

A Hypothesis for Early Kofun Rulership¹

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This article continues the argument proposed in Barnes 2007 that Early Kofun rulership was predicated on knowledge of Chinese Queen Mother of the West mythology. A variety of archaeological and textual data, plus consideration of the historical circumstances in Japan's relation to the continent, are pulled together to support the idea that the Queen Mother was both legitimator of political rulership and a ruler's guide in the afterlife. It is shown archaeologically that the Miwa polity of the Early Kofun period was territorially circumscribed and could not have ruled over the entire western archipelago. The spread of the Mounded Tomb Culture beyond Miwa can be explained by the existence of a charismatic avatar of the Queen Mother (Himiko?) who attracted adherents for their own benefit. The Early Kofun burial system can be interpreted in terms of Queen Mother attributes, beginning with the monumental tombs themselves, their stone chambers, and the various pseudo jade objects and bronze mirrors—the most important of which bear the image of the Queen Mother herself. It is further argued that Amaterasu is likely the extension of Queen Mother ideology as reconstituted between the fifth and seventh centuries, continuing the important political functions of legitimating the rulership of historic Japan.

Keywords: Japanese archaeology, Kofun period, state formation, Chinese mythology, rulership ideology, Daoism, Yamato state, Amaterasu, Shinto, Queen Mother of the West

The Early Kofun Ritual System and Queen Mother of the West Ideology

Since beginning study of the Kofun period in 1965 as a freshman at International Christian University in Tokyo (under Professor J.E. Kidder), I have always been fascinated by the way the Mounded Tomb Culture (*kofun bunka* 古墳文化), signified by the keyhole-shaped tomb, appeared suddenly and without precedent in Japanese prehistory. I avoided this topic in my doctoral work, but a book by Mori Koichi 森浩一 on third century Japan further stimulated my interest in the transition from the Yayoi 弥生 to the Kofun 古墳 periods.² Though the lineage of the keyhole tomb can now be traced back into the Late Yayoi period,

¹ A Japanese language version of an earlier manuscript for this article was published as Barnes 2011.

² Barnes 1983, 1988; Mori 1983.

this genealogy does not explain why the keyhole tomb was monumentalized at the time it was. Similarly, many of the precious grave goods of Early Kofun were known previously in different forms, but why were they suddenly produced as widespread prestige goods in a relatively homogeneous burial set?

Since the 1960s, scholars have proposed that the Mounded Tomb Culture (abbreviated here as MTC) of the Early Kofun period represented the imposition of Yamato political power (Yamato *seiken* 大和政權) over western Japan. However, given that the extent of the Yamato State (Yamato *kokka* 大和国家) even in the fifth century was confined to the Kinai 畿内 region, it is difficult to think that the whole of western Japan encompassed by the Early Kofun MTC was under firm Yamato rule.

Moreover, if one looks at the political structures in the Nara 奈良 Basin in the third and fourth centuries A.D., the extent of what I call the Miwa 三輪 polity, controlled by the Miwa Court (Miwa *ōchō* 三輪王朝), was confined to the south-eastern corner of the basin (Figure 1). Terasawa Kaoru 寺沢薫

has come to the same conclusion independently, defining the Shiki 磯城 polity with almost the same territorial boundaries as the extent of the Miwa polity which I have specified through different methods.³ Finally, Terasawa Tomoko 寺沢知子 has proposed links between particular tomb locations and the hypothetical boundaries of the Shiki polity, while I have identified documentary evidence that suggests the Miwa polity was confined to the south-eastern Nara Basin.⁴

If it is the case that the Miwa polity, or Miwa Court as more commonly known, was geographically limited, then how can we understand the rapid spread of the MTC through western Japan into southern Tōhoku 東北—from its point of origin in the Makimuku 纏向 Tomb Cluster—in a span of only fifty years (the length of the first phase of the Early Kofun period EK1, late third century A.D.). Mann has proposed four major sources of power for emerg-

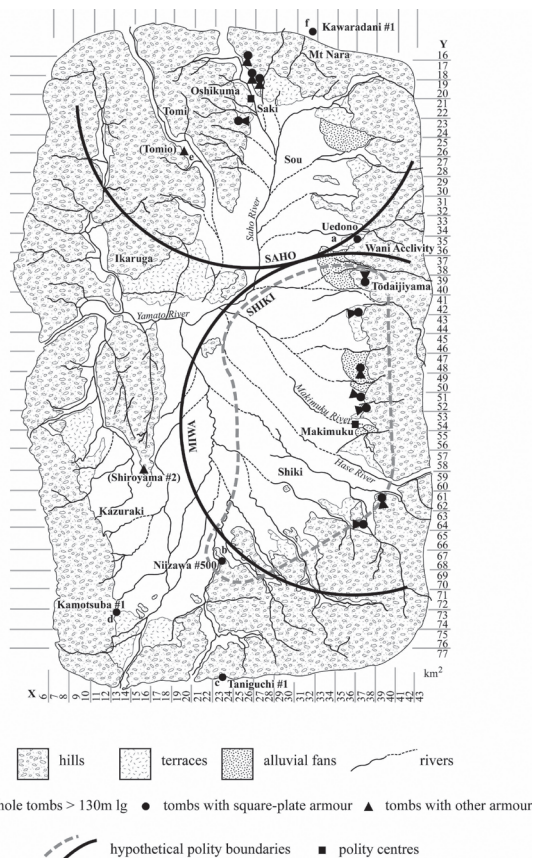


Figure 1. Theoretical two-polity division of the Nara Basin in Early Kofun, with Saho 左保 in the northwest and Miwa 三輪 (Shiki 磯城) in the southeast (Barnes 2007, Fig. 6.6).

3 Terasawa, K. 2000; Barnes 1986a.

4 Terasawa, T. 2003: Fig. 3; Barnes 1986a, 1988, 2007.

ing states, using the acronym IEMP: ideological (I), economic (E), military (M), and political (P) power.⁵ It is clear that political power (*seiken*) is of foremost concern for Kofun period archaeologists, but I will argue that it was ideological power that was most important in the Early Kofun period. In the following sections, I will examine these two opposing sources in terms of the Early Kofun data: political power in terms of territorial rule and ideological power in terms of burial ritual.

The Kofun period is defined by its monumental mounded tombs (*kofun* 古墳, “old mound”). These represent the emergence of an elite that was separated from commoners socially, economically and politically. The period is known in Japan for its “stratified society,” and social stratification in Western theory is acknowledged as the threshold for state formation. The tombs manifest this social system by being spatially isolated from commoner burials, by involving an impressive amount of labor in construction that the elite were able to muster, by containing many prestige goods of rare or valuable materials that were unavailable to commoners, and by the ability to employ craftspeople to make those goods or obtain finished items from afar. It is well known in worldwide archaeological studies that stratified chiefdom organizations and early state organization often have robust ritual systems. The form of rule in these societies is often described as a “theocracy.” In the past, the MTC has not been interpreted as representing a ritual system, though a few archaeologists suspected that there may have been some influence of Daoism from China in Early Kofun ritual.⁶ I would like to expand this suspicion to propose a hypothesis that in fact the Early Kofun ritual system, as manifested in burial ritual, was based on the Chinese Daoist mythology of the Queen Mother of the West.

In the following sections, I outline the many strands of data that I think can be woven together to provide a coherent basis for proposing that Queen Mother of the West ideology underlay the Early Kofun burial system. This presentation is based on my book, but the discussion of the material culture of the Queen Mother goes beyond the book’s content.⁷ I will respond here to views expressed by one reviewer in order to justify my thinking on this subject.⁸

In any case the reader should be aware that, at most, this hypothesis is just a hypothesis and not the truth of past reality; I believe it will be very difficult either to prove or disprove it, as it relies on circumstantial evidence rather than hard historical facts. However, one test of the strength of a hypothesis is how many strands of different kinds of data support the hypothesis, and I hope to demonstrate that, in fact, there is strong support because of the variety of data all pointing towards the same conclusion: that the ideology of Early Kofun period rulership was founded on ideas about the Queen Mother of the West.

5 Mann 1984.

6 Acknowledged recently as well, Fukunaga 2005, p. 226.

7 Barnes 2007, especially Chapter 8.

8 See Edwards 2008; Piggott 2009; Sasaki 2010. I will respond to Piggott.

Why “Yamato Seiken” Is Not Sufficient to Explain the Early Kofun Mounded Tomb Culture

The concept of Yamato Seiken is based on the presumed power of Yamato over the whole of western and central Japan that participated in the Mounded Tomb Culture. One of the first proponents of this concept was Iwasaki Takuya 岩崎卓也, who focussed on the minijar–jar stand set as the evidence of the spread of Yamato authority (Figure 2).⁹ Interestingly, Early Kofun tombs do not include ceramics as grave goods, but this jar set was seen by Iwasaki to signal a nationwide (meaning western Japan) uniformity of ritual formalities, established when regions began to have some political connection with the Yamato Court. Kobayashi Yukio 小林行雄 focussed instead on triangular-rimmed bronze mirrors as the defining feature of the Early Kofun political system, proposing that their distribution from Yamato to regional chieftains was the means to solidify

political relations between centre and periphery.¹⁰ Kondō Yoshirō 近藤義郎 emphasized standardization of the keyhole tomb shape as the most important indicator of Yamato power.¹¹

These seminal works have greatly influenced later hypotheses about state formation in early Japan, but by using such artefacts and features with widespread distributions to characterize Yamato Seiken, the actual limits of territorial power have been overlooked. From the mid-third to mid-fourth centuries, the Nara Basin was indeed home to Yamato power, but a close examination of the territorial extent of the Miwa polity indicates that the Miwa Court did not have control over the whole basin, much less all of the Kinai or western and central Japan—the extent of the Mounded Tomb Culture. Let us look first at the political structure of the Nara Basin during this hundred year span.

This time period can be divided into three phases, according to the current ten-phase scheme for the Kofun period. Early Kofun (EK) covers the first four phases (EK1–4), with the late third century being EK1, the early fourth century being EK2, and the middle fourth century being EK3, with the latter half of the fourth century being EK4 (see Table 1).

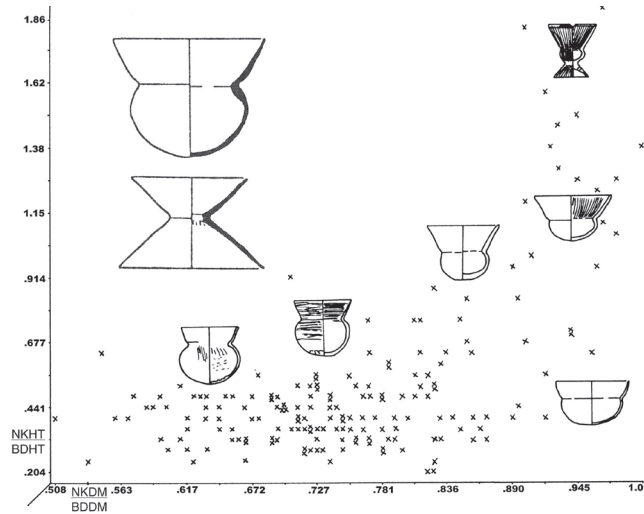


Figure 2. Kofun period minijars. The scatter plot charts the changing shape of minijars, never more than 7 cm tall, from their early tall-rimmed forms (upper right) to a more bowl-like shape in Middle Kofun (lower left). The minijar was conveniently placed on a small ceramic stand (inset) (after Barnes 1986b, Fig. 4.3 and Barnes 1988, Fig. 80).

9 Iwasaki 1963.

10 Kobayashi 1961.

11 Kondō 1968, 1983.

Table 1. Traditional list of Japanese sovereigns and historical events. Sovereigns mentioned in the text are in ALL CAPS. The historical dates for the imperial line do not coordinate well with the archaeological material; the tomb assigned to Sujin is early fourth century. The *adjusted* dates for Sujin's reign fall in the Terminal Yayoi period (was he Himiko's brother?). Placement of the Kofun period phases (EK 1, etc.) are only approximate. Female sovereigns are asterisked. *Nihon shoki* (NS) page numbers are from Aston 1972 (compiled from Barnes 2007, Tables 1.3, 3.1).

King list no.	Sovereign	NS vol. and pp.	Adjusted reign dates	Yayoi-Kofun chronology	Continental events
	Kimi (King)	NS vol. 1	A.D.	Yayoi period ca. 800 B.C.–A.D. 250	
				147–189 Wa no Hanran 180? Himiko accession?	9–220 Late Han dynasty 142 Daoist church founded 184–196 Yellow Turban Revolt
					196–219 Jian'an era deity-beast mirrors
10	SUJIN	150–64	219–249	238 Himiko embassy to Wei 240 Wei envoys visit Himiko 243 Himiko embassy to Wei ca. 248 Death of Himiko	220 Fall of Han dynasty 221–265 Wei dynasty 231 Centralized control of Daoist church disintegrates 238 Daifang established
				Kofun period 250–710	
11	SUININ	165–87	249–280	EK1 Start of Miwa Court 250? 280? Hashihaka Tomb imported TR-mirrors 266 Iyo Embassy to W. Jin	265 Fall of Wei 265–316 W. Jin dynasty 280 Daifang abandoned
12	KEIKŌ	188–214	280–316	EK2 Jades and pseudojades in tombs; early 4th century local production of deity-beast mirrors	302 Daoist state founded 313 Wei capital destroyed 313 Koguryō destroys Lelang commandery 317–419 E. Jin dynasty
13	Seimu	214–16	316–343	EK3	
14	Chūai/Chiuai	217–23	343–346	Deterioration of locally made deity-beast mirrors ca. 350 Makimuku abandoned 362? Chūai's postulated death End of Miwa Court	
	JINGŪ /Jingo*	224–53	fictitious		
15	Ojin	254–71	346–395	EK4 375 Start of Kawachi Court	369 7-branched sword from Paekche; wars with Koguryō
16	Nintoku	272–300	395–427	MK5	
17	Richū /Richiu	301–310	427–432		
18	Hanzei	310–11	433–438	MK6	
19	Ingyō /Ingio	312–27	438–453		
20	Ankō	328–32	454–456	MK7	
	Ōkimi (Great Kings):				
21	Yūryaku/Yuriaku	333–72	457–479	461 <i>Nihon Shoki</i> becomes chronologically valid	
22	Seinei	373–77	480–484		
23	Kenzō	377–93	485–487		
24	Ninken	393–98	488–498		
25	Buretsu/Muretsu	399–407	499–506		
		NS vol. 2			
26	KEITAI/Keidai	1–25	507–531	LK9 Start of Asuka Court	
27	Ankan	26–32	534–535		
28	Senka/Senkwa	33–35	536–539		
29	Kinmei	36–89	540–571	LK10 Introduction of Buddhism	
30	Bidatsu	90–105	572–585		581–618 Sui dynasty

31	Yōmei	106–111	585–587		
32	Sushun/Sujun	112–20	587–592		
33	Suiko*	121–56	592–628		618–690 Tang dynasty
34	Jomei	157–70	629–641		
35	Kōgyoku*	171–94	642–645		
36	Kōtoku	195–247	645–654		
37	Saimei	248–73	655–661		
38	Tenji/Tenchi	274–300	668–671		
39	Kōbun	–	671–672		
40	TENMU	301–381	673–686		
41	Jitō	382–423	687–697	694 Built Fujiwara Palace	

Miwa Polity Limits

Terasawa hypothesizes—on the basis of ceramic, lithic and geographical considerations—that there were at least three aggregations in the Nara Basin by the Late Yayoi period, focused on Shiki in the southeast, Kazuraki 葛城 in the southwest, and Sofu 層富 in the north.¹² This divisioning differs somewhat from the four divisions of the basin in Yayoi that I arrived at based on the distribution of bronze bell clusters.¹³ Either way, there is considerable evidence that the basin was not a homogeneous social space and that different groupings were present, affecting subsequent socio-political development into the Kofun period, when territorial development is usually assessed by monitoring keyhole tomb placement through time.

In previous publications, I used the rank-size rule to monitor keyhole tomb distribution in the Nara Basin.¹⁴ My two basic assumptions were that tomb size was indicative of rank in a political hierarchy and that tomb clusters stand as proxies for political centers. At that time, tomb dating as listed in my standard reference, the site surveys of the 1970s, was relatively coarse, with each tomb relegated to Early, Middle, or Late Kofun if at all, as opposed to the ten-phase system now in use and described above (EK1 etc.).¹⁵ In my early studies, the rank-size analysis revealed two concentrations of large keyhole tombs (tombs averaging 225.6 m in length) within the Nara Basin in Early Kofun, suggesting the partitioning of the basin into two polities (Figure 1). I hypothesized that these large-tomb clusters—Saki 佐紀 Tomb Cluster in the northwest and Ōyamato 大和 Tomb Cluster in the southeast—formed the centers of two polities: Saho 左保 in the northwest, focused on the Saki site, and Miwa in the southeast, focused on the Makimuku site. The Hashihaka 箸墓 Tomb in Makimuku is—according to the eighth century Japanese chronicle, the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀—the burial place of the Princess Yamato Totohi Momoso Hime 倭迹迹日百襲媛, and is also thought by many to be the burial site of Queen Himiko 卑弥呼 mentioned in the Chinese *Weizhi* 魏志, chronicles of the Wei 魏 dynasty of China (221–265).

This work was conducted under the rubric of Peer Polity identification, but the reaction of Japanese archaeologists to the idea of the basin hosting two contemporaneous

12 Terasawa, K. 2000.

13 Barnes 1988, Fig. 55.

14 Barnes 1986a, 1988.

15 Naraken Kyōi 1971–1975; Kondō 1991–2000.

polities in the Early Kofun period was negative.¹⁶ Terasawa himself postulates that only one polity occupied the basin but that the initial extent of this polity was equivalent to only one of his three Late Yayoi socio-cultural divisions in the basin: his Shiki region, which is congruent with my Miwa polity. In the collection of data for the keyhole tomb project in the late 1980s, it was clarified that the Saki Tomb Cluster (in Saho) belonged to EK3–4, while the Ōyamato Tomb Cluster (in Miwa) belonged to EK1–2.¹⁷ Thus was born the idea of Shiraishi Taichirō 白石太一郎 that the focus of the Early Kofun polity shifted from Miwa to Saki in the mid- to late fourth century.¹⁸ Shiraishi admitted in discussion with me that the reason for the shift is unknown and remains one of the unsolved mysteries of the Early Kofun period.¹⁹ The fact that Saki Tomb Cluster was built slightly later in the Early Kofun period than the Ōyamato tomb Cluster, about which I was originally mistaken, actually strengthens my hypothesis.

In his 2009 book, Shiraishi suggests that the Saki tombs might have been built in the region of the succeeding ruler's mother.²⁰ I believe that this problem can be solved another way by looking at the *Nihon shoki* stories attributed to the Early Kofun period.²¹ Although these stories might be apocryphal, they have an uncanny match with the archaeological data, implying a kernel of truth within.

Documentary Evidence of Military Power

To bolster the hypothesis that the Miwa polity was limited to the southeastern Nara Basin, there is considerable documentary evidence that this polity had rivals in the northern Nara Basin as well as in the southern Kyoto 京都 Basin. According to the *Nihon shoki*, during the time of the first Miwa sovereign, Sujin 崇神, troops were dispatched to attack a hostile force in Yamashiro 山城 (southern Kyoto Basin). Sujin's seeress aunt, the Princess Yamato Totohi Momoso Hime, "told the Emperor that Takehani Yasuhiko 武埴安彦 was about to plot treason against him."²² Aston's footnote comments that this "prince" was a "half-brother" to the emperor (by the traditional genealogy) and he lived in Yamashiro.²³ The *Nihon shoki* states that "the troops took sacred jars and planted them at the top of the acclivity of Takasuki 武録 in Wani 和珥. Then they advanced with their best troops and ascended Mount Nara and occupied it."²⁴ Mount Nara 那羅, now named the Nara Hills, separates the Nara and Kyoto Basins—or separates Yamato from Yamashiro.

These actions suggest that the Wani Acclivity marked the northern boundary of the southeastern polity (Figure 1); Wani remains a modern place name in Tenri 天理 city and is located where the Furu 布留 river alluvial fan drops off towards the northern basin. In the Sujin chronicle, the person dispatched to deal with disorder in Yamashiro, using the Wani Acclivity as his launching point, was Hikokunifuku 彦國葺, later claimed as the ancestor of

16 Renfrew and Cherry 1986.

17 Published in Kondō 1991–2000.

18 Shiraishi 1989, 2009.

19 Personal communication December 2004.

20 Shiraishi 2009.

21 Cf. Aston 1972.

22 Sakamoto et al. 1967, p. 244; Aston 1972, vol. I, p. 156.

23 Aston 1972, vol. I, p. 156.

24 Sakamoto et al. 1967, p. 244; Aston 1972, vol. I, p. 157.

the Wani clan hypothesized to have occupied the northeastern basin.²⁵ From this story, the acclivity clearly formed a notional border, and ritual protection was needed to go beyond. It follows that Mount Nara, separating modern Nara and Kyoto prefectures, was not then under Miwa's control and the Yamashiro location may have implied the area occupied by Tsubai Ōtsukayama 椿井大塚山 Tomb (Figure 3).

If the northern area had to be first subjugated by military force (the Wani Acclivity story), it was then affiliated to Miwa through marriage alliance (the Saho story). The “Saho Uprising” reveals an attempted coup by the brother and sister pair Saho Hiko 左保彦 and Saho Hime 左保姫, the latter being the “beloved” consort of the second Miwa sovereign, Suinin 垂仁.²⁶ Not only does the naming pattern of a place name (Saho) combined with the *hime/hiko* ヒメ・ヒコ (princess/prince) designation imply this was a local ruling gender-pair, it puts them squarely in the northwestern basin, where the Saho river flows.²⁷ The Empress, Saho Hime, refused to carry out Saho Hiko's plan that she murder her husband Suinin and indeed confessed the plot to her husband. However, when Suinin raised troops to storm the Inaki 稲城 (a rice granary compound?) of Prince Saho, the Empress fled to the side of her brother and was immolated with him in Suinin's firing of the Inaki. We can assume this story belongs to EK2 (second phase of the Early Kofun period), since the construction of the Saki Tomb Cluster dating from EK3 began immediately after Suinin's death.

The building of the Suinin Mausoleum in the hills overlooking Saki took place at the beginning of EK3. As noted above by Shiraishi, the shift of royal tomb building from southeast to northeast Nara Basin is unexplained, though he identifies the Saki area as the homeland of the mother of Suinin's successor. By this, he must be referring to Suinin's *second* wife Hibasuhime 日葉洲媛, mother of Keikō 景行, who is allegedly buried in Saki Misasagi-yama 佐紀陵山 in Saki. However, I believe the building of Suinin's tomb in this area is directly related to his *first* wife, Saho Hime, and her treachery. That is, I see it more as a symbolic imposition of Miwa authority in the area after disturbances, which are portrayed in the chronicles as an attempted coup d'état. The creation of the royal burial ground at Saki with concomitant ritual visitations injected the physical presence of Miwa personnel. By incorporating the northwestern basin into the center's routine round of ritual activities and

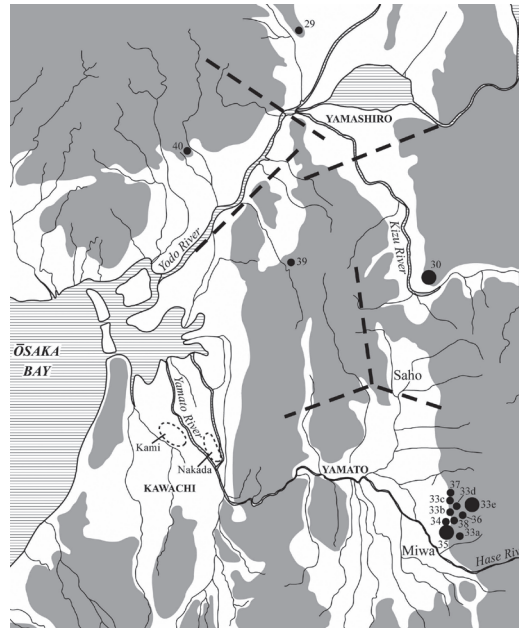


Figure 3. Theoretical divisioning of Kinai polity territories in the late third century (Early Kofun Phase 1), by Thiessen polygon calculations (Barnes 2007, Fig. 6.3a).

25 Kishi 1959, Fig. 346.

26 Sakamoto et al. 1967, pp. 262–64; Aston 1972, vol. I, pp. 170–72.

27 Takamura 1966.

by emplacing visible forms of political authority on the landscape, the Miwa Court asserted its authority over a rebellious part of the basin.

It is questionable whether Prince Saho's revolt was a localized phenomenon or whether it was incited in part by competition between Miwa and the ruler ensconced in the southern Kyoto Basin, where the EK1 tomb of Tsubai Ōtsukayama was succeeded by the EK2 Hirao Shiroyama 平尾城山 Tomb. As revealed above, three forms of data so far place the northern boundary of the Miwa polity at approximately the same place in the northeastern Nara Basin: the Miwa/Saho divide (based on the division between large-tomb clusters, Figure 1), the Hashihaka/Tsubai Ōtsukayama divide (based on primate tomb nearest neighbor distance, Figure 3), and the Wani Acclivity ritual activities (based on textual evidence). By all these measures, Saho may have been included in the nominal territory of the southern Kyoto chieftain (Figure 3) who, if equated with Takehani Yasuhiko (see above), may have been half-brother to Suinin himself. So, was the EK1 struggle between elite relatives carried over to EK2 as competing for the loyalty of Saho? Or, was Prince Saho one of those interstitial local elites who could theoretically choose the nearby ruler with which to align themselves? Thus, what we might be seeing reflected in the chronicles is conflict between these two areas for control of the Kinai core; at the least, we can say that Miwa had less than complete control over the north basin and was, in the early phases EK1-2 of the Kofun period, very much confined to the southeast.

Documentary Evidence of Marriage Alliances

The Saho Uprising story above suggests that marriages to the Miwa sovereign involved the families of local rulers. Using females to consolidate political relations between families is an age-old strategy, which usually results in friendly rather than hostile relationships. To pledge a female to a superior is an alliance mechanism that automatically creates a geographical hierarchy between these families. That the Saho polity was affiliated to Miwa in this way is similar to other liaisons that the Miwa rulers apparently arranged.

The *Nihon shoki* states that Suinin's predecessor Sujin took as wives the daughter of Arakaha 荒河, the Tobe 戸畔 (Chief) of the Land of Kii 紀伊, and the daughter of Ohoshiana no Sukune 大海宿禰 possibly from Ōmi,²⁸ and perhaps another woman named Ohari no Ohoshiamahime 尾張大海媛 possibly from Owari 尾張. Suinin, after the death of Saho Hime, took to wife five daughters of Prince Taniha no Michinushi no Ōkimi 丹波道主王 (King of the Road) of Tanba 丹波.²⁹ Then after his second wife Hibasuhime died, he obtained the daughter of Yamashiro Ōkuni no Fuchi 山城大國不遲 (or 淵).³⁰ The areas of Yamashiro and Tanba lie on routes north from the Nara Basin to the Japan Sea, while Kii forms an alternative southern outlet to the Osaka Bay region and Owari leads to the Pacific seaboard (Tōkai) and Kantō regions. At least three of the name elements (Tobe, Nushi, Ōkimi) of the fathers of the brides indicate top-level persons in local hierarchies. The Miwa rulers can thus be seen through documentary evidence to have established personal ties to chiefly families in the Kinai region, and this expression of allegiance through marriage of

28 Sakamoto et al. 1967, pp. 236–37; Aston 1972, vol. I, p. 150. Because Aston transcribes the name “big sea” as *obo-umi* rather than *obo-sbiama* as in Sakamoto et al. 1967.

29 Sakamoto et al. 1967, p. 264; Aston 1972, vol. I, p. 172.

30 Sakamoto et al. 1967, p. 274; Aston 1972, vol. I, p. 181.

daughters to the paramount by local rulers carried on into the historical period with the sending of daughters to court as *uneme* 采女 (court maidens).

These relationships suggest that Miwa allies existed in the Kinai region but not far beyond; it is unlikely that the Miwa sovereign took wives from every local ruler who built himself a keyhole tomb. Thus, although an incipient geographical hierarchy was built into Miwa's political dominance, it does not account for the rapid and far reaching spread of the MTC. Nor do the stories of strife between local rulers such as Saho Hiko and the person in Yamashiro speak for a state organization that was firmly in control of even the Kinai in the Early Kofun.

In conclusion, the Miwa polity was limited in both its territorial and its social reach. Miwa did not lack military power, but this was deployed on a very local scale and was not involved in the imposition of the MTC throughout western Japan. Elite relationships beyond the basin speak not for uniform hierarchical and bureaucratic control but for a system of negotiated alliances with widely separated individuals, including the possible assignment of Miwa personnel to distant parts. If actual political power was seemingly so ephemeral, the question arises: why was the MTC culture growing out of the Miwa area so dominant among the regional chiefs at this time? To answer this, we must look at the contents of the burial repertoire that represents the major ritual activities in the Early Kofun period.

The Ideological Significance of the Early Kofun Burial Rituals

As stated above, Kobayashi Yukio believed that the disbursement of triangular-rimmed (TR) mirrors from the Kinai to peripheral chieftains was a crucial strategy for creating political alliances in the Early Kofun period. This idea replicates the Chinese strategy of giving precious goods to distant chieftains to ensure their alliance; Himiko herself is said by the *Weizhi* to have received bronze mirrors from the Wei dynasty court.

Although a great deal more is now known about TR-mirrors, focus on the utilitarian disbursement of mirrors overlooks the significance of the mirrors' design.³¹ Most triangular-rimmed mirrors, the dominant Early Kofun grave good, bear the godly figures of the Queen Mother of the West, her husband King Father of the East, and the Queen's feral companions—tigers and dragons (Figures 4, 5). Mirrors with these deity beast designs only began to be produced in China in the second century A.D., after a millennial movement there to receive a manifestation of the goddess herself. The Queen Mother cult was alive and active particularly in northeast China just at the time of the Wa Disturbance (*Wa no hanran* 倭の反乱, 146–189 A.D.), after which Himiko was elevated as the Wa 倭 paramount in Japan.

The oldest deity beast mirror is dated back to 167 A.D. in China, and mirrors with this design (though with flat, not triangular, rims) are thought to have been imported into the archipelago from around 196 A.D.³² This date falls in the middle of the Yellow Turban Revolt (184–205), a Daoist revolt against the Late Han 漢 dynasty that contributed greatly to its downfall. Since the Queen Mother is a figure from early Daoist cosmology, it would not be surprising if the Queen Mother myths entered Japan at the same time as the

31 See Fukunaga's 2005 tome on TR-mirrors. Although Mizoguchi (2013, pp. 258–60) acknowledges the mirror's proposed role in gift-giving and discusses their placement in the tombs vis-à-vis other imported and locally cast mirrors, he makes no mention of their iconography.

32 Fukunaga 1999.

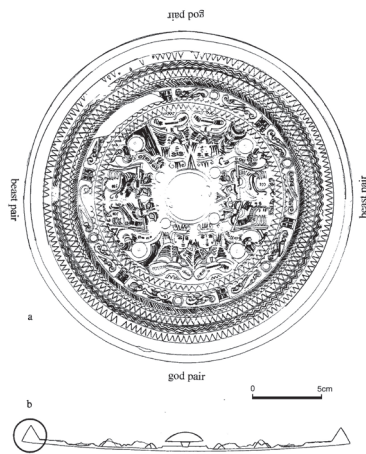


Figure 4. Triangular-rimmed deity-beast mirror. Named for the triangular cross-section of the rim (not the zigzag motifs), this kind of mirror is unknown on the continent, though the imagery and technical skill of its depiction speak for Chinese craftsmanship. Various numbers and combinations of deities and beasts are known from a corpus of over 500 TR-mirrors (after Barnes 2007, Fig. 4.3).



Figure 5. Representations of the deities and beasts illustrated on triangular-rimmed mirrors. The upper human figure appears to be male, interpreted as King Father of the East; the lower human figure appears to be female, interpreted as Queen Mother of the West. The identities of these figures are not in doubt, as mirrors bearing the pair were popular in China in the second century A.D. The animals accompanying them seem to be tigers; note their prominent tails. (Modified from Edwards 1999, Fig. 5.)

mirrors—either with political refugees or traders, given the times of unrest and population movements during the Daoist rebellion.

The big question is, then, did Late Yayoi rulers know the Queen Mother story, and did this story serve as a ruling ideology from the late second to early fourth centuries A.D.? The historical context makes both these possibilities very likely, and the Early Kofun burial ritual also supports them, as we shall see below. But first, let us look more in detail at what the Queen Mother represents.

Rulership Attributes of the Queen Mother of the West

The Queen Mother myth may have begun in the Late Shang 商 period (thirteenth to twelfth centuries B.C.) and thereafter evolved in meaning and form. She is said to have resided in the western mountains, beyond the boundaries of Chinese civilization, and to have been responsible first and foremost for maintaining cosmic harmony and order. By the Han dynasty, she had been “domesticated” through pairing with a husband, King Father of the East. According to texts such as the *Shanhaijing* 山海經 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子, she was associated with mountains, caves and a variety of material objects including jade, headdress and staff. Cahill interprets the Queen Mother, appearing in the *Xunzi* 荀子, as teacher of Yü 禹 the Great, who legendarily tamed the Yellow river floods and is revered as the founder of the Xia 夏 dynasty (second millennium B.C.). Cahill thus concludes that the Queen Mother “confers both legitimacy or the right to rule and the power necessary for ruling on Yü.... She is worshiped in the sacred, superior, and legitimizing role of the teacher for centuries to come.”³³

³³ Cahill 1993, p. 15.

It is this last attribute of legitimizer that is most important to understanding the possible role of the Queen Mother cosmology in Early Kofun rulership. If the Queen Mother could “confer the right to rule,” then all local rulers in the archipelago who heard of her would probably want that ultimate heavenly stamp of approval. This would be an important motivation to profess belief in her and to obtain material goods that objectified that belief. On behalf of the Miwa rulers, if the disbursement of deity beast mirrors was conjoined with a cult system that rewarded believers with the “right to rule,” then Miwa would be seen as the legitimator of local rulership.

The second Queen Mother attribute most important to Kofun period rulers relates directly to the mirror. Cahill reports that mirrors in general were “buried with the dead to light the soul’s way to the next world and provide it with blessings there.”³⁴ But deity beast mirrors in particular were even more highly valued in China because the Queen Mother herself had a “role in assisting the tomb occupant on his journey to the heavens.”³⁵ Thus, if these Chinese beliefs were known to Kofun period rulers, any mirrors were good objects to put in a grave goods assemblage, but deity beast mirrors would be most coveted for ensuring the personal assistance of the Queen Mother, as imaged on the mirror, in the afterworld.

These two attributes form a solid basis for an Early Kofun ruling ideology: confirmation of the right to rule on earth, and guaranteed help in attaining the heavens after death. As with other instances of theocratic rule in early societies, only the elite, and in this case the very top stratum of rulers, had access to the heavenly beings. Access to the other-worldly is a major feature of social stratification, separating rulers from ruled. It is not a coincidence that the Mounded Tomb Culture, which in material terms signifies the emergence of stratified society, should have appeared simultaneously with a ruling ideology that allowed rulers to be clearly separated in ideological as well as material terms from the ruled.

Material Attributes of the Queen Mother of the West

The Mounded Tomb Culture is the materialization of social stratification. This has never been in doubt in Japanese archaeological treatises, but major questions—how, where, and why the components of the MTC suddenly came together in a coherent burial ritual—have never been answered. If we look at the material attributes of the Queen Mother, as revealed in Chinese Daoist documents, we can see that many are potentially reflected in the Early Kofun burial repertoire as if the burial facilities were to provide a home for the Queen Mother. I will frame the following observations as questions because I do not have the answers, but my overriding impression is that these objects and features are not unrelated to each other, and that they form a coherent set which reflects an underlying *raison d’être* for their use in the Early Kofun. Could that underlying *raison d’être* be Queen Mother mythology?

First and foremost is the mounded tomb itself. Although Late Yayoi mound-burials could be quite large, forty meters to a side, the earliest keyhole-tombs in the Makimuku Tomb Cluster dating to the early third century were over twice as long: ninety meters. By the mid-third century, the construction of Hashihaka tripled this length: to 280 meters. This is theoretically recognized as the monumentalization of ruler burials, and the creation

³⁴ Cahill 1993, p. 28.

³⁵ Cahill 1993, p. 30.

of monuments is common in stratified societies. But could this have further significance within the Queen Mother myth? She is said to live on a mountain; was the keyhole tomb an attempt to create an artificial mountain?

The Queen Mother is also said to have lived in a cave or “stone apartment.” One of the most striking innovations of the Early Kofun burial system is the development of the pit-style burial chamber made of stones. This burial facility has no antecedent in Yayoi archaeology. Could the creation of a stone chamber represent provision of a cave or “stone apartment” as the Queen’s residence was sometimes called?

The Queen Mother carried a staff. Although wooden staffs have been discovered in Late Yayoi contexts, the provision of beadstone (jasper and green tuff) staffs is a new development in Early Kofun. They are not only interred in burials but represented also on *haniwa* 埴輪, the clay funerary sculptures arranged on the tomb’s surface.

The Queen Mother was associated with tigers, especially tigers’ teeth. As noted in the *Shanhaijing*, she is said to have possessed the “tail of a leopard and the teeth of a tiger.”³⁶ Can the sudden exuberant production of *magatama* 勾玉 curved beads in the Early Kofun period be related to this? *Magatama* have existed in Japan since the Jōmon 縄文 period, and are often speculated to represent animal fangs or claws. We know that the meaning of objects can change through time in different social contexts. Did *magatama* acquire the interpretation of tiger teeth in Early Kofun? Jade and other beadstone *magatama* in Early Kofun are obviously elite objects, but did they come to be chosen for burial rather than just personal adornment because of the Queen Mother associations?

Unfortunately, we have no evidence of leopard tails in the archaeological record of Japan; even if a substitute for this animal not usually present in Japan were available, the tail would likely have been made from organic material and long since deteriorated.

The Queen Mother was associated with jade. Although Chinese nephrite jade is usually red or white, Japanese jadeite is green, and the multitudinous green beadstone objects in the Early Kofun repertoire may relate to this preference for “jade.” The staffs and *magatama* mentioned above were accompanied by the various bracelets made of jasper and green tuff. “Bracelets” are not specifically mentioned in the Chinese documents as associated with the Queen Mother, and as we know, there are several antecedent Yayoi types of shell bracelets, which account for stone bracelet shapes occurring in the tombs. But did the remake of indigenous shell bracelets in beadstone signify an appeal to the Queen Mother’s preference for jade?

The Queen Mother sits on a stool. One representation of a stool in the Kofun repertoire is a talc imitation from Mesuriyama メスリ山 Kofun in Nara, but does this hark back to the Queen Mother mythology? The Queen Mother enjoys holding divine feasts, and depictions often show supplicants holding cups (Figure 6). In the Tōdaijiyama 東大寺山 Tomb was found a set of twelve minijars and one integral minijar-on-stand. These were carved of talc, a less precious stone than either jade or jasper, but still green and easily shaped. The jars are replicas of Haji ware minijars and stands that can be found in great numbers in pits of the Early Kofun period, such as at Daifuku 大福 site in Nara. As long ago as 1983, I interpreted these pit contents as the remains of feasts—another trait of early stratified society the world over.³⁷ *Haniwa* shamanesses are often sculpted as raising a cup to the lip: was the Queen

36 Loewe 1979, p. 106.

37 Barnes 1983.

Mother the object of this ritualized drinking, as shown in the Chinese artworks?

Finally, the Queen Mother wore a *sheng* 勝 headdress. This is the only object on the Queen's list (besides leopard tails) that does not appear in the Early Kofun material repertoire. The material with which the *sheng* was made in China is not known, and even the shape is only known from some artwork (Figure 6). Thus, it does not seem to have been a burial good and may have been made of organic materials so that copies did not survive. The shape, however, is arresting: it consists of a bar connecting two discs, each of which have attached triangles. If only one side of the ornament is considered, as is represented in a jade from Korea (Figure 7), two objects in the Kofun period burial ritual can be seen to be similar in shape. First, these remind me of the shape of the round mound with two projections of Tatetsuki 楯築 mound-burial in Okayama 岡山 and of Nekozuka 猫塚 in Kagawa 香川. These are variants of the early keyhole-shaped tomb, after which the shape was standardized with only one triangular projection. The keyhole shape is known to have developed from the Late Yayoi mound-burial, which is a moated round mound with the moat broken by a solid walkway onto the tomb, but no rational explanation for the expansion of the walkway into a triangular shape has ever been offered.

I admit that it is far-fetched to associate the *sheng* headdress with a tomb shape. On the other hand, what do we make of the headgear of the *haniwa* shamaness? She is often described as having a “board-shaped” hairdo; examples often show it to be narrower in the center of the head than either forward or back, taking on at least the waisted shape of the *sheng* end piece. The coincidence of both headgears, of the Queen Mother and *haniwa*, having similar shapes though differently positioned, is very thought-provoking.

A recent article on Queen Mother iconography offers an intriguing origin for the *sheng*. Knauer states categorically that “there are no convincing prototypes for her [the Queen Mother's] image to be found in the art of Bronze or Iron Age China. Her iconography

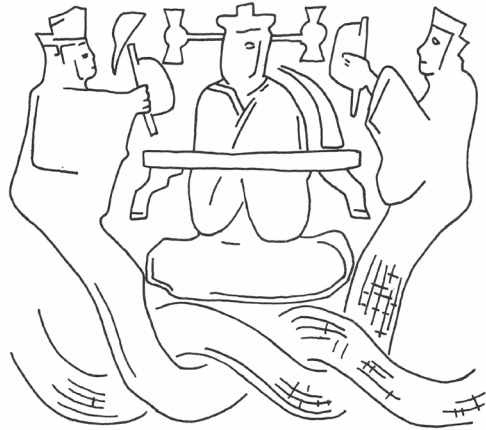


Figure 6. Chinese representation of the Queen Mother of the West wearing a *sheng* 勝 headdress, with supplicants at her side raising flanged bowls (after Loewe 1979, Fig. 18).

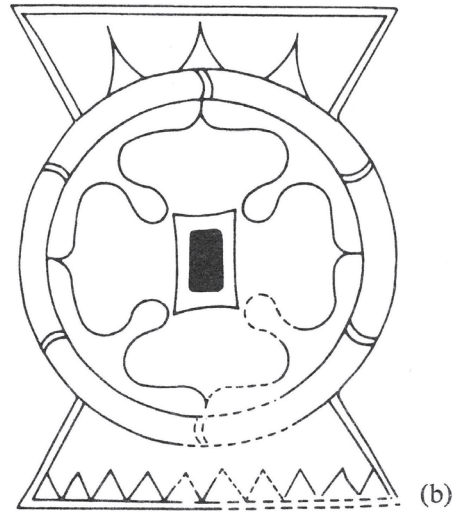


Figure 7. Korean carved jade artifact shaped like a *sheng* end piece (after Loewe 1979, Fig. 17b).

is clearly indebted to the West.”³⁸ After comparing the limited depictions of the Queen Mother in China with Hellenistic and Central Asian figurative representations on coins, statues, seals, silver bowls and bracelets and Roman clay lamps, Knauer decided that the representation of Kybele, Mother of the Gods, sitting in a chair, is the most likely prototype. The cross-bars of the high-backed chair behind the figure of Kybele are reduced to a double-ended projection from each side of the head, and interpreted as a headdress in the Chinese renditions. By the time of this adoption, the other accoutrements of the Queen Mother had been assembled: the high headdress, an animal throne, cup, and staff.³⁹ A clear depiction of the final form of the *sheng* appears in several tomb carvings in Shandong (Figure 6 is just one of them). Chinese scholars appear to have likened it to the cross-bars on a weaving loom, bringing in the Queen Mother’s role as “a weaver of the universe.”⁴⁰

This kind of transfer of artistic design from the West perhaps began in the previous Qin period. Nickel has argued that the monumental sculptures of the Qin 秦 dynasty (not only the terracotta army but particularly the twelve giant bronze statues cast from collected weapons by order of the First Emperor) derived from the Hellenistic sculptural tradition.⁴¹ Similarly, Han iconography was influenced by “impulses from beyond the borders,” and it would not be unreasonable to assume the further transference of such a powerful mythology from northeastern China into Japan at the height of the Queen Mother’s popularity. In a previous study, I interrogated the function of the *chokkomon* 直弧文 design that appears in the Kofun period, calling it the “art of death.”⁴² It appears that this design can also be traced to the ring-ribbon motif in Han dynasty tomb art.⁴³ In Han tombs of Shandong 山東 province, the ring-ribbon motif is “exclusively used in funerary contexts,” either framing the Queen Mother or as an independent panel.⁴⁴ In Japan, the Queen Mother appears only on bronze mirrors (most likely made in China), while the *chokkomon* is also inscribed on other burial goods or weapons of death. It is not improbable that these two aspects of Han dynasty art were transferred to Japan either together or independently *along with* their symbolism.

In conclusion, several of the material attributes of the Early Kofun burial system have earlier antecedents, or can be explained by distant origins. However, why they were all put together into a single system goes unexplained with these diverse histories. In science, it is said that the simplest answer is often the most correct, and that the answer which explains the most things about the problem is the most efficient and therefore probably the most correct. Whether this works with human behavior is another question, but the Queen Mother mythology may provide the answer to why these specific objects, their shapes, sizes, and materials all proved extremely popular among Early Kofun rulers.

38 Knauer 2006, p. 73.

39 Knauer 2006, p. 92.

40 Knauer 2006, p. 75.

41 Nickel 2013.

42 Knauer 2006, p. 94; Barnes 2003.

43 See Knauer 2006: Figs. 3.56 to 3.62, and her Appendix that discusses the Chinese motif.

44 Knauer 2006, p. 94.

Himiko as an Earthly Avatar of the Queen Mother

Himiko is a crucial component of this proposed early rulership ideology. The *Weizhi* says she “occupied herself with magic and sorcery... [and] had a younger brother who assisted her in ruling the country.” Unfortunately, we do not know exactly when she became the ruler of Wa, though the *Weizhi* states that:⁴⁵

the country [of Wa] formerly had a man as ruler. For some seventy or eighty years after that there were disturbances and warfare. Thereupon the people agreed upon a woman for their ruler. Her name was Pimiko [Himiko].

The “disturbances” mentioned might have been what are known as the Wa Disturbance (*Wa no hanran*), which ended in 189; from 196, as mentioned above, flat-rimmed deity-beast mirrors were being imported into the archipelago.

Could the elevation of a female as ruler have had anything to do with the Queen Mother myth? We have to remember that the period between 184 and 205 corresponded to the Yellow Turban Revolt, causing much unrest on the China mainland and the possible movement of people across the seas. Although the Queen Mother cult was popular with the people, Loewe notes an elite preoccupation with the Queen Mother “in officially inspired writings and works of art of the upper classes.”⁴⁶ There were no formal embassies to China from the Japanese Islands in the late second century, so we must assume that the deity-beast mirrors were brought into Japan as prestige goods by Chinese elites or obtained by Japanese elites trading with northeast China. The myth of the Queen Mother could have been spread in this manner, through the movement of peoples during these times of unrest; and it is the movement of people, not the goods by themselves, that would have facilitated the transference of the Queen Mother myth by word of mouth.

Terasawa Kaoru has postulated that Himiko was a shamaness of the Nara Basin, discovered by an incoming group of Seto 瀬戸 leaders from the Inland Sea region who chose her to be their ruler. Whether there was an incursion of Seto rulers or not, the *Weizhi* is clear that Himiko was a *chosen* paramount.⁴⁷ What would have made “the people” choose a female as ruler? Could the belief in or even just knowledge of a female goddess (the Queen Mother) have influenced their choice?

My hypothesis is that Himiko might have been considered as the living avatar of the Queen Mother. Representing the cult in the flesh, she would be able to nominally confirm rulership of local paramounts. This must have been her role for the years of her rule until her death between 248 and 250 A.D. Then, the *Weizhi* states that upon her death,⁴⁸

a king was placed on the throne, but the people would not obey him. Assassination and murder followed.... A relative of Pimiko named Iyo [壹與], a girl of thirteen, was [then] made queen and order was restored.

45 Both quotes from Tsunoda and Goodrich 1951, p. 13.

46 Loewe 1979, p. 125.

47 *Haniwa* and minijars, part of the MTC, are both known to have derived from Yayoi traditions in Okayama.

48 Tsunoda and Goodrich 1951, p. 15.

Why would gender have been this important at the Miwa court? If the Queen Mother hypothesis is correct, a male could not serve as the earthly analog of the female goddess. So when a man was proposed as ruler after Himiko's death, he was rejected by the people. Thus in the mid-third century, Wa apparently had at least two female rulers. Were they chosen because they represented the power of the Queen Mother to legitimate rulership, as the mythology relates?

Himiko and the Queen Mother in the *Nihon Shoki*

The Chinese recognized the female ruler Himiko, but the Japanese chronicles do not include her in the official imperial genealogy relating to third century Japan. (We must discount here the chronicle of Empress Jingū 神功, whom historians acknowledge as a fictitious ruler inserted to account for the Chinese knowledge of Himiko.) But is Himiko absent altogether?

First, we must recognize that the *Nihon shoki* was compiled under a Confucian-oriented Ritsuryō 律令 state of the late seventh and early eighth centuries. This is more than five centuries after the events recorded in the *Weizhi*. These centuries gave ample time for the evolution from an early female-oriented political ideology to one which valued male rulership under Confucian philosophical tenets. Under such a male-dominated philosophy, it is not surprising that Nara courtiers emphasized the male lineage in establishing the imperial genealogy, resulting in Himiko and Iyo not being included as early rulers.

Nevertheless, historians have identified two female figures in the chronicles that may have been Himiko or shamanesses like her: Princess Yamato Totohi Momoso Hime, seeress aunt to the sovereign, Sujin; and Yamato Hime no Mikoto 倭姫命, the daughter of Suinin and Hibasuhime and sister of Keikō.⁴⁹ We will hear more of the latter, but first, we must consider Sujin's seeress aunt.

Yamato Totohi Momoso Hime is alleged to have been buried in Hashihaka Kofun, the first monumental keyhole-shaped artificial mountain in Japan. Moreover, she is said to have been married to a god, Ōmononushi no Kami 大物主神. In these attributes, she resembles the Queen Mother who lived on a mountain and was married to a god herself. Moreover, the princess's husband-god also lived on a mountain (Mt. Miwa), east of Hashihaka, so the West-East pairing of female-male is replicated from the Queen Mother mythology. The seeress aunt is paired with her nephew Sujin in the chronicles, as Himiko was paired with her brother, though the ruling status was reversed between the Japanese chronicles (male ruler) and Chinese records (female ruler); these pairings also replicate the Queen Mother–King Father pairing.

Piggott has commented in her review of my book that “I cannot think of a single narrative in Japanese mythology that unambiguously evidences the Queen Mother as Barnes elaborates.... Were it so important to late Yayoi and early Kofun people, would not memory of its deity be preserved somewhere in recognizable form in later Japanese mythology?”⁵⁰

Indeed, there is no mention of the Queen Mother in the Japanese texts. However, the creation myths and the early chronicles have copious references to the goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大神 and her cult.⁵¹ The second princess named above, Yamato Hime no

49 As related in Edwards 1996. See the Sujin and Suinin chronicles in the *Nihon shoki*.

50 Piggott 2009, p. 415.

51 See the “Age of the Gods” chapter and Sujin chronicle in Aston 1972, vol. I.

Mikoto, was allegedly entrusted with serving the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, and making sacrifices to her. Amaterasu means “heaven shines,” and her symbol in Shinto shrines throughout Japan, except the Miwa shrine, is a mirror.⁵² The mirror has long been seen as a sun symbol, as it reflects the sun’s rays and shines, lighting up the world. When Amaterasu withdrew into a cave (as the Queen Mother lived in a cave?), the world grew dark (a solar eclipse? Queen Mother as controller of the universe?). To bring her out, a mirror and jewels were hung on the sacred *sakaki* 榊 tree. Is it not an incredible coincidence that mirrors are crucial elements in both Queen Mother portrayals and Amaterasu myths? That tree branches were used to show religious commitment to the Queen Mother?⁵³ And that the deity-beast mirror served to light the way (*terasu* 照らす) for the deceased to the world of the gods (heaven, *ama*)?

Amaterasu and the Queen Mother also have weaving in common. Loewe has identified links between the Queen Mother and the Weaving Girl of the Tanabata 七夕 myth.⁵⁴ This myth itself came from China and has long been celebrated in Japan. As controller of the cosmos, the Queen Mother was responsible for bringing together the Weaving Girl and Oxherd Boy (the stars Vega and Altair) every year on the seventh day of the seventh month. This was also the date that the Queen Mother met with rulers of the Zhou 周 and Han dynasties. Finally, the Weaving Girl in some myths is said to have been the Queen Mother’s granddaughter. Amaterasu herself was a weaver, as we know from the story of her contest with her brother Susanoo 素戔鳴, who flung a flayed piebald horse into her weaving room. Como proposed that Amaterasu was a “silkworm goddess,” thus formalizing her association with weaving.⁵⁵

Amaterasu also fits the pattern of paired female-male rulership. She and her brother Susanoo competed to rule heaven. A dual-gender rulership system (*himelhiko sei* ヒメ・ヒコ制) in the early chronicles was identified by Takamura Itsue 高群逸枝 in 1966.⁵⁶ Pairs of ruling males and females, such as Saho Hiko and Saho Hime mentioned above, are commonly ascribed in the chronicles to both creation myth ruling structures as well as earthly ruling structures.

But how indigenous was the *himelhiko sei*? Can dual-gender rulership be traced back into Middle Yayoi society? The ruler of the north Kyushu polity of Na 奴 who received a gold seal from the Late Han emperor Guangwu 光武 in 57 A.D. was ostensibly a male—with no mention of females, and the *Weizhi* states that the former ruler of Wa was a male. Can it be that the change to dual-gender rule was a product of the Queen Mother myth, as it became known to residents of the Japanese Islands from the late second century onwards?

We do not know what the Early Kofun people called the Queen Mother, but probably not her Chinese name Xiwangmu 西王母, or as read in Japanese, Seiōbo. When discussing the birth of Amaterasu in the Japanese creation myths, the *Nihon shoki* refers to her initially as Ōhirume no Muchi 於保比縷咩能武知, then by the combined name Amaterasu Ōhirume no Mikoto 天照大日靈尊, or just Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大神.⁵⁷ The connection between Ōhirume and mirrors is clearly stated in the *Nihon shoki*:⁵⁸

52 The god enshrined at Miwa is not Amaterasu but Ōmononushi no Kami.

53 Wu 1989, p. 130.

54 Loewe 1979, pp. 105, 120–23.

55 Como 2009.

56 Piggott 1997, p. 39; Takamura 1966.

57 Sakamoto et al. 1967, p. 86.

58 Aston 1972, vol. I, p. 20; Sakamoto et al. 1967, p. 88.

Izanagi no Mikoto [伊奘諾尊] said, “I wish to procreate the precious child who is to rule the world.” He therefore took in his left hand a white-copper mirror, upon which a Deity was produced from it called Oho-hiru-me no Mikoto [大日靈尊]. In his right hand he took a white-copper mirror, and forthwith there was produced from it a God who was named Tsuki-yumi no Mikoto [月弓尊].

If Izanagi was holding deity-beast mirrors, it is as if the figures of Queen Mother and King Father rose up off their bronze beds and became living gods. What better testimony is there to the connection between the Queen Mother image on the mirrors and Amaterasu Ōhirume? While the goddess was first designated Ōhirume no Muchi, her later name of Amaterasu might have derived from the enshrinement of mirrors and their illuminating qualities, presumably in Tenmu’s time and reflected in the shrines listed in the *Engishiki* compiled in 927.

The Japanese creation myths in general contain many material references to Early Kofun material culture (swords, beads, etc.). Anthropologist Ōbayashi Taryō 大林太良 has noted that several aspects of the Japanese creation myths hark back to the Late Kofun period: he suggests that the story of Izanami 伊奘冉 secluding herself in a cave (another cave!), and partaking of the food of the dead comes from the late fifth to sixth century custom of using corridor-style chamber tombs filled with food offerings in Sué ware.⁵⁹

Thus, the creation myths are possibly products of Kofun period cosmology, not some primordial myths surviving from Jōmon times. And in this sense, the personal attributes and function of Amaterasu closely resemble those of the Queen Mother in all but name, and her name clearly derives from the function of mirrors as they were first entombed and then enshrined to light the way to heaven. Amaterasu is a female deity; she is written into the *Nihon shoki* as the grand ancestress of the Japanese imperial line. In this capacity, she legitimates the entire rule of the Japanese nation from protohistoric times onwards. Was not this the role of the Queen Mother in the Early Kofun period?

Matsumae Takeshi 松前健 argues that the worship of Amaterasu began as a local cult in the Ise 伊勢 region. Early on, he states, Amaterasu was a male god Amateru, but “In the sixth or seventh centuries A.D., the sex of this deity gradually changed from male to female, as a result of the strong impression of successive generations of *saiō* [齋王, shrine maidens].”⁶⁰ In his 1980 work, he states that Amaterasu was only adopted gradually by the central court under the influence of the Korean mythologies of a solar deity, while “actual rituals and offerings...were not performed [to Amaterasu] until the middle of the Heian period.”⁶¹

Michael Como’s recent book amplifies and extends Matsumae’s thesis, arguing that Amaterasu was elevated to primary deity during the reign of Emperor Tenmu 天武 (673–686) from a pre-existing background extending across the Japanese landscape of many local female weaving-deities such as Akaruhime 阿加流比売.⁶² Como also attributes the sun worship aspect of Amaterasu to Korean immigrants arriving in the Japanese Islands from the early fifth century onwards and the important roles the immigrant families played in

59 Ōbayashi Taryō (personal communication, July 1992).

60 Matsumae 1978, p. 10.

61 Matsumae 1980, p. 171.

62 Como 2009.

the Yamato Court.

Como's work is extremely detailed and illustrates how complicated the mythological psychology of the late seventh century was. There is no space here to debate these issues, but I would like to propose that the Queen Mother experience in the Early Kofun laid the foundation for acceptance of a female progenitor of the imperial line with the establishment of the Amaterasu cult in Tenmu's reign. My hypothesis, that Amaterasu is somehow related to the prior existence of a Queen Mother cult in Japan, focuses on the common political functions of these two goddesses, which are not addressed by Matsumae or Como. This continuity of function is much more convincing than a sex-change due to good performances by *saiō*, as proposed by Matsumae.

In summary, we can draw the inference that a Queen Mother cult in Early Kofun Japan focused on a female shamaness who was able either to communicate with the Queen Mother, regardless of what she was called, or to serve as her analog on earth. Just as the name Himiko does not appear in the Japanese chronicles, neither does the name Queen Mother. However, the Japanese chroniclers have included many important female shamanesses.⁶³ The second century historical context was ripe for the introduction of Queen Mother mythology into Japan, and many of the personal attributes of shamanesses in the *Nihon shoki* fit her myth. Many objects of the Early Kofun burial ritual system conform to the Queen Mother's attributes, and we know that the most valued mirrors actually bore the Queen Mother image, and that they were used both for political and cosmological ends. Finally, we know that the Queen Mother was an important legitimator of political rule. So, even if the Queen Mother does not appear in the chronicles by name, just as Himiko does not, is it not reasonable to view the Queen Mother and Amaterasu as successive female goddesses, the latter drawing from the former if not being an actual transformation of her?

The Queen Mother Cult: If It Existed, How Did It Work?

I have in essence proposed that the rulership ideology of the Early Kofun period took the form of a cult of the Queen Mother of the West. If this were the case, how did this cult operate in terms of the Miwa polity and regional rulers?

The attraction of belonging to a major cult system would help explain the rapidity with which the Mounded Tomb Culture spread throughout western Japan. Such a system would have been centripetal, with prospective believers voluntarily presenting themselves for membership, much as Himiko voluntarily sent embassies to the Wei Court in order to participate in the tribute system. And much like her, it can be surmised that the supplicants to the Miwa Court were sent away with cult objects that reinforced their status as ruler in their own realm.

The centripetal aspect of Miwa is already known through the ceramic assemblage at Makimuku. Substantial proportions of the Haji ware found at the site, believed to be the Miwa capital, are from the eastern and northwestern seaboard respectively: Tōkai 東海 (49 percent) and Nihonkai 日本海 (17 percent).⁶⁴ If these ceramics were being brought in by people attracted to the Queen Mother cult, it might also explain how the Miwa Court

⁶³ See Barnes 2007.

⁶⁴ Ishino 2005, Fig. 111.

was able to expend considerable labor in building large tombs for the rulers, starting with Hashihaka. Mizoguchi Kōji 溝口孝司 has already postulated a voluntary coming together of the regional population to celebrate and support a great mystical figure. He argues that the elites of the time lacked the military or economic supremacy to coerce the populace into building a tomb as large as Hashihaka. Instead, volunteering to construct the tumulus would have “constituted a significant element in people’s self-identification [and] would have affirmed their social existence.”⁶⁵ I agree with his analysis but go one step further in trying to identify the “great mystical figure” and the source of her power.

The cult gained momentum into the fourth century and beadstone objects were added to the grave goods assemblage, and the variety in all these objects suggests that the Miwa Court was not the only source of either mirrors or beadstone talismans. Much work has to be done on manufacture and distribution mechanisms for these goods. Only two tombs have yielded large caches of TR mirrors. Kobayashi Yukio’s scheme of TR mirror distribution was based on the cache of 33 mirrors excavated from the Tsubai Ōtsukyama Tomb in 1953; those mirrors represented only one third of the mirror sets (each set deriving from the same mold) known in the early 1960s. The excavation of Kurozuka 黒塚 in 1997 yielded an equally large cache of TR mirrors, but again with mirrors from only one-third of the currently known TR mirror sets. Neither tomb possessed examples of all mirror sets, meaning that distribution must have bypassed them in some way, and many mirror sets were not represented in those tombs at all. Thus, the distribution of all types of mirrors must be investigated for alternative sources and exchanges between elites, since centralized distribution does not seem to have been in operation.

Beadstone objects were mainly produced in bead-making villages of western Hokuriku 北陸.⁶⁶ The conflict recorded in the Wani Acclivity story above may have related to the opening of a direct route north between Makimaku and the Noto 能登 peninsula. At the beginning in the early fourth century (EK2), beadstone objects manufactured by these specialists were widely distributed to regional rulers. There is little evidence that they passed directly through the Miwa Court to be handed out. Like the mirrors, there may have been several routes of procurement of beadstone objects.

One mechanism of distribution may have been marriage alliances. The *Nihon shoki* suggests that these expanded geographically through time: as mentioned above, Sujin had liaisons with Kii and Owari, while Suinin took wives from Yamashiro, Ōmi and Tanba. Thus, in addition to people coming in to Makimuku due to the attraction of the cult, objects could have flowed to distant persons stimulated by marriage links. The local ruler whose daughter was taken as wife by the Miwa sovereign would have his status raised to an imperial in-law, with his rule materially confirmed by the centre. The secondary sharing out of objects through further marriage alliances between regional elites might have been one way that mirrors and jade-like objects moved around the landscape without being disbursed from the center.

Possession of these cult objects materially demonstrated a living ruler’s status as legitimated by the Queen Mother myth, and when the ruler died, the objects were included in the grave to assist the deceased in the next world, the second function of the Queen Mother.

65 Mizoguchi 2002, pp. 199–200. More recently, he sees the MTC as signaling a shift in conceiving the deceased ruler more as a “commanding body” than a “communal body” (Mizoguchi 2013, p. 262).

66 Kawamura 2006, p. 39.

Because of this conspicuous consumption, each successor to rulership had to obtain the cult objects anew. Consequently we desperately need to know what paths these objects took from manufacturer through user(s) to final deposition.

Finally, we must recognize the important role of males in this cult. If the *Weizhi* is correct in its view of Himiko—that “after she became the ruler, there were few who saw her”⁶⁷—we can assume that the female shamaness serving as the Queen Mother analog was secluded. The shamaness still served as the fountainhead of political legitimacy, but her brother (or nephew or husband) performed the daily political duties. This separation of power between the female and male then allowed the development of a political system in addition to a cult system.

To envision how the cult might have developed, we can profitably refer to the role of males in more recent female-incited cults. Tenrikyō 天理教 and Ōmotokyō 大本教 are both current “new religions” which began in the nineteenth century with revelations by gods to humble females, as if females were the natural conduit for godly communication in the modern era as in the protohistoric era. The teachings did not at first prosper as religions—until male disciples or managers intervened to spread the cult. Their intervention resulted in hierarchies full of male priests who now control the religions—much like the evolution of the Shinto priesthood from the simpler assignment of female attendants to the shrines of Amaterasu.

If Terasawa Kaoru is correct in identifying a group of male rulers who chose Himiko as their high ritual priestess, then the male contingent of the cult structure was already in place at the time of her ascension to queenship. The cult was spread through their personal relations with other regional rulers, drawing in adherents who wished the advantages of goddess-granted ruler legitimacy and immortality. These core rulers, who must have formed the nucleus of what we usually refer to as the Miwa Court, practiced political rulership through *matsurigoto* 政 (court rituals), invoking the power of the goddess in real-time relationships.⁶⁸

The rapid spread of the Early Kofun cult preceded the organizational expansion of the Miwa polity. Perhaps an analogy with the Catholic Church will illuminate how a widespread ritual system can co-exist with local political systems without directly ruling them; the ritual unification across broad regions does not require those regions to be part of a single political system. The fact that the Miwa polity was so small when its influence was so large can only be credited to the existence of a charismatic persona to whom local leaders were attracted.

The expansion of the Miwa political system can be seen in EK3, when tombs of armor-bearing males were established on the polity borders and near strategic passes out of the Nara Basin. Towards the end of this phase, the Queen Mother cult declined through a combination of historical factors involving warfare on the continent.

Demise of the Queen Mother Cult

That the cult was a coherent entity rather than a ragtag assemblage of miscellaneous features

67 Tsunoda and Goodrich 1951, p. 13.

68 Note that the verb *matsuru* 政, to make obeisance or offerings, is the base of *matsurigoto* meaning “to hold court” or “to manage affairs of state”; this is the origin of politics, *seiji* 政治.

is demonstrated by its demise from the mid-fourth century. Authentic triangular-rim mirrors made by Chinese craftsmen became unavailable in the early fourth century. This is probably because the fall of the Western Jin 晉 dynasty (265–316) caused the cessation of trade with China and immigration of Chinese mirror craftsmen. Imitation mirrors began to be made which replicated the deity-beast designs but without the skill of the Chinese casters. Mirror designs were degraded, and finally deity-beast mirrors fell out of use. The sudden expansion of beadstone production in EK2 might even be seen as compensating for a growing deficit of deity-beast mirrors; local casting of the latter began in the early fourth century but deteriorated thoroughly by mid-century.⁶⁹

Makimuku, thought to be the capital of the Miwa polity, was also abandoned towards the late fourth century, after large tomb-building shifted to the northwestern Nara Basin. More beadstone grave goods came to be made of talc, a “cheaper” less valuable stone than jasper and green tuff. Eventually, bracelet-like objects drop out of the grave goods repertoire altogether.

These events coincided with a shift in focus from China to the Korean Peninsula and the growing involvement of Wa-Yamato warriors in peninsular warfare. The status of the Miwa cult seems to have been very tenuous in the late fourth century. But in the fifth century, ritual activity on the slopes of Mt. Miwa began, such as at the Yama no Kami 山ノ神 site; and in the sixth century, the Miwa no Kimi 三輪の君 were established to care for the ancestral imperial grounds. The Miwa shrine and the resident god of Mt. Miwa, Ōmononushi no Kami, may have been rehabilitated at this time. The trend in modern research is to see the Miwa no Kimi as *toraijin* (渡来人, continental immigrants) settled in Sué mura 須恵村 in Izumi 和泉, Osaka where stoneware kilns were established in the fifth century and the jars were used to brew sacred saké at Miwa.⁷⁰ Perhaps it was from this time that the god Ōmononushi no Kami came to be worshipped at Miwa. Miwa saké became famous for its use in the religious rituals, which kept alive the historical roots and importance of the Miwa Court homeland.

With the potential hiatus in Miwa cult worship in the late fourth century, it is also possible to think that memory of a female goddess was revived under the influence of Korean interaction and the presence of solar deities such as Akaruhime in Korean myths. Via these continental influences, the fifth century also might have been the time when the goddess became known as Amateru or Amaterasu, if she had not been so named previously. By the early sixth century, when elite household records began to be compiled under Emperor Keitai 継体, these other names might have been the only terms in use, thus explaining why Piggott has not been able to find any reference to the Queen Mother in early Japanese documents.

The new adoption of a female goddess as the imperial ancestor in a Confucian-oriented state in Tenmu's time does not seem to make sense without a strong precedent and local development. Differing from both Como and Matsumae, I would push this precedent back into the fourth century before immigration from the peninsula brought new ideas to overlay and augment the Chinese mythology of the Early Kofun period.

69 Fukunaga 2005, pp. 215–26.

70 Abe 1993.

Conclusions

The Early Kofun material record, historical context and documents, and mythistory all provide data to support the hypothesis that the Chinese legends of the Queen Mother of the West were well known and formed the basis of Miwa polity power. Many of the details might be debated, and I hope they will be, but so many strands of the data point in the same direction that it is difficult to envision another *system* that accounts for all aspects of the Early Kofun Mounded Tomb Culture. The disjunction of the geographical extent of the Miwa polity from the area of its influence in particular needs to be explained if this hypothesis is to be judged false. One awaits, with relish, further research and discussion of these issues.

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