TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................2

1. NAVAGRAHA: PLANETARY ICONS FROM INDIA ......................................................7

2. TRANSMISSION OF PLANETARY ICONS TO CHINA .............................................15

3. PLANETARY ICONS IN TANG CHINA .................................................................23

4. INDO-IRANIAN PLANETARY ICONS IN JAPAN ....................................................30

5. CONCLUSION ...............................................................................................................36

REFERENCES .......................................................................................................................37
INTRODUCTION

The search for who or what holds power over human lives is one of the recurring universal topics discussed in philosophy, literature and history. Among the diverse truths and understandings worldwide, the extended repertoire of images developed reveals the commonality of the divinization and personification of celestial bodies and abstract concepts. Beyond the realm of ancient astronomical observations and the practicality of its data, images of the planets developed from dotted charts to divinized beings, each with individual personalities and physical attributes. However, when, how and why were these iconographies created? How did they develop as they spread in other cultures?

Even today, in an astrological perspective, planets and stars are understood to hold positive and negative effects on personalities, our health, our fortunes and misfortunes. As images are worshipped, planetary deities, believed to possess evil and virtuous attributes, hold power over the fortunes and the destiny of humans. When planetary deities are mentioned, the discussions often lead to the Greco-Roman gods of Venus and Apollo or Saturn among others. Nonetheless, within the extended parameters of global art history, the range of their divinized representation is as intriguing as their iconographical history which binds together diverse cultures in one visual narrative. Despite this fact, it is not a subject of general discussion or knowledge; both in academic publications as well as artworks found in museum catalogues or collections. When searching for the images of celestial beings, whose existence is verified by astronomical observations, the center point is often directed towards the zodiac and the constellations. But how is this possible when the planets are perceived to shine brighter than stars because they are closer?
These planetary icons find their place within the Hindu and Buddhist pantheons yet in tradition they are not as distinguished, in contrast to other deities of a higher circle such as Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and many others who in turn represent more abstract concepts. Their value is undisputed, for they were believed to play a major role in the fortunes and misfortunes in human destinies. For this reason, the following pages pay undivided attention to the history of the anthropomorphic iconography of the planets from their scant mention in Vedic literature in India to their expansion in Buddhism as it spread to China and Japan. The relevance of these images, beyond their esoteric roles and their astralatry, is that they reflect the social and cultural context in which they flourished. The present paper studies the iconography of the planets in regard to specific artworks in accordance to the periods in which their representations flourished; ranging from Medieval India, to the Tang dynasty in China and finally the Heian period in Japan, as well as the accessibility to their images.

Even in their earliest textual references in Vedic literature, the mention and attention to the planets has been scant in comparison to other stars and constellations. There is academic research published about the astronomical and astrological perspectives, rather the iconographical views. Scholar R.K.K. Rajarajan believes that this is still “a virgin field for further work” where even “the pioneers in Hindu iconographical studies, T.A. Gopinatha Rao (1914) and H. Krishna Sastri (1916: 235-239) have very little to say on the subject.” Even though he hints that

Scholars in the field have paid more than due attention to Siva, Visnu, Brahma, Devi, Skanda-Murukan and such other gods and goddesses of the higher circle. Gods of the little tradition (cf. Whitehead 1976) remain much neglected in spite of the efforts of Mundkur and others. (1)
Others have contributed with distinction to the iconographical studies of these deities. In this small spectrum, *Heavenly Bodies and Divine Images: The Origin and Early Development of Representations of The Nine Planets* by Stephen Markel published in 1987 stands out as it entails a detailed paper with a chronological and literary understanding of the origins and the history of their iconographical creation. Lilla Russel-Smith’s 2006 publication *Stars and Planets in Chinese and Central Asian Buddhist Art in the Ninth to Fifteenth Centuries* is as well an important source, because she not only includes sections of sutras that determined the iconographies for the planets in China, Japan and Korea until their most recent representations, but also states that western traditions were transmitted through India.

In contrast, most recently, Jeffrey Kotyk, a Robert H.N. Ho Buddhist Studies Postdoctoral Fellow at McMaster University, has published papers, as recent as 2017, such as *Astrological Iconography of Planetary Deities in Tang China: Near Eastern and Indian Icons in Chinese Buddhism* where he discusses the flourishment of the iconographies during the Tang dynasty in China. In addition to his other publication, titled *Iranian Elements in Late-Tang Buddhist Astrology*, his contributions transform the historization and perspectives taken on their iconographical development. He gives detailed arguments for the way these images should be approached based on the external influences that shaped their representations, as he states that the iconography should be divided into three sets: Indian, zoomorphic and Iranian-Mesopotamian because of these different influences.

The following chapters pay attention to the discussion of the iconography of the Navagrahas as they developed in India and later spread to China and Japan. The first chapter sets the literary background that inspired the visual representations of the divinized planets and exposes the development of the planets which grew from five, to seven and finally nine planets known as the
Navagraha. The attributes for each planet of this group are specified before discussing the near eastern influences that later shaped their attributes as they reached China.

Jeffrey Kotyk’s studies are the most recent and relevant publications on the particularity of external influences that shaped their images in China and Buddhist iconography in addition to Lilla Russel-Smith’s earlier publication. In effect, the third chapter titled “Planets in Buddhism: Tang China 6th, 7th to 10th century (618 to 907)” dives into the Buddhist views in China with the nine planets in company of the Tejaprabha Buddha, whose image is not evidenced to have been in India. Finally, the last chapter titled “Planets in Buddhism: Heian Japan (794–1185)” is an overview of Japanese artworks where these celestial bodies are represented within new contexts such as original Japanese-Buddhist mandalas. Finally, a unique scroll of the Descent of the Nine Luminaries and the Seven Stars at Kasuga an important religious site in the ancient capital of Nara, dated, outside the Heian period, in the Nanbokuchō period (1336-1392).

Throughout the following chapters the exposition of the involvement of cultural and religious affairs in the iconographical development of the divinized planets is key to the appreciation of their expansion. In effect, this paper follows the iconological methodology with the purpose of not only analyzing and following the development of these iconographies but also fully understanding and appreciating them. This method supports the understanding of their association with the astrological symbolism, the attributes of each planetary icon and the branches of influences that contributed to their image. Panofsky’s three levels of understanding are exercised, beginning with a natural perception of the artworks, followed by a more informed description from ancient Vedic texts and the precise way they were represented in their origins. Following this, the data of the iconography of the planets in the regions nearby that influenced their visual development is supported by Jeffrey Kotyk’s contributions in his published works as
the principal reference. Throughout this data, descriptions of their representation within the selected artworks follow, and consequently interpretations are applied. A contrast of the influences and visual changes in their iconographic variations are sustained by scholar publications and analyzed as a part of their symbolic evolution and integration in Buddhism as well. The same publications are compared in the cases where they pose contrary statements.

Finally, the phenomenon of the Navagraha is compiled in the following pages with the purpose of making their existence visible, and most importantly to highlight one of the intertwined histories the fabric weaved by our global history.
1. NAVAGRAHA: PLANETARY ICONS FROM INDIA

The earliest references to astronomy in India are found in the Vedic texts (Frawley, 495). Images of the celestial figures observed varied from the astronomical dotted charts and the astrological icons worshipped. Complex data gathered included knowledge from the 27 or 28 Nakṣatras (constellations of the Moon), whereas mention of planets is minimal. The Vedānga Jyotisa, the earliest Vedic astronomical text, contains no register of the planets however there is mention of the Sun, Moon and the Nakṣatras as well. (Frawley, 495) There is debate among scholars that state that the Jyotisa is not an original text, and that it is greatly indebted to external influences.

Markel mentions that the first direct reference to the planets is situated in the late Vedic period text, the Atharvaveda (19:9:7) “Favour Mitra, Varuna, Vivasvat, and the Finisher | Portents on earth and in the air, and planets wandering in heaven! ||”. However, Frawley affirms that it is in the Mahābhārata, an epic generally dated around the 2nd century B.C., where the first clear reference to the planets by name is found. (Udyoga Parva 143: 8-11, Bhisma Parva 2.32; 3.11-18, 27-28.) On account of this intricate literary trail, many scholars have been led to conclude that due to the planets brief mention in the Vedic texts unaltered by external influences, their acknowledgment is due to foreign sources. Nonetheless, the earliest indicator of personification of the planets in India is found in a translation into Sanskrit of a Greek text on astrology by Yavanesvara in 149/150 A.D. This text (Fig 1) is only known though the versification titled Yavanajātaka.
written by Sphujidhvaja in 269/270 A.D. (Markel, 128) However, according to the historian of astronomy Bill Mak: "New reading and evidences suggest however that David Pingree’s dating of the original by Yavaneśvara (149/150CE) and translation by Sphujidhvaja (269/270CE) is untenable. In the first place, there has all along been only one author, Sphujidhvaja, who was known also as Yavaneśvara.” Nevertheless, within its text, the Sun, the Moon and five planets are anthropomorphized, and their psychological traits described, as well as of those born under their influence. Stephen Markel, in relation to the origins of the images of the planet’s, states in his publication “Heavenly Bodies and Divine Images: The Origin and Early Development of Representations of the Nine Planets”

The retention of the personalities of the planets, in addition to their Hellenistic attributes, suggest that the iconography of the planetary deities was transmitted to India though textual descriptions rather than through Greek manuscript illustrations which were reinterpreted by Indian artists. The textual passages, however, were not simply translated. The Text was expanded to include allusions to Indian mythological figures and to the sacred lore of the Hindus. (128)

On the other hand, scholars such as David Frawley argue that there is much evidence to show that the Vedic people did know of the planets but being that the Vedas are non-astronomical in nature, they are referred to indirectly and in a highly metaphorical manner. Pingree claimed that all early Indian astronomy originated from Babylonia, yet there is no evidence for such statement. Regardless of the unoriginality that many scholars believe there is in Indian astronomy, it should be noted that the creation of the images of group of the planetary icons known as Navagraha is an original Indian creation.
Additionally, there is mention of the planets in the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* as well as later texts between the 4th and 8th centuries where, according to Markel, earlier characterizations of seven of the planetary deities in addition of descriptions of Rahu and Ketu are repeatedly shown. “These texts are extremely important in understanding the artistic forms of the early representations of the planetary deities. In medieval images and texts, the regional variations in the details of the planets’ personifications are increasingly elaborated.” (Markel, 129)

It is undetermined when and where the term ‘navagraha’ first appeared, yet the distinguishable name for the group of the nine planetary deities signifies the ‘nine cosmic influencers’. Image worship, a concurring factor in all cultures throughout history, didn’t occur in India until after the Vedic Age (c. 1500 – c. 1100 BCE).

Representations are not found in the early Buddhist cave-temples or at stupa sites since the planetary deities were not incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon until much later times, which suggest that the Hindus were the originators of the artistic forms. From the literary passages discussed earlier, one would expect images to appear in the Kushan period on account of the strong Greco-Roman cultural influence. Yet no such representations are known. It is not until more than 200 years later, at the end of the fifth century, that the planetary deities begin to appear in art. (Markel pg. 131)

Individual representations of the sun god Surya date back to the 2nd century B.C., whereas the group images of the planetary deities appear to not have been sculpted before the end of the 5th century A.D. (Markel, 129) According to Markel, what stimulated the creation of the planets is in response to Sphujidhvaja’s text and the order of the planets given in the 3rd
10

century verses where the author arranges the planets after the Sun and the Moon “according to the astrological categories of benevolent (Venus and Jupiter), neutral (Mercury), and malevolent (Mars and Saturn)” (Markel, 131) However by the 4th century the planets are listed in the order of their regency over the days of the week: Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus and Saturn. (Markel, 131) This results in effect of the particular order and number of the days of the week from the West that entered India sometime during the 4th century.

Previously, the Indian calendar was based on lunar cycles. In roman times an eight-day market week, known as the *nundinae*, was prevalent until the earlier third century when the seven-day week began to be utilized. It became increasingly common, and in 321 A.D. Emperor Constantine officially adopted the seven-day week and decreed Sunday as a day of rest. (Markel, 132)

Markel states that what originated the tradition of the visual representation of the planetary deities in ancient India was the union of the Greco-Roman astronomical data, with the introduction and spread of the seven-day week (132) and it is also relevant to add to this equation the importance of the already developed Vedic and Hindu lore and beliefs, and its extensive pantheon of deities. This evidence of the agglomeration of different cultural influences that led to one specific repertoire of images, supports the importance and relevance of they dynamics of transculturality in the ancient context between Asia and the West. As professor of Global Art History at the Cluster “Asia and Europe” Monica Juneja stated in an interview by Mariachiara Gasparini (PhD student at the Graduate program for Transcultural Studies of the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies), the histories of transculturality “have been characterized by conflict and competitions as well as by long centuries of cultural interactions ranging from migration, trade, mobile objects and artistic practices and a reciprocal formation of concepts and
institutions.” In addition to that fact, the “research problems have been defined as hermetically sealed and each region’s history and culture regarded as explicable purely from within.”

According to Stephen Markel, the earliest extant representations of the planetary deities are those found on an immense, theriomorphic sculpture of Varaha, the boar incarnation of Visnu, erected at Eran in central India ca. 500-505 A.D. (Fig 2) In it, (Fig 3) seven planets are represented in the order of their regency over the days of the week “situated above the metal support band amidst the miscellaneous cosmological divinities standard on this type of Varaha image” (Markel. 129) beginning with Surya who is holding lotus buds in both hands at shoulder level followed by six figures, all holding with the left hand an ascetics water flask at waist level and gesturing reassurance with the right-hand. The reason for the planets incorporated in this iconography is because it represents the creation myth of the earth as Varaha saved Bhu Devi (deity of Earth) from drowning in the ocean. As Varaha emerged with Bhu Devi the surface separated and, in this manner, created order in the physical world. The planets, represented among other cosmic deities, delineate a fragment of the hierarchy in the order of the physical realm of existence.

Often found in temple lintels, the Navagraha finally get together in the 7th century with the incorporation of Ketu’s icon. (Markel, 131) The representation of their order in regency over
the days of the week and
the homogeneity in the
attributes held by six of
the planetary icons –
Chandra (Moon),
Mangala (Mars), Budha
(Mercury), Brihaspati (Jupiter), Shukra (Venus) and Shani (Saturn)– could presumably indicate a
canon in their iconography that continued until medieval times. This canon could be indicated in
a hierarchy, not in the measurements of the figures, but in the attention to the detail in their
attributes and physical language. On this premise, as seen in a 7th century lintel (Fig 4) in the
Cleveland Museum, the deities bodies have been repeatedly represented holding the same
attributes while standing in tribhaṅga, a standing body position or stance used in traditional
Indian art from a classical dance like the Odissi where the body bends in one direction at the
knees, the other direction at the hips and then the other again at the shoulders and neck, while
only Surya is standing upright holding the distinguishable lotus buds in his shoulder-high hands.
Moreover, a significantly smaller figure stands in front of him, this being Aruna his charioteer
and the god of the dawn which is very similar to the icon of Apollo in Greco-Latin culture. Aside
from Surya, Rahu and Ketu at the end of the line always stand out due to their distinct nature.

Astronomically, Rahu and Ketu denote the lunar nodes, North and South, where the Sun
and the Moon intersect causing eclipses. Ketu is responsible for the eclipse of the Moon and
Rahu of the solar eclipse. These demons “were included in the planetary group, even though the
scientific astronomical texts of the period prove an awareness of the physical causes of eclipses
and the nature of the comets.” (Markel, 129)
Furthermore, in the Agni Purana, instructions regarding the depiction of the planets, Rahu and Ketu’s state that “Rahu (the ascending node of the moon considered a planet) (is represented) as holding half of the lunar disc, (that of) Ketu (the descending node of the moon considered as a planet) (is represented as) holding the sword and lamp. (142)

Although the Navagraha in their early depictions are not accompanied by other star deities, they do appear in company of the Trimurti; Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva (Fig 5) in an 11th century lintel from the Vaisnava Shrine preserved at the Allahabad Museum.

Their figures stand out from the other planetary icons whose figures are completely human. Rahu’s iconography is depicted as only a head with cupped palms, and Ketu’s body is depicted with a serpent tail holding a sword. In addition, generally Shani stands next to Rahu in a standing position different from the other figures, as his left leg is bent behind his right. At first glance, the slim waists on these celestial bodies might suggest that the planetary icons are female, yet they are all male forms, in contrast to later representations when gender in some
figures are noticeably different. This is the case of Ketu, who in medieval times is depicted as “a female and is frequently headless, as if he might be the severed body of Rahu” (Markel, 131)

Furthermore, changes within their iconographies are seen within Indian culture, as is the case of a lintel at the Bangkok National Museum (Fig 6) depicts the Navagraha with a drastic change. Where Mangala (Mars), Budha (Mercury), Brihaspati (Jupiter), Shukra (Venus) and Shani (Saturn) are replaced by the figures of Vayu, Skandar, Indra, Kubera and Agni. These replacements may suggest a relationship of these deities in hierarchy over the planetary deities.
2. TRANSCULTURAL PLANETARY ICONS: TRANSMISSION TO CHINA

At first glance the planetary iconographies in China, which are primordially represented within the Buddhist context, may suggest that their origins find roots with the Indian deities. However, because “the anthropomorphic representations of the planets became popular only after the arrival of Buddhism in China” (Russel-Smith, 1), and Chinese Buddhist texts are translations of Indian Buddhist scriptures, it doesn’t mean that there weren’t foreign intermediaries. When observing Chinese artworks that include the planetary beings, only few images have common traits with the Indian Navagraha. This is due to the fact that the mainstream representations of planetary figures come from Iranian scriptures, which in turn have Arabic and Mesopotamian origins. It may seem complex; how did the Iranian iconographies get mixed within the Buddhist context?

Yet the answer can be simple, and it lies on the routes of the Silk roads. When looking at a map of these routes (Fig 7) all the roads intersect and lead to China. Lilla-Russel Smith states in *Stars and Planets in Chinese and Central Asian Buddhist Art in the Ninth to Fifteenth Centuries* that “It is likely that Western traditions regarding their appearance was transmitted through India. Little new research has been conducted into the origins of the iconography of planets in Western art.” (Russel-Smith, 2)

However, it may be inferred that due to the variety of exchanges occurring amidst the network of these trade routes, where the East and the West became connected, various interactions provoked the emergence of new images that depict a fusion of knowledges and cultures. Also, the

Figure 7 Silk Roads Map, Ancient History Encyclopedia
predominance of the Near Eastern planetary iconographies observed in China, automatically discards the possibility that the route directly connecting the right end of the Indian territory with China meant a direct transmission of anything.

Nevertheless, Jeffrey Kotyk’s states in *Astrological Iconography of Planetary Deities in Tang China* that the set of the icons from Iranian-Mesopotamian origins “were introduced through a Sogdian intermediary” (46) into Buddhism in the Tang dynasty. (Fig 8) The Sogdians were an Iranian civilization from the area of Sogdiana, or Sogdia, located between the rivers Amu Darya and Syr Darya. The truth is that Sogdiana was at a key location, where a trade route of the Silk Roads traversed its territory towards China.

Furthermore, as Kotyk points out, “the Sogdians were prominent caravan merchants in Central Asia from the fifth to the eighth or ninth century. They were also a prominent ethnic community in Tang China. They spoke an Eastern Iranian language.” (46) Sogdians were a culture of traders, merchants, travelers and artisans who were deeply involved in the trade of silk. Their trading activities can be dated much earlier.

Some of the Sogdian inscriptions on rocks in the northern Indus (Hapta Hindu) valleys (now in northern Pakistan), as well as artefacts found in Indus Valley settlements and in Central Asia, testify to their activity during the Stone Ages along routes south into the Indian subcontinent. (Eduljee)
As seen (Fig 8) on the top right corner, there was a region known as Dunhuang, which was one of the first trading cities where merchants and pilgrims arrived from the West. This ancient Buddhist site, had a strategic position “on a crossroads of two major trade routes within the Silk Road network. Lying in an oasis at the edge of the Taklamakan Desert” (Unesco)

There, religious Buddhist art fills the walls of the Mogao caves. One of the many murals located in the South wall of the passageway of the Mogao Cave 61(Fig 9), depicts the Tejaprabha Buddha accompanied by “eleven star gods, the zodiac and alms-begging monks and nuns. There are inscriptions both in Tangut and Chinese,” (E-Dunhuang)

High quality images of these walls are not accessible online, besides the fact that the east and lower parts being damaged. However, there are detailed descriptions of he figures presented and some of their distinguishable attributes. From description given by the ‘Digital Dunhuang’ webpage, it is understood that the Iranian-Mesopotamian influence are already mixed considering that the iconography of Venus is holding the Pipa, and Mars is wearing a donkey-shaped crown. Additionally, Mars is depicted with four arms in which he is holding two halberds and a bow and arrow, and no Iranian-Mesopotamian planetary icon is ever represented with more than the natural human body parts. Mangala (Mars) “is red coloured, with four arms” (Hinduism; An alphabetical guide) in his final iconography up to this day. This indicates that at the moment when the mural in Dunhuang was created, the complex iconographies of the Navagraha deities where already becoming, or had already become, more heterogeneous and individualized in their traits. In contrast to their previous homogeneous representations as seen in the previous chapter.
Nevertheless, what is most important about these caves in Dunhuang and this particular mural (Fig 10) is its key location and the period in which it was developed. This is dated to have been during the Five dynasties (A.D. 907-960) which is the period is right after the Tang dynasty when foreign astrology was flourishing in China. In essence, Dunhuang depicts the blend of Chinese and Western, which is an epitome of the cultural integrations between the East and the West. Sequentially this integration can be considered as the most sublime and ideal transcultural phenomenon that can occur.

Moreover, in addition to the geographical evidences, the literary traces in astrological and magical scriptures also reinforce the understandings of this transmission towards China. Tang Buddhist texts refer to the planets using the native Chinese names, but also their “Sogdian names in Chinese transliteration” and this is evidenced in the Xiuyao Jing, an astrological manual that “does not discuss iconography or magic”. (Kotyk, 46) Such text was compiled by Amoghavajra, an eight century Indian Buddhist monk “who arrived in China in 720 to help transmit the esoteric teachings”. (China Buddhism Encyclopedia) Considering all the previous statements, it may be inferred that although diverse cultures travelled the Silk road, the Sogdians, from present-day
Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, played a major role in the transmission of the iconographies of the planetary icons into China.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Iranian planetary icons have Arabic and Mesopotamian origins. This means that the names of the planets in Sogdian, come from these influences alongside the iconographical features. These planetary figures were named after major deities in the Zoroastrian pantheon, a custom which was originally Mesopotamian, and one that also speak to Greek and Latin speaking cultures. The renaming of the planets in Iran after Mesopotamian equivalents date back to the Achaemenid era. (Kotyk, 47)

This group of planets includes only five; Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus and Saturn. Unlike the Navagraha which considers the Sun, the Moon and the lunar nodes, Rahu and Ketu as part of the planetary bodies. Nevertheless, like the Navagraha, these planets were believed to hold power over the fate of human lives and for this reason, in Iranian tradition, they are always found in astrological and magical texts. Most importantly, although the inclusion of certain astral bodies varies between the Iranian and the Indian planetary groups, there are similarities that can’t be ignored. For instance, both cultures recognize, and additionally Greco-Latin cultures, Mars as a warrior planet and associate Venus with the arts and this could possibly be due to Hellenistic influences. Consequently, the fixed iconographies of the five planetary icons from Iranian-Mesopotamian sources depict a transcultural essence that corresponds to the appropriations that occurred from the trades in the Silk roads and even before. This is because the Iranian modifications originally stemmed from the earlier Greco-Egyptian tradition of astral magic. But how did these iconographies look?
The attributes and traits of the planetary icons can be perfectly appreciated in a manuscript from the 14th/15th century Egyptian from El Cairo, by a Persian. (Fig 11) Although this manuscript is from the 14/15th century, it is one of the few lasting reproductions of a Persian astrological treatise from the 9th century titled *Kitâb al-Mawâlid* (The Book of Nativities or The Book of Revolution of the Birth Years) by Abû Ma'shar who was “thought to be the greatest astrologer of the Abbasid court in Baghdad”. (Yamamoto) Many of its folios depict the planetary figures interacting with one another, however they are mostly represented within a thumbnail. (Fig 11) shows

Saturn, one knee on the ground, a black and bearded man, naked torso and ax in hand; Mercury symbolized by a scribe, a codex open by hand; Jupiter, a lawyer in a turban, sitting cross-legged; Venus, as a woman musician playing the lute; Mars painted as a helmeted warrior, sword raised and holding a decapitated head.

(Bibliothèque nationale de France)
Here the fundamental attributes and characteristics of each of the planetary icons, that were re-interpreted in Chinese Buddhist artworks, can be observed. Unlike the Indian tendency to deify these icons, these figures appear to be more human than divine, however the Chinese Buddhist adaptations turn to visually divinized their figures once again. Also, some of these planetary figures of Iranian lore have animal vehicles which are also be represented in Chinese Buddhist scrolls. For instance (Fig 12) Saturn mounts an Ox, and (Fig 13) Mars a horse. An important difference from the Iranian and the Indian iconographies is that, the Iranian planetary icons are stemmed from the Greco-Egyptian tradition of astral magic, for instance the visual representation and magic of Saturn indicate that this planetary deity in East Asia can actually be traced back to the Hellenistic Kronos, rather than the Indian Shani.

There are other Arabic astrological and magical texts such as the medieval manual of astral magic The Ghayat al-Hakim (The Aim of the Sage). This text “relies to some extent on Iranian lore even citing the names of the planets in Persian. (Kotyk, 47) and was “recognized by
Muslim thinkers as the most thorough exposition of celestial magic in Arabic. (Pingree, 2) Kotyk and Pingree’s research explore the transmission of magical and astrological texts into China, which implies the presence of astral knowledge in which the planets were believed to play a decisive role in the fate of individuals. Furthermore, as Kotyk states, this exposes that the types of magical acts described in the text reflect also ancient traditions, some of ultimately Mesopotamian and Egyptian origin, transmitted through Hellenistic and this further demonstrates that the Chinese Buddhist practice of astral magic was effectively an extension of global interest in such things. (48) There is no doubt that the Iranian planetary iconographies were a transcultural phenomenon themselves before becoming integrated into the East-Asian cultures.

On the other hand, although in China the Navagraha are not portrayed with the same amount of representation as the Iranian iconographies, they follow in second place often portrayed as part of the Esoteric or Tantric Buddhism known as Mahayana or Vajrayana. This Buddhist schools had a very active role in Nepal, geographically located between China and India which can also be considered to have also been a defining factor for the representations for the Navagraha in China.
3. PLANETARY ICONOGRAPHIES IN TANG CHINA

Although the astronomy in China was already advanced, the anthropomorphized planetary icons weren’t depicted until after the arrival of Buddhism, which reached China during the Han dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD). Nevertheless, horoscopy was transmitted to through Iranian, rather than Indian intermediaries. In addition, the study and practice of foreign astrology – both Indian and Iranian – became popularized and widespread in the Tang dynasty (618-907). (Kotyk, 25) The parallels drawn by Kotyk from a perspective of the linguistic and literate connections serve as proof that the “Chinese Buddhist practice of astral magic was effectively and extension of global interest in such things” (48) and that the universality of the concepts of the planetary deities and their iconographies are part of the multicultural artworks of this period. A division of planetary iconographies, proposed by Jeffrey Kotyk, separates the planetary representations in China into three sets; the Indian set of the Navagraha, Near Eastern icons, and a zoomorphic set.

For the Near Eastern set, Kotyk gives detailed mention of the equivalents of the Sogdian, Sogdian Chinese, Middle Persian, Akkadian and Greek details that are described in Chinese texts such as the Qiyao rangzai jue, the Fantian huoluo jiuyao and the Brahmadeva-saptagraha-sutra. These texts make evident the transcultural fusions in the planetary images. For instance, these texts coincide in Mars description, as Fantian huoluo jiuyao describes him as a deity “of red mineral color, wearing a donkey hat of a furious red color, and a leopard skin skirt. Four arms: one hand holds a bow, one hand holds an arrow, and one hand holds a blade” (48) and Kotyk confirms how the others mention the same attributes. On the other hand, in the same text Mercury is described as “a lady wearing a blue garment and a monkey hat with a scroll held in hand” (51), Jupiter resembles a minister who “wears a blue garment and a board hat. In his
hand(s) he holds flowers and fruits.” (52), Venus possesses a female figure “atop the head she wears a fowl hat. White silk garment. Plucking strings” (54) of a *pipa*. Finally, Saturn, “is like a Brahmin. Ox cap on the head. His hand holding a monk’s staff.” (55) Some of the vehicles that some of these icons mount on have been depicted as hats, however they are also depicted with the deities mounting them as is the case of Saturn on the Ox and Mars on the donkey. These descriptions from Chinese texts, on which Kotyk provides a detailed analysis of each icons near eastern cultural influences and sources, serve as a reference for the iconographical parallels drawn in the following chapter.

While the Iranian-Mesopotamian became the mainstream images of the planetary deities, the “Indian set was used within the *Mantrayana*, albeit possessing only a minor function.” (Kotyk, 69) However the Near Eastern set was transmitted alongside astral magic “which itself draws on an earlier Greco-Egyptian tradition”. (Kotyk, 69) These transmissions were adopted by Buddhists and Daoists “most likely in response to fears of unfavorable astrological prognostications, and a desire to magically vade unwanted fates.” (Kotyk, 69) As expressed by Kotyk, the rituals performed by Chinese Buddhists indicate that they believed the planetary

![Figure 14 Saturn from the Book of Nativities (Ma'shar Abu al-Balkhi, Kitab al-mawālid)](image)
Saturn from The Five Planets and Twenty-Eight Constellations, Zhang Sengyou, China. 6th century
Saturn from Tejaprabha Buddha and The Five Planets, China, 897
deities to be sentient and for this reason offerings and ceremonies were employed as a means of quelling their influences (69) which also was seen with the Navagraha in India.

The Iranian iconographies of Saturn as an aged man with dark skin holding a pickax or mounted on an Ox (Fig 14), Mercury a male figure as a scribe holding paper (Fig 15 Left), Venus as a female figure playing the *pipa* (Fig 15 Right), a musical instrument that itself is from the West, and Mars a military figure holding a sword and a human head in his hands are the predominant references used in China. Nevertheless, modifications in certain details such as changes in gender and the addition of other attributes occur. For instance, such is the case of Mercury (Fig 15 Left), who was portrayed as a male figure in the Iranian-Mesopotamian image yet is a woman accompanied by a monkey on the Chinese adaptation. (Fig 15 Right) As Lila Russel-Smith suggests, “Saturn is shown as an aged man in China, too. Mercury, who is always male in the West, became a female figure in China, but was still portrayed as a writer holding an inkstone and a brush. In China Venus mostly appeared clad in white and playing the *pipa* and instrument that itself came from the West. In Arabic manuscripts Venus also often plays a lute.” (Russel-Smith, 2) A rare image that is originated in China is that of the Tejaprabha Buddha accompanied by the five planets. (Fig 17) These details can be observed in the sutras and scrolls that depict the
Tejaprabha Buddha accompanied by the planets “often described as paying homage to the Buddha and listening to his teachings”. (Russel-Smith, 2)

In addition to these details, the Tejaprabha Buddha has no previous record outside of China, which may lead to the understanding that it is of Chinese creation. A curious location of the earliest representations of this buddha and the planets is found at the South wall of the passageway at the Mogao Cave 61, which is located in Dunhuang titled the ‘Buddha of Tejaprabha and the Gods of Astronomy’ by the Hong Kong Heritage Museum. Images of this passageway are difficult to come across in high quality, however, they Hong Kong Heritage Museum states that the “themes attest to the specific value of the Dunhuang murals as an epitome of cultural integration between the East and the West.” (Hong Kong Heritage Museum) The presence of this image and the astral icons might as well indicate a moment and a place where the astronomical and astrological exchanges along with the integration of images developed.

On the other hand, there are a well-preserved painting of this rare Buddha (Fig 17) at the British Museum, in which the changes in gender that Russel Smith points out are evident. The planetary icons along with the Tejaprabha Buddha have little to nothing in common with the iconographies of the Navagraha. The icons previously discussed belong, such as those that accompany the Tejaprabha Buddha, the set of Near Eastern (Iranian-Mesopotamian) influence. “In light of how
all the planets are regarded as baneful, we should probably regard depictions of the planetary deities in the presence of Tejaprabha as tamed and controlled figures, rather than benevolent attendants before a buddha.” “On implication of these findings is that scholars may have overlooked other elements within Chinese Buddhism and Daoism that, in actuality, have their origins in the Near East, rather than India.” (69)

The other two sets are the Indian set and the Zoomorphic set which depicts the planetary icons with animalistic features as seen in the figures of Mars and Jupiter in a scroll from the 6th century by Zhang Sengyou (Fig 18) in which Mars is depicted with the donkey face while riding a donkey and his four arms, and Jupiter is a feline figure atop a boar-faced animal. The zoomorphic set “includes a few icons strongly suggestive of an Egyptian origin. The existence of Egyptian icons in East Asian astrological art would not necessarily be surprising in light of the presence of Egyptian asterisms (the decans and horas) in the Sanskrit Yavanajataka”. (Kotyk, 43)
Finally, the Indian set, as Kotyk states, are “mostly found within mandalas” (68) and were used “within Mantrayana, albeit possessing only a minor function”. (69) Mantrayana is related to Vajrayana, which in English refers to the Tantric or Esoteric Buddhism.

For instance, they are seen in the scrolls of the Taizo Zuzo (Fig 19) that depicts iconographical drawings of the Womb World mandala from Tang China. This scroll was exported to Japan by Chishodaishi Enchin (814-891) along with other Buddhist scrolls. According to the Okugaki (postscript added at the end), this Taizozuzo (Fig 19) is the third copy of the original that was brought by Enchin to Japan.

These iconographical illustrations (Fig 19) represent the figures in style which makes the figures almost identical, however they differ in just the details of the attributes held in their hands. From the Top: Left to right there is Ketu, Shani (Saturn), an unidentified icon and Chandra (Moon) with the seven birds/geese. At the bottom: from left to right Rahu is depicted with only his head and two hands very similar to his original Navagrahan iconography, Shukra (Venus), Brihaspati (Jupiter), Budha (Mercury) and Mangala (Mars) holding in his left hand a spear.

Similar to the role of the planetary icons in India, these astral deities converted into Buddhism continued to exercise their power and influence, as they were similarly believed to prevent harm. Yet, in contrast to the planetary representations in India, the tridimensional figures
are for the most part translated into the bi dimensionality of the images in scrolls. Nevertheless, the Indian set of planetary deities are “mostly found within mandalas”. (Kotyk, 68)
4. INDO-IRANIAN PLANETARY ICONS IN JAPAN

The presence of the planetary icons in Japan is not very common, and unlike the divisions in three sets of planetary icons in China proposed by Jeffrey Kotyk, the planetary representations in Japan evidence only one group that depicts the complete fusion of the planetary icons mentioned in the preceding chapters. Planetary icons in Japan depict a fully Indo-Iranian iconography which are mostly represented within the horoscopy contexts as well.

One of the artworks that evidences this merge is the icons depicted in the scroll of The Secret of the Nine Luminaries (Fig 20) located at the Metropolitan Museum of New York “would have served as an iconographic reference for the monks”.

(Metropolitan Museum) The influence of the Indian Navagraha is primarily suggested due to the inclusion of Rahu, Ketu and the Sun and Moon as planets. On the other hand, the Iranian-Mesopotamian traits are appreciated in the five forms of Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn who show very little relation to the Indian representations of these figures. In the case of these figures, they depict the Chinese changes to the original Iranian-Mesopotamian figures,
considering how each are depicted with their animal vehicles (or \textit{varahas} in Sanskrit) on their heads (Fig 20); Venus with a bird, Mars with the horse/donkey, Saturn with the Ox, Jupiter with the Boar and Mercury as a female figure with the Monkey. Although there are evident differences between the Iranian-Mesopotamian and the Navagraha characters, and logically in their physical traits that are adapted within each culture, and the lore and myths that accompany each one, there is still an undeniable fact that should not be discarded nor forgotten regardless of how minimal it may seem. Regardless, both sets of iconographies, have their origins and relations with the Hellenistic influence. For instance, because Mars is identified as a War planet, it is no surprise that the cultures with Hellenistic influence incorporated this into their icons. So, the planetary icon in India for Mars, known as Mangala, is described with four arms and holds two halberds (although these attributes change is certain cases into spears or swords) and a bow and arrow, and the Iranian-Mesopotamian is a warrior figure as well wearing an armor. (Fig 21) Although these transcultural mixes are seen in China, they are difficult to identify as a final product considering Kotyk’s proposal of the three sets. However, finally in Japan they are clearer to identify. The icon of Mars in the Japanese scroll of \textit{The Secret of the Nine Luminaries} (Fig 21) shows an Indo-Iranian iconography with the use of Rahu and Ketu, the figure of Mars with its armor but with the Indian four arms holding a bow, an arrow, a spear and a sword, and the particular Chinese adaptation where his vehicle, the donkey/horse, is atop his head. This scroll shows that, as opposed to the Chinese portrayals of
the planets that Kotyk divided into sets, in Japan the iconographies simply show the result of all grouped into one.

On the other hand, in this same scroll there are Indian Navagraha traces primarily in the representation of all nine planets and then in certain attributes of the other four figures; the Sun, the Moon, Rahu and Ketu. This scroll is significant in the study of the iconographies because the transcultural it is like the matrix of the transcultural planetary icons. For instance, the icons of the Sun and the Moon are Indian. Their female forms (Fig 22) (Fig 23) are a bodhisattva-like figure in robes.

Another significant detail about this scroll are the iconographies of Rahu (Fig 24) and Ketu (Fig 25) whose bodies have multiple arms holding a variety of objects, and they are also seated on vehicles or their varahas. Rahu is atop a dragon and Ketu is atop a Bull, they are meaningful details “given that they are based on the Iranian symbolic conception of the ascending and descending nodes of the Moon, called gdzihr that is visually conceived as a dragon sprawling across the sky. (Kotyk)

The representation of planetary icons in Japan, depicts only the inherited structures and canons, both philosophically and artistically, however the Japanese incorporated new contexts to the repertoire of images for these astral figures. For instance, a scroll held at the Cleveland Museum from the Nanbokuchō period depicts the planetary figures alongside the seven stars in descent from the
sky towards the Kasuga Shrine. (Fig 26) The scheme of this painting depicting these celestial beings in descent is of Chinese origin, however its appropriation within the Japanese context of the Shinto Kasuga Shrine, a major religious site in Japan’s ancient capital of Nara, adds value to the transcultural factors represented in this image. Additionally, depicting the stars coming to earth as earthly realities represents the notion that stars, and astral phenomena have their terrestrial equivalence.

In the lower part of the painting the Nine Luminaries, another term for the Navagraha, descend on cloud banks — the sun and moon; the planets Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, Venus, Mercury and Rahu and Ketu. Also, it depicts “the original Buddhist form mandala (Japanese: honjibutsu mandarazu) format prevalent in medieval Japanese Shinto-Buddhist painting, to generate an image connected to the worship of celestial bodies in Esoteric Buddhism.” (Cleveland Museum) In this scroll the iconographies are depicted with Japanese physical traits and clothing and additionally, Mars, Rahu and Ketu are represented as red demon-looking figures which makes a reference to the Indian icons. (Fig 27) (Fig 28)

Finally, Japan also incorporated the planetary icons into their original Buddhist mandala named the
Japanese Buddhist astrologers were effectively practicing a system of horoscopy whose roots are in large part traced back to Alexandria, although even earlier elements, such as Babylonian goal-years are found in the Japanese tradition. (Kotyk)

This mandala unique to Japan is seen either in a rectangular shape or a circular shape. The circular mandala (Fig 29) formed by five concentric circles and an external ring of figures where the astral bodies are displayed in a circular diagram or map in which the various elements are placed not only as a cosmogram but also as a taming device in which the demonic powers of the astral bodies could be entrapped. (Faure) The elements within the Star mandala are ordered in a systematic way where the heavens are mapped show the seven stars, the nine luminaries (the planetary icons), the twelve signs of the zodiac and the 28 lunar mansions.

The Buddha Shakyamuni of the Golden Wheel occupies the central circle, while the disks in the second circle represent the Big Dipper. The third and fourth circles contain the Nine Luminaries (including Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, Venus, Mercury, the sun, and the moon) as well as the lunar nodes (Ragō and Ketō) and the twelve zodiac symbols. In the fifth circle are the Twenty-Eight Lunar...
Mansions, the constellations through which the moon travels. Furthermore, the Thirty-Six Calendric Animals are paired with the Thirty-Six Celestial Guardians. (Metropolitan Museum)

The creation of these types of mandala could be interpreted as if the Buddhists saw the astral world as a finite realm where each astral body could be defined. It is a map of the heavens that reflects the reality of the earth and a divine order. The visual hierarchy observed with the figure of the Buddha Shakyamuni could be interpreted as a powerful figure that is able to keep the astral divinities and demons tamed.
CONCLUSION

The dynamic of transculturality between East and West is proven to be a phenomenon that is present throughout the history of the development of the anthropomorphized planetary icons due to the many cultural influences involved in their creation and transmission. From the many cultural backgrounds and belief systems such as Iranian-Mesopotamian, Indian Hindu Navagraha, Indo-Iranian, and Chinese Buddhist the planetary figures are part of the structured celestial bodies that although they are fundamentally universal celestial bodies, their anthropomorphized images and iconographies underwent appropriation and transculturation in various cultural contexts and belief systems. Additionally, the study of the iconography of the planetary figures from East and West serves to prove, as well, that there is no pure, original, anthropomorphized planetary icon considering that the common source is of a Hellenistic nature.

Tracing the influences in each iconography is not meant as a means for conflict or competition, but of understanding and appreciation in a global perspective. To study transcultural subjects is not about just categorizing and separating, but also about unifying the many into one. After all, global art history is about studying the interrelated phenomena that together forms the panoramic view in humanity’s art history. There is a very important literary and astronomic background behind the visual alterations of the planetary icons from the Near East inherited in China and then Japan that makes no distinction when it comes to religious beliefs or racial matters. There shows to be a fixed knowledge, that although it was rewritten and adapted in different languages it remained essentially the same, even today, in effect limited the creative expressions for the planetary icons. For instance, from their earliest tridimensional, homogeneous representations in temple lintels as seen in India, to the bidimensional Near Eastern icons in astrological texts and horoscopy charts, to the Buddhist murals and scrolls in
China, and finally to their incorporation in mandalas meant for horoscopy in Japan as well: Mars remained a war icon, Mercury and Jupiter remained political figures, Venus was firmly a female figure associated with music and Saturn always an old man associated with the agricultural. These planetary icons, in all their different sets as Kotyk categorized, they proved to be the most powerful forces of all the astrological figures. Despite the fact that they form the smallest group of the astrological figures, and that they are not as abundantly represented as other cosmic and celestial figures in all the cultural contexts discussed, their presence - from being exposed to the public in temples, to knowledgeable astral magic texts, to being reserved only for the eyes and knowledge of the Buddhist monks in the Chinese and Japanese scrolls - they always remained feared and respected for their decisive power over human fate. Their power was such that even the belief of a Buddha figure, essentially a terrestrial figure that became divine, could tame them was formulated. From the many adaptations and changes observed in the development of the planetary iconography, it may be concluded that despite categorizations and divisions in sets, when it comes down to the astrological and celestial, all beliefs share a common ground in the visible, material world.
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