THE INTERCHANGE OF EASTERN AND WESTERN CULTURES AS EVIDENCED IN THE SHÔSÔIN TREASURES

BY

Yoshito HARADA, Lit. D.

It is needless to emphasize here that the Shôsôin 正倉院 of Nara is the treasure-house of the world, and that the culture of the T'ang dynasty, which the treasures preserved in that Imperial Repository reflect, was blended with cultures of such western countries as Persia, the Eastern Roman Empire, India, etc. However, the traces of these western cultures are mostly hidden underneath the Chinese culture, which was at the height of development then, and naturally they are not immediately evident to the casual observer. Such being the case, though visitors to the Shôsôin are usually struck with something exotic when viewing the treasures, it is often hard for them to point out specifically the concealed western elements. It is my humble intention, within the limited scope of this short article, to point out some of the outstanding examples and trace through them the interchange of eastern and western cultures.

Let us first choose two or three examples of receptacles. Preserved in the South Section of the Shôsôin are three small gilt bronze cups, oblong and foliated into eight lobes 金銅八曲長坏 (*Plate 1-1*). It measures 166 mm. in length and 45 mm. in height, and is provided with a low foot-rim. It presents a floral shape in eight lobes, the long indentations, one on either side, on the inside attracting our attention.[1] A similarly shaped receptacle is to be found in the Middle Section

---

1) See *Tôyei Shukô* 東瀛珠光, Vol. V.

also. It is a green glass cup foliated into twelve lobes 綠琉璃十二曲長坏 (*Plate I-2*). Being of floral shape in twelve lobes, there are two, instead of one, indentations on either side on the inside. The exterior is covered with a cut seaweed design and near the upper rim, on either side, the shape of a fish (or rabbit) is cut in relief. The cup is beautiful, with the decorations on the exterior showing through. It measures 133 mm. in extreme length, and 45 mm. in height.[1] The former is called an oblong eight-lobed cup 八曲長坏 and the latter an oblong twelve-lobed cup 十二曲長坏, but the names they now bear must have been given to them in later years for convenience, and we do not know their original names.

As we do not find similarly shaped objects among the receptacles in our country prior to the Nara period, we may assume that these receptacles were not original with our people. On the other hand, we must admit that they existed in China in face of the fact that similarly shaped receptacles of the T'ang dynasty in gold, silver or gilt bronze have been excavated in China in recent years. To mention one or two examples, attention may be called to the eight-lobed, flower-shaped silver cup with the design of a pair of carp in the late Eumorfopoulos collection in London. (*Plate II-1*). The inside is decorated with the design of carp, one on either side placed opposite each other in reverse. It is provided with an eight-lobed floral foot-rim, similar in shape to that of the cup. The extreme length of the silver cup measures 175 mm. and the height, 70 mm.[2]

The gilded eight-lobed silver cup decorated with human figures and flowers (*Plate II-2*) in the possession of the Metropolitan Museum of New York is of a type very similar to the examples mentioned above. The cup is decorated on the inside with human figures, disporting fowl, and flowering plants incised and hammered. Its extreme length is 133 mm. and the height, 70 mm.[3] Judging from

1) See *Shôsôin Zuroku* 正倉院圖錄, Vol. VII. This catalogue contains a number of photographic reproductions of various phases of this oblong cup.

2) See *Tô-sô Seika* 唐宋精華, (Select Relics of the T'ang and Sung Dynasties in Europe and America) European Section.

3) *Ditto*. American Section.

the technique shown in the cup, there is hardly any doubt as to its being the product of the T'ang dynasty. However, this type of vessel was not confined to the T'ang dynasty of China: its existence may be traced further west. We may note in this connection that a group of silver vessels, containing two silver cups as shown in *Plate III* (*1-2*), was discovered a little over one hundred years ago at Choniakow, a mountain village in Ostrog in the region of Volhynia on the eastern frontier of Poland. One of these two silver cups belongs to the Czartoryski Museum of Cracovia, and is of floral shape with twelve lobes, decorated with a design of human figures, running animals, and floral scrolls. Its extreme length measures about 273 mm. and its height about 60 mm. The other cup belongs to Mr. Khanenko of Kiev. This is foliated into eight lobes, and decorated with the design of a pair of deer and winged animals under a tree. This also measures about 273 mm. in extreme length and slightly over 60 mm. in height. Both are similarly made, the design being executed mainly by chasing. Judging from the standpoint of design, the cup with twelve lobes belongs to the Indo-Sassanian type and the one with eight lobes to the Indo-Scythian. They both appear to have been produced about the 7th century A. D.[1] Perhaps they were made in Persia under the Sassanian dynasty or in the neighbourhood of that country.

This particular type of receptacle was unknown to Egypt, Assyria, Greece and the other countries of the west. However, the existence of oval cups in China from the most ancient period has been proven beyond the shadow of a doubt by the evidence furnished by documents and artifacts.[2] Such being the case, there is a strong possibility that the eight-lobed or twelve-lobed cups were developed from the oval ones of China. Thus the silver cups excavated in Poland may have been made by taking the oblong Chinese cups as a model. But I wish to reserve for the time being this assumption, owing to my limited knowledge of the artifacts of the west. However that may be, it is a matter of deep interest to

1) Piotr Bienkowski: *O Skarbie Srebrnym z Choniakowa na Wolyniu.* (Swiatowit. Tom. XIII)

2) "On the Shape and Use of Chinese Cups" by the author. (*Minzoku* 民族 Vol. 2, No. 6.)

observe that in the 8th century A. D. this shape of receptacle was widely distributed over the world, reaching as far as Japan in the east and Poland in the west.

There is in the North Section of the Shôsôin a well-known lacquered ewer on a bamboo-basket foundation, commonly called *shikkohei* 漆胡瓶. It is about 425 mm. in height, and is decorated in the style of inlay known as silver *heidatsu* 銀平脫, the design consisting of deer in pairs, flowers, birds and insects. It is provided with a slender bow-like handle similarly made. The mouth, together with the lid, forms a bird's head, the lid being chained to the handle.[1] (*Plate IV-1*) Like the white bronze ewer with dragon-head design 白銅龍首水瓶 in the Imperial Household collection, originally from the Horyuji Monastery, this lacquered ewer is teeming with western feelings in design and decoration. The white glass ewer 白琉璃瓶, about 273 mm. in height, in the Middle Section is similar in shape to the above-mentioned ewers.[3] (*Plate IV-2*)

The name *ko-hei* 胡瓶 is mentioned in the *Todaiji Kenmotsucho* 東大寺獻物帳, the original memorandum of dedication to the Todaiji, and it goes without saying that it was called so in the Nara period (8th century). Furthermore, this shape of receptacles was more than likely to have been brought into this country at the same time as its name. In the *An Lu Shan Shih-chi* 安祿山事蹟, Vol. 1, by YAO JU-NÊNG 姚汝能 of the T'ang dynasty a mention is made of a large silver *ko-hei* described as *chin-sa* (gold inlay) 金鈒大銀胡瓶 and a small ko-hei described as *chin-yao* (ceramic?) 金窯細胡瓶. Perhaps these two ewers were somewhat similar in shape to the ones we have already described. In recent years this type of ceramic ware has been excavated in large numbers in China, some being decorated with three-coloured glazes, with the design in relief. Though with a plain surface, the white ceramic ewer in the design of a phoenix-head 白磁鳳首水瓶 (height 284 mm.) in the Imperial Household Museum in Tokyo, originally from the Yokokawa

1) See *Shôsôin Zuroku*, Vol. II.
2) See *Horyuji Okagami* 法隆寺大鏡, Vol. XI.
3) See *Shôsôin Zuroku*, Vol. VII.

collection, is a superb example.[1] (*Plate IV-3*) That this type of ewer was in use in Hsi Yü 西域 (Central Asia) in the T'ang dynasty is plainly shown by the wall painting (Fig. 1) found in the region of Idyqutšähri.[2] Not only so, but the head of the deer with the flower-shaped antlers, on the lid of the ewers shown, is similar to that of the embossed reindeer (Fig. 2) on the gilded silver platter with edges slightly foliated into six lobes 金銀花盤 kept in the South Section of the Shôsôin.[3] This is interesting. As this type of design was formerly unknown in China, it plainly shows the result of western influence.

Fig. 1

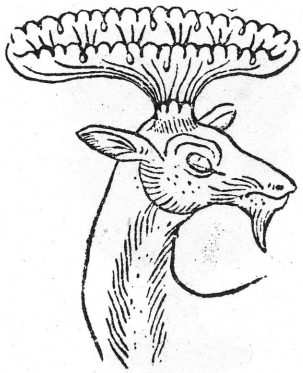

Fig. 2

The *ko-hei* (Chinese *hu-p'ing*) 胡瓶, as the name suggests, without doubt originated in Persia or thereabouts.[4] Take for instance the Persian relics of the Sassanian dynasty. The bronze ewer in the Polowtzoff collection in Leningrad bears a resemblance in shape to the lacquered ewer in the Shôsôin, and the design of the winged horses on it may be compared, as every one knows, to that on the above-mentioned white bronze ewer in the Imperial Household collection.[5]

1) See *Tokyo Teishitsu Hakubutsukan Zuroku* 東京帝室博物館圖錄, Vol. IV, No. 12.

2) A. Grünwedel: *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten in Chinesische-Turkistan* s. 334.

3) A perfect photograph of this floral platter has not yet been published. It will be included in the *Shôsôin Zuroku* to be published soon.

4) The race designated as "Hu" 胡 in the T'ang dynasty meant mainly Iran. See *Toyo Bunko Ronsô* No. 4. "Studies of Costumes as Observed in the Paintings Discovered in Chinese Turkestan" by the author. See page 76.

5) F. Sarre: *Die Kunst des Alten Asien.* Also Chuta Ito: "On the Origin of the Nara Design." (*Kokogaku Zasshi* Vol. 3, Nos. 5 and 6.)

Consider also the bronze ewer (*Plate IV-4*) which measures about 303 mm. in height, in the Sarre collection in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin.[1] It is plain and in shape closely resembles the white glass ewer in the Shôsôin Repository. There are a great many examples of *ko-hei*, but we refrain from dealing with others in order to avoid complications.

In the Middle Section of the Repository there are a number of glass objects. Besides the green glass dish foliated into twelve lobes and the glass ewer in pitcher-shape, both already mentioned, there are the following four receptacles: a dark-blue glass cup 紺琉璃坏 with a silver pedestal, measuring 112 mm. in height (Fig. 3); a wide, shallow glass vessel with a tall foot 白琉璃高坏, a glass bowl 白琉璃碗, and a blue glass jar 紺琉璃壺. They undoubtedly are imported objects, but their provenance is not certain. It is difficult to decide whether they were made in China or in one of the western countries, and coming to Japan through China. That some glass ware was imported into China from further west in the Chin Dynasty (265–420 A. D.) is plain from the following passage concerning the difficulty of their importation in the *Liu Li Wen Fu* 琉璃埦賦, an ode to a glass bowl, by P'an Ni 潘尼:

Fig. 3

"Across dangerous deserts, over the precipitous Great Pamir . . . ."

However, later in the 5th century A. D., in the reign of Shih Tsu 世祖 in the later Wei dynasty a fairly good quality of glass receptacle came to be made in China, as recorded in the Shi Yü section 西域傳 of the *Wei Shu* 魏書 which is to the following effect:

"At the time of Shi Tsu 世祖 a merchant of Ta Yüeh Shih Kuo 大月氏國 traded in the capital. He spoke of his ability to make glass of five colours by

1) *Ibid.*

smelting stone. Thereupon ore was gathered from the mountains and smelted in the city. Results were obtained. The lustre of the glass objects made was more beautiful than that of those which came from the west. A crystal palace large enough to accommodate more than one hundred persons was constructed at the Imperial command. The light and colour shining through the building looked beautiful. So much so that all those who gazed upon it marvelled and believed it to be the work of the gods. Henceforth the value of glass went down in the country, and the people no longer regarded it as a rarity."

Thus as here recorded, the Chinese came to produce glass objects with sufficient success to stop further importation from the time of Shih Tsu, and the price was naturally lowered. Later glass manufacturing declined, but in the Sui dynasty (589–618 A. D.) the technique was revived and the secret of the art was bequeathed to the T'ang dynasty. Some foreign artisans must have been working there, and with the general advancement of arts and crafts the glass-making art must have made some headway. Such being the case, no one can swear that the glass objects in the Shôsôin were not made in China. Especially does the green glass jar resemble in shape the cuspidors in use in China from the time of the Han dynasty.

We also know that the shape of the large tall glass dish is of the same type as the pedestalled clay dish of ancient times. Furthermore, the metal open-work (Fig. 4) on the silver foot of the above-mentioned deep blue glass cup reveals the Chinese honeysuckle design. All these points somehow indicate the possibility of their being Chinese products of the T'ang dynasty.[1] Putting aside the question of the makers, the above-mentioned glass ewer of pitcher-shape and the deep-blue glass cup as well are thoroughly western in type. Consider for a moment the foot of the cup. A long, slender foot with an entasis in the middle and expanding at the base,

Fig. 4

1) See *Shôsôin Zuroku*, Vol. VII.

such as shown in *Plate IV-1* and Figure 3, is not to be found in Chinese receptacles before the Six Dynasties 六朝 (265–589 A. D.), though it is the type commonly seen in Roman glass receptacles and Persian silver utensils. This type of tall foot found in the receptacles of the T'ang dynasty, it must be acknowledged, shows western influence. It may not be generally known, but gold and silver utensils came into vogue in China especially in the T'ang dynasty. The following passage in the *An Lu Shan Shih-chi* 安祿山事蹟, Vol. 1, affords a glimpse of conditions then existing:

> "Food, incense and medicine were given by the Emperor to An Lu Shan together with the gold and silver receptacles in which they were served. This happened again and again so that the receptacles accumulated more than can be counted."

As we have already stated, many gold, silver and gilt bronze receptacles, which may be accepted as products of the T'ang dynasty, have been discovered in China in recent years. And not a few of these possess a tall foot such as the one described above.[1] Perhaps among the upper-class people in the reign of the Emperor Hsüan Tsung 玄宗 tall, pedestalled glass cups, as well as gold and silver ones, may have been used. There is a passage to the following effect in the *Side History of Yang T'ai Chên* 楊太眞外傳:

> "T'ai Chên has a *po-li ch'i-pao* 玻璃七寶 (glass cloisonne?) cup and filled it with grape-wine donated by Hsi Liang Chou 西涼州."

Though the passage does not describe the shape of the cup, the exotic flavour is vary evident as befitting the T'ang Court where An Lu Shan and Shih Ssu Ming 史思明 from *Hu* 胡 were so influential.

Let us next take one or two relics of the T'ang dynasty found in the western

1) Two similar pedestalled cups were found from under the main altar of the Kofukuji 興福寺 temple in Nara. One was silver gilded; the foot missing. The other was gilt bronze. Both were incised with a design of birds and floral scrolls. These are counted among the most authentic materials. See Mosaku Ishida: *Tempyo Chihô* (Treasures of the 7th and 8th Centuries Excavated in Japan) Published by the Imperial Household Museum in Tokyo.

part of Asia and very closely related to certain objects in the Imperial Repository, Shôsôin. We all know that the Repository preserves a large number of ceramic-ware specimens with the so-called three-coloured glazes of the T'ang dynasty. There are twenty-five bowls, twenty-nine plates and dishes, a vase, a drum-body, etc. Their provenance is still disputed; whether they were made in Japan or imported from China. So of course, it is impossible for me to decide. Yet we know that the body of these ceramic pieces in the Shôsôin is not uniform: the clay used for the bowls and the vase is greyish-white mixed with fine grains of sand, while that of the drum-body is pale pink. The lead glazes of green, yellow and brown are used together in but few instances, the majority of cases being in two colours. In this respect they are not defferent from the ordinary three-coloured type of ware of the T'ang dynasty. It is to be wondered at that while there are so many of these ceramic examples preserved in the Shôsôin, not a single piece is preserved in any of the temples or private collections, except two: one in the Baron Masuda collection—a small ceramic dish said to have been excavated at Tô-no-mine in Japan; and the other, some potteries in three colours recently discovered at the site of the Temple Sûfukuji in Omi province. We have not heard of any other discovery. In recent years glazed potteries of the Nara period have been discovered from time to time, but almost all of them have a dark-grey body, known as *iwaibe* 齋瓷, covered with green glaze; none of them are of the three-colour type.[1] The ceramics in the Repository may have been specially imported from China, or a closer examination in better light may show them to be Japanese make. However that may be, no one will disagree with me when I assert that these ceramics show a technique similar to that of the three-coloured T'ang dynasty wares.

While I was staying in Berlin I had occasion to see pieces of pottery excavated at Samara in West Asia by Mr. Sarre. Among them I saw a few pieces with a green glaze mottled on a white ground. Their striking resemblance to the pieces

1) Ibid.

in the Shôsôin startled me. The Samara period lasted there from A. D. 838 to 883, corresponding to the period of time in the T'ang dynasty extending from the reign of the Emperor Wên Tsung 文宗 (827–841) to that of the Emperor Hsi Tsung 僖宗 (874–889). According to Mr. Sarre's own version, these particular pieces were found on the site of the Imperial Palaces of Samara. This leads us to conjecture that these may have beem transported from China.[1] This is yet another proof that the three-coloured T'ang pottery was widely appreciated, in the east as well as in the west, in the 8th and 9th centuries. Still another examples will be shown below.

Everybody knows that there are preserved in the Shôsôin a number of large mirrors more than 30 cm. in diameter, besides the eight-lobed mirror with design of birds, animals and flowers on the back (*Plate V–1*) which measures over 64 cm. in diameter. When I visited Constantinople, Turkey, some years ago, to my great amazement I came across, a large T'ang mirror among the exhibits of the Isramian art in a special building of the National Museum. This mirror measured about 67 cm. across, just about 3 cm. larger than the above-mentioned eight-lobed mirror in the Repository. It was of white bronze having an iron ring attached to the knob. It was labeled "Persian Shield;" and I was told that it had been excavated in Jerusalem. I then requested the director to send me a photograph of it as I was a traveller hurrying through the country, but this I never received, to my great regret. Fortunately, however, a friend of mine, Mr. Teruo Akiyama, visited that museum a few years later, and was able to take a rubbing of the mirror which he brought back.[2] Within the inner circle, around the knob, on the back, there are phoenixes and lions, two each, placed alternately. In the outer zone are found running beasts, birds in flight, and flowers and birds intermingled as in a kaleidoscope. The narrow zone along the border was also filled with designs in flowers and birds in a

1) Manzo Nakao; *Ancient Chinese Ceramics of Hsi Yü* 西域 *Type*. See the accounts on three-coloured pottery excavated in Samara.

2) See *Shôsôin Zuroku*, Vol. II. Also Teruo Akiyama: "On Rare Large T'ang Mirror in Turkey." (*Hô-un* 寶雲 Vol. 5)

row (*Plate V-2*). Judging from the nature of the design and from the size, this mirror gives us the feeling that it might have been sneaked out of our Shôsôin. No one will dispute the fact that this mirror was a product of China. Perhaps it was taken to Jerusalem by a Saracen from China in the 7th or 8th century.

Let us now take examples from the gaming sets kept in the Shôsôin. There are several *sugoroku* (Chinese *shuang-lu*) 雙六 (雙陸) boards. In addition, there are some of the accessories, such as dice, dice-boxes and pieces.[1] This game was in vogue in the 8th century in Japan, as well as in China, but its origin is not sufficiently clear. Ts'ao Chih 曹植 of the Wei 魏 dynasty (220–265) is sometimes credited with its invention, but the guess is of course doubtful. There exists a passage in the *Kuo Shih Pu* 國史補 by LI CHAO 李肇 of the T'ang dynasty to the following effect:

"There is now a game called chang-hang 長行, which is very popular. The paraphernalia of this game consists of a board, black and yellow pieces, fifteen each, and two dice to be cast. It is played after the method of *wu-shuo* 握槊 which is a modification of *shuang-lu* 雙陸 (backgammon). The Empress Wu 則天武后 once dreamed that she was unable to win the game of backgammon. Ti Liang Kung 狄梁公 declared that there was no *tzu* 子 (referring to the backgammon pieces and insinuating at the same time that there was no child) in the palace. Later people devised *chang huang* in its place."

The top of the backgammon board is marked with a passage in the middle crosswise, and on either side of it twelve passages running lengthwise. In playing the game one shakes two dice in a box and throws them, and according to the number of the dots turned up the black and white pieces, fifteen each, are moved and the game is settled. The name *chang huang*, according to the explanation given in the *Kuo Shih Pu* 國史補, seems on the whole similar to backgammon, which in turn developed from *wu shuo*, the origin of which in China is unknown. There is a passage in the art section of the *Wei Shu* 魏書 which may be interpreted as follows:

1) See *Shôsôin Zuroku*, Vols. I and VIII.

"Kao Kuang Tsung 高光宗, of Fou Yang 浮陽, played *ch'u p'u* 樗蒲 well, and Li Yu Hsü 李幼序, of Ch'ao Kuo 趙國, and Ch'iu A Nu 丘阿奴, of Lo-Yang 洛陽, were both skilled in *wu shou* 握槊. This is a foreign game which was imported recently. It is said that a foreign king had a younger brother, who was about to be executed for some crime he had committed. While in jail he devised this game and presented it to the king, thinking that the death was easy when left alone, and that he might be detained to teach the game. It became a very fashionable game since the time of Shih Tsung 世宗."

From this it may be known that *wu-shuo* was a foreign game introduced into China in the late Wei dynasty, and that it became a specially fashionable game from the time of Shih Tsung. To our great regret we confess we are unable to ascertain the name of the foreign country to whose king reference is made in the quotation. Furthermore, we are unable to determine whether *wu-shou* is a Chinese name, or the Chinese rendering of a foreign term. As the data necessary to enable us to trace the development of backgammon is lacking, unfortunately, we must leave the investigation of its origin to another occasion. Here let us add a few words concerning the dice used in playing backgammon.

The character for *t'ou* 頭 stands for another *t'ou* 骰 meaning dice. In the *Yen Fan Lu* 演繁露 by CH'ÊNG TA CH'ANG 程大昌 of the Sung dynasty is written, "It was originally written as *t'ou* 投 and later changed to *t'ou* 頭. *T'ou* 投 (to throw), *tou* 骰 (dice), and *tou* 頭 (head) require different characters, but they have the same pronunciation (in Japanese pronounced *tô*), the name derived from the meaning "to throw." As the dice were usually carved from bone, the character for bone 骨 was used as the radical in forming the new character *t'ou* 骰. Originally, before the Six Dynasties, the Chinese games did not use dice with six faces. Previous to this, a wooden die was used in the shape of an apricot-stone called *wu-mu* 五木, with one surface black and the other white and five of these were thrown together in order to get the number.[1] The dice with six faces, marked with dots, one to

1) After *Yen Fan Lu* 演繁露 by Ch'êng Ta Ch'ang 程大昌 of the Sung dynasty.

six on each, perhaps entered China from the west with *wu-shuo* or *shuang-lu* (backgammon).

According to the *Todaiji Kenmotsucho* there were 116 pairs and 1 single dice, totalling 233 dice, when the dedication was made to the Daibutsu, the Vairocana Buddha. In addition, there were two pairs of unfinished dice. But today there remain only six, three of which are reproduced in Fig. 5, 1–3. They are all carved

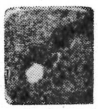

Fig. 5–1

Fig. 5–2

Fig. 5–3

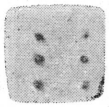

Fig. 5–4

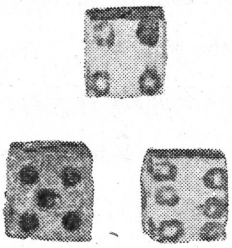

Fig. 5–5

Fig. 5–6

from ivory, the dots being filled with black lacquer, and the largest measuring about 17 mm. cube. I do not know of any authentic ancient die discovered in China proper, but Sir Aurel Stein of England has discovered in the region of Miran one bone die 15 mm. cube.[1] (Fig. 5.–4) He also discovered three wooden ones about 12 mm. cube each in the region of Mazâr-tâgh.[2] (Fig. 5–5) Perhaps these dice are the relics of the T'ang dynasty.

Similar dice were very popular in ancient Greece and Rome, and a number of these specimens are kept in the British Museum and elsewhere. I too possess a stone die which may be accepted as dating from the Roman period (Fig. 5–6). Herodotus gives credit to the Lydians for inventing the dice, and old specimens

1) A. Stein: *Serindia*, Pl. LI.

2) A. Stein: *Innermost Asia*, Pl. VI.

are often found in the western part of Asia. These considerations incline us to believe somehow that the origin of the dice is in Asia.[1] Even in India dice are mentioned in Rig-Veda. Though we are not certain as to the route which the six-sided dice took in rolling from the east to the west, or *vice versa*, it is very interesting to note that we have to go far to the west when we are tracing the origin of the dice of the Nara period.

It is not only in the case of dice, but also in not a few of the musical instruments which are preserved in the Imperial Repository that we have to go so far as to West Asia for their origin, as has already been said frequently. While we are about it, I may be allowed to make one or two observations here. The following musical instruments in the Shôsôin are highly exotic in the impression which they give: the *kugo* 箜篌, the *genkan* 阮咸 and the *biwa* 琵琶. The *kugo* (pronounced *k'ung-hou* in Chinese) is mentioned in the *Fêng Ch'an Shu* 封禪書 of the *Shih-chi* 史記 and we learn that it was made when the Emperor Wu Ti 武帝 (B. C. 140–86) of the Han dynasty enshrined Tai I Hou T'u 太乙后土. From this we may know that the *kugo* was already in use in the Han dynasty. It is also mentioned in the section dealing with musical instruments in the *Shih Ming* 釋名 by LIU HSI 劉熙 of the Later Han dynasty (A. D. 25–220). The passage is to the following effect:

"*K'ung-hou* 箜篌 was made by Shih Yen 師延, and it produces a soft amorous music. Later it appeared in place of obscene music, and was favoured by a marquis of K'ung Kuo 空國."

Thus we have reference to a marquis of K'ung Kuo who was fond of this instrument. Again it is referred to by YING SHAO 應劭 in his *Fêng Su T'ung* 風俗通 dealing with the manners and customs of the people, to the following effect:

"*K'ung-hou* is also called k'an-hou 坎侯. When the Emperor Wu Ti enshrined the Heaven and the Earth on Mt. T'ai Shan, he had a musician named Hou T'iao 侯調 make *k'an-hou*, fashioning it after the *ch'in* 琴. The words of the

1) See "Die" in *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

song harmonized with the chop, chop tune. Hou suffixed his own name *hou* in forming the name of this instrument."

Thus Ying Shao substituted *k'an-hou* 坎侯 for *k'ung-hou* 箜篌 and explains that the instrument obtained its name from the chop, chop sound it produces. Needless to say that this is a farfetched interpretation. The difficulty lies in the interpretation of the Chinese characters for *k'ung-hou*. Professor Pelliot of France has compared *k'ung-hou* to the Turkish word *qobuz*.[1] Whether this is right or not is another matter, but it was wise of him to seek out a similar sounding word in a foreign language.

Whatever the origin of the name of this instrument, we may enquire next what might have been the form of *k'ung-hou* (*kugo*) of the Han dynasty? We are unable to ascertain whether it looked similar to the *k'ung-hou* of the T'ang dynasty, as no Han specimen is forthcoming and as there is no trace of one even in the stone bas-relief of that period. Moreover, it is rather strange that this stringed instrument should be represented by two characters, *ku* 箜 and *go* 篌, both with bamboo 竹 as the radical.

Fig. 6

Putting aside this question for a while, the examples of the *kugo* in the Shôsôin (Fig. 6) are the so-called vertical *kugo*, regarding which the musical section 音樂志 of the *Chiu T'ang Shu* 舊唐書 contains a passage to the following effect:

"The vertical *k'ung-hou* is a foreign musical instrument. The Emperor Ling Ti 靈帝 (168–189 A. D.) of the Later Han dynasty was fond of it. It is curved and long, having twenty-three strings. It was played with both hands, being held close to the chest vertically."

This type of stringed instrument may be discerned in the scene at the banquet given by Ashurbanipal, the king of Assyria, as shown in Figure 7.[2] This goes to

1) P. Pelliot: "Le 箜篌 *k'ong-heou* et le Qobus." (Sinological studies published in Commemoration of Dr. Naito's Sixtieth Birthday).

2) H. R. Hall: *Babylonian and Assyrian Sculpture in the British Museum*. Pl. XLI–2.

Fig. 7

prove that this kind of stringed musical instrument already existed in ancient times in Western Asia. Under the circumstances we cannot doubt the theory that the stringed instrument of this type originated in the west.[1] As the *kugo* was counted among the principal musical instruments in Kao Ch'ang 高昌 (Turfan), Kuei Tzu 龜茲 (Kuchah) and Su Lo 疏勒 (Kashgar), it is not difficult to conjecture that it was fashionable at that time in the Hsi Yü (Central Asian) region. Moreover, this instrument is represented in the following paintings and sculpture: the fragement of Buddhistic painting on silk discovered in the T'un Huang Cave Temple 敦煌石室 by Sir Aureal Stein[2] (*Plate VII–1*); the piece of fresco painting excavated at Kum-tura by Professor Le Coq of Germany, shown in *Plate VII–2*; and the wooden sculpture of a Bodhisattva collected at Kyzil by Professor Le Coq, shown in Figure 8. These paintings, as well as the wooden figure playing on the instrument, date from the 7th or 8th century, and one cannot help noticing the striking resemblance which the examples in the Shôsôin bear to those represented in the above-mentioned paintings and sculpture. As we ponder upon this resemblance, do not these artifacts reflect the fact that, while the *kugo* in the Shôsôin must either have come from China or been made after the

Fig. 8

1) Miyokichi Shimomura: "Regarding *Kugo* 箜篌." (*Kokokai* 考古界, Vol. I, No. 12; Vol. II, Nos. 1 and 6; Vol. III, No. 1) Hisao Tanabe: *Report of the Musical Instruments in the Shôsôin.* (Published by the Imperial Household Museum in Tokyo. Shuichi Goto: "Regarding *Kugo* 箜篌" (*Kokogaku Zasshi* 考古學雜誌, Vol. 20, Nos. 5 and 7).

2) A. Stein: *The Thousand Buddhas.* Pl. XXX.

Chinese *k'ung-hou*, this instrument of Chinese make was reimported to the Hsi Yü region?

Let us next consider the *biwa* 琵琶. This instrument was already known in the Han dynasty by a name in two other character 枇杷 of the same pronunciation. The musical instrument section of the *Shih Ming* 釋名 contains a passage concerning *biwa* (Chinese pronounciation, *p'i-pa*) to the following effect:

"The *p'i-pa* 枇杷 originally came from a foreign country. It is played on horseback. When the hand is pushed forward in playing the action is called *p'i*, and when the hand is pulled back and lets go of the string the action is called *pa*. The name was derived from these two motions in playing."

Thus from early times it was recognized as foreign music. *P'i-pa*, like *k'ung-hou*, is difficult to interprete as Chinese words. Liu Hsi's 劉熙 explanation of the *p'i-pa* cannot escape the criticism of being far-fetched, as his ideas usually are. Some of the European historians of music have traced the origin of the term to *barbat* in Persian, or *bharbhe* in Sanskrit.[3] Whether they are right or not is another matter, but I think this a wise suggestion.

There are about three kinds of Chinese *biwa*, as explained by Mr. Shigeo Kishibe: the four-stringed *biwa*, the *genkan*, and the five-stringed *biwa*.[4] The most common is the four-stringed, regarding which there is a passage in the *T'ung Tien* 通典 by Tu Yu 杜佑 to the following effects:

"In the instrument with a curved neck the size is somewhat larger. It came originally from a foreign land. According to vulgar tradition it was made in the Han dynasty. The instrument which partook of the regulations of the Ch'in and Han dynasties was called *ch'in-han* 秦漢 the method used in both being applicable to it"

There are several *biwa* preserved in the Shôsôin, including one in shitan-wood,

1) Le Coq: *Die Buddhostische Spätantike Mittelasien* II. Tafel 22.
2) *Ditto*. I. Tafel 44. c.
3) Shigeo Kishibe: "The Origin of *Biwa*." (*Kokogaku Zasshi*: Vol. 26, Nos. 10 and 12.)
4) *Ibid*.

inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which is almost one metre long.[1] (*Plate VI-1*) The four-stringed *biwa* of China came through Hsi Yü from some country which we do not know. Yet as the instrument is represented on the Sassanian silver plate[2] shown in Figure 9, we know that there existed this kind of *biwa* in Persia from ancient times. Who knows but that it might have reached even China from Persia?

Fig. 9

The second on the list of *biwa* is the *genkan* 阮咸 (Chinese pronunciation *yüan-hsien*) to which reference is made in the *T'ung Tien* 通典 in the following strain:

"Nowadays for pure music the *p'i-Pa* is played. In vulgar terms it is called *ch'in-han-tzu* 秦漢子. It has a round body and a slender neck. It was copied after *hsien-t'ao* 絃鼗. Fu Hsüan 傅玄 says that it has a round body, and a straight handle, and twelve bridges . . . . "

The same book has another refrence:

"*Yüan-hsien* is called also *p'i-pa* of Ch'in 秦. It has a longer neck than the one now used, and has thirteen bridges. Since YÜAN HSIEN, one of the 'Seven Sages of the Bamboo Thicket,' is represented in the painting as playing a similar instrument, this was called by his name, *yüan-hsien*."

This corresponds with those in the Shôsôin, which contains two examples, one shown in *Plate VI-2*, and is made of shitan-wood and inlaid with mother-of-pearl and measures one metre in length.[3] This one corresponds with an item in the *Todaiji Kenmotsucho*, and makes it clear that this type of musical instrument was called *genkan* at that time. Actual ancient examples of this instrument are to be

1) See *Shôsôin Zuroku* Vol. I.
2) F. Sarre. cf. (14).
3) See *Shôsôin Zuroku* Vol. I.

found today only in the Shôsôin. But the statuette of a woman in white marble[1] reproduced in Fig. 10 which was excavated in China and belongs to the Tokyo School of Art is represented as playing on a stringed instrument identical with the *genkan* in the Repository. From this we may know that such an instrument was used in the T'ang dynasty.

Fig. 10

The history of the development of the *genkan* is not yet sufficiently clear. But the musical instrument which is found portrayed on the fragment[2] of wall painting purportedly dating from the 7th century, discovered by Professor Le Coq at Kyzil, is evidently a *genkan*. Perhaps such musical instrument has found its prototype in China.

Let us now come to the third kind of *biwa*, namely, the five-stringed one. This instrument appeared much later than the other two already mentioned. According to the section on music in the *T'ang Shu* 唐書, the five-stringed *biwa* became fashionable after the time of Wen Hsiang Wang 文襄王 in the Nothern Ch'i 北齊 (550–589 A. D.). It was unknown in the Han dynasty. That it came to China from a foreign country may be known from the *T'ung Tien* 通典 in which it is spoken of as follows:

"The five-stringed *p'i-pa* is somewhat smaller. It came from a northern country."

The Shôsôin has a five-stringed *biwa* of shitan-wood inlaid with mother-of-pearl, measuring 106 cm. in length.[3] (*Plate VI–3*) This enables us to know the general appearance and full details of this interesting instrument. Moreover, upon its plectrum-guard of tortise-shell a foreigner, inlaid in mother-of pearl, is depicted riding on a camel and playing upon this instrument, thus deepening the western

1) After Seigai Omura: *Shina Bijutsushi Chosohen* Plates.
2) Le Coq: *Spätantike* II. Tafel 2.
3) See *Shôsôin Zuroku* Vol. I.

flavour of the whole.

A number of five-stringed *biwa* are depicted in the wall paintings of Kuchah of the 6th and 7th centuries, an example of which is shown in *Plate VII-4*.[1] They may also be found in the wall painting of Ajanta Cave in far-off India (Fig. 11).[2] Perhaps, as Mr. Kishibe explains, the *biwa* may have come from India across Kuchah to China at the time of the Late Wei 後魏 (6th century). A further investigation is required regarding the origin of the *biwa*, but do not these relics specifically prove that this same instrument was in fashion in China, Central Asia, and even as far as Persia and India at the time of our Nara period?

Fig. 11

There are a number of other objects in the Shôsôin which reveal elements not altogether peculiar to the Far East. Leaving aside the objects themselves, let us take a glimpse at some of their designs. The designs shown by the treasures in the Shôsôin are what have generally been designated as "Nara designs," a term elucidated by Dr. Chuta Ito.[4] We shall here confine ourselves strictly to the consideration of the designs with strong western elements in the textile fabrics of the Shôsôin.

Let us first examine the design of a hunting scene which strongly embodies the peculiarities of the Nara design, shown in *Plate VIII-1*. This is a hunting scene on silk brocade on a blue ground.[5] Within one-half of the circle formed by small

1) A. Grünwedel: *Alto-Kutscha*. Tafel XXX.

2) J. Griffiths: *The Paintings in the Buddhist Cave Temple of Ajanta* Vol. I. p. 11. Fig. 19.

3) Shigeo Kishibe: cf. (32).

4) Chuta Ito. cf. (14).

5) *Gomotsu Jodai Senshokumon* 御物上代染織文. (Textile Fabrics of the 7th and 8th Centuries in the Imperial Collection) Part 3. Published by the Imperial Household Museum in Tokyo.

roundels an equestrian hunter and a lion are placed on either side of the tree standing in the middle, with two running deer *vis-a-vis* above the tree and two standing deer facing each other, one on either side of the tree. The other half of the circle shows the mirror-reflection of this design. The circle is surrounded by grape-vine scrolls, and adorned by long-tailed birds. It belongs to the same type of design as that on silk brocade with four guardian deities 四天王文錦[45] preserved in the Horyuji Monastery, but this has greater flow and life in the lines. Scholars agree that this type of design originated from the textile fabrics of the Sassanian dynasty in Persia, and therefore it is unnecessary to dwell upon the point any further. But for the sake of reference, a similar design on brocade in the possession of the Kunstgewerbe Museum in Berlin is here reproduced in *Plate VIII-2*.[46]

Another characteristic of the Nara design consists of birds and beasts within circles of small roundels or within floral scrolls. *Plate IX-1* reproduces the design on the arm-rest of silk brocade with phoenix on a purple ground 紫地鳳形錦御軾, and *Plate X-2* shows a Persian fabric[4] of the 6th century in the possession of the Vatican. By a careful comparison of the two we may see that the design on the arm-rest has been developed from the western design and refined. We know that a large quantity of textile fabrics was imported at that time from western countries by the merchants of Persia, Arabia, etc. There is a passage to the following effect in the *Hai-jên Hsien Wen-chin Fu* 海人獻文錦賦 by LI CHUNG-FANG 李君房 of the T'ang dynasty:

"The *fêng* dances and the *luan* soars. Or striding to and fro they caress their wings. Flowers and leaves in profusion form intricate designs. Illuminating the ground, these flowers seem to bend and break. A rainbow appears to be drinking from the shore and dividing its colours."

---

1) Yonekichi Miyake: *Kokogaku Kenkyu* 考古學研究 (Archaeological Studies). Dr. Miyake pointed out in the early days that the silk brocade with four guardian deities was of western design.

2) O. Falke: *Decorative Silks*. Many examples are shown in this book.

3) See *Shôsôin Zuroku*, Vol. III.

4) See O. Falke. cf. (46).

This description in the ode reflects the flourishing state in which the importation of textile fabrics from the western countries was carried on.

A design showing a symmetrical arrangement of birds and beasts on either side of a standing tree was in great vogue in the Far East about the 8th century. The popularity of this type of design caused a simple method for dyeing similar designs to be devised. The art of *kyokechi* 夾纈 (Chinese *chia-hsieh*), a method of dyeing in which the silk was folded double and cramped between two boards with perforated designs and then dyed, was invented in the T'ang Court in the reign of the Emperor Hsüang Tsung 玄宗.[1] *Plate IX-3* shows a screen panel in the Shôsôin with a pair of deer dyed by the *kyokechi* method.[2] By comparing this with the Persian textile sample[3] of about the 8th century, reproduced in *Plate IX-4*, the development of the design will suggest itself. Examples of this type of design are too numerous, both in the East and the West, to be enumerated here.

A design consisting of a single bird or beast under a tree was also very popular at that time. A screen panel in the Repository with an elephant design dyed in the *rokechi* 蠟纈 method (*batik*) is reproduced in *Plate X-1*.[4] If this be compared with the Sassanian fabric[5] preserved in a Spanish Church in Berlin, reproduced in *Plate X-2*, and the Byzantine fabric[6] in the possession of the Kunstgewerbe Museum in Berlin, both with an elephant design, the origin of this design will suggest itself. In some instances a human figure has been substituted for the bird or beast, as may be seen in the famous screen panels in the Shôsôin, each with the design of a lady under the tree decorated with bird's feather. Designs similar to those on the textile fabrics are shown on various other objects in the Repository, especially on the backs of mirrors. But as I once wrote on this subject[7] I shall

1) *T'ang Yü Lin* 唐語林 by Wang Tang 王讜 of the T'ang dynasty.
2) See *Shôsôin Zuroku*, Vol. II.
3) O. Falke. cf. (46).
4) See *Shôsôin Zuroku*, Vol. II.
5) O. Falke. cf. (46).
6) *Ibid.*
7) "Western Designs on the Backs of Mirrors." By the author. (*Shigaku* 史學, Vol. 4, No. 1.)

refrain from repeating myself here.

Before concluding, however, I wish to call the attention of my readers to one more example of a design selected from among the Imperial treasures other than those on textile fabrics. Reproduced in *Plate XI-1* is one of the six stone slabs with the twelve signs of the zodiac kept in the North Section of the Repository. The design represents a dog and a boar in low relief. Preserved with these slabs are two similar slabs carved with *shishin* 四神, or four deities: the one with a blue dragon and red phoenix representing the east and south; the other with a white tiger and a tortoise in the coils of a snake symbolizing the west and north. The design on each of these slabs consists of two animals with the curved lines of honeysuckle and cloud scrolls intermingled. The animals are represented in an active yet peaceful mood. At one time these slabs were believed to correspond to the item—"16 white stone weights"—mentioned in the *Todaiji Kenmotsucho*. But today they are supposed to be a sort of panelling used in architecture.[1] Perhaps this last supposition is correct. The design of two animals intermingled has commonly been used in Scythian and Sarmatian art, which seems to have exerted a fair degree of influence on the Chinese art of the Han and the Six Dynasties.[2] But they are, almost without exception, represented struggling or biting each other—in a quite different mood from that on our slabs. So it is difficult to detect the scythian influence on the design of these marble slabs carved with the twelve signs of the zodiac. However, a similar design may be seen in the painting on the ceiling panels of the Ajanta Caves in India[3] shown in *Plate XI-1* and *2*. The way these animals are depicted as disporting among honeysuckle scrolls is interesting. There is something here akin to the carving of the twelve signs of the zodiac and the four deities on our stone slabs. It has already been pointed out by Dr. Ito that the origin of the floral scroll designs carved on the side of the stelae of the T'ang

1) See *Shôsôin Zuroku*, Vol. IV.

2) M. Rostovtzeff: *Inlaid Bronzes of the Han Dynasty*. Sueji Umehara: *A Study of the Northern Type of Ancient Civilization*.

3) J. Griffths. cf. (41).

dynasty is to be traced to India and to other countries of Western Asia.[1] It may be that the four deities and the twelve signs of the zodiac under consideration reveal the influence of India.

There was frequent intercourse between China under the T'ang dynasty and Japan at about the time of the Nara period. China was then in intimate relations with Western Asia. Our history, as well as theirs, are explicit on these points. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that the cultures of the East and West should have influenced each other spiritually as well as materially. I have made but a meagre attempt to present one or two observations on this point by citing the Imperial treasures in the Shôsôin which enable us to trace specifically the interchanges which were made between the eastern and western cultures. It was in a way natural that a foreign visitor to the Shôsôin should once have remarked after examining the treasures there that he was amazed for having felt as if he had gone through a museum in his own country.

(*Original in Japanese in the* TOZAI KOSHO SHIRON, *published by the Shigakkwai; revised and translated*)

1) Chuta Ito: cf. (14).