

Rethinking Imported Relics Excavated at *Okinoshima* Island
—A Study on the Import Route of Dragon Heads—

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The island of Okinoshima in the Genkai Sea was an ancient place for worship from the fourth century to the tenth century. Approximately 100,000 relics were found from three excavations that took place from 1954 to 1971. The relics varied greatly: There were mirrors; steel weapons; tools; glass beads; ancient accessories such as *magatama* and talc stones; pottery such as *sueki* and *hajiki*; ritual implements made of steel, bronze and gilt bronze; imported gilt bronze harnesses; glassware; T'ang vases decorated in three-color glaze; and gilt bronze finials of dragon heads.

The paper focuses especially on gilt bronze finials in the shape of dragon heads and studies similar relics, and how they were worshipped and imported.

A pair of dragon heads was excavated from No. 5 site at Okinoshima. One finial was 19.5 cm. long (dragon head A) and another was 20.0 cm. long (dragon head B). The two formed a pair although they were slightly different in detail.

A dragon's face was carved in a curved cylinder, and there was a steel hook at the top. The opposite side of the cylinder was connected to a wooden handle. Similar dragon heads were excavated at Anap-chi Pond Site in Yöngyu, North Kyöngsang, and these are kept in the Hoan Art Museum (Seoul) and Kwangju National Museum. Some of these heads were attached to flag poles and others were elements of metal fittings for buildings and furniture. The dragon heads excavated at Okinoshima are just the same as the Yöngju dragon heads and must have been made during the age of the Unified Silla. Flagpoles with dragon heads appear in the mural paintings of the Tunhuang Caves that were produced during the T'ang and Sung dynasties. In the paintings, the poles with dragon heads are placed in pairs in the temple gardens, at mountain gates and at the back of temple halls. At the sites of temples built during the age of the Unified Silla, many pillars had the same poles with dragon heads, just like the buildings in China.

Imported relics that show Chinese influence during the seventh and eighth century are found at the Okinoshima site. Some were imported from China and others from Silla and many show the strong relation between Japan and Silla. These dragon heads must have been presented to Okinoshima as a result of negotiations with Japan during the age of the Unified Silla.