

Yijiang Zhong

Month without the Gods: Shinto and Authority in Early Modern Japan

*Comments from Mark Teeuwen (Oslo University)*

I have read this article with much interest, because to my mind, it represents exactly the kind of research we need more of if we are to make any progress in understanding the dynamics behind the development of shrines and Shinto: serious investigations that relate doctrinal developments to concrete historical contexts. Zhong's article casts light on the emergence in the Edo period of two aspects of Izumo Taisha's modern identity: the notion that the kami assemble at Izumo in the 10<sup>th</sup> month, and the connection between Izumo and *en-musubi* (expressed today in the form of an Izanagi-Izanami-type wedding rite). I appreciate this article greatly as a solid contribution to our understanding of the Edo-period transformation of shrines and Shinto, and the following remarks do not detract from that positive response.

I am not at all knowledgeable about the particulars of Izumo Taisha's history, but felt unsure about the article's representation of that history on three points.

1. On p. 8, the Izumo shrine of pre-Edo (or pre-Mori) times is described as a site that "remain[ed] within the earlier framework of anchoring the communal life of the region and securing agricultural production" – in other words, as a fundamentally non-political centre of community-based agricultural rites. To me, this sounds too much as though Izumo were emerging from a state of primordial innocence through the onslaught of Sengoku-period politics. I wonder whether the "default" vision of shrines as apolitical sites of communal agricultural rites is not a post-Meiji construct – and a notion that reflects ideological concerns of that era. More sources, or a more critical examination of those that may exist, would no doubt reveal a rather different reality. The fact that Izumo served as the "first shrine" of that province already indicates that it was a highly politicised place not only from the Mori onwards, but also earlier – presumably all the way back to classical times. Also, the agricultural framework marginalises the Buddhist nature of most of Izumo's rites in a way that sounds too Meiji-like to me.

2. In several places (e.g., pp. 2 and 28), the author argues that the new teachings about Ōkuninushi and *kami-ari-tsuki* "relativized the authority of the imperial house and the Sun Goddess". Here, I wonder whether such an assessment does not contrast Edo-period Izumo with post-Meiji Ise, rather than with the Ise that was its contemporary rival. Edo-period Ise preachers did of course refer to Amaterasu's connections to the imperial house, but I would argue that other concerns were much more central. Ise's *onshi* associated Ise with the gods of the cosmogony (Ame no Minakanushi /Kuni no Tokotachi) as well as Amaterasu, and stressed Ise's beneficence as an agricultural deity, a life-giving solar deity, and (much like Izumo's Ōkuninushi) a combination of creator deity and deity of fortune. In Meiji, a radical redesigning of Ise was necessary to "restore" its

imperial character; most importantly, all *onshi* had to be removed from the scene. I am quite ready to believe that Izumo *oshi* were aware of Ise competition in their preaching; but I do not believe that they were seeking to relativise imperial authority. This would not have fitted in with the pre-Meiji context in which they were marketing their shrine (predominantly to a rural, *hyakushō* audience).

3. Finally, I wonder about Izumo's connections with the Yoshida in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and Kokugaku from the late 18<sup>th</sup> onwards. The passage about Ōkuninushi, his jewel, and his lordship over "hidden things" played a central role in Yoshida theology (see Bernhard Scheid's chapter in Scheid & Teeuwen, eds., *The culture of secrecy in Japanese religion*). Also, the very existence of Yuiitsu Shinto was in many cases central to shrine priests' struggles to gain autonomy from domineering temple monks, and I would expect that the Yoshida played some kind of role in the Izumo shrine's success in sidelining Engakuji in the 1660s. The same passage looms large in Hirata Atsutane's thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and also in the Izumo shrine's struggles against Ise domination in the *saijin ronsō* controversy, which ended in defeat for Izumo's Senge Takatomi in 1881. Is there an untold story here?

I found very few errors in the manuscript; Ishimi must be Iwami, and it is unclear to me how Ōkuninushi can be translated as "the Great *Pillar*."

All in all, I greatly enjoyed this article and was surprised to see so many clear overlaps with the histories of shrines that I know somewhat better, such as Ise and Hie. The Izumo shrine's Edo-period transformation follows a broader pattern that is instantly recognisable. This pattern emerges only when we have a broader range of shrine histories available. Zhong's article is a great contribution towards that goal.

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