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Original Research Article

An Analysis of the Symbolic Role of Mirrors in Iranian and Japanese Culture as a Tool for Peaceful Living and Enlightenment

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Abstract

Objects in the world have a form, structure, and meaning that affect human thinking, imagination, dreams, emotions, and actions towards themselves and the world around them. Human artifacts have long played an effective role in shaping their beliefs. A number of them have acquired a symbolic aspect and have found their way into rituals and ceremonies. Since every conscious and creative person, in the process of understanding and perceiving this subject, seeks to establish communication with different aspects of objects, he or she designs a sign or symbol for the recipient to help him or her understand the hidden or self-created meaning of the object's narrative and establish a conceptual relationship. With the assumption and goal that some of these objects, as ritual tools, have and will have a prominent role in relationships between humans; An ancient structure such as a "mirror" was studied with a descriptive-analytical method, considering its similarities and differences in the ritual and folk beliefs of the two rich cultures of Iran and Japan, as a valuable and symbolic object for promoting friendly relations between nations. In the Iranian-Islamic spiritual and sacred belief, the mirror is a symbol of the human heart and a reflection of the creator's beautiful and glorious qualities, and a dual symbol of good/bad. In Japanese beliefs, this valuable object is also a sacred symbol and a symbol of wisdom, honesty, and truth, which indicates the justice and impartiality of the divine will. The findings showed that the mirror can be introduced and used as a symbolically valuable gift with a message of enlightenment, honesty, wisdom, and world peace to promote deeper relations between nations.

Keywords: *Symbol, Mirror, Belief, International Relations, Iran, Japan.*

Introduction

Symbols are reflections of archetypes rooted in the transhistorical myths of humankind. They serve as coded signs of human functions in relation to the self, nature, and the other, and are represented through the fusion of customs and beliefs in the form of culture, art, philosophy, literature, and beyond. "Myths and symbols… are responses to human needs and bear the responsibility of disclosing the most hidden dimensions of existence" (Eliade, 1991/2014, 13). Humanity's inquisitive gaze toward nature, along with its struggle for survival, led to various inventions and discoveries, resulting in the creation of tools that brought both comfort and, at times, harm. These tools shaped individual and collective relations and often entered everyday life, rituals, and ceremonies in symbolic forms.

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On this basis, the researchers sought to answer two central questions of this study: How can an object such as the mirror, as a symbolic and value-laden artifact, contribute to the consolidation and enhancement of cultural relations between nations? and What meaningful connection exists between the symbolism of the mirror in Iranian and Japanese cultures that could foster the strengthening of cultural ties between the two peoples? To address these questions, materials were collected through library research and the study of documents, in order to identify shared concepts surrounding this object in the two cultures. In doing so, the study aims to offer a new and practical perspective on traditional artifacts such as the mirror, recognizing it as a symbolic object carrying messages of peace, friendship, enlightenment, and as a means to promote and reinforce cultural relations among nations.

Background and Research Significance

The mirror has, in many respects, been an essential and significant object in human life. However, to date, no comprehensive studies have been conducted that examine the mirror as a symbolic and value-laden artifact specifically in the context of strengthening and enhancing relations among nations. A few sources have discussed the mirror from linguistic, structural, artistic, and symbolic perspectives in literary texts, as well as its artistic and cultural status in traditional mirrorwork, geometric designs, and paintings. In Dehkhoda Dictionary (Dehkhoda, 1998), explanations are provided about the history and types of mirrors, which have been taken into consideration in this study.

Semsar (1963), in his various studies such as The Mirror and Its History, examined its background and development. Jung (1964/1998), in Man and His Symbols, highlighted the symbolic role of objects such as the mirror. Hall (1974/2024), in Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art, addressed a range of ritual and symbolic objects in human life. Scholars such as Ghirshman (1976/1993), Anvari & Mohammadi (2003), and Vanden Berghe (1959/2012) have studied artifacts unearthed in ancient Iranian sites, including mirrors. Christensen (1918/2006) examined the role of the mirror among alchemists and the folk superstitions of the Iranian people in "Beyond the Caspian Sea: From an Oriental Journey at the Outbreak of War," translated by Manijeh Ahmadzadegan Ahani.

Chevalier & Gheerbrant (1969/2005), in " Dictionary of Symbols: Myths, Dreams, Customs" (translated into Persian by Soudabeh Fazayeli), discussed the mirror as a symbolic tool and provided numerous references to great thinkers.

Mircea Eliade (1991/2014), in "Images et Symbols "(translated by Kazem Mohajer), examined the role of symbols and symbolic artifacts. Mirzaei & Mafi Tabar (2023), drawing on encyclopedic sources, addressed the "Rediscovering the symbolic concepts of the mirror in Iranian folk culture," which has also been relevant to this study. Regarding the presence and influence of mirrors in Japanese culture, Helen Gardner's (1986/2012) "Art through the ages", "Encyclopedia of Japanese art" by A. Pashaei (2020), and Shinto Shrines and "Japanese mythology" by Piggott (2022) have all highlighted the role of mirrors in myths, symbols, and rituals of Japan. Additional works, such as "Traditional Japan" by Nardo (1995/2022) and Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things by Lafcadio Hearn (2004/2016), were also consulted to examine the role and application of mirrors in Japanese narratives.

Although these works share similarities with the present inquiry and have been insightful, they do not directly align with the main objectives of this research. The fact that the mirror, with its symbolic and functional legacy, can acquire renewed vitality and a new resonance in the contemporary world with universal messages, demonstrates the necessity of this study. By examining the symbolic role of the mirror not only in Iranian and Japanese cultures but also in broader intercultural relations, this research seeks to highlight its potential as an example for reaching new and practical understandings of such creative cultural artifacts.

Research Methodology

Assuming that certain ancient artifacts have played a significant role in shaping human relations, the researchers sought to address the question of how such objects can be employed as symbolic and value-laden tools in fostering peaceful relations, promoting mutual understanding, and strengthening cultural commonalities among nations. To this end, a descriptive-analytical method was applied to examine the role of the mirror within the belief systems of Iranian and Japanese cultures. Finally, using MAXQDA software, the concepts and meanings associated with this object in both cultures were identified and analyzed.

Theoretical Foundations: Myth and Symbol

• Myth, symbol

Myth is a sacred narrative of the primordial beginning that transcends time and space, manifested in the form of archetypal patterns and expressed symbolically in human everyday life so that humanity may not forget its sacred mythic memory and can once again re-actualize the sacred time in which those events originally occurred (Eliade, 1991/2014, 63). Just as Müller regarded myth as the primitive pictorial language of natural phenomena, heavenly forces, and manifestations of earthly powers in Indo-European sources (Esmailpour Motlagh, 2020, 46), Jung (1964/1998, 95) likewise interpreted the re-reading of myths and primal images as the symbolic representation of the imaginative world and the essence of the archetypal self. For Jung, these served as prisms and models for humanity's cultural, social, political, and spiritual functions, explaining both this-worldly and otherworldly beliefs from the dawn of time to the present. "Myths are eternal, universal, and archetypes are the manifestations of emotions, instincts, motifs, signs, and shared themes in the collective unconscious of humanity", reflecting themselves symbolically in all times and places.

Every symbol is a crystallization of an archetypal narrative, pointing beyond its literal meaning through signs, words, combinations, expressions, or objects (Pournamdarian, 2010, 4). Such symbols often expand in meaning in two forms: sacred or memorial. Memorial symbols, such as mountains, birds, skies, or events, commemorate real occurrences, whereas sacred symbols are drawn from myths and preserved within rituals (Anuse, 1996, 190). Over time, some of these symbols have moved beyond their original mythological context and now appear within contemporary customs and traditions, becoming polysemous in their meanings.

One such symbolic and value-laden object, possessing mythical, ritual, and historical multiplicity, is the mirror. Because of its multi-dimensional qualities, the front, the back, the depth, and the interplay between the visible and the hidden, it has acquired a mysterious aura in various systems of belief, while also offering potential for cultural application. Although, in a broader view of humanity and the cosmos, cultural, social, ethnic, racial, and gender distinctions are dissolved within recorded civilizations and their belief systems, one must also recognize that "the specific events of each society influence the behaviors and norms of others, and mutual interdependence within a society creates a chain of connections that affects decision-makers both domestically and internationally" (Bahmani & Safarian, 2010, 11 & 12). This dynamic underscores the functional role that symbols such as the mirror may play in fostering intercultural relations among nations.

Mirror, Belief, and Intercultural Relations

The word āyineh (mirror) derives from the Pahlavi terms Ayinak and Ayenak, which are themselves related to the meaning of ayin (ritual, custom, or way) (Dehkhoda, 1998, 268). In the earliest Pahlavi text, it is stated that Hormazd "created humankind in five parts: body, soul, spirit, mirror, and Farvahar. The body was that… and the mirror was that which stood upon the foundation of the sun" (Dadegi, 2011, 48). Across civilizations, the mirror has been regarded as an instrument of illumination, purity, wisdom, and awareness.

It is said that Pythagoras possessed a "magical mirror," which he used before divination, holding it up to the moon like sorcerers did. The use of such a mirror was considered a primitive form of conjuring spirits and apparitions—images reflected therein that had not yet taken shape, or actions that were to occur in the future (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1969/2005, 328). In Buddhist ritual, the mirror functioned as a medium for transmitting wisdom and divine secrets. Celestial intelligence, symbolically paired with the sun and associated with the moon, was believed to reflect the sun's light within the mirror. In Chinese thought, the mirror contained the "vital essence of creation." It was believed not only to be sacred and capable of warding off evil spirits, but also to reveal the internal organs of the body. Shamans of Central Asia used mirrors for divination by turning them toward the sun or moon, believing that these celestial bodies were themselves mirrors reflecting earthly events (ibid., 325–329). Many alchemists also believed that "the soul, when it saw itself in the magical mirror, recognized its own impurities, cleansed itself of all stains and shadows, and […] became spirit" (Christensen, 1918/2006, 461). Through legends, such ideas of the polished, magical, and prophetic mirror gradually permeated popular beliefs among nations (Lang, 2007/2010).

Some traditions attribute the invention of the mirror to Alexander the Great, who, in historical legends, constructed a lantern on the coast of Macedonia and placed upon it a mirror of wisdom and philosophy in order to detect uprisings of foreigners. From this, the concepts of foresight and world-vision were derived, later appearing in Persian literature in the forms of the Jām-e Jam (Cup of Jamshid) and the "World-Reflecting Mirror" (Āyina-ye Jahān-namā) (Yahaghi, 2007, 65). In Japan, a mirror known as Etteham (Accusation) existed, believed to reflect truth and expose sins (Shojaee , 2017, 10). In the Christian tradition, the mirror symbolized virgin birth and the Virgin Mary (Hall , 1974/2024, 5).

The mirror embodies both positive and negative functions: on one hand, associated with flaws such as pride, lust, and black magic; on the other, a symbol of the spirit of life, wisdom, and the reflection of divine light. It shares a semantic cluster with concepts such as the dead, the sun, and the mask. In mystical thought, "through a semantic transformation, mythological symbols were transfigured into symbols of the mystic's heart and the Perfect Man" (Ameri & Panahi, 2015, 145). The connection of divinity with the soul turned the mirror into a symbol that could guide the seeker to wisdom and truth, purify the heart, and grant glimpses of universal knowledge by reflecting into the inner soul (Hall , 1974/2024, 5). This interpretation was absorbed into Persian mystical thought and literature by figures such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, Suhrawardi (2014), Attar Neishabouri (2008), and Rumi (2005), where the "opacity of the body" was likened to the back of the mirror and its polished surface to the "soul."

For Jung, the role of the mirror stands in dialectical tension with the mask. On one hand, it removes the mask and reveals one's true self; on the other, it aids in donning a mask so that others do not see the real self (Behbanfar, 2008, 66). In folklore and popular belief, the mirror reflects a dual nature of sacredness and superstition, such as the mirror in Snow White, symbolizing truthfulness, or the "Bibi Maryam mirror," which is still hung at the end of wedding halls in regions of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan for good fortune (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1969/2005, 332).

The following discussion will examine the symbolic role of the mirror in Iranian and Japanese cultures as a case study to reach new and practical insights into the intercultural significance of this object.

Manifestations of the Mirror in Iran

In Iran, the mirror is a multifaceted object that maintains both visible and hidden connections with the past and present of human life. Over time, it entered art, literature, religion, mysticism, and folk beliefs, acquiring sacred and symbolic significance. It became associated not only with the sun but also with the soul, the heart, and the concept of the Perfect

Table 1. Selected symbolic and functional concepts of the mirror in Iran. Source: Authors.

Symbolism	Semantic Cluster
Myth and Archaic Beliefs	From myths such as the creation story—when Kayumars, at the moment of death, releases his seed, which is then purified by the sun (Christensen, 1918/2006, 22)—this element entered human life and, in the ancient Pahlavi texts, is described as one of the essential components of human existence, directly connected with the sun. It is an inner element that remains with the person while alive and, after death, reunites with the sun. In the legend of Jamshid, there appears a world-revealing cup; when Ahura Mazda bestows it upon him along with several mysterious objects for the prosperity of the world (Dadegi , 2011, 48). This cup possessed magical properties and reflected hidden truths. According to Shaykh al-Ishrāq (Suhrawardī), this world-reflecting cup specifically belonged to Kay Khosrow, one of the Kayanian kings (Suhrawardī, 2014, 11).
Mysticism and Sufism	God is the creator of humankind and of mirrors, for "in the creation of man, He placed mirrors upon both his exterior and interior in correspondence with the Divine attributes […] thus He set a thousand and one mirrors, each corresponding to a thousand and one attributes" (Razi, 2012, 72). In mystical belief as well, the heart of the believer is the dwelling place of God's light and reflects both one's own flaws and those of others. The mirror of the heart, the mirror of the soul, and the mirror of existence not only signify the virtuous character of the Sufi but also serve as symbols of everything luminous and pure (Sadri Afshar, 2009, 123).
Literature	Some scholars trace the etymology of the word āyeneh (mirror) back to āhanīneh (made of iron), citing Ferdowsi's Shahnameh: "From that dusky iron he dispatched, a mirror gleaming, polished clear of rust." (Ferdowsi, Vol. 6, 29; Mirzaei & Mafi Tabar, 2023, 2). The use of various types of mirrors—Roman, Chinese, and Alexandrian—attests to their importance and their impact on the human mind and way of life (see Farrukhi Sistani, 2017). Nizami (2002, Vol. 2, 1110) provides an extensive and symbolic account of the Alexandrian mirror in his Iskandarnāmeh. Sa'di believed in the effect of sighing or exhaling upon a mirror: "You are a radiant mirror, beware the sigh of the afflicted / My dear, for a sigh leaves its mark upon the mirror". Rumi likens death to a mirror, since it reveals human deeds and intentions. The motif of the mirror occurs with remarkable frequency in Rumi: "Thus he made a caliph with a pure heart / so that his kingship might have a mirror" (see Heydari & Khaleghzadeh, 2015; Rumi, 2005, Vol. 6, 395). Bidel Dehlavi, moreover, has been called "the poet of mirrors" (Shafi'i Kadkani, 1997, 323).
Magic and Sorcery	"By gazing into a mirror—either themselves or through a child—sorcerers claim to locate a lost object or person. Such individuals are referred to as mirror-seers, fortune-tellers, or simply soothsayers. As Ṣā'eb wrote: 'At every moment it appears in a different form to the eyes of the people, / From that boundless beauty, like a sorcerer's mirror.' The fear associated with the mirror's supposed witchcraft derives from its ability to reflect objects both truthfully and sometimes in reverse" (Mirzaei & Mafi Tabar, 2023, 6).
Arts and Other Sciences	"The use of mirrors in buildings is both a religious art and a manifestation of divine light. Mirror work, often rendered in geometric patterns, is a distinctly Islamic art form with extensive applications in architecture. The oldest mirror work can be found in the divan-khaneh of Shah Tahmasp in Qazvin (Samsar & Zoka, 1988, 240). Today, mirrors are not only used in modern architecture (Taghavi , 2015, Introduction) but also have numerous applications in various scientific fields, including medicine. For instance, a mirror is used to assess the breath of an unconscious or dying person. A well-known mirror called the 'Aine-ye Daq' was a piece of copper used to treat patients with tremors. Mirrors were also applied to the forehead or head of an injured person to relieve pain (Rezaei, 2002, 460), kept away from individuals suffering from eye ailments such as keratitis for healing purposes, and employed in speech therapy for the treatment of stuttering (Shahri, 1999, Vol. 2, 251)."
Folk Beliefs	"Most people consider it a symbol of blessing, good fortune for the New Year, and general prosperity, rooted in beliefs about birth, cycles, and light. It carries a sense of sacredness and marital commitment (Mostowfi, 2024, Vol. 1, 500) and has traditionally been part of auspicious decorations for celebrations (Shamlou, 2002, Vol. A, 111). Seeing the bride in a mirror by the groom is believed to bring good luck and respect (Masse, 2008, Vol. 1, 92), whereas in some cases, a broken bridal mirror is considered inauspicious. Travelers, when leaving home, pass under a mirror and the Quran three times, after which a bowl of water is poured behind them (Azizi & Mirdehghan 2019, 345). Wrestlers would attach mirrors to their knees to avoid being outmatched by their opponents (Mirzaei & Mafi Tabar, 2023). Superstitions surrounding mirrors include that looking into one at night may cause madness, blindness in old age, shortened lifespan, or poverty (Khalatbari, 2008, 100). Even today, some people consider direct gazing into a mirror to be inappropriate."
Religious–Ritual	"Looking at the first moon of the lunar month, and then at water, a mirror, or plants, is considered virtuous and auspicious by many devout people. During the ritual of Ihram in the Hajj pilgrimage, 'looking into a mirror with the intention of adorning oneself' is prohibited (Khamenei, 2006, 41).
Decorative and Cosmetic	"From past to present, mirrors have been valuable ceremonial objects and part of the decorative and cosmetic items used by women in royal courts. Today, most women and girls carry small pocket mirrors. Mirror frames were adorned with silver or gold and precious jewels. The surface was often covered with expensive embroidered fabrics or lace to prevent dust from settling on them" (Shahri, 1999, 252).
Proverb	The mirror also holds a special place in proverbs and idioms. For example, the phrase "Have you lost your mirror?" is used in response to an unattractive person who criticizes others' appearance (Shahri, 1999, Vol. 2, 252); similarly, "giving a mirror to the blind" is an admonition directed at a disobedient or unworthy person (Afifi, 1993, Vol. 1, 97–102).

Human (Sajadi, 2022, 45). Table 1 briefly examines its mythological link as a valued object with the semantic cluster of body, soul, farr (divine glory), and spirit on the one hand, and its symbolic connection with various beliefs on the other.

These examples, along with many others that persist in the diverse beliefs of the Iranian people and continue to be used today, trace their origin to a single, enduring narrative known as the "importance and value of the mirror" from past to present.

Manifestations of the Mirror in Japan

Japan is a land of symbols, mythological signs, and mysteries, closely connected to human-made artifacts, including the mirror. Linguistically, the mirror is represented by the kanji kagami (鏡), meaning a tool for viewing shadows and scenes created by sunlight. In Japanese culture, the sun and the mirror share a close relationship and constitute an important symbol in Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan, used to convey respect and gratitude toward nature.

The name of Japan, Nihon or Nippon, literally means "origin of the sun," and the rising sun is symbolically represented on the national flag as a red disc (Javadi, 2020, 9). This connection revolves around the worship of deities inhabiting natural environments and plays a role in shrines similar to that of the cross in churches. In the myths and culture of Japan, the mirror symbolizes purity and spiritual perfection: a soul free from corruption that reflects itself upon consciousness (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1969/2005, 326).

Contemporary popular beliefs in Japan regarding the connection of the mirror with the sun and human life have evolved from myths, rituals, and religious as well as folk legends. Its significance in Japanese culture remains so profound that this valued object is still preserved in shrines and used in various ceremonies as a symbol of the sun. Some of the most important symbolic forms and applications of the mirror in Japan are summarized in Table 2.

As observed in Tables 1 & 2, the mirror and its symbolic role have been significant in both Iranian and Japanese cultures, with the roots of this thought and its applications tracing back to the primordial myths of creation. The conceptual and semantic network of the mirror's shared components in these two cultures is presented as follows (Fig. 1).

Within this conceptual framework, the mirror possesses a multifaceted existence, often exhibiting fundamental, conceptual, and functional similarities across cultures. It can be introduced and utilized as a symbolic and meaningful object to promote friendly relations and convey cultural goodwill, carrying the message of "peace with global stability, honesty, illumination." Such cross-border social interactions reflect the reality of more enduring and continuous exchanges among nations, particularly those with shared historical or cultural backgrounds, helping to balance long-standing domestic and foreign political tensions. Therefore, an effective connecting link in strengthening intercultural relations can be objects and tools that symbolically embody a mythological and meaningful narrative shared among nations.

Conclusion

The analysis revealed that the mirror represents a symbolic and often emblematic face of humanity's past, present, and future, maintaining a direct connection with time and survival. This mysterious and valued object, passing through myths and history, continues to play a role in people's lives and may even serve as the "mirror of the future," reflecting the present and past regardless of temporal or spatial boundaries, reminding humanity that, anywhere in the world, neither past nor future exists independently, only the present, which embodies both yesterday and tomorrow of nations.

In both Iranian and Japanese cultures, the mirror symbolically relates to the sun, guiding individuals toward self-awareness after completing cycles of perfection. Moreover, the mirror's multifaceted and transformative nature positions it as a meaningful and functional tool, occupying a special place in various

Table 2. Symbolism and uses of the mirror in Japan. Source: Authors.

Symbolism	Semantic Cluster
Myth and Ancient Beliefs	In Japanese culture, three objects are recognized as sacred treasures, or Sanshu-no-Jingi, and serve as symbols of the imperial authority. According to mythology, the sun goddess Amaterasu bestowed these items upon her grandson Ninigi-no-Mikoto: the Kusanagi sword, symbolizing the emperor's power; the Yasakani jewel (magatama), representing his benevolence; and the Yata mirror, reflecting the emperor's wisdom. This mirror embodies the spirit, or shintai, of Amaterasu and is used in Shinto rituals (Hall, 1974/2024, 5). According to the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki, Amaterasu's wish was for her descendants to kneel before it daily, contemplate heavenly blessings, and eliminate evil thoughts and desires, allowing the polished surface to reflect a pure and beloved spirit within them (Hadland Davis, 1959, 191). She told her grandson Ninigi-no-Mikoto: "Take it as my spirit and worship it as you would worship me" (Philippi, 1968, 140). Nardo (1995/202, 16) notes, "This is a sacred mirror for you." The mirror also symbolizes Amaterasu's wrath and her retreat into the cave, which prompted the gods to lure her out by placing the mirror at the cave's entrance. Its reflective surface restored light to the world, bringing illumination once more. This mythological narrative is still represented today in the form of an eight-pointed mirror displayed above entrances of certain homes and shrines dedicated to the goddess. The eight triple lines engraved on it signify harmony and perfection (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1969/2005, 328). Currently, it is believed that Amaterasu still resides within the Yata-no-Kagami mirror, located at the heart of the Grand Ise Shrine in Mie Prefecture, Japan. Another mirror is kept in the Naiku, or inner sanctuary, of the shrine, serving as the sacred seat of the sun goddess and the imperial ancestor. This mirror symbolizes purity, truth, and divine wisdom and is believed to have the power to foresee human thoughts (Komakichi, 1936, 253).
Art and Other Sciences	The mirror was first introduced to Japan from China during the Yayoi period, and until the fourth century CE, local craftsmen produced them in the same Chinese style. Gradually, however, Japanese aesthetic sensibilities and innovations in decorating the back of the mirror began to flourish (Pashaei, 2020, 61).
Ritualistic – Sacred Ceremonies	Sacred Mirror "A mirror conceals nothing; it shines without a selfish or proud mind. Everything—good or bad, right or wrong—is reflected in it without alteration. The mirror is a source of honesty, as it benefits from the virtue of reflection in accordance with the essence of the object it reflects. It signifies the justice and impartiality of the divine will" (Chikafusa, 1914, 22). Many precious mirrors were used ceremonially in tombs and were believed to repel evil spirits. They were considered representations of the deceased's soul and judges of the dead (emao) (Hall, 1974/2024, 4 & 5). Archaeological discoveries have revealed numerous skeletons accompanied by mirrors placed at the waist in the Kofun of Kurozuka. The emao, when judging the guilty, uses a mirror to reveal all the deceased's sins and adjudicate them (Roberts, 2009, 35).
Religious – Ritualistic	In Buddhism, the "Mirror of the Heart" refers to a pure heart. It is said that the heart, like a mirror, is bright and clear and can illuminate everything. The "Magic Mirror" was first introduced to Japan in the 3rd century CE as a gift for prominent lords and became known as Shinjokyō. However, its most extensive use occurred only in the 17th century, when it served as a tool to obscure religious images from Catholic believers (Rodríguez, 2024).
Folk Beliefs	The Japanese believe in the feminine spirit of the mirror. It is said, " […]there is a secret in the mirror that will eventually be revealed. [...]The spirit of the mirror, as always in the legends, is female, and the mirror embodies the female spirit" (Pigott, 1969/2022, 230). This concept is essentially a metaphorical expression, reflecting a practice in which the Chinese inscribed a spirit on the back of many bronze mirrors to personify them (Hearn, 2004/2016, 38).
Literature and Folktales	The mirror holds a special place in Japanese literature and folklore. For example, in the story of the "Magic Mirror," the secret of Mount Fuji and the significance of the mirror are revealed: "Mount Fuji was initially a harmless mountain. Years later, an old man discovered an infant on its slope. He raised the girl, named Kaguya-hime, as his daughter. Over time, her beauty grew so great that the emperor fell in love with her and married her. Kaguya-hime told her husband that she was not mortal and had to return to the heavens […] She gave him a mirror to forever behold her beautiful face. Heartbroken, the emperor began to climb Mount Fuji, hoping to join his wife in heaven[…] but when he reached the summit, he could not find her. His love was so immense that it erupted like a blazing fire from his chest, illuminating the volcano" (Roberts, 2009, 41 & 42). The legend of the "Mirror Girl" also conveys beliefs in the feminine spirit, purity, lineage, and the power of prophecy and protection (Pigott, 1969/2022, 228–232).
Magic and Sorcery	It is a Tsukumogami—an object that acquires a spirit after at least 100 years—which is depicted in the book Hyakki Tsurezure Bukuro (translated as "The Illustrated Bag of a Hundred Demons" or "A Mass of Abandoned Household Items") by Toriyama Sekien. This possessed mirror reflects the monstrous form of anyone who gazes into it. Sekien notes: "That which is called Shōmakyō (the magic mirror that reveals the true identity of demons) reflects many mysterious things" (Sekien, 1805, 4).
Proverb	There is a Buddhist proverb that states: "A fallen flower never returns to the branch; a broken mirror never reflects again" (Hearn, 2004/2016, 102).

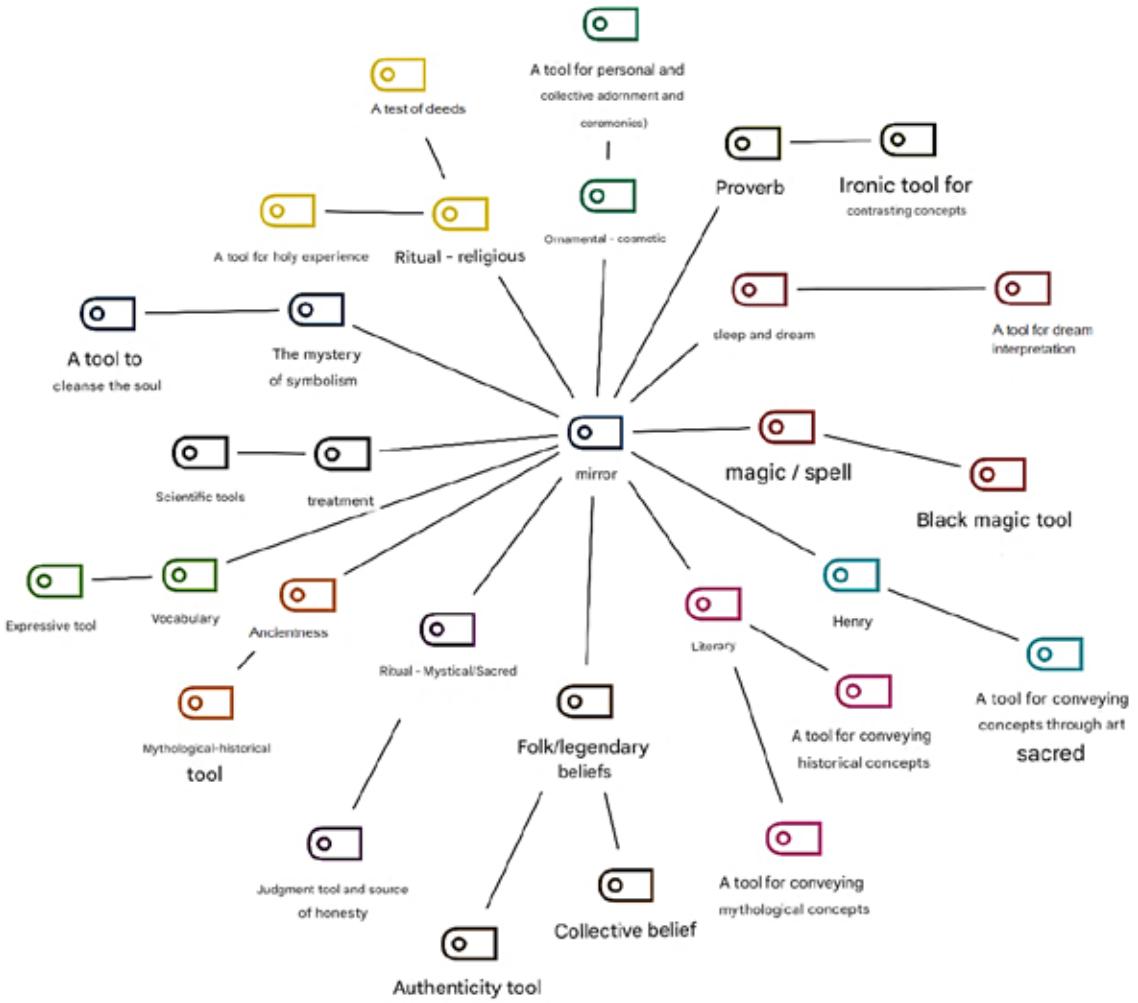

Fig. 1. Network of concepts and meanings of the mirror in Japanese and Iranian cultures. Source: Authors.

cultures, either positively or negatively. It has had a significant impact on both individual and collective life in these two societies and continues to be employed both concretely and symbolically. Therefore, given its conceptual and functional similarities in Iran and Japan, this valued object can play a crucial role in cultural exchange and in establishing a stronger foundation for relations among nations, serving as a "symbol of purity, peace, and illumination".

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the conduct of this research.

Endnotes

1. Archetype

2. Golaleh Honari (2019) notes in the Encyclopedia of Iranian Culture that the terms ābgīn and ābgīneh ("mirror") derive from Middle Persian ewenag, which itself comes from the ancient form adanaka (Mackenzie, 1971/2012; Bartholomae, 2004). Mehrdad Bahar has also traced the Middle Persian word ewenag, meaning "form" or "mold," to the term āyineh (mirror). If the words ewenag and ayenak are etymologically related, one may perceive a close semantic connection between āyineh (mirror) and āyin (ritual) (Farahvashi, 2018, 17).

3.The technology required for casting bronze mirrors was introduced to Japan from China during the Yayoi period (ca. 3rd century BCE – 3rd century CE), and the earliest Japanese mirrors were influenced by it. Bronze mirrors continued to be produced in Japan until the 19th century, when the country opened its borders and ended its isolation. Afterward, like many other nations, Japan replaced bronze mirrors with glass ones (Nerāghi, cited in Gregory, 2024).

4. Sanshu no Jingi: 三種の神器

5. The Kojiki

6.Nihon Shoki

7.The legend of Jigokudayū: Jigokudayū was a courtesan who, in some Japanese woodblock prints, is depicted before a mirror belonging to Emma-Ō, the King of Hell (Roberts, 2009, 62).

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