

REVIEW ARTICLE

## Izumo, Ise, and Modern Shinto

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Yijiang ZHONG, *The Origin of Modern Shinto in Japan: The Vanquished Gods of Izumo*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016. xii + 260 pages. Cloth, £28.99. ISBN 978-1-4742-7108-0.

THE FIELD OF Shinto studies is coming of age. The new Shinto series of Bloomsbury Academic, edited by Fabio Rambelli, already has four volumes at the time of writing, with more in the pipeline. The book under review here, which appeared as the second volume of this series, fills a prominent hole in the existing literature by addressing the early modern and modern history of Izumo Shrine and its deity.

There are many good reasons why this shrine deserves a detailed study. It is among the oldest and largest in the country, rivaled only by the Ise Shrines when it comes to the richness of its history and its prominence on the Shinto map. Ise and Izumo are often mentioned together as two anti-poles in the force field of Shinto. Where Ise represents Yamato, the heavenly deities, the imperial dynasty, and the hierarchical politics of rice, Izumo is associated with a pre-Yamato past, the earthly deities, vanquished clans, and the freedom of the sea. Izumo and Ise, positioned on opposite sides to the west and east of the imperial capital, have inspired a wealth of esoteric literature portraying these sacred sites as the yin and yang of ancient Japanese culture. This trend peaked in 2013, when both Izumo and Ise moved their kami to new shrine buildings (*daisengū* 大遷宮 at

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Izumo, *shikinen sengū* 式年遷宮 at Ise), and both attracted millions of visitors and unprecedented amounts of media attention. In this light, it is more than fitting that Bloomsbury's Shinto series followed up on this volume on Izumo with a monograph about the history of Ise (TEEUWEN and BREEN 2017). As co-author of the latter book, I am particularly excited about this development. In this review I will juxtapose Zhong's findings to our Ise history where I find the parallels particularly striking, or where our understandings are at odds.

Zhong does not cover the whole of Izumo's history but focuses on a time span of just over two centuries, from the 1660s, when the Izumo Shrine was reconfigured as a site of Shinto, until the 1870s and 1880s, when Izumo's priests attempted to secure prominence for their deity Ōkuninushi in the state pantheon of imperial kami—a battle that they lost. It is in fact around this deity, rather than its shrine, that Zhong builds his history. Much of his book deals with changing conceptualizations of Ōkuninushi and his relationship to Amaterasu; the local affairs of Izumo, its priests, and its patrons tend to recede into the background.

The 1660s saw the promulgation of the so-called Shrine Clauses, and with them, the establishment of Shinto (or *jingidō* 神祇道, as the Clauses call it) as a "sect" on a par with the sects of Buddhism. It was also in this decade that multiple daimyo experimented with Confucian forms of Shinto as a way to edify the population of their domains. The lord of Matsue, where Izumo was located, employed a disciple of Hayashi Razan, Kurosawa Sekisai, who advised him to strengthen Shinto for the same reasons. From 1665 to 1667, the Buddhist pagoda and other temple buildings that dominated the grounds of the Izumo Shrine compound were dismantled and the site was "restored" as a Shinto shrine. This also involved a change of Izumo's kami, from Susanowo to Ōkuninushi. It is striking that very similar developments occurred at Ise in the decade after 1665. It was in these years that Ise became identified as a site of Shinto. Ise agents fashioned their understanding of Ise's meaning around this new term only in the 1650s, after having relied heavily on the fundraising efforts of Buddhist temples and mendicants for the site's restoration in the late sixteenth century. When Shinto became a category of shogunal governance in 1665, this further aided the marginalization of Buddhist agents in and around the shrines. Numerous temples were removed from the vicinity of the shrines after a fire in 1670, and in 1675, all "Buddhists" (*bukke* 仏家) were excluded from the pilgrimage business. Izumo and Ise, then, became sites of non-Buddhist Shinto almost simultaneously—at least in the eyes of the priests and the authorities who oversaw them.

The similarities do not stop there. Both Izumo and Ise had developed into popular centers of pilgrimage in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In both places, pilgrims concluded contracts with *oshi* 御師 (translated by Zhong as "respected teachers," and in Teeuwen and Breen (2017) "prayer masters"). These *oshi* ran inns near the shrines and held exclusive rights to accommodate those

pilgrims with whom they had contracts. The *oshi* and their assistants organized confraternities (*kō* 講), visited their patrons in the provinces, and mediated between their patrons and the gods. The amulets distributed by Izumo's *oshi* depicted Ōkuninushi as Daikoku, one of the seven gods of good fortune; Ōkuninushi's son Kotoshironushi was marketed as Ebisu, the god of fishermen. The Izumo priests and *oshi* also promoted the idea that all the gods leave their shrines and convene at Izumo in the tenth month to decide who will marry whom in the coming year.

Zhong argues that Edo-period lore about the Izumo gods formed a “theological matrix” that “implicitly displace[d] the discursive and ritual structure in which the authority of Amaterasu was articulated and the imperial court was organized” (87). This appears to me as an over-interpretation that reads Meiji concerns into the Edo period. Izumo's *oshi* were competing not only, or even primarily, with the *oshi* of Ise, but also with agents from such places as Zenkōji, Ōyama, Konpira, and other sites. Their stress on Daikoku, Ebisu, and match-making hardly served to profile their shrine as an alternative to Amaterasu or Ise. In fact, the *oshi* of Ise did not advertise their shrine to pilgrims as a site of imperial ritual but as a place of miracles, healing, prosperity, and, not least, entertainment—including one of Japan's largest prostitution and theater districts. Even printed guidebooks to Ise disagreed about the identity of Ise's kami. Some focus on the Outer Shrine, whose deity was the “god of the origin of Heaven and Earth”; others give various divergent theories and conclude that the identity of Ise's deities is a great mystery that should not be divulged. When Izumo priests and *oshi* reinvented the gods of their shrine in the Edo period, challenging an Ise that did not yet exist was not on their agenda.

In his third chapter, Zhong moves away from Izumo to explore the reinvention of Ōkuninushi by Kokugaku scholars, notably Hirata Atsutane. He stresses the influence of Catholicism and Western astronomy on Hirata's novel interpretations of the Japanese gods and their place in the world. In his innovative cosmological scheme, Hirata redefined Ōkuninushi as the lord of the Invisible World who judges the souls of the dead. This elevated Ōkuninushi to a position on a par with—or even above—Amaterasu, whose role was now limited to that of imperial ancestor and lord of the Visible World. Zhong offers convincing evidence (most importantly *Honkyō gaihen* 本教外篇, 1806) to suggest that in devising this theology, “Hirata was reworking Catholic doctrines to reconfigure them into a Shinto form” (117). Hirata's vision was not universally accepted even among Kokugaku scholars; many followed Motoori Norinaga and his successors of the Suzunoya school in concentrating authority more narrowly in Amaterasu and her descendants, the emperors. Zhong shows that in Izumo, too, Kokugaku-inspired priest-scholars developed their own theories about Ōkuninushi's role in the cosmos and the polity (126–29). It was only in the Bakumatsu years that

Hirata's views gained a solid foothold at the Izumo Shrine, when they were embraced by Senge Takatomi, the shrine's upcoming *kokusō* (head priest).

Again, the parallels to Ise are striking. Kokugaku theories made inroads here too, leading to conflicts between the *oshi* communities of the two shrines. In 1798, a student of Motoori Norinaga printed and distributed a pamphlet that claimed that *kagura* dances, which were the main staple the ceremonial *oshi* offered to their patrons at both shrines, were "a ritual peculiar to the Inner Shrine alone," because *kagura* was a reenactment of the dance that had been performed by the kami in front of the heavenly rock cave where Amaterasu had hidden herself in the Age of the Gods. Amaterasu dwelt in the Inner Shrine, and therefore *kagura* was not an appropriate practice for *oshi* of the Outer Shrine, which accommodated a different deity. Such doctrinal arguments had obvious economic repercussions, so the Outer Shrine priesthood and the *oshi*-dominated council of the town at that shrine's gates, Yamada, brought the matter to the attention of Ise's shogunal magistrate. Ultimately, this led to the instigation of strict rules of censorship in Ise. New ideas about Ise's deities spread in scholarly circles, but the authorities tried actively to isolate the social reality of the pilgrimage from their influence. Did such processes occur at Izumo as well?

Chapter 4 takes us into the first years of the Meiji period, up to the year 1875. It was during this period that the reinvented Shinto of the late Edo period was catapulted onto the national stage. In these years the new regime sought to bolster imperial authority and simultaneously prevent the spread of Christianity by "unifying ritual, doctrine, and governance" on the basis of Shinto. Shinto ritual and doctrine were to serve as the foundation of governance, and the government launched a Shinto "mission" to convert the populace to this new national creed. In 1872, however, this policy was found to be too narrow and divisive. The Shinto Missionary Office (*Senkyōshi* 宣教使) was replaced by a joint Shinto-Buddhist Ministry of Doctrine (*Kyōbushō* 教部省), which coordinated the so-called Great Promulgation Campaign through a semi-private body called the Great Teaching Institute (*Daikyōin* 大教院). Buddhists soon found out, however, that this campaign forced them into a Shinto framework and compromised their freedom to uphold their own doctrines. The Shinshū priest Shimaji Mokurai employed the Western notion of "religion" as a means to denounce the many contradictions of the campaign. Most importantly, he argued that the state could not base its authority on doctrine because doctrine belonged to the realm of religion and therefore could not be enforced. In 1875, four Shinshū sects (including Shimaji's) left the campaign, and in that same year the Great Teaching Institute was dissolved. The Shinto leg of the campaign responded to this crisis by founding a new Office of Shinto Affairs (*Shintō jimukyoku* 神道事務局) so as to coordinate the activities of priests and campaign instructors. The question was, however, what kind of Shinto this Office should propagate. Should the Office of Shinto

Affairs avoid religious doctrine and focus on ritual, in Shimaji's spirit, or should it disseminate a Shinto doctrine that aimed to inoculate the populace against Christian conversion?

Chapter 5 describes how in the 1870s and 1880s, tensions between Izumo and Ise, or Ōkuninushi and Amaterasu, set the Office of Shinto Affairs on fire. At Izumo, Senge Takatomi had built up an extensive propagation program by organizing the old confraternities of his shrine into a new "Izumo Church" (168). In 1872, he petitioned the Ministry of Doctrine to recognize the special status of Izumo's deity Ōkuninushi as the creator of the land and the founder of the state, and to rank Izumo as equal with Amaterasu's Ise, which was elevated above all other shrines. Senge found allies among priests who were inspired by Hirata Atsutane's teachings, and also among those who found the idea that Ōkuninushi judges the dead in the Invisible World indispensable as a doctrinal foundation for Shinto funerals (169–71). Initially, this idea also won support in Ise. The Ise Shrines were restructured and restaffed in a truly revolutionary manner in the early 1870s. The main architect behind these reforms was Urata Nagatami, who had organized the Ise confraternities into an Ise Church even before Senge did the same at Izumo. Izumo and Ise branch churches throughout the land served as important stages for the Great Promulgation Campaign.

Initially, the Ise churches, too, held that Ōkuninushi and Amaterasu ruled the Invisible and Visible Realms in perfect harmony. However, this opinion was not shared by Tanaka Yoritsune, a former Satsuma samurai who was appointed as head priest of the Ise Shrines in 1874. It was Tanaka who took the initiative to found the Office of Shinto Affairs in 1875, and he was adamant that this bureau would streamline Shinto propagation under a unified Ise leadership. There was no place in his vision for either Izumo or Ōkuninushi. In 1877, he proposed that Ise should assume responsibility for the management of all shrines and shrine priests in the country, with the Ise Church supervising all Shinto instructors (180). As one might expect, this antagonized not only Senge but many other priests as well—including Ise priests such as Urata.

In the meantime, Senge had been lobbying to have Ōkuninushi enshrined as Amaterasu's equal, first in the Great Teaching Institute, and after 1875 in the Office of Shinto Affairs. This triggered the incident that is generally known as *saijin ronsō* 祭神論争, the "enshrinement debate." This conflict is often cited to highlight the divisions within the Shinto world and, more generally, the absurdity of the Great Promulgation Campaign, and it was indeed very destructive. It split the Shinto world and invited ridicule in the press in 1880. The discussions became ever more acrimonious until the Home Ministry reluctantly intervened. Senge wanted to settle the issue by means of a vote in a general assembly of the office, while Tanaka did everything to prevent this from happening. Tanaka won: in 1881, the matter was decided by an imperial edict ordering the office to

enshrine the same deities as the Imperial Palace: Amaterasu, the spirits of past emperors, and the gods of heaven and earth. This ended Senge's dream of winning parity for Ōkununushi with Amaterasu.

Zhong gives an excellent analysis of these events, and makes the convincing argument that this conflict was not only a factional battle between Izumo's Senge and Ise's Tanaka, but also an ideological dispute between two views on the place of Shinto in the modern state. Where Tanaka fought for a nonreligious, or at least nonsectarian, Shinto that focused on imperial ritual, Senge envisioned a Shinto mission based on a specific religious doctrine, as though 1872 had not happened. In 1879, Tanaka's followers argued that Senge was effectively "preaching Christianity while hiding behind Ōkununushi" ("Ōkununushi no kami o motte kage ni Yaso ni gi-shite ronzu ga gotoki..." 大國主神ヲ以テ陰ニ耶蘇ニ擬シテ論スルカ如キ, FUJII 1977, 102)—a characteristic that outraged Senge and caused the conflict to escalate even further. In light of Zhong's emphasis on the Christian nature of Hirata's reinvention of Ōkununushi, this was a very ironic turn of events, and it is a pity that Zhong misses this detail in his account. He does, nonetheless, offer a very convincing analysis of the way the debate was handled, its outcome, and its aftermath. In 1882, the Home Ministry adopted measures that were in line with Shimaji's logic, separating shrines from "religion" as sites solely dedicated to "ritual." We can conclude that Tanaka had read the mood of the times more accurately than Senge.

In subsequent decades, both the Izumo and the Ise churches took on the status of religious Shinto sects, as did the Office of Shinto Affairs itself. The Ise Church, however, was eventually subsumed under the Ise Shrines and transformed into an association for the propagation of the "nonreligious" veneration of Amaterasu (in 1899). The "religious" Jingūkyō 神宮教 of 1882 now became the nonreligious Jingū Hōsaikai 神宮奉斎会, without any noticeable change in the organization's activities: they still formulated and preached Ise teachings and distributed Ise amulets, using the same premises around the country and the same staff, only now these activities were redefined as public and nonreligious. This forms a striking contrast with the Izumo Church, whose ideas and practices were branded as religious in the late 1870s and remained so until 1951, when the "religious" Izumo Church (Izumo Taishakyō or Ōyashirokyō 出雲大社教) was merged with the shrine in much the same manner, though under a new regime of religious freedom, as per the Ise Church half a century earlier.

Zhong wraps up his book not by following Izumo's further development as both a shrine and a church, but by shifting focus to imaginings of Izumo in Meiji-period and post-war writings of academic historians. In the 1880s, historians like Hoshino Hisashi and Kume Kunitake used "Izumo mythology" to speculate about the existence of an ancient Japanese empire that had included Korea. This notion merged with wider arguments about the "shared roots" of Japan and

Korea, and it was widely utilized to justify the annexation of Korea (206). After the Second World War, scholars like Mizuno Yū and Ueda Masaaki found in Izumo a pre-Yamato alternative to the now disgraced Kokutai discourse. Izumo now became the subject of new historical theories that sought to relativize the centrality of Yamato and the imperial dynasty by excavating a rival “Izumo culture,” fostered by a separate “Izumo people,” *minzoku*, or even “race,” *jinshu* (207–208). The lasting attraction of such theories manifests itself in countless popular works on Izumo. Yet, Zhong finds little enthusiasm for such politicized reframing of the shrines among today’s Izumo priests. With some disappointment, he concludes that today’s Izumo priesthood is not interested in questioning the “coherence of the nation and *minzoku*” and sticks to “reaffirming the exclusive ethnic identity of the Japanese” (213).

Zhong’s volume is timely, well researched, and focused. He covers some aspects of the social history of Izumo Shrine from the Edo period onwards, but in the end is more interested in the conceptual history of the *idea* of Izumo, in contrast to Ise. A better understanding of the dynamics at Ise, as Izumo’s “opponent,” would have allowed him to refine his argument even further. Also, for the period after Meiji, Zhong loses interest in the local agents in Izumo, their economic and social concerns and initiatives, and their perspective on the transformation of Shinto in the early years of Meiji. We never learn what happened to Izumo’s *oshi* or what impact the Meiji reforms had on the Izumo pilgrimage, nor does Zhong delve into the history of the Izumo Church after the 1870s. In Ise, former *oshi* and other local businessmen and politicians played a major role in the refashioning of the Ise Shrines and their larger setting, notably by setting up a “Sacred Garden Society” (Shin'enkai 神苑会) that raised funds for the beautification of the shrines and the towns that served them. The transformation of Ise after Meiji can only be understood fully if we give due attention to the problems and initiatives of local actors, in addition to national debates and policies. To what degree is that also true of Izumo?

All in all, this book is an important contribution to our understanding of Shinto in the Edo- and early-Meiji periods. Zhong offers a thorough analysis of the Shintoization of Izumo in the 1660s, the development and demise of the Hirata school’s Ōkuninushi-centered theology, and the “enshrinement debate” that culminated in 1880–1881. By analyzing the emergence of “modern Shinto” in the first decades of Meiji through an unfamiliar lens, Zhong opens up a fresh perspective that inspires many new insights. This book joins a growing collection of monographs on shrine histories—including, for example, Sarah Thal’s history of Konpira (THAL 2005) and Barbara Ambros’ history of Ōyama (AMBROS 2008). As this body of scholarship grows, it will become easier to single out parallels and divergences across shrines. Such scholarship is essential if we are to aim for a historical understanding of Shinto that is less myopically obsessed with

intellectual developments and that gives more consideration to the social and economic realities of shrine life. I, for one, note with regret that we did not have the opportunity to benefit from reading this book while writing our book about Ise.

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