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ARCHAEOLOGY AND ONMYŌDŌ: HUMAN-SHAPED RITUAL OBJECTS ASSOCIATED WITH PURIFICATION RITES AND CURSES

Marianna Lázár

This chapter examines human-shaped effigies (*hitogata*) and a unique type of ritual pottery characterized by human faces (*jinmen bokusho doki*) from ancient Japan in the context of *Onmyōdō*, a tradition of blending elements from Daoism, esoteric Buddhism, and Shintō. *Hitogata* were used in purification and exorcism rituals by ritualists, acting as symbolic surrogates to absorb and remove defilements, thus restoring harmony. Based on specific archaeological finds, historical records, classical literature, and secondary sources, the study explores their origin, characteristics, and function in both state and private rituals. Additionally, *jinmen doki* are examined for their role in roadside rituals and spirit pacification, connecting the living with the spiritual realm. The research investigates their iconography, distribution, and ritual use, reflecting continental cosmological beliefs and *Onmyōdō* practices. By exploring the similarities and differences between these objects, the paper demonstrates their significance in ancient ritual practices, many of which were conducted by *onmyōji* practitioners.

Keywords: *Onmyōdō*, *onmyōji*, human-shaped effigies (*hitogata*), ritual pottery (*jinmen doki*), purification rites, curses

1. Introduction

Onmyōdō is a traditional Japanese esoteric cosmology that originated from a blend of Daoist, Esoteric Buddhist, the native Shintō tradition,¹ and folk beliefs.

¹ As the indigenous “religion” of Japan, Shintō can be understood as a multifaceted assembly of beliefs, practices, attitudes, and institutions that express the Japanese people’s relationship with nature, their ancestors, and their lifecycles. Numerous deities (神 *kami*), including natural forces and clan ancestors, were worshiped in ancient Japan. The oldest type of Shintō

Starting from around the 6th century, many ancient Chinese practices, and beliefs formed the basis of what we now recognize as *Onmyōdō*. This became deeply interwoven with Japanese culture and spirituality, fully establishing itself around the 10th century as an elaborate system of divination and ritual practices centered around the concepts of *yin-yang* (陰陽)² and *wuxing* (五行, “Five Phases”),³ serving as a guiding force in both the personal and political-ritual spheres of ancient Japan. Practitioners, known as *onmyōji* (陰陽師, “*yin-yang* experts”), were responsible for performing various rituals aimed at ensuring harmony between humans and the spiritual forces of nature. The ancient Japanese imperial court frequently employed *onmyōji*, among other religious practitioners, to perform rituals for protection against epidemics, natural disasters, and political turmoil.

In this chapter, after giving a brief introduction on the development of religious practices in ancient Japan, highlighting the intense contact with Korean kingdoms and Tang China, I explore the question of what connection can be drawn between ancient Japanese purification rites, exorcism, cursing rituals, and *Onmyōdō* rites. I examine ritual *hitogata* (人形, “human-shaped figurines”) and *jinmen bokusho doki* (人面墨書土器, “ink-painted pottery with human face,” hereafter as *jinmen doki*) from the Asuka (538–710), Nara (710–794), and Heian (794–1185) periods, focusing on the origin, characteristics, function, distribution, and possible usage of these ritual objects, using an interdisciplinary approach. I will explain how they were used as a medium for transferring one’s impurity, to pacify an angry spirit, to heal an ill person, to curse someone, or to protect someone from a curse. I also discuss the extent to which these objects were related to certain ancient rituals and beliefs of *Onmyōdō*.

My research is based on specific archaeological finds, excavation reports, historical records, law books, liturgical sources, classical literature, and provincial gazetteers from the Asuka, Nara, and Heian periods, as well as secondary sources. *Kojiki* (古事記, *Records of Ancient Matters*, 712), *Nihon shoki* (日本書記, *The*

ceremonies that could be called religious were dedicated to agriculture and kami worship, and always emphasized ritual purity by cleaning practices. The concept of purification (祓 *harae*) in Japan has deep roots in old Shintō beliefs.

² *Yin* (陰) and *yang* (陽) define the universe as the interaction of polar opposite but complementary forces. *Yin* is the female, cold, dark, passive power, while *yang* represents masculinity, light, and warmth. The interplay of the two forces makes up *chi* (氣, or 氣 *ki* in Japanese), the material principle governing the universe (Inada 2003, 42–43).

³ *Wuxing* explains the interactions and relationships created in phenomena that consist of fire, water, wood, metal, and earth and lead to life, death, change, and rebirth. It was combined with the *yin-yang* theory during the Spring and Autumn period (approx. 770 to 481 BCE) in China and was developed during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) into a comprehensive and logical view of the cosmos called *yin-yang wuxing* (陰陽五行), which could be applied to every field of human society (Inada 2003, 68–77).

Chronicles of Japan, 720), and *Shoku nihongi* (続日本紀, *The Continued Chronicles of Japan*, 797) are not only reliable historical records of the rise and decline of Japan's new *ritsuryō* (律令)⁴ order that regulated imperial rites, but they are also a major source of information on epidemics in early Japan. Because of their detailed provisions, *Taihō ritsuryō* (大宝律令, *Taihō Code*, 701),⁵ its revised version *Yōrō ritsuryō* (養老律令, *Yōrō Code*, 757), and *Engi shiki* (延喜式, *Regulations and Laws of the Engi Era*, 927), a compendium of rules and procedures for implementing penal codes, administrative codes, and supplementary laws, are valuable sources concerning all matters related to aristocratic government, such as imperial rules and regulations concerning regular annual ceremonies, and their ritual implements used between the 8th and 10th century.

The majority of the secondary sources I consulted offer an introduction and analysis of *ritsuryō* rituals of ancient Japan and early *Onmyōdō* practices until the end of the Heian period, including early *Onmyōdō* divinatory techniques, developing and declining *ritsuryō* religious practices, linkages between ecology and religious institutions, and ritual objects (e.g., Kaneko 1988; Shinkawa 1999; Como 2009, 2012; Farris 2009; Hosoi 2020). Ritual pottery decorated with ink writings and specific designs are extensively dealt with in Hirakawa's (2000) monograph, in which the author expressed his view that some of these objects, excavated from the remains of ancient villages, and their motifs or inscriptions could be associated with early *Onmyōdō* beliefs. During the last two decades, a number of studies, such as Yamaguchi (2000) and Minami (2005), published in the journal *Mokkan kenkyū* (木簡研究, *Research on Wooden Tablets*) have analyzed *hitogata* effigies and inscribed wooden tablets recovered from ancient capital sites. *Hitogata* and their malevolent purposes were also examined by Mizuno (1982) and Helfenbein (2017). Inscribed clay pots or wooden tablets (with or without a human face), as well as their possible connection with different continental and Japanese religious practices, such as syncretic *Onmyōdō* rituals, were exhaustively studied by Masuo (1996), Onizuka (1996), and Monta (2011).

Furthermore, numerous archaeological research reports have been published in Japan in the last 40 years, documenting *hitogata* and *jinmen doki* finds in detail. In this chapter, by examining the data from both older and recent excavation reports, archaeological news, and the characteristics of wooden tablets and ritual pottery housed at prestigious Japanese museums (e.g., The Niigata Prefectural

⁴ The *ritsuryō* system refers to the governmental structure and operation defined by *ritsu* (律), the criminal code, and *ryō* (令), the administrative and civil codes, of 8th century Japan.

⁵ It was the first officially promulgated set of legal codes at the end of the Asuka period which contained both penal and administrative laws. It was modeled after the civil and penal codes of the Chinese Tang dynasty (618–907) and contained new provisions for the priesthood of local cults and practices.

Museum of History, Kyōto City Archaeological Museum) and research institutes (e.g., Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties), I introduce the similarities and differences of the most representative finds and discuss the extent to which *hitogata* and *jinmen doki* were related to certain syncretic rituals and beliefs of *Onmyōdō*.

2. The development of religious practices in ancient Japan

Since the beginning of the Asuka period (538–710), when Buddhism and Confucianism were introduced to Japan from China, a stream of continental ideas and values began to weave its way into Japanese society. During this period, the first Japanese state, Yamato, was transformed into a centralized, strictly organized *ritsuryō* state based on the Chinese Tang model, and actively assimilated legal, administrative, and social systems, as well as culture from China. From the middle of the 6th century, early Buddhism in Japan developed a complicated fusion with Chinese cosmological traditions, such as the combined *yin-yang wuxing* system, Daoist thought, and indigenous Shintō beliefs, resulting in a combinatory system between the foreign astral deities, buddhas, and the native *kami* that grew out of their cultic interactions and their mutual transformations.

Many cultural and religious influences during the Asuka period originated in China but were adapted in the Korean kingdoms of Baekje or Goguryeo before reaching Japan. We know from the detailed entries in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* chronicles that Korean and Chinese monks, craftsmen, physicians, and scholars who arrived in Japan in the 6th and 7th century helped accelerate the diffusion of continental political, cultural, and religious norms as service groups and immigrant lineages (Kurano and Takeda 1971; Sakamoto 1994). Moreover, imperial Japanese envoys who visited Tang China, came back to Japan with Chinese cultural knowledge, and introduced new religious traditions and cultural elements of the Tang period. Continental cults, deities, and cosmological elements were never clearly separated from either Shintō cults for local deities or esoteric Buddhist tradition. They can only be detected in ancient ritual practices, material evidence, official documents, and narratives (Kaneko 1988, 199; Masuo 1996, 78).

Especially between the late 7th century and the early 8th century, during the reigns of Tenmu (天武天皇, r. 673–686), Jitō (持統天皇, r. 686–697), and Monmu (文武天皇, r. 697–707), the Chinese festival calendar, divinatory techniques, Daoist elements, and the *yin-yang wuxing* cosmological concept had a significant influence on the state-building and emerging syncretic religious culture of the Japanese imperial court. The early Japanese court employed various strategies to legitimate the emperor or empress, including many that linked royal virtue to divinity, purity, health, and long life. Tenmu was the first Japanese emperor who claimed to be

the heir of the sun goddess Amaterasu, making him the descendant and representative of one of the most important deities of the Shintō pantheon, which also meant that the emperor's laws are laws of a "living god." By trying to monopolize a scientific system of knowledge, such as a variety of folk beliefs under the general rubric of Daoism, calendrical, medical, and divinatory science, as well as the *yin-yang wuxing* system and astronomy, Tenmu set in motion a grandiose project, adapting foreign practices to suit the court's social and political circumstances. He believed that this complex, systematized knowledge—gained from Buddhist monks and scholars of Korea—would be helpful in state-building, divination, and performing rituals to display the meaning of his divine rule, setting himself apart from former rulers. In other words, he actively utilized religion, philosophy, and scientific knowledge from China to justify his position as a supreme ruler of Japan (Ooms 2009).

From the late 7th century, state ceremonies had to be conducted meticulously according to the *Taihō ritsuryō* and *Yōrō ritsuryō*. Formal annual court events, such as the *Ōharae* (大祓, "Ceremony of Great Purification") rite, the *Michiae no Matsuri* (道饗祭, "Rite of Roadside Offerings") rite, or the *Chinkonsai* (鎮魂祭, "Festival to Appease the Spirit") rite, became part of the administrative calendar of the Japanese government (Ooms 2009).

People living in ancient times on the Japanese islands feared supernatural powers and attributed misfortune, illness, and disasters to impurities, pollution and defilements, angry supernatural entities, and even curses of malicious people. With the introduction of Buddhism during the Asuka period, additional layers of interpretation were added to the understanding of pollution and disease. Buddhist teachings framed suffering, including illness, as the result of karmic retribution or cosmic imbalance, further reinforcing the need for ritual acts of purification to restore health. Calamities were also interpreted as "disturbances" in the *yin-yang wuxing* system. For example, Emperor Tenmu's reign in the Asuka period was marked by natural disasters and prolonged dry periods which often made the emperor seek the support of supernatural powers through rituals in an attempt to appease dangerous supernatural entities,⁶ restore the balance of the *yin-yang*, and put an end to these calamities.

Officials called *onmyōji* began to appear around the late 7th century, after the *Onmyōryō* (陰陽寮, "Bureau of Yin-Yang") was established during the reign of Tenmu. The bureau oversaw divination,⁷ observation of the sky (astrology),

⁶ In ancient Japan, the line between angry spirits, dislocated or disease-bearing *kami*, demons, and ghosts were never clearly drawn, but all dangerous supernatural entities were in need of pacification and propitiation (Como 2012, 46).

⁷ When an accident or strange incident occurred at a public institution, such as a government office, shrine, or temple, they would use their skills to determine the significance of that

calendar-making, and timekeeping. Early *onmyōji* diviners were Korean or Chinese learned monks, who were forced to abandon their status and to return to the secular world to enter the administration as officials, since the *Sōniryō* (僧尼令, “Monastic Rule for Monks and Nuns”) of 701 forbade Buddhist monks from performing divination.

Established in the early 8th century, the government office *Jingikan* (神祇官, “Department of Divinities”) also included diviners and ritual specialists and managed a wide range of activities. It oversaw Shintō-related affairs at court, provincial shrines, state-sponsored purification rites, as well as coordinating the ritual practices in the provinces with those in the capital. *Jingikan* employed ritualists from Japanese and immigrant aristocratic kin groups, such as the Nakatomi, Mononobe, and Fumi clans (Como 2009, 92–94).

3. Purification rituals and *Onmyōdō* rites in ancient Japan

Continental rites of purification and exorcism constituted a major force in the development of the religious traditions of ancient Japan. Protective ceremonies were held regularly in Yamato Japan from the late 7th century at the corners of imperial palaces, capitals,⁸ the most prestigious Shintō shrines and Buddhist temples, crossroads, along main highways (leading from Kyūshū to the Yamato plain), and at locations along rivers and ditches in provincial headquarters.

The practice of purification, exorcism, healing, and cursing involved the use of ritual objects, such as human-shaped effigies, wooden tablets with incantations, inscribed pottery often decorated with human faces, model ovens, small skewers, and figurines of horses, cows, and chickens. These ritual objects worked according to Chinese conceptions of spirits and the logic of transference and ritual body substitution. *Migawari* (身代わり, “body substitution”) with material surrogates was considered an important way to safely communicate with the divine (Kaneko 1988; Como 2009, 33).

Archaeological finds of the above-mentioned ritual objects are gradually revealing how ritual procedures spread from the capital to the provinces, closely following the example of *ritsuryō* institutions of the center. Moreover, as Como (2012, 48) has noted, they highlight the degree to which urbanization and construction

event for the realm. In ancient Japan, *onmyōji* and esoteric Buddhist priests used *rikujin* (六壬) divination, a type of board divination that was most commonly used from the 8th until the 16th century and was modeled on methods practiced during the Chinese Sui (581–618) and Tang dynasties (Trenson 2012, 108–110).

⁸ The most notable capitals of the Asuka, Nara, and Heian periods were the Asuka capital (飛鳥京, 672–694), the Fujiwara capital (藤原京, 694–710), the Heijō capital (平城京, 710–740, 745–784), the Naniwa capital (難波京, 744–745), the Nagaoka capital (長岡京, 784–794), and the Heian capital (平安京, 794–1180).

technologies from the late Asuka period required the participation of diviners and ritualists familiar with continental practices for pacifying spirits and manipulating the balance of *yin-yang* in each location.

Although traditionally, court-sponsored purification rituals were performed by ritualists and immigrant diviners of the *Jingikan*, from the Nara period, Buddhist monks, *onmyōji*, and other kinds of practitioners regardless of their ethnic backgrounds could also achieve the same role, using their special knowledge and skills (Ooms 2015, 54–55). If there were disturbances in the *yin-yang wuxing* system, or, in other words, any crises in the Japanese islands, *onmyōji* would have been called to restore the balance of *yin-yang* by performing purification rituals with special spells, movements, and ritual objects. Moreover, from the late 8th century, new elements of esoteric Buddhist astrological and divinatory practices also influenced *Onmyōdō* and its rituals (Monta 2011, 6).

Onmyōji were allowed to perform different court-sponsored purification ceremonies from the Nara period, such as the *Ōharae* rite and the *Michiae no Matsuri*. The *Ōharae* rite was designated by the *Taihō ritsuryō* as a twice-yearly state ceremony from 703, but it was first introduced to the nation in 676 by Emperor Tenmu, referred to as *Daikaijo* (大解除, “Great Exorcism”). It was conducted by the sea at Naniwa. Nara and Heian period *Ōharae* rites were also performed on special occasions at various administrative levels, when it was requested by the emperor or empress, such as when moving to a new imperial palace, before important state ceremonies, or after epidemics or natural disasters. From the 8th century, two separate rituals were performed during *Ōharae* at the imperial court. A *kami*-related one was conducted by a Nakatomi ritualist, and a Chinese, Daoist-influenced one, was performed by immigrant diviners or ritualists (Ooms 2009, 56). According to the rules of *Taihō ritsuryō* and a passage from Book 1 of *Engi shiki*, during the first court ritual, princes and high officials in the capital gathered in front of the Suzakumon gate,⁹ and a Nakatomi ritualist read a prayer, so evil was cast out from the realm. A full liturgy is provided in Book 8 of *Engi shiki*, where the Daoist-influenced part of the *Ōharae* ritual is called *Yamato Kawachi no Fumibe no Harai* (東西文部祓, “Purification Rite of the Fumibe from Yamato and Kawachi”). This rite was performed specifically at important shrines for court and nation on the last days of the 6th and 12th lunar months of the year. It was a ritual in which diviners from the Fumi clans of Yamato and Kawachi provinces offered *hitogata* effigies and a ritual sword, then chanted a liturgical text in Chinese (Bock 1970, 88–89). The liturgy is particularly notable for its strong connection to foreign spirit pacification rituals, which are based on

⁹ Suzakumon (朱雀門) was the main gate at the center of the south end of the outer enclosure that surrounded the imperial palace compound at Heijō and Heian capitals. It was named after the Guardian of the South (朱雀, “Vermilion Bird”), one of the four mythical guardians in East Asian cosmology.

Chinese astrological and calendrical concepts, such as the Queen Mother of the West. Moreover, it refers to Japan as to a mythical location far east of China, a Daoist paradise inhabited by flying immortals (Como 2009, 94).

Another popular purification ritual was the *Michiae no Matsuri*. Although being a regular part of the court's ritual calendar in the capital, it was also held against infectious diseases, demons, and malevolent deities along the main highways of Yamato. *Michiae no Matsuri*, like the *Ōharae* rite, was performed on the final days of the 6th and 12th months of the year. During the ceremony, supernatural entities were offered a substitute body, given food offerings and animal hides of cows and boars, and admonished not to return (Como 2009, 30). The first mention in historical records of this ritual presumably conducted by *onmyōji* as envoys from the capital is from the *Shoku nihongi*. It records an account of the rite in the 7th year of Tenpyō (735), providing insight into the state's response to a smallpox outbreak which was one of the most significant epidemics during the Nara period. It originated in Dazaifu, Kyūshū, later spread to the capital, and devastated the population of Japan. In response to this crisis, measures were taken by the government to save the lives of the people through medical and spiritual treatment. These included offering rites to the deities within the jurisdiction of Dazaifu, conducting sutra recitations at temples, distributing food and medicine, and issuing directives to perform the *Michiae no Matsuri* purification rite in various provinces from Nagato Province eastward (Aoki et al. 1990, 293).

Since epidemics in the Nara and Heian period spread quickly along major transportation corridors and crossroads leading to the capital,¹⁰ it is not surprising that purification rites, such as the *Michiae no Matsuri*, came to occupy such an important position among 8th century court rituals. Due to a variety of factors, however, this ceremony gradually disappeared during the mid-Heian period.

Throughout the Heian period, widespread concern over pollution and disease stimulated the emergence of new ritual forms and divinatory practices aimed at the prevention and removal of a variety of crises. From the 9th century, new ritual forms incorporating more esoteric Buddhist and *Onmyōdō* elements emerged, and ritual implements underwent a transformation (e.g., reduction in quantity, lack of standardization). Historical sources and narratives attest that the imperial court pursued multiple ritual strategies: from the production of effigies and talismans offered by *onmyōji* to elaborate Buddhist ceremonies with sutra recitation, a multiplicity of procedures catered to the needs of all levels of Japanese society.

¹⁰ Since travelers and construction workers were easy targets for robbers and prone to starvation, large numbers of corpses are believed to have littered the roads and rivers of early Japan. Moreover, the close association between crossroads and spirit pacification was almost certainly related to the belief that demons traveled along the roadways of the land (Como 2009, 33, 47).

During this period, *Onmyōdō* spread through private *onmyōji* beyond the confines of *ritsuryō* state institutions in the Heian capital, and aristocrats started consulting *onmyōji* privately for managing the affairs of their daily lives, such as determining and prescribing taboos, exorcism, recovery from illness, and even cursing (Shigeta 2012, 68–69; Yamashita and Elacqua 2012, 81–83). From the late 10th, early 11th century, *onmyōji* could compose new, or reuse old prayers of popular purification rites, and could formally perform purification and protection spells against curses in various headquarters of the country. Popular purification ceremonies, such as the *Ōharae* ritual, the *Michiae no Matsuri* rite, and other private rituals of *onmyōji*, started to show more diversity in the countryside and in provincial capitals (The Niigata Prefectural Museum of History 2020, 40–41).

4. *Hitogata*: human shaped effigies of ancient Japan

From about the 7th century, the practice of purification and cursing involved, among others, the use of *hitogata* figures. In addition to the native customs,¹¹ the origin of human-shaped effigies used in *ritsuryō* rituals can also be traced back to ancient China. Human-shaped wooden tablets unearthed from Mawangdui tombs (馬王堆漢墓) in Hunan province indicate that remarkably similar effigies already existed during the western Han Dynasty (206 BCE–9 CE) (Minami 2005, 2).

Hitogata that were created between the Asuka and Heian periods in Japan have the physical features of either a man or a woman. They are made of flat or thick material with cuts made on the left and right to represent the head, shoulders, arms, legs, etc. In ancient times they were made of silver, wood, rice straw, or miscanthus reeds. The intentional selection of specific types of wood for use in purification rituals can be traced back to ancient China, where supernatural powers were attributed to certain types of wood. From the Nara period, the wood material for making *hitogata* was usually *hinoki* (檜, “cypress”),¹² *momo* (桃, “peach”),¹³ or *sugi* (杉, “Japanese cedar”). For wooden dolls, a thin or thick board was typically cut or carved to express a certain body type, and a face was drawn in black ink

¹¹ Japanese people inhabiting some of Japan’s main islands in the middle Yayoi period (approx. from the 10th century BCE to the middle of the 3rd century CE) seem to have used carved, doll-like wooden figures in rituals, especially in the Kinki region. In the Kofun period, terracotta clay figures arranged on and around the mounded tombs of the Japanese elite were made as funerary objects.

¹² Revered for centuries for its beautiful, durable wood, and the fragrant essential oils, its use as construction wood is attested in the *Kojiki* chronicle. It has been used in Shintō ceremonies and purification rituals since ancient times, to build shrines and temples, and to construct fragrant tubs for bathing.

¹³ Peaches were claimed to ward off evil spirits in China. In the *Kojiki*, creator deity Izanagi no Mikoto successfully repels his ogre pursuers by throwing three peaches at them.

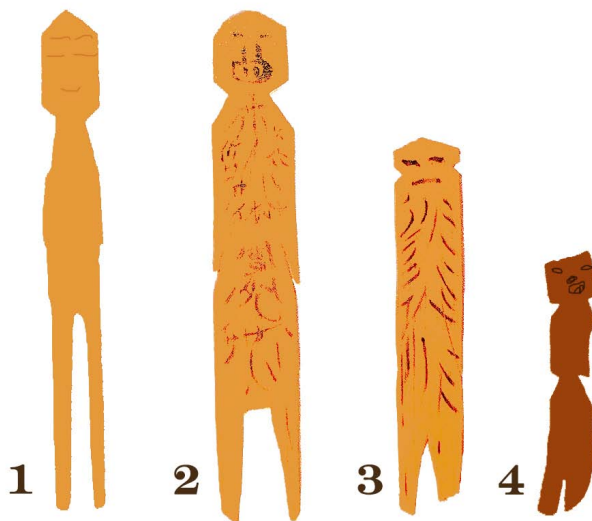


Figure 1: Thin plates of wooden hitogata effigies from Heijō Capital and Heijō Palace sites
(7–8th century, housed at Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Nara)
(1) 24.5 cm, (2) 15.5 cm, (3) 11.5 cm, (4) 8 cm

(Source: *Digital illustration made by the author based on photos taken by Zsófia Imai at the special exhibition History of Shintō Purification at Kokugakuin University in Tokyo, May 20–July 9, 2023*)

to copy a person's facial features. Smaller body parts could be made separately of wood or paper. Rarely, some *hitogata* were carved out to show a man's face and neck only, with specific facial features drawn in black ink. Among the *hitogata* figures excavated to date, there is a wide variety of facial expressions, ranging from simple engravings or drawings to bizarre demon-like faces. In a few cases, names are also written on the body of the human-shaped item. Effigies with particularly frightening faces might portray an angry *kami* (Kaneko 1988, 199). *Hitogata* figures that we know of range in length from 5 to 119 centimeters, but the average size is about 17–18 centimeters.

Depending on their purpose, these items could be cast into water, burned, cut, or a person could also hit a nail into the figure. *Hitogata* were used in three ways. They were used at court-sponsored purification ceremonies (such as *Ōharae* rite) as a simple substitute figure. In this case, impurities and sins of the aristocrats were transferred to the carved effigy by blowing their breath to the figurine or touching it, then a prayer was chanted, after which *hitogata* were cast into a body of water to float away.

They also served as a substitute figure into which demons, angry spirits, or the epidemic deity (疫病神 *yakubyōgami*) move during religious ceremonies, such as

roadside rites or private rituals of purification and healing. The *hitogata* did not represent the disease-bearing or an angry spirit itself, but rather temporarily incorporated the defilement that had been transferred onto it. While a ritualist recited prayers, demons and mischievous deities were offered a substitute human body, given food or other offerings, and admonished not to return (Como 2009, 33).

A *hitogata* could also function as a substitute for a certain person, for whom a fatal curse (魘魅 or 厭魅 *enmi*) was offered. This is a unique function of the effigies, because curses are not the result of divine anger, but a choice of mortal humans. The earliest record of cursing practices in Japan exists in the *Nihon shoki* from the year 587, however, the record is not specific regarding the exact methods used (Sakamoto 1994). Within the *Yōrō ritsuryō*, the sections *Zokutōritsu* (賊盜律, “Penal Laws of Theft”) and *Myōreiritsu* (名例律, “Terminology of Precedents and Laws”) define cursed *hitogata* in the following way: the hands and feet of the figurine would be bound, the chest and the eyes would be stabbed through with angular nails (Mizuno 1982, 43). By the end of the Heian period, the use of cursed figurines became so favored that prayers against fatal curses were included in imperial ceremonies and private *onmyōji* rituals as well.

In the case of cursing practices, *hitogata* seem to have been used as a singular piece in the Nara and Heian period, usually with a name written on them (e.g., the name of officials, nobility, or members of the imperial court). However, when conducting exorcism or healing, *hitogata* were combined (e.g., using two or four figures), and the malevolent deity’s name was written on the pieces (Kaneko 1988, 199–200). It should be pointed out here, that by this time, the native *kotodama* (言霊, “word spirit”) concept, a belief that mystical powers dwell in words and names, already existed in Japan. Written characters were also believed to have a supernatural power in Chinese Daoism and Buddhism: *fulu* (符籙, “talismanic script”)¹⁴ and written *mantra*¹⁵ or *dharani*¹⁶ were used as part of exorcistic and healing rituals. Especially within the Chinese-influenced ritual context, the identification of the cursed Japanese person by name was important to gain control over them.

In 729, Emperor Shōmu (聖武天皇, r. 724–749) banned the use of *hitogata* for curses and introduced laws to punish those accused of performing maledictions with them. The *Shoku nihongi* recorded several crimes of curses after the practice had become a criminal offence, proven by several archaeological finds from the Nara period. Despite the prohibition, the tendency to put a curse on someone

¹⁴ *Fulu* is the term used for Daoist incantations and magic symbols written or painted as talisman by Daoist practitioners.

¹⁵ *Mantra* is a sacred utterance, a sound, a syllable, a word, or group of words believed by practitioners to have religious, magical, or spiritual powers.

¹⁶ *Dharani* are protective Buddhist chants, mnemonic codes, incantations, or recitations.

did not diminish in the old capitals. In the Heian-period narrative tale *Shōmonki* (將門記, “Record of Masakado’s Life,” 940s), we can read about how the central government ordered the making of a *hitogata* to curse Taira no Masakado (平將門, 903–940), the samurai leader of the first recorded uprising against the Heian court. The wooden figure, which had the physical features of Masakado, was placed under an *onmyōji*’s divining board during the ritual, while presumably performing magical steps (反閉 *henbai*) with the effect of subduing evil spirits and awakening vital forces (The Niigata Prefectural Museum of History 2020, 37).

Ritsuryō rituals involving *hitogata* seemed to have been fairly standardized by the 8th century, and by the 9th century, the ritual system no longer appeared to be regulated. From about this period, *hitogata* were presented to the court by an *onmyōji* each month for the performance of a purification rite called *Nanase no Harae* (七瀬祓, “Purification of the Seven Brooks”). During this rite, the emperor would first breathe onto seven *hitogata* on an auspicious day, then stroke the objects. Heian aristocrats or an *onmyōji* would then take the paper figures to seven waterways and float them away, removing defilement from the emperor and court (Lomi 2014, 277–278).

One of the first mentions of *hitogata* used at roadside rites for spirit pacification is from the *Hizen no Kuni no fudoki* (肥前国風土記, “Gazetteer of Hizen Province”) that documents a tale from a time before the introduction of the *ritsuryō* system (Akimoto 1958).¹⁷ Legend has it that there was an angry deity in the upper reaches of the Saka River in Kyūshū that allowed half of the travelers to live but killed the other half. Ōarata, an ancestor of the leader of Saka region at the time, carried out a divination, and learnt that there were two female chiefs from clans that did not show allegiance to the ruler of Japan, but as priestesses, they advised Ōarata to extract clay from the village of Shimota and create human-shaped and horse-shaped effigies, and if Ōarata offered them to the malevolent deity, it would be appeased. When Ōarata followed the instructions, the deity was pacified (Akimoto 1958, 392). *Hitogata* was supposed to be a substitute body and an offering created from the soil of the village where the angry deity resided. The narrative clearly shows connections to continental rites of spirit pacification, but also suggests that local practitioners already had some kind of understanding of those practices before the introduction of the *ritsuryō* system. Spirit pacification rituals were acknowledged religious practices for rural clans of Kyūshū and they involved religious practitioners of local folk beliefs.

¹⁷ *Fudoki* manuscripts are ancient records on culture, folklore, geography, and oral tradition concerning the old provinces of Japan. The gazetteers’ compilation was ordered by Empress Genmei in the Nara period. One of the most substantial ones which have survived is the *Hizen no Kuni no fudoki*, containing historical, cultural, and geographical records about the Hizen province, which was located in the area of present-day Saga and Nagasaki prefectures.

An illustrated book called *Juso hendōkō daiji* (呪詛遍道功大事, “Encyclopedia of Curses and Pilgrimages”)¹⁸ from the 16th century explains how to break free from curses with *hitogata*. In one example, instructions are written as follows: after making paper dolls with magic spells and the lattice shaped 井 symbol, one should chant these spells and keep praying to the river stream, then throw the dolls into the river so the curse one received will be returned to the person who put it on them. This source also mentions that *kuji* (九字) practices are an important part of the purification ritual, especially when *hitogata* figures or other magical items are used at the same time (The Niigata Prefectural Museum of History 2020, 76).

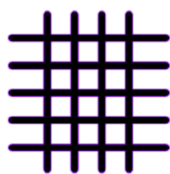


Figure 2: The *kuji* symbol

(Source: An illustration made by the author)

The 井 symbol is an abbreviation of the *kuji* symbol which has five horizontal and four vertical lines (see Figure 2). The original *kuji* symbol is first introduced in *Baopuzi* (抱朴子, “The Master Who Embraces Simplicity”), a Chinese Daoist text, as a protection spell against misfortune. There are five *yang* syllables and four *yin* syllables in the spell. How the *kuji* arrived in Japan in the late Nara or early Heian period is still a matter of debate, however, the early *kuji* chant was probably a simple prayer, then mutual influences of *Onmyōdō* and esoteric Buddhism helped this practice develop into a new Japanese system, with many variations. Magical symbols were created for expressing the practice in a simple form, such as the 井 symbol. Since the late Heian period, this system can be found extensively not only in *Onmyōdō* and esoteric Buddhist materials, but also in *Shugendō* (修験道, “Way of Shugen Practice”)¹⁹ and *Ryōbu Shintō* (両部神道, “dual Shintō”)²⁰ (The Niigata Prefectural Museum of History 2020, 76).

¹⁸ This book is in the collection of Tōno City Museum (遠野市立博物館) in Iwate Prefecture. The author and the compilation date are unknown.

¹⁹ *Shugendō* is the name given to a Japanese religious tradition based on ancient Japanese mountain cults, which took shape at the end of the Heian period under the influence of esoteric Buddhism, Daoism, and old Shintō beliefs.

²⁰ *Ryōbu Shintō* is a form of Shintō that took in elements of esoteric Buddhist practice from the Shingon sect (真言宗).

The distribution range of these items extends from the Akita Castle site (秋田城跡) in the north to the Dazaifu site (大宰府) in the south, encompassing over 100 locations, mainly crossroads, highway areas, and riverside locations of old capital sites and provincial headquarters of the Asuka, Nara, and Heian periods. Most effigies used for harming a person were discovered only in old capital sites or in their agglomeration, indicating that their use could be related to the imperial court. The earliest discovered cursed *hitogata* was recovered from a well of the Heijō capital site and has the name “Sakabe □ken” (坂部□建)²¹ written on either side of the torso. It is a male figurine which was made of Japanese cypress. Both the chest and the eyes of the effigy are pierced through with angular wooden nails. The position of the wooden nails corresponds to the descriptions of cursed effigies in two sections of the *Yōrō ritsuryō* (Mizuno 1982, 33, 43).

In contrast, the wooden figurine found in Nara at the eastern main canal of Heijō Palace is unmistakable evidence for the use of healing figurines in the 8th century. This eleven-centimeter *hitogata* dated to the first half of the 8th century and bore several ink marks around an eye. The writing on its back says, “the left eye became ill on this day” (左目病作□今日□) (Helfenbein 2017, 19). During another discovery from the Nara period, more than two hundred wooden *hitogata* were excavated just outside Mibu Gate (壬生門) leading into Heijō Palace, lying in a ditch along Nijō Avenue (二条大路). Yet another eight *hinoki* pieces were found at the same Heijō capital site, along the Horikawa Canal. Three of them are nearly one meter tall (Nara Kokuritsu Bunkazai Kenkyūjo 1983, 22–24). Considering the placement of these examples, archaeological data suggests that these figurines might have been used by an *onmyōji* during the *Michiae no Matsuri* rite in the latter part of the Nara period.

Archaeological finds from the Heian period in Kyōto also reveal the characteristics and highlight the function of *hitogata* used from about the 9th century. Many recovered figurines seem to have been cursed objects. For instance, a pair of *hitogata* were excavated in 2004 from a well of the Ukyō district of the Heian capital, presumably representing court nobles from the 9th century. The smaller figure (height 16.5 cm, width 2.5 cm, depth 1.5 cm) resembles a woman with her hair styled into a bun called *zujō ikkei* (頭上一髻).²² Its nose, mouth, eyes, eyebrows, and nipples are carved and painted. The bigger doll (height 23 cm, width 4 cm, depth 2.5 cm) resembles a nobility with both a mustache and a beard, sporting an *ebōshi* (烏帽子, “crow cap”)²³ on his head. A hole is carved out from his stomach.

²¹ The symbol □ is used in this chapter for the parts that cannot be deciphered.

²² It was a popular formal hairstyle for Japanese noble women from the Nara period, influenced by Chinese court fashion.

²³ A type of black-lacquered court cap worn only by men of a particular social status, originating during the Heian period.

The hands of both dolls are tied behind their backs, and on their chests, there are names written in two vertical lines in black ink. The bigger doll bears the name Fujii Fukumaro (葛井福万呂) on the left side of the chest; the other figure's inscription says Hinokuma Ako (檜前阿古) (Kyōtoshi Maizō Bunkazai Kenkyūjo 2004, 10–11). Fujii Fukumaro might have been the descendant of immigrants who settled in Kawachi province: several members of this family lived and worked in Ukyō district as lower-class officials.



Figure 3: Cursed male figure excavated from the Ukyō district of the Heian capital site (wood, early Heian period, housed at Kyōto City Archaeological Museum)

(Source: Digital illustration made by the author based on reports of Kyōto City Archaeological Museum)

Wooden figures also keep becoming known throughout the countryside, places that might have been district headquarters of ancient Japan. The *hitogata* (height 17 cm, width 3.7 cm, depth 0.3 cm) excavated from the Iba site (伊場遺跡) in Shizuoka prefecture is from the Nara period and bore the name Wakayamatobe no Kotojime (若倭部小刀自女), complete with some other characters suggesting her illness. It appears to be an effigy that prayed for Kotojime's recovery (Hamamatsushi Shimin Bunkazaika 2019, 15). Another peculiar looking pair of *hitogata* was found at the Kadoya site (角谷遺跡) in present-day Fukui prefecture, among other typical Nara-period ritual objects (Mikatachō Kyōiku Iinkai 1991). One piece has an oval head and thick body carved out of a 20.7 cm long wood stick; its legs are relatively thin

and pointed. Slightly below the neck, there is a hole on the body carved through the side. This hole could indicate that originally, arms were attached to the body as early as in the 8th century. The other figurine is an even bigger 21.6 cm long wood stick with a head carved on both ends, and the eyes, nose, and mouth also carved. On the head, an *ebōshi*-like simple carving suggests to us that this person was a nobility. Based on the much simpler carving style and facial features of these figures, they seem to have been made earlier than the 9th century pieces from the Heian capital site (Fukuiken 1993).

It should also be noted that several collections of wooden charm tablets (呪符木簡 *jufu mokkan*) were often excavated together with similar looking wooden *hitogata* figurines (Masuo 1996, 78). The oldest dated item (length 21.6 cm, width 3.9 cm) is from the 7th century and was excavated from Kuwazu site (桑津遺跡) in Ōsaka (Masuo 1996, 80). *Jufu mokkan* from the late Heian period have standardized expressions and symbols, while *hitogata*, in contrast, lacked standardization in this period. Although these inscribed tablets were usually not figurative items, they were used in purification rituals as talismans created by *onmyōji* or Buddhist monks. Spells and auspicious characters were drawn on them in a similar way to how they were on Chinese Daoist talismans. Expressions or auspicious characters, such as the pentagram (五芒星 *gobōsei*)²⁴ or the abbreviated *kuji* symbol, can also be found on inscribed ritual pottery recovered from the same excavation sites, however, to my knowledge, no *hitogata* figure with a pentagram or *kuji* symbol has been discovered yet (Monta 2011, 8).

5. *Jinmen doki*: ritual pottery decorated with a human face in ancient Japan

Jinmen doki, that is, reddish-brown, or grayish orange pottery²⁵ decorated with human faces painted on their exterior surfaces with black ink were also important objects linked to epidemics and purification. First, the study of *jinmen doki*, however, needs to be situated within the context of research on inscribed ritual pottery of ancient Japan. Hirakawa (2000) has noted that the practice of inscribing motifs or characters on ritual pottery is believed to have originated in ancient China, then

²⁴ The pentagram is presumably a representation of the ever-changing material forces of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water (*wuxing*) and originates in East Asia as a symbol of the supernatural world (Monta 2011, 6). In Japan, the symbol was also the seal of Heian-era *onmyōji* Abe no Seimei (安倍晴明, 921–1005).

²⁵ Evolved from earlier pottery traditions, haji ware (土師器 *hajiki*) is a type of unglazed pottery that was produced in Japan from the Kofun period (around 3rd to 7th centuries AD) until the Heian period. It was fired at relatively low temperatures, and was made for everyday and ritual purposes as well.

it was incorporated to the early ceremonies of the *ritsuryō* state, with its earliest appearance dating to the mid-7th century in the Fujiwara capital. In China, from at least the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600–1046 BCE), pottery scripts and oracle bone inscriptions were used as written elements of divination on topics, such as illness and death, sacrifices, agricultural forecasts, and war, consulted with the deities. Moreover, with ritual pottery utensils, the living could make offerings to the angry spirits in order to appease them. The inscribed ritual pottery of ancient Japan also had major ritualistic significance. Among these decorated objects, *jinmen doki* is considered to have played a central role in the healing and purification rituals until the end of the 10th century.

These vessels were produced using local coarse clay and hand-built or wheel-thrown techniques, depending on the period and region. The faces are often schematic and stylized, exhibiting regional variations in style. The brush strokes vary widely, from the very skilled to the poor, childish doodling. Expressions are usually humorous, sad, or ghastly in appearance, but there are also examples in which the face is not entirely drawn, but rather a symbol of a beard, nose, oblique lines, or ripples are painted on the surface. Eyes are typically almond-shaped or simple slits, sometimes outlined in bold strokes. The mouth is depicted with simple horizontal lines, sometimes with slight curves to suggest expression. Eyebrows are usually included as additional details. The human faces were sometimes accompanied by inscriptions and motifs. From the late Nara period, the inscriptions became more elaborate, sometimes including prayers, invocations, or references to auspicious motifs and syncretic Shintō, Buddhist or Onmyōdō deities.

The face(s) could represent a deity or a person who is sick or “impure.” They are typically painted on the center or upper part of the vessel, either near the rim or on the body. The number of faces on one vessel ranges from one to as many as eight, but two are the most common. These items were mostly used in multiples, not as a single unit. They are between about 8 and 30 centimeters in height and each of them have different shapes, inscriptions, and decorations (Kaneko 1988, 204).

Although there is a great deal of debate about the native origin of *jinmen doki* in general, Kaneko (1988) has suggested that *jinmen doki* might have an early artistic connection with half-realistic caricatures (戯画 *giga*) painted in ink on different surfaces by carpenters in the late Asuka and Nara period. Some of the earliest and most renowned caricatures were drawn on the wooden ceiling of the Main Hall of Hōryūji temple (7th century), and on the lotus pedestals of the wooden statues of Brahma and Indra deities in the Main Hall of Tōshōdaiji temple (8th century). According to local Buddhist traditions, these humorous pictures of men are thought to be representations intended to ward off evil spirits (Kaneko 1988, 204). Based on written records and archaeological data, the proto-*jinmen doki* presumably appeared in the Fujiwara capital in the late 7th century and, at first, they

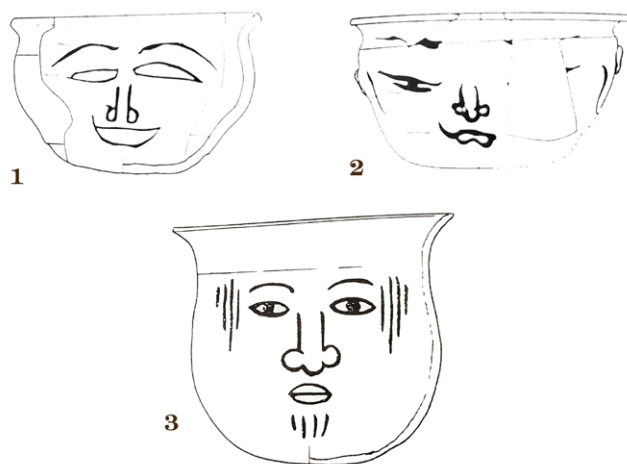


Figure 4: *Jinmen doki* from Heijō capital site in Nara (1, 2) and Mizue site in Saga (3)
(Nara period, in the collection of Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties)

(Source: Digital illustration made by the author based on figures of Kaneko
(1988, 96, 101–102))

were used only for preparing food offerings at western and southern locations. The standard version of *jinmen doki* appeared in the early 8th century. This was a *ritsuryō* ritual implement in which diseases or impurities were transferred, sealed, and washed away along with the breath of the sick person. It could also be broken at the conclusion of the ceremony, symbolizing the destruction of the impurities (Kaneko 1988, 204). By the late 8th century, an advanced type of earthenware was established and not only spread throughout the entire capital, but also to outer provinces as well, with a pressed mold on the bottom and traces of rolled clay cord on the outside, as archaeological findings seem to confirm. They were presumably produced by dedicated craft workshops in different provinces (Onizuka 1996, 29).

The function of the most advanced *jinmen doki* has been recorded in the Heian period liturgical sources as well. In Book 1 of the *Engi shiki*, for example, there is a passage (四時祭大祓条, “Great Purification Rite of the Festivals of the Seasons”) about the offering of two *jinmen doki* in a purification rite in 927 (Bock 1970). *Seikyūki* (西宮記, “Record of Court Practices”), an exemplary book on Heian rituals, reports that Emperor Murakami blew his breath three times onto this crucible (Kaneko 1988, 204). Additionally, *Majinai chōhōki* (呪詛重宝記, “Manual of Magical Rites,” compiled by Kikuya Kihei in the 18th century) describes an early, possibly Heian-period ritual, where the number of hungry spirits is determined according to the Chinese zodiac sign of a long-term patient. For each hungry spirit, a paper

talismans with a demon is drawn by an *onmyōji*, placed alongside a *hitogata* figure, and accompanied by the same number of rice cakes. During the ritual, the talismans and rice cakes are placed in an inscribed earthenware vessel—possibly a *jinmen doki*—and carried away by the river (Onizuka 1996, 20).

More than 2,500 pieces of *jinmen doki* have been excavated in the Japanese islands in the last 40 years, mostly from beds of streams, drainage ditches, sewers, wells, or ruins of rural houses. Broken pieces were mostly found in Nara and Kyōto prefectures in old capital sites, Akita, Iwate, and Niigata prefectures, and a few in the Kantō region and Kyūshū area as well. The earliest examples of *jinmen doki* were recovered from Fujiwara capital sites. 8th century artifacts were distributed across various Heijō capital sites, including the Maekawa site (前川遺跡) and Kujō Avenue (九条大路) area in the south, the Suzaku Avenue (朱雀大路), and by the end of the Nara period, the roadside ditches on the eastern side of the Heijō Palace (平城宮). In the Heian capital, findings have been detected in the areas surrounding the Eastern and Western Markets (東市・西市), close to main avenues (Onizuka 1996, 23–28).

Based on recent excavations in ancient capital sites, it is evident that *jinmen doki* and *hitogata* figurines do not necessarily accompany each other at the same time and location. For instance, no *jinmen doki* have been found within the Fujiwara Palace area in the Fujiwara capital and in the Nijō Avenue area of Heijō capital close to the Imperial Palace, in contrast to the many *hitogata* figurines found in the same areas in the Asuka and early Nara periods. Additionally, only a small number of inscribed potteries have been discovered so far around the ruins of Naniwa palace in Ōsaka. However, excavation at the Hieda site (稗田遺跡)²⁶ of the Heijō capital from the late Nara period has yielded about 100 items, mainly *jinmen doki* and *hitogata* figurines (Onizuka 1996, 28). Archaeological data suggest that *jinmen doki* are observed together with *hitogata* from the mid-8th century onward. The incorporation of standard *jinmen doki* into *ritsuryō* rites in the capitals most probably occurred later than that of human-shaped figurines.

In eastern Japan, during the excavation of the Shōzaku site (庄作遺跡) in Chiba prefecture, 123 pieces of *jinmen doki*, dated to the Nara and Heian periods, were unearthed, and most of them contained short ink-painted inscriptions. The contents of such inscriptions are diverse, including the names of persons or deities, simple words suggesting *kami* worship, and motifs indicating syncretic Shintō, esoteric Buddhist, and *Onmyōdō* beliefs (Monta 2011, 6). Judging by characters and symbols, such as 火 (*hi*, “fire”), 竈神 (*kamadogami*, “hearth deity”), the pentagram, or the *kuji* symbol, inscribed *jinmen doki* from this site were presumably used to offer food to the hearth deity among commoners to avoid misfortune. It is

²⁶ Hieda was a local purification river in which the inhabitants of the Heijō capital floated objects downstream to ward off illnesses and calamities.

important to note that the god of earth in early *Onmyōdō* belief, Dokujin (土公神), was also worshiped as the hearth deity in rural areas of eastern and north-eastern Japan from the Heian period. The deity was believed to move from one place to another around the estate depending on the season. If any digging or construction was made during the season when it was dwelling in a specific area of the home, there had to be special rites to appease the deity beforehand. If the deity were appeased, it would bring good fortune and health to the family. Presumably, the clay pots offered to the hearth deity were made from the same soil where the house itself was located (Yokohamashi Rekishi Hakubutsukan 2012).

Based on archaeological records, it can be concluded that there were three kinds of symbolism in religious services connected with *jinmen doki*: (1) to keep the plague, sickness, or other impurities away, (2) to be used in a purification ritual, and (3) to appease the *kami* by offering food to them on special occasions, while at the same time, being a mediator between the local *kami*'s world and the human world.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study offers a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted nature of ancient Japanese religious practices, particularly in the context of *Onmyōdō*, while highlighting the significant roles of *hitogata* effigies and *jinmen doki* vessels. The investigation began by situating the development of these practices within the historical background of Japan's interaction with Korean kingdoms and Tang China. This cultural exchange highly influenced the Japanese religious landscape at the time, incorporating elements of Daoism, Buddhism, and Shintō into the native folk practices, ultimately forming the basis for *Onmyōdō*.

The key contribution of this study is the comparison between *hitogata* effigies and *jinmen doki* vessels in terms of their characteristics, distribution, functions, and roles. Both reveal the ritualistic efforts to interact with spiritual forces, whether in personal purification of the ruler of Japan or the broader scope of protecting communities, such as the imperial court, the capital, or rural provinces. The examination highlights how *hitogata* served as symbolic surrogates for individuals, facilitating the transference of defilements, while *jinmen doki* probably functioned as both surrogates for spirit pacification purposes and as mediators between the living realm and the local deity's supernatural realm, especially in the context of appeasing the hearth deity in rural areas of ancient Japan. Since ritual pottery is made by firing the very clay that comes from the land where the hearth deity lives, *jinmen doki* vessels can also play a kind of mediating role, with the same aim at spirit pacification.

Furthermore, the study delves into *Onmyōdō*'s complex symbolism, focusing on Chinese chants, Daoist talismans, and the *kuji* and pentagram symbols utilized for spirit pacification and protection. Notably, while *hitogata* effigies did not bear the *kuji* and pentagram symbols, other ritual objects excavated from the same locations, like *jufu mokkan* tablets and *jinmen doki*, did. The absence of these symbols on *hitogata* suggests that their power derived not from Daoist or Buddhist symbols but rather from the written incantations on them and from the ritual actions performed by an *onmyōji*, emphasizing the effigies' role as direct surrogates for the individuals they represented.

In sum, this study provides a nuanced understanding of the symbolic and ritualistic dimensions of *hitogata* effigies and *jinmen doki* vessels. It underscores their importance in the broader religious and cultural practices of ancient Japan, illustrating how *Onmyōdō* integrated diverse continental ritual elements into a developing Japanese spiritual system. This interdisciplinary examination contributes to our understanding of the complex interplay between material culture and esoteric ritual practices of ancient Japan.

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