The Interpretation of Drawing of
a Fight Sketched on Dōtaku

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In the drawings on dōtaku bronze bells manufactured during the Yayoi period, there are some motifs that show men fighting with arms in their hands.

On Inomukai No.1 dōtaku found in Fukui Prefecture, the oldest one, there is a drawing in which a tall man with a halberd in his hand is winning the battle with a shorter man holding a dagger in his hand. On another Sakuragaoka No.5 dōtaku found in Hyogo Prefecture, a man holding a stick whose head is drawn round is overwhelming an unarmed man whose head is triangular. Judging from other drawings that show the distinction of sex, the person having a round head and the person having a triangular head represent the male and female, respectively. Therefore, the drawing on the dōtaku show that the man is defeating the woman. In the drawing on the Isonokami No.2 dōtaku found in Nara Prefecture which was manufactured in the later period, there is no distinction of sex and the two people are holding halberds in one hand and pestles in the other hand. The reason why those two people hold pestles is because the motif of fighting and a motif of threshing using a pestle are mingled. It is clear that the person who drew this motif did not know the meaning a motif of fighting. As such, a motif of fighting had lost its original meaning in the changing process of dōtaku.

It is hard to imagine that the fights between men and women existed in the everyday life. Perhaps, the fight drawn on the dōtaku is depicting symbolically the fight between a god and goddess in a mythical world, not the fight in the actual world.
In the Japanese mythology, there is no such scene that a god and goddess fight with each other with weapons in their hands. Therefore, a myth in the Yayoi period, based on which the dōtaku depicted the fight between the man and woman, probably came into existence and ceased to exist during the Yayoi period. In the Kinki district, according to the analyses of tombs made in the periods from Jōmon to Yayoi, there is a growing tendency of the patrilocal marriages in the mid-Yayoi period and, accordingly, the authority of men became stronger. The drawing on the dōtaku that the god is overwhelming the goddess may be symbolically depicting the expansion of the authority of men and the decline of that of women.

From the sites in the Yayoi period, daggers and halberds made of wood were unearthed. Presumably, men and women, or men and men in the guise of women might have fought a mock battle holding these ceremonial goods in their hands.

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Figs. 1~2 Motif of fight and threshing drawn on the dōtaku.

Fig. 3. Inomukai No.1 dōtaku, Fukui Prefecture (upper) and Sakuragaoka No.1 dōtaku, Hyogo Prefecture (lower).

Fig. 4. Tokyo National Museum No.36667 dōtaku (upper) and Mori dōtaku, Hyogo Prefecture (lower).

Fig. 5. Sakuragaoka No.5 dōtaku, Hyogo Prefecture (upper), Isonokami No.2 dōtaku, Nara Prefecture (lower left) and Kawayori-Yeshihara dōtaku shaped clay thing, Saga Prefecture (lower right).

Fig. 6. A man holding a bronze halberd, drawn on the bronze ware of the Shang period in China.

Fig. 7. Sakuragaoka No.1 dōtaku~Tomari dōtaku, Tottori Prefecture. The reconstructions of the drawings on the five dōtaku made by the same mould.

Fig. 8. Ditto, rubbed copy.

Fig. 9. Ceremonial goods in the various forms of weapons made of wood in the Yayoi period.
Fig. 10. Two kinds of pestles unearthed at Kitoragawa site in Osaka Prefecture (left: for ceremony, right: for practical use).