「尼」2		Early ninth century
The Gongenushiro site	H-cup「(Human face)/村神郷丈部國依甘魚」	H-cup「神/神」			Early ninth century

include those with Hasetsukabe 丈部 (丈部廣刀自咩, 丈部鳥万呂, 丈部山城) and others (大生部直猪, 物部真依, 野家立馬子). "Mononobe no Kuromaro," whose name was inscribed on a vessel from the Tsunodadai site, was from Sōsa District, demonstrating that such individuals were not necessarily from Inba District alone but may have come from a wider area spanning multiple districts.

The widespread distribution of ink-inscribed pottery indicates the presence of a literate stratum within settlements during this period. The fact that individuals recorded their names and performed acts of prayer suggests that Buddhist beliefs and practices introduced by monks into settlements manifested at the level of the individual. Moreover, traditional local deities were the ones receiving the offerings: Ōkunitama 大國玉, Kunitama gami 國玉神, and Ōkami 大神. Such deities were incorporated into individual-level religious beliefs and practices.

Purification and the Extinguishing of Transgressions

Some of these ink-inscribed vessels bear the character for "transgression" (*tsumi* 罪), indicating its close relationship with this category of pottery. An example from the Nishine site, inscribed "丈部春女罪代立奉大神," can be interpreted as an offering to Ōkami in place of one's own transgression. Similarly, a vessel from the Narukamiyama site inscribed with "大国玉罪" suggests that food offerings were made to the deity Ōkunitama to atone for transgressions. The act of dedicating valuable items in substitution for one's own transgressions accords with traditional notions of purification (*harae* 祓).

From the Nishine site also comes ink-inscribed pottery reading "佛" and "罪官." The latter can be read as *tsumi no tsukasa* 罪のつかさ, an official who judges transgressions. A similar meaning is found on a late eighth-century *haji* 土師 pottery vessel bearing the inscription "罪司進上代" from the Kunō-takano site. The first two characters can likewise be read the same way. These vessels represent offerings made to such officials in place of one's own transgressions.

Additionally, from the Shōzaku site come vessels inscribed "罪ム国玉神奉" and "[滅罪□]" (see **Figure 3**).[20] The character "ム" can be interpreted as an abbreviation of "弗" based on examples in the *Hokke shuhō ippyakuza kikigakishō* 法華修法一百座聞書抄 (1110 AD).[21] Since "弗" is used for "祓" in cases of phonetic borrowing,[22] this inscription can be read "罪弗（祓）国玉神奉". Like the Nishine site's "丈部春女罪代立奉大神," it can be understood as grounded in traditional purification beliefs and practices, in which

[20] Sanbu Kōkogaku Kenkyūjo, *Obaraku iseki-gun*. Regarding the reading of "滅罪" on these vessels, see Sasō, "Ennin to 'Butchō-sonshō darani-kyō', soshite kodai Nihon no metsuzai shinkō."
[21] In this text, we find "舎利弗" written as "舎利ム." Yamagishi, *Hokke shūhō ippyakuza kikigakishō*.
[22] Per *Shuowen tongxun dingsheng* 説文通訓定聲 as quoted in Morohashi, *Daikanwa jiten*, p. 691.

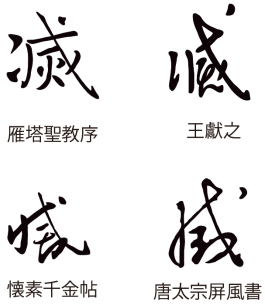
(Traced from the measured drawings in Note 20)

The orthography of " 舎利弗 " in the
Hokke shūhō ippyakuza kikigakishō
(Quoted photo plates from Note 21)

Ink-inscribed pottery with "罪ム（弗）国玉神奉" excavated from Pit Dwelling No. 25 at the Shōzaku site

(Traced from the measured drawings in Note 20)

Ink-inscribed pottery from Pit Dwelling No. 67 at the Shōzaku site:
photographs and outline drawings of the inscriptions
(Photo by author; collection of the Shibayama Kofun and Haniwa Museum)



Examples of the character "滅" in Chinese inscriptions
(Traced from the rubbings in Fushimi Chūkei, ed.
Kadokawa shodō jiten, Kadokawa Shoten, 1977)

Ink-inscribed pottery with "[　滅罪□]" excavated from Pit Dwelling No. 67 at the Shōzaku site

Fig 3. Ink-inscribed pottery with the word "罪" excavated from the Shōzaku site

offerings were made to a traditional deity (Kunitama gami) to remove transgressions.

In contrast, the inscribed pottery reading "[　滅罪□]" directly records the "extinguishing transgressions" (*metsuzai* 滅罪) beliefs and practices as taught in texts such as the *Lotus Sutra*, namely, that one could annihilate one's own transgressions through Buddhist merit. In other words, at the Nishine and Shōzaku sites, the following existed side by side: (1) transgressions that could be removed through the traditional purification ritual of offering material goods as substitutionary atonement, (2) transgressions incurred by violating Buddhist precepts, and (3) the Buddhist belief in "extinguishing transgressions" through the accumulation of Buddhist merit. In the villages of the eastern provinces at that time, the traditional purification grounded in indigenous deity beliefs and practices and the Buddhist beliefs and practices centered on extinguishing transgressions appear to have been understood as compatible. Furthermore, if we consider that purification shifted to repentance rites,[23] then such rites, too, may have been accepted alongside the belief in extinguishing transgressions.

Transgression-Judging Officials and the Medicine Master Sutra

As noted above, a compound referring to a deity who acts as an official judge of transgressions is found at the Nishine and Kunō-takano sites. A comparable being appears in the *Medicine Master Sutra* in the figure of Dharma King Yama (Enma Hōō 琰魔 [閻魔] 法王). In Xuanzang's aforementioned translation, it states that "Dharma King Yama examines and punishes in accordance with the gravity of the transgressions,"[24] describing how, at the time of death, he confirms the deeds performed in life and judges transgressions and merit. In other words, he is a transgression-judging official. This suggests that the conceptual foundation of these ideas found at the Nishine and Kunō-takano sites lies in the cult of King Yama found in this sutra.

Within the monk–official network of Shimōsa Province, the Nishine site lay on the route leading south from the Ōtsukamae site—situated at the branch-point of the network linking Shimōsa Provincial Temple and Ryūkakuji—to Shirahata-mae. The Kunō-takano site lay on the route connecting Ryūkakuji to the site of Yōkaichiba-Ōdera. Both can thus be assumed to have been linked to Ryūkakuji, the early temple of Hanyū District. Ryūkakuji can be dated to the latter half of the seventh century based on its Yamada-dera–style eaves tiles, and preserves a bronze seated *Yakushi Nyorai* 薬師如来

[23] Kawaguchi Eryū 川口恵隆 argues that in the *Nihon Ryōiki*, "Ancient people's ideas about purifying transgressions and defilement shifted to the format of Buddhist repentance, which then shifted to the purely Buddhist beliefs and practices of scripture recitation and copying." It appears that the coexistence of purification with repentance/transgression-eliminating beliefs and practices indicates the transition period from the former to the latter recorded in the *Nihon Ryōiki*. See Kawaguchi, "'Ryōiki' no Hokke-kyō."

[24] Izumi and Tajima, *Kokuyaku issaikyō Indo senjutsu-bu kyōshū-bu 12*.

(Medicine Master) statue from the Hakuhō 白鳳 period. Given that the stylistic features of the head resemble the buddha head at Kōfukuji 興福寺 in Nara (formerly the main icon of Yamada-dera's lecture hall, dated 685), the statue at Ryūkakuji was probably the principal icon at the time of its founding in the latter seventh century.[25] If *Yakushi Nyorai* was the principal object of veneration, then naturally the foundation of Ryūkakuji's religious beliefs and practices in the latter half of the seventh century would have been the *Medicine Master Sutra*. It follows that the religious beliefs and practices surrounding the Dharma King Yama, as expounded by the sutra, must also have been transmitted to Ryūkakuji at an early stage. The sutra teaches that "committing unfilial conduct (*fukō* 不孝) and the five heinous offenses (*gogyaku* 五逆), reviling the three jewels, destroying the laws of ruler and ministers, and violating belief and the precepts," and, alongside this, religious beliefs and practices surrounding Dharma King Yama, who adjudicates and punishes transgression according to its gravity. It may be inferred that this belief system spread through a network of monks and government officials based at Ryūkakuji into a wide range of settlements within Shimōsa Province. One imagines that, as a result, ink-inscribed pottery bearing the characters for "transgression-judging official" was produced, offerings were placed inside them, and individuals prayed that judgment might be rendered even slightly more lenient. This, too, illustrates a form of individual religious belief and practice introduced into settlements alongside Buddhist teachings.

In this way, from the latter half of the eighth to the ninth century, within the settlements of the eastern provinces, religious beliefs and practices centered on personal salvation spread via Buddhist proselytization networks through which monks circulated. These beliefs interacted with shifts in the consciousness of "transgression," and likely brought about major transformations in views of the afterlife. The relationship between Dharma King Yama and transgression seen here also became an important narrative theme in the *Nihon ryōiki*. Buddhist beliefs and practices that promised salvation from punishment for an individual's transgressions appear to have penetrated the populace on an individual level.

4. The Characteristics of Settlements and Religious Beliefs and Practices

Settlements of the Obaraku Archaeological Complex

Did Buddhism and individual religious beliefs and practices spread evenly across ancient settlements in the eastern provinces? To examine this, I will compare the trajectories of several neighboring settlements at the Obaraku archaeological complex, which includes the Shōzaku Site—a node along the Buddhist proselytization network. This archaeological complex is situated on a plateau at an elevation of 30–40 meters, on the left bank of the

[25] Chiba-ken Shiryō Kenkyū Zaidan, *Chiba-ken no rekishi tsūshi-hen kodai 2*.

Takaya River, a tributary of the Kuriyama River that flows into the Pacific Ocean. Along the section facing the Takaya River, the settlement sites of the Tōnodai 遠野台/Nagatsu 長津 and Jōraku 上楽/Tanikubo 谷窪 sites are aligned from north to south. North of the Tōnodai site lie the Ōsato 大里 and Ōtsukadai 大塚台 *kofun* 古墳 groups, while hillside hole graves (*yokoana* 横穴) have been found on the slope of the plateau to the northwest of the Jōraku/Tanikubo sites. The Shōzaku site is located on the plateau that faces the head of a tributary valley on the east side of the Jōraku/Tanikubo sites (**Figs. 4–7**).[26] First, I will review the changes and characteristics of the settlements at the Jōraku/Tanikubo and Shōzaku sites, which developed adjacent to each other from the Kofun period through the Heian 平安 period, and then examine the religious beliefs and practices at each. The scale of each settlement is as follows:

Jōraku site: 105 pit (*tateana* 竪穴) dwellings, 6 post-in-ground buildings.
Tanikubo site: 68 pit dwellings, 0 post-in-ground buildings.
Shōzaku Site: 83 pit dwellings, 11 post-in-ground buildings.

Although the Shōzaku site has a not-insignificant number of post-in-ground structures, pit dwellings are central in all three settlements. Therefore, I am going to trace changes in settlements by reviewing the number of pit dwellings for which dates can be determined from excavated pottery (**Figure 5**).[27]

Fig 4. Location of the Obaraku archaeological complex (adapted from Fukuma 1998; see Note 26)

[26] Sanbu Kōkogaku Kenkyūjo, *Obaraku iseki-gun*; Fukuma, "Obaraku iseki-gun."
[27] For the dating of pit dwellings, I relied on the below publications' pottery timelines: Ozawa, *Bōsō kofun bunka no kenkyū*; Bōsō Rekishi Kōkogaku Kenkyūkai, *Bōsō ni okeru rekishijidai doki no kenkyū*.

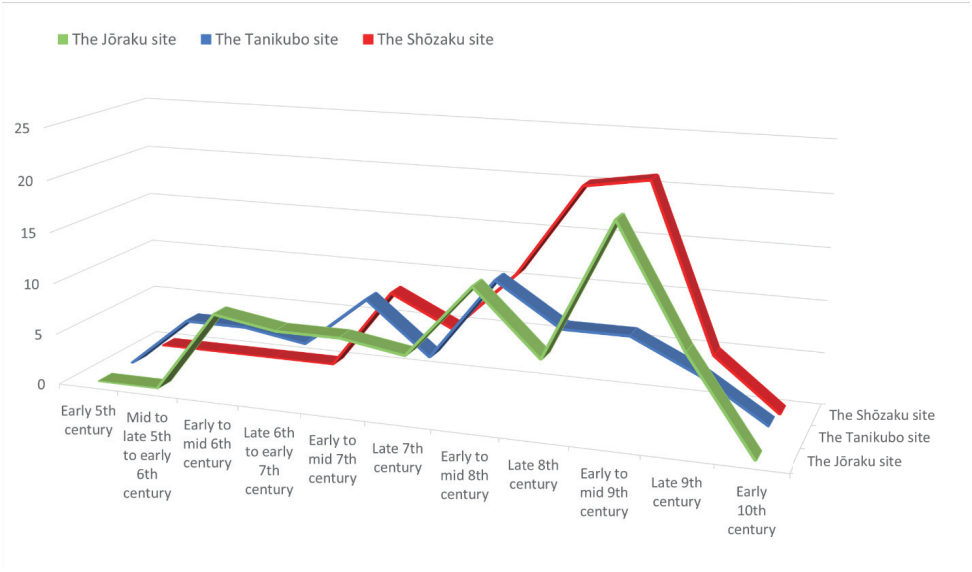


Fig 5. Changes in the number of pit dwellings

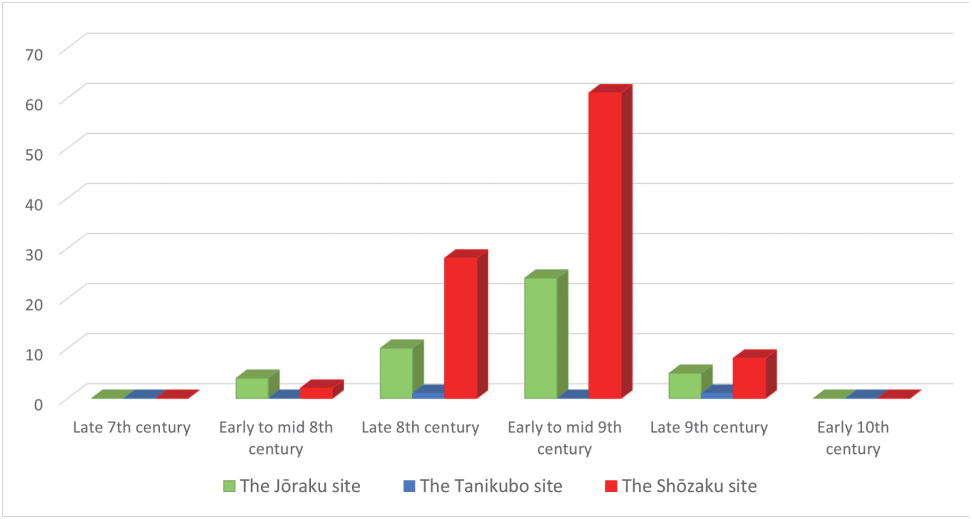


Fig 6. Changes in the number of ink-inscribed pottery excavated

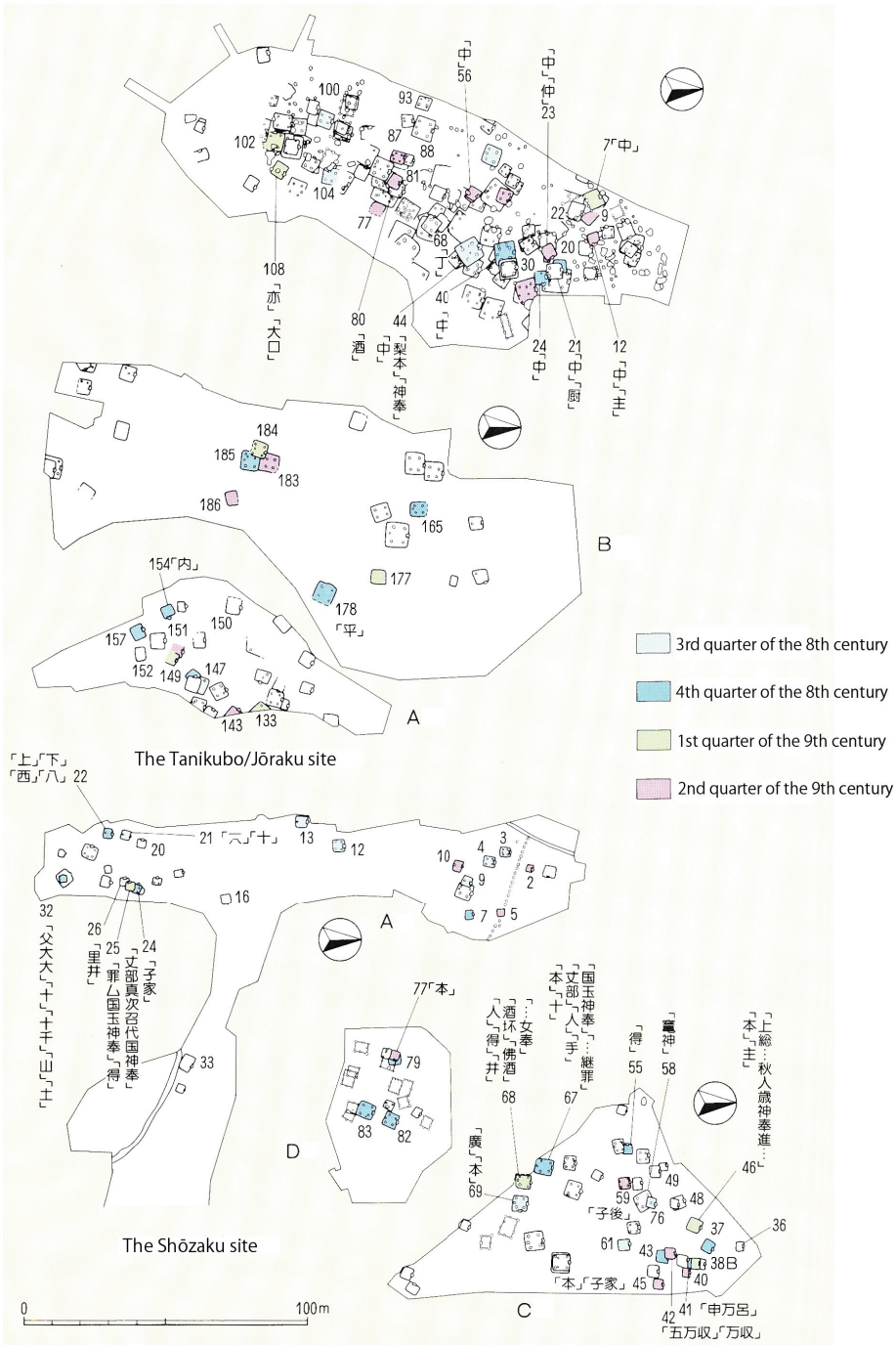


Fig 7. The Obaraku archaeological complex structures and ink-inscribed pottery distribution map (adapted from Fukuma 1998; see Note 26)

Settlement Changes and Character at the Jōraku/Tanikubo Sites

The Tanikubo site was established between the mid-fifth and early sixth century with five pit dwellings, the first of these settlements. In the early and middle sixth century, it continued to have five pit dwellings (average 2.5 dwellings per phase). At the Jōraku site, eight pit dwellings (average four per phase) were constructed during the first and middle sixth century, forming a settlement. From the late sixth to the late seventh century, a total of twenty pit dwellings appear; divided across the four phases of the late sixth and early/middle/late seventh centuries, this averages to five dwellings per phase. At the Tanikubo site, a total of seventeen pit dwellings appear from the late sixth to the late seventh century, averaging 4.25 dwellings per phase. At the Jōraku site in the mid-sixth century, a large pit dwelling measuring 9.8 × 9.4 meters was constructed. Iron sickles, knives, iron arrowheads, and iron slag have been found, indicating that this was a hub-like settlement capable of ironworking.

In the early and middle eighth century, the number of pit dwellings increased to thirteen (average 6.5) at the Jōraku site and twelve (average 6) at the Tanikubo site. In the late eighth century, the Jōraku site had seven pit dwellings and the Tanikubo site eight. In the early and middle ninth century, the Jōraku site had twenty pit dwellings (average 10 per phase), while in the late ninth century, this fell to nine. At the Tanikubo site, eight dwellings appear in the early to middle ninth century (average 4), and five in the late ninth century. However, by the early tenth century, the number of pit dwellings plummeted, leaving only one at the Tanikubo site, after which the settlement disappeared entirely.

Turning to excavated artifacts, a fragment of *sue* 須恵 ware repurposed as an inkstone has been found at the Jōraku site, dating to the late eighth century, suggesting the presence of a literate stratum. Additionally, gray-glazed ceramics such as wide-mouthed jars (*hirokuchi tsubo* 広口壺), small bottles (*shōhei* 小瓶), and long-necked bottles (*chōkeihei* 長頸瓶) dating into the ninth century have been recovered, alongside iron "goose-foot" arrowheads (*karimata-zoku* 雁股鏃), iron spindle whorls (*bōsuisha* 紡錘車), Kinai-type *haji* ware cups from the early eighth century (used in the capital region of Heijō-kyō 平城京), copper belt fittings for government officials (*junpō* 巡方) from the early ninth century, and stone belt fittings for government officials (*marutomo* 丸鞆) from the late ninth century. At the Tanikubo site, gray-glazed long-necked vessels and copper fittings worn at the tip of officials' belts have also been found (*dabi* 鉈尾). From the presence of Kinai-type *haji* ware, high-grade gray-glazed ceramics, and belt fittings for government officials, it is possible to infer the presence of such officials linked to the capital who were engaged in *ritsuryō* local administration. Thus, from the eighth century onward, the Jōraku/Tanikubo sites likely functioned as hub-like settlements positioned at the lowest tier of the *ritsuryō* provincial administrative system.

The Jōraku/Tanikubo sites were situated facing rice paddies in the lowlands along the Takaya River, and there are indications that they had the character of traditional settlements in existence from the fifth and sixth centuries. The seven hillside hole graves discovered on the northwest slope of the plateau above the Jōraku site,[28] though undatable due to not having yet been surveyed, are likely the burial area associated with the settlement due to their spatial proximity. The Jōraku/Tanikubo sites may therefore be understood as traditional kinship settlements bound by a sense of genealogical descent from ancestors buried in the tombs. Given such strong kinship ties, it is likely that the traditional settlement structure established in the fifth and sixth centuries was maintained until the ninth century.

Settlement Changes and Character at the Shōzaku Site

At the Shōzaku site, a settlement was established in the early seventh century, slightly later than at the Jōraku/Tanikubo sites. During the early, middle, and late seventh century, the settlement maintained an average of roughly four pit dwellings. In the early and middle eighth century, the number rose to eleven (average 5.5), making it somewhat smaller than the Jōraku/Tanikubo Sites. However, in the late eighth century, the number of pit dwellings surged to twenty, roughly a fourfold increase. In the early and middle ninth century, there were twenty-one dwellings (average 10.5), followed by a decline to five in the late ninth century. By the early tenth century, the settlement had disappeared.

The Shōzaku site is notable for a roughly fourfold increase in pit dwellings during the late eighth century. The site lies near the border between Musa 武射 District of Kazusa Province and Sōsa District of Shimōsa Province. The lowlands along the Takaya River likely consisted of arable land by the late Kofun period, when the hub-like settlements of the Jōraku/Tanikubo sites formed. The Shōzaku site is situated on a plateau facing the head of a tributary connected to that lowland. The rapid expansion of the settlement in the late eighth century suggests a large influx of people, likely driven by development in the tributary valley and on the surrounding plateau. Consequently, the Shōzaku site likely transformed into a settlement composed of people of varied origins, characterized by fluid social relations.

Ink-Inscribed Pottery and Religious Artifacts

Did differences in religious and spiritual life exist between the Jōraku/Tanikubo sites—traditional clan-based settlements that may have housed figures involved in *ritsuryō* administration—and the Shōzaku site, which seemingly expanded rapidly in the late eighth century and likely became a fluid community composed of diverse groups? To

[28] Sanbu Kōkogaku Kenkyūjo, *Obaraku iseki-gun*.

explore this, I will examine the distribution of ink-inscribed pottery and religion-related artifacts.

Figure 6 summarizes changes in the number of ink-inscribed pottery samples at the Jōraku/Tanikubo sites and the Shōzaku site. In the early eighth century, ink-inscribed pottery is found only at the Jōraku site, with three pieces bearing the single character "酒." Two of these are inscribed upon special dish-shaped vessels (*banjō tsuki* 盤状坏) modeled after capital tableware. At this time, Kinai-type *haji* ware cups also appear at the Jōraku site, probably used in ceremonial banquets linked to *ritsuryō* administration. No ink-inscribed pottery has been found at the Tanikubo site for this phase, and only a single illegible piece appears at the Shōzaku site.

In the late eighth century, however, ink-inscribed pottery at the Shōzaku site dramatically increased to twenty-eight samples, greatly surpassing the Jōraku site (ten samples) and Tanikubo site (one sample). At the Shōzaku site, ink-inscribed pottery reaches a quantitative peak in the early and middle ninth century, totaling sixty-one samples. Although twenty-four samples also appear at the Jōraku site, this is less than half the Shōzaku total. At the Tanikubo site, where the aforementioned inkstone suggests the presence of a literate stratum in the late eighth century, none have been found.

This contrast is also reflected in the inscriptions' content. At the Jōraku Site, most examples are one or two characters—such as "中," "仲," "夜子," "厨," or "丁"—and no multi-character inscriptions from which sentence meaning can be reconstructed have been found. Only a single fragment reading "神奉" has been recovered.

In stark contrast, at the Shōzaku site, multiple multi-character inscriptions have been found that identify both an individual and the object of the rite. Examples include: "□□女奉" from the late eighth century; "人面墨書＋丈部真次召代国神奉," "上総［　秋人歳神奉進," "人面墨書＋国玉神奉," and "人面墨書＋罪厶（弗）国玉神奉" from the early ninth century. These inscriptions can be read as offerings to Kunitama gami, Kunigami 国神, and Toshigami 歳神, and they clearly record personal names such as "丈部真次" and "秋人," demonstrating that these were individual, rather than communal, practices.

The distribution of religion-related artifacts likewise differs sharply between the Jōraku/Tanikubo sites and the Shōzaku site. At the Jōraku site, clay *magatama* 勾玉 beads have been found dating to the sixth century, and hand-formed and miniature vessels appear from the eighth century. These are ritual implements dating from the Kofun period, likely used in traditional rites to traditional deities. The "Kunitama gami" appearing on ink-inscribed pottery from the Shōzaku site probably refers to the deity of the spirit (*tama* 玉) of the land (*kuni* 国), an indigenous tutelary deity, that was the object of religious belief and practice for many generations. Such rites to the land deity likely employed traditional ritual implements such as clay *magatama* beads and hand-formed vessels, in prayers for

the well-being of the entire settlement. However, aside from lamp cups used for votive oil lamps (*tōmyō-tsuki* 灯明坏), no artifacts suggesting Buddhist religious beliefs and practices have been found at the Jōraku/Tanikubo sites.

By contrast, at the Shōzaku site, artifacts clearly related to Buddhist devotion have been recovered. These include a small ceramic pagoda as well as ceramic begging bowls used by monks. This indicates that a small Buddhist hall once stood at the site, housing the pagoda and visited by monks. Among the ink-inscribed vessels, we find "［　滅罪□," as well as "佛酒," with the latter written on *Haji* ware—likely alcohol offered to Buddhist objects of veneration.

Characteristics of the Communities and Their Religious Beliefs and Practices

Buddhist beliefs and practices are not clearly attested at the Jōraku/Tanikubo sites, but at the Shōzaku site there was unmistakably both a facility that functioned as a Buddhist center and monks. This difference can be understood as having been shaped by the character of the human communities that inhabited these respective settlements. At the Shōzaku site, the settlement expanded rapidly in the late eighth century, suggesting the influx of a large number of people. As a result, the settlement became a community characterized by fluid human relationships, unlike the tightly knit kinship groups and clans of traditional settlements. It was precisely under these conditions that Buddhist beliefs and practices at the individual level—Buddhism that preached individual salvation—resonated. These beliefs and practices introduced a new view of transgression (as arising from the violation of Buddhist doctrine) to the traditionally conceived notion of transgression (which, alongside defilement, was treated as an object of purification). In communities composed of mobile populations of diverse origins, Buddhist beliefs and practices that taught personal salvation from the calamities and punishments brought about by such transgressions functioned as an adaptive form of religion.

At the same time, indigenous beliefs and practices remained deeply rooted in the region in the late eighth and early ninth centuries. Thus, even as individual-level Buddhist beliefs and practices were accepted, traditional deities such as Kunitama gami and Kunigami remained as objects of devotion and came to be the object of individual beliefs and practices. These widely worshipped local deities were likely perceived as interchangeable with Dharma King Yama and the aforementioned transgression-judging officials described in the *Medicine Master Sutra*. The ink-inscribed vessel from the Shōzaku site bearing an inscription about an individual's offering to Kunigami ("丈部真次召代国神奉) shows this configuration in concrete form. The religious artifacts from the settlements of the Obaraku archaeological complex thus reveal the process by which Buddhist doctrine promoted the transformation of local society that had continued since the Kofun period, and by which traditional clan rites were reshaped through individual-

level beliefs and practices.

5. Changes at the End of Ancient Times and the Formation of Japanese Culture

The Dissolution of Ancient Settlements and Clans

In the tenth and eleventh centuries, phenomena similar to those seen in the settlements of the Obaraku archaeological complex—namely, the rapid contraction and disappearance of ancient settlements—can be observed widely across the Japanese archipelago.

For example, the group of ancient settlements in the Oyumino area of Chiba City (the southwestern part of Shimōsa Province), on the eastern shore of Tokyo Bay, shows a comparable pattern. There, in the late fifth century, a core settlement was established at the Ariyoshi 有吉/Takazawa 高沢 sites, and around it a cluster of *kofun* (a cemetery area) took shape (**Figure 8**). At the head of this *kofun* group stands Kami-Akatsuka 上赤塚 Tumulus No. 1, constructed in the early fifth century. This circular mound, with a diameter of 31 meters and a height of 3.3 meters, contains two wooden coffins buried at its summit. Grave goods include stone pillows on which the heads of the deceased rested, iron swords, iron sickles, iron hoe blades, axes, stone ritual replicas of axes and sickles, and *magatama* beads. It was the first fully developed *kofun* in this area.[29]

From around the end of the fourth century, just before the construction of Kami-Akatsuka Tumulus No. 1, we can infer that the scale of the settlements in the vicinity of the Akatsuka 赤塚 tributary valley extending south from this tumulus expanded, iron agricultural implements and tools, together with blacksmithing, were introduced, and the development of arable land within the tributary valley progressed. It is reasonable to think that the leader who introduced this technology at the beginning of the fifth century and promoted the development of the valley was buried in Kami-Akatsuka Tumulus No. 1. Shortly thereafter, in the late fifth century, the settlement at the Ariyoshi/Takazawa Sites came into being. The leader who introduced new techniques around the beginning of the fifth century and advanced development in the tributary valley would have been remembered as a special ancestor who laid the foundation for the area, and the *kofun* in which his body was buried would have been maintained as a monument symbolizing his personhood. It can be inferred that the settlement at the Ariyoshi/Takazawa sites was composed of a clan that regarded the leader buried in Kami-Akatsuka Tumulus No. 1 as its common ancestor, and that this configuration of settlement and cemetery landscape was preserved until the ninth century (**Figure 9**).[30] The character of this settlement was that of a traditional hub-like settlement continuing from the late fifth century,

[29] Chiba-ken Bunkazai Sentā, *Chiba tōnanbu nyūtaun 13*.
[30] Sasō, "Keikan keisei to kami, reikon-kan."

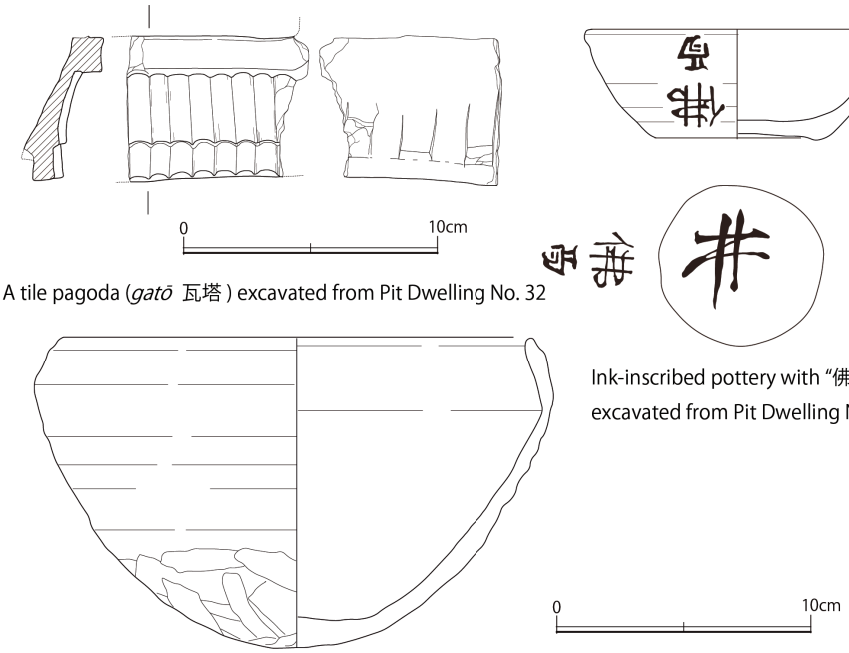


Fig 8. Buddhist-related artifacts excavated from the Shōzaku site (traced from the measured drawings in Obaraku Iseki-gun; see Note 20)

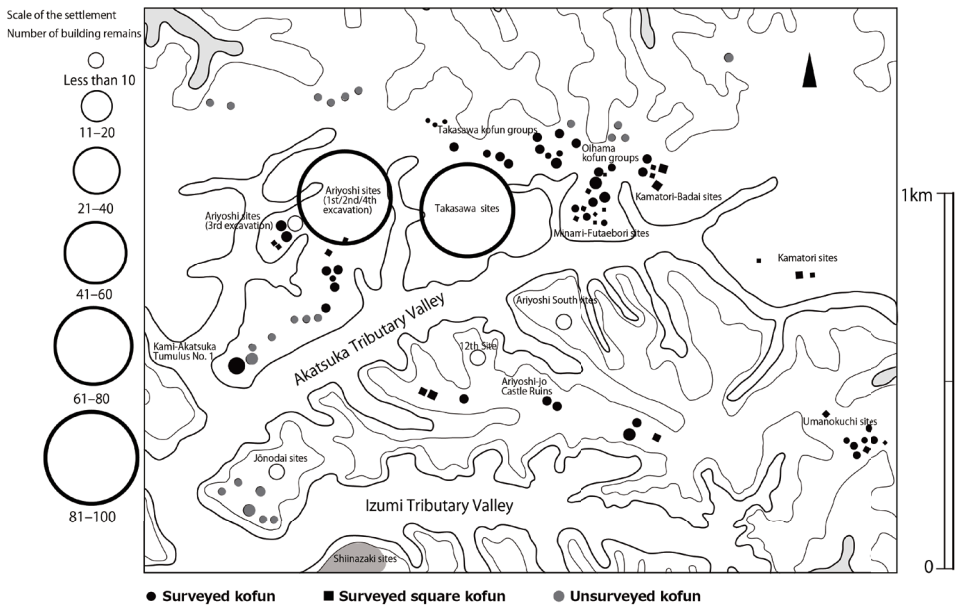
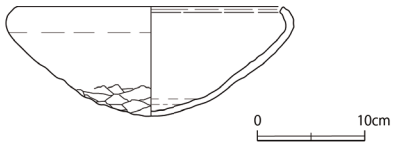


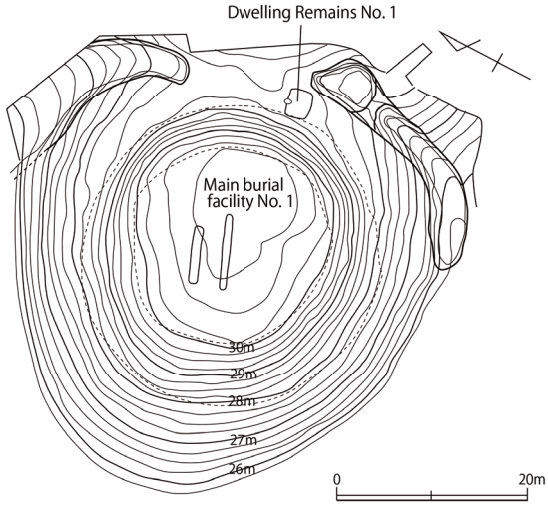
Fig 9. Location map of settlement sites and *kofun* in the Oyumino area (9th century)

comparable to the Jōraku/Tanikubo sites' settlements at the Obaraku archaeological complex. In the early tenth century, however, the settlement at the Takazawa/Ariyoshi sites shrank rapidly in scale, and by the latter half of the tenth century it had completely disappeared.

Around the end of the ninth century—just before the Ariyoshi/Takazawa settlement disappeared—a significant change can be observed at the Kami-Akatsuka 上赤塚 Mound No. 1. A pit dwelling was constructed inside the peripheral ditch (moat demarcating the mound) of it. Alms bowls have also been recovered. This all suggests the residence of monks (**Figure 10**). By this point, it is likely that Buddhist memorial practices for the mound's deceased (ancestors) had been introduced. A similar situation is seen at the Shiinazaki sites in the same area, where the settlement is adjacent to the Nishihara Kofun group. On the peripheral ditch of the fifth-century Nishihara 西原 Mound No. 2, a pit dwelling was constructed in the tenth century, and a gray-glazed ritual ewer (a container for drinking water and a monastic possession) was recovered.[31] By the first half



A ceramic bowl used by monks for alms excavated from Pit-dwelling Remains No. 1



Kami-Akatsuka Kofun mound and Dwelling Remains No. 1

Fig 10. Measured drawings of the mound of the Kami-Akatsuka kofun, Dwelling Remains No. 1, and an excavated ceramic bowl used by monks for alms

[31] Chiba-ken Bunkazai Sentā, *Chiba tōnanbu nyūtaun 6*.

of the tenth century, the Ariyoshi/Takazawa settlement disappeared, and by the first half of the eleventh century, the Shiinazaki sites also ceased to exist. Even in these traditional hub settlements, from the end of the ninth into the tenth century, Buddhist beliefs and practices concerning personal salvation penetrated ancestor veneration, contributing to the dissolution and dispersal of the ancient settlements that were based on fifth-century clan structures and corresponded to burial areas (*kofun* clusters).

Changes in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries

The dissolution and dispersal of settlements cannot be attributed solely to the influence of Buddhist beliefs and practices. According to climate reconstruction data derived from oxygen isotope ratios in tree-ring cellulose by Nakatsuka Takeshi 中塚武, the period from the latter half of the ninth through the tenth centuries was characterized by unstable climatic conditions marked by pronounced summer aridity—peaking in AD 948 (Tenryaku 天暦 2)—alongside frequent humid years.[32] Consulting the *Nihon kiryaku* 日本紀略 (Abridged Chronicle of Japan) and *Honchō seiki* 本朝世紀 (Chronicle of Japan) reveals that natural disasters associated with climatic fluctuations—droughts and floods—occurred frequently and with increasing severity. Major earthquakes also occurred; diseases repeatedly broke out in the capital of Heian-kyō, causing large numbers of deaths. Flood events altered river courses, and sediment accumulated in downstream and coastal areas. This reshaped irrigation networks, paddy fields, harbors, and other productive and transportation infrastructures.[33]

In particular, in the Oyumino area of present-day Chiba City, the southwestern lowlands stabilized as coastal sand ridges developed, and at the Ichihara Jōri 市原条里 System site located there, paddy fields expanded after the tenth century. The Ariyoshi/Takazawa settlement—dependent on *yatsu* 谷津 rice paddies—had reached production limits, making relocation toward areas facing plains with expanded arable land more advantageous.[34] Moreover, by the end of the ninth century, Buddhist beliefs and practices centered on personal salvation began to affect traditional ancestor veneration, which had previously served as the binding mechanism for settlements. The interaction between environmental and psycho-spiritual change contributed to the dissolution and disappearance of traditional settlements based on ancient clan (blood-kin) groups from the tenth through the eleventh centuries.

In the latter half of the tenth century, in 985 (Kanna 寛和 1), Genshin's *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集 (Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land) was compiled—a work that systematized the

[32] Nakatsuka and Tamura, *Kikō hendō kara yominaosu Nihonshi 4.*
[33] Sasō, *Matsuri to kamigami no kodai.*
[34] Sasō, "10-seiki no kikō hendō ga motarashita mono."

complex Buddhist views of the Pure Land and the afterlife.[35] At its foundation lay beliefs and practices for personal salvation, profoundly altering ideas concerning the dead and the afterlife. However—as demonstrated above—such personal salvation-based practices and beliefs did not emerge only in the tenth century among citizens of Heian-kyō due to the transformation and disintegration of the *ritsuryō* system. By the late eighth century, they had already penetrated communities in the eastern provinces situated along Buddhist proselytization networks linking provincial temples and early district temples. To this, from the latter half of the ninth century onward, were added increasingly frequent and severe natural disasters and environmental changes. The interaction between acute awareness of existential risk and the desire for individual salvation brought society and religion to a major turning point in the tenth century. As a result, settlements grounded in ancient clans dissolved and dispersed, and by the twelfth century were reorganized into new medieval settlement and cemetery landscapes.

The tenth century also saw changes in the economic sphere. In the Japanese archipelago, rice and cloth came to function as substitute currencies, marking the dawn of a monetary economy. In parallel, the Japanese archipelago was incorporated into the broader East Asian trading sphere centered on the Northern Song. By the twelfth century, currency-based market economies using Chinese coins were fully operational.[36] In this context, indigenous deity beliefs and practices (*jingi* 神祇) were incorporated into Buddhism—a world religion corresponding to trans-East-Asian trading networks—and the *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 beliefs and practices, which saw the original forms of Japan's deities as buddhas and bodhisattvas, spread rapidly. A new religious view developed in which Japanese deities were enshrined (*kanjō* 勧請) through Buddhist rites.[37] The prototype of Japanese culture commonly called the "national style" (*kokufū* 国風)—together with views of deities and the physical landscape of shrines that continue to the present—was formed in response to the developments of the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Conclusion: Elements of Cultural Evolution in Ancient Japan

The findings of this study may be summarized as follows:

(1) From the eighth through the ninth centuries, the organizational relationship between Buddhism—a world religion—and the state persisted. Beliefs in personal salvation, together with the Buddhist conception of "transgression," penetrated even settlements of the eastern provinces. Combined with the influence of *ritsuryō* document-based administration, this led to a rapid expansion of the literate stratum.

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[35] Hayami, *Jōdo shinkō-ron*.
[36] Itō, *Nihon chūsei no kahei to shin'yō/ryūtsū*.
[37] Sasō, *Matsuri to kamigami no kodai*.

(2) From the latter half of the ninth through the tenth centuries, warfare and natural disasters (floods, droughts, epidemics, earthquakes, etc.) heightened social anxiety and strengthened desires for personal salvation. In addition, environmental changes prompting the reorganization of productive and transportation systems contributed to the dissolution of ancient settlements based on traditional clan (kin) groups. By the twelfth century, these were reorganized into new medieval villages.

(3) From the tenth through the twelfth centuries—when the above conditions unfolded—circulation networks inside and outside the Japanese archipelago were reconfigured, and the archipelago was incorporated into the broad East Asian exchange and distribution sphere centered on the Northern Song.

(4) In the case of the Japanese archipelago, between roughly the eighth and twelfth centuries, conditions (1) through (3) converged, allowing the formation of the foundational shape of Japanese culture as it continues to the present.

At the same time, even amid such transformations, traditional sacred spaces and deities of indigenous deity beliefs and practices were preserved. In Fujiwara no Michinaga's 藤原道長 Edict of Chōhō 1 (*Chōho gannenrei* 長保 1; Chōho 1 is 999 AD), it is stated that the interruption of rites and the destruction of shrines directly lead to disasters, clearly articulating a policy mandating the performance of rites and prohibiting shrine damage. It has been suggested that this served as an impetus for the establishment of the *nagare-zukuri* 流造 architectural style, which became the standard form of shrine main halls.[38] In the diverse natural environments of the Japanese archipelago and its insular geography distant from the continent, a view that intuitively perceives agency in natural processes and treats that agency as divine, and rituals offering precious goods and food to maintain and enhance desirable divine workings, were adaptive. As such, rites (*matsuri*) continued after the tenth century and became a defining feature of Japanese culture.

While rites—*matsuri* as a set of ceremonial acts—were preserved and developed in varied forms, the deities toward whom these rites were directed became incorporated into Buddhist belief. At the Shiotsu 塩津 Port site in Shiga Prefecture, from shrine remains, wooden plaques with oaths to Buddhist and indigenous deities (*kishōmon* 起請文) have been recovered. The oldest datable example is from Hōen 保延 3 (1137). In it, a person engaged in Lake Biwa shipping swears by Buddhist deities such as Indra, Brahmā, and the Four Heavenly Kings, as well as Japanese deities such as Kamigamo 上賀茂 and Shimogamo 下賀茂, Hachiman 八幡, and Sannō 山王, vowing to perform his work faithfully and stating explicitly that divine punishment would follow if the oath were broken.[39] It is significant that, within the transport system sustaining the Heian-

[38] Maruyama, *Kodai no jinja zōei*.
[39] Hama, "Shiotsu kishōbun no sekai"; Shigeta and Hama, *Shiotsu-kō iseki 2*.

kyō market economy, Buddhist and Japanese deities served as supernatural monitors. The Shiotsu Port site, where these oath plaques were found, was a logistical hub linking Tsuruga—an important Japan Sea–side port visited by Northern Song merchants—with the capital. In the twelfth century, the port expanded its functions,[40] and increased shipping to Heian-kyō probably activated the market economy. This situation corresponds with the development of coin-based market economies at the same time. The wooden oath plaques from Shiotsu Port were created in such an environment. Together with Buddhist deities, Japanese deities came to possess the character of "big gods"—entities important for contract enforcement—within wide-area trading networks.[41]

In the process by which Western Europe's distinctive psychology formed, Joseph Henrich identified the following elements: the linkage between world religion and the state, the expansion of the literate stratum, the dissolution of ancient clans, and the activation of market economies. Comparable elements can be observed in the Japanese archipelago in roughly the same period. At the same time, the two regions differed substantially in terms of natural environmental change, especially disasters. Examining these similarities and differences from multiple perspectives and reconsidering the formation of Japanese culture from a broad vantage point is necessary to situate it within world history. It is my hope that this paper contributes, however modestly, to that endeavor.

Postscript: This article is a revised and expanded version of a research presentation delivered at the "Kami Studies" Workshop of the Organization for the Advancement of Research and Development, Kokugakuin University, on 15 February 2025. My analysis and interpretations of the Obaraku archaeological complex site group are based on a forthcoming article (Sasō, "Kodai Tōgoku ni okeru 'tsumi' ishiki to shizoku shūdan no kaitai).

(Translated by Dylan L. Toda)

[40] Yokota, "Hakkutsu sareta Shiotsu-kō iseki."
[41] Norenzayan, *Big Gods*.

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