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## Korea in the *Kamiyo*

### Locating Korea in the Age of the Gods Narratives in Early Modern Japan

Early modern Japan witnessed new and unprecedented debates surrounding ancient history, including a school of thought that suggested a significant Korean influence upon ancient Japan. This line of thought contrasted sharply with the contemporary school of *kokugaku*, which emphasized the traditional understanding of Japan as entirely indigenous. Scholars of *kokugaku* often positioned their work as a polemic against what they perceived as the widespread influence of traditions imported from China, especially Confucianism, for their alleged corruption of an autochthonic Japanese culture. Modern interpreters of *kokugaku* thereby focused on the issue of their revulsion of Chinese influence. Focusing on Motoori Norinaga, often considered the consummator of *kokugaku*, this article analyzes Norinaga's responses to interpretations of a possible Korean origin of Japanese culture and customs. By contriving commentaries that eliminated such possibilities, this article argues that Norinaga attempted to defend the traditional understanding of ancient Japan as entirely indigenous and unified *ab initio*.

KEYWORDS: Korea—Motoori Norinaga—*Kojiki*—*Nihon shoki*—Susanoo—Tō Teikan—*kokugaku*

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THE AGE OF the Gods (*kamiyo* 神代) narratives are national-religious mytho-history recorded under the Japanese imperial court's commission in the early eighth century. They tell of the origin story of the Japanese imperial house, how the universe came to be, and Japan's *sui generis* place within it. Recorded in two of the earliest extant Japanese texts, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*, the Age of the Gods narratives provided a textual foundation for the continued legitimation of the court as well as various religious discourses in Japan over the centuries thereafter (KŌNOSHI 1999, 33–53; 2000; 2009). The Age of the Gods narratives are therefore essential in discussions of ancient Japanese history.

The early modern period in Japan marked the end of more than a century of a destructive civil war and the beginning of rapid commercialization and urbanization that stimulated a dramatic revitalization of the arts and scholarship (NOSCO 1990, 15–40; BURNS 2003, 16–34). Along with the unprecedented growth of publishing and other scholarly activities, this period also witnessed new debates surrounding Japan's history. In the study of ancient Japan, no one made more of an impact than Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801), who revolutionized the field with a unique combination of erudition and creativity along with a pioneering model of textualism. Because of his work's enduring influence, he remained at the center of debates among Japanese scholars of antiquity before and after his passing (BURNS 2003).<sup>1</sup>

Norinaga positioned his work as a polemic against the widespread influence of traditions imported from China, especially Confucianism, for corrupting what he perceived to be the autochthonic Japanese culture and tradition. Norinaga also associated himself with a group of scholars sharing some of the same concerns regarding “foreign” systems of beliefs. Their study of Japan and ancient Japanese texts thereby arose in contention with the then-dominant study of China and Chinese texts (MOTEGI 1979; NOSCO 1990, 41–233).<sup>2</sup> The Age of

1. Norinaga's work continues to shape scholarship on early Japanese language and literature more than two centuries after his death. Furthermore, Norinaga's xenophobia and occasional willful irrationalism in light of his enormous erudition and rigorous textualism constitute the thorny “Norinaga problem” for scholars concerned with the links between Norinaga's work and ideologies of State Shinto and modern Japanese nationalism (KOYASU 1995).

2. While Norinaga himself recognized the influence of some prominent scholars of *kokugaku* 国学 (“national learning” or “nativism”) in his work, there are some concerns in seeing Norinaga as a part of a “lineage” or “school” (MCNALLY 2011).

the Gods narratives were essential in their debate. For instance, while Norinaga sought to instantiate the Age of the Gods narratives to establish Japan's primordial identity as autogenous and even superior to that of China, many Confucian scholars rebuked the mythical nature of Japan's origin story. In analyzing Norinaga's scholarship, many scholars thereby focus on his revulsion against Chinese influence on Japan—what Norinaga often referred to as “Chinese mind”—when explaining his ideological or even theological stance (BURNS 2003, 68–101; HIGASHI 1999; PAE 2017).

In this article, I explore a lacuna in this scholarship by focusing on Norinaga's specific responses to the interpretative possibilities within the Age of the Gods narratives that indicate ancient Japan's close historical connections to the ancient polities of the Korean Peninsula. The Age of the Gods narratives, as per other sections of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*, were commissioned to instantiate the imperial court's legitimacy to rule Japan in universal terms (BROWNLEE 1987). Furthermore, the texts portrayed Japan as possessing its own world order by depicting ancient Korean kingdoms as subservient tributaries to the Japanese throne (KŌNOSHI 2000, 52–53).

At the same time, the preservation of two primary texts that present structurally incompatible narratives, along with several other partly irreconcilable texts from the same era, reflects the pluralism of the mytho-historical narratives that circulated in the early eighth century. Moreover, their existence also shows a willingness on the part of the court and scholars involved in editing the texts to preserve that diversity (KŌNOSHI 2007; KURE 2018).<sup>3</sup> Despite the goal of depicting the court as the ruler of an entirely indigenous and unified Japan *ab initio*, the extant Age of the Gods narratives include characters and stories that suggest ancient Japan's historical connections to ancient Korea. Depending on the reader, such stories could be read in a way that threatened the traditional understanding of Japan's ancient history.

The continued existence of the problematic or sometimes even contradictory narratives regarding the early history of Japan potentially undercut the legitimacy of the court. By the early Heian period, efforts were underway to reconstruct the Age of the Gods narratives by sorting out unwanted accounts. Texts such as the *Kogo shūi* 古語拾遺 can be read as an effort to resolve the inconsistencies between the existing narratives by arbitrarily cutting and pasting parts of different narratives to create a unitary story that better serves the purpose of legitimization. Such efforts to create a single, amalgamated narrative that

3. Moreover, the preservation of “alternative narratives” (*issho* 一書) in different parts of the *Nihon shoki*, including in the Age of the Gods narratives, also shows that the compilers sought to preserve variant narratives (SEKINE 2020).

resolves the preexisting “flaws” would continue unabated for centuries (KŌNOSHI 1999, 163–187).

Norinaga sought to differentiate himself from such ostensibly contrived efforts by basing his work on rigorous textualism and originalism. His point is reinforced by the fact that his magnum opus, the *Kojiki den* 古事記伝, is centered on the *Kojiki*, the oldest surviving Japanese text. However, Norinaga was also concerned with sorting out problematic accounts within the Age of Gods narratives. Beyond his public reproaches against the “Chinese mind” in search of the “undefiled” ancient Japan, I argue that Norinaga also worked to forcefully eliminate the interpretative possibilities within the Age of the Gods narratives that Japan’s civilization may not have been indigenous or fully unified from the start.

### *Searching for the Origin of Japan*

One of the most controversial figures in the Age of the Gods narratives is Susanoo, and his paradoxes are rooted in the ancient texts that recorded his legend (PHILIPPI 1969, 402; GADELEVA 2000). As one of the “three precious children” of the Japanese creator god Izanagi, Susanoo is a brother of the sun goddess Amaterasu and the moon god Tsukuyomi, the first of whom is considered to be the direct ancestor of the Japanese imperial house. Despite Susanoo’s prestigious birth into the family, Susanoo rebelled against it. His family eventually expelled him from the heavenly realm, and following his expulsion Susanoo descended to the earth and permanently settled in Izumo 出雲 Province, western Japan. However, one of the variant narratives of the *Nihon shoki* records Susanoo making a stop in Korea before settling down at Izumo:

Susanoo descended to [the ancient Korean kingdom of] Silla with his son, Itakeru, and stayed at a place called Soshimori. He loudly proclaimed, “This land is not where I want to live.” He then created a ship from the soil. He sailed it and headed east, arriving at Izumo Province. (NS 1: 127)

Susanoo’s initial “descent” to Korea before moving to Japan has often been interpreted simply as a story of the ancient Japanese conquest of Korea (*Gahō Rin gakushi bunshū* 2: 287; *Ishō Nihon den* 2: 1268–1269; *Tawaregusa*, 42). Such an interpretation, of course, befits other narratives recorded in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* that suggest ancient Japanese domination of Korean kingdoms. But the narrative structure that shows one of the most prominent figures in the Age of the Gods narratives first appearing in Korea before moving on to Japan also opened the interpretative possibility that Korea may have been the place of origin of civilization in Japan. A rising early modern scholarly trend of critically reappraising the mythical aspects of the Age of the Gods narratives also kindled this interpretation.

Instead of reading the Age of the Gods narratives as literal and definitive, many early modern scholars began to critically reassemble the Age of the Gods narratives and assigned new meanings (BROWNLEE 1997, 15–60). Moreover, reflecting the influence of Chinese texts, some even adopted and localized legendary narratives from China in their interpretations. Such efforts included a theory that entirely replaced the Age of the Gods narratives with an argument that the legendary Chinese sage Taibo 泰伯 was the actual progenitor of the Japanese imperial family (NG 2019, 3–67). Writing in the early eighteenth century, Arai Hakuseki 新井白石 (1657–1725) recorded a theory of the Korean origins of Japan that was in circulation at the time. While Hakuseki himself disagreed with this position, he nevertheless recorded the theory in detail.

Noting that Korea might have been “our country’s predecessor,” the theory claimed that the aforementioned heavenly realm (literally the “Plain of High Heaven” [Takamanohara]), where the Japanese gods reportedly lived (and Susanoo descended from), was located in ancient Korea. In this scheme, Susanoo’s “descent” upon Korea reflects a movement inside of Korea, and Susanoo’s subsequent relocation across the sea from Korea to Japan marked the beginning of civilization in Japan. Of course, many scholars have also attempted to demystify the heavenly realm by explaining or even locating it. Hakuseki himself argued that the heavenly realm was an actual place in Hitachi 常陸 Province of eastern Japan (NAKAI 1988, 236–249).

The proponents of the theory of the Korean origins of Japan based this view on observations that saw noticeable similarities between aspects of Korean and Japanese cultures. For instance, advocates of this theory as well as Hakuseki noted that the practices of Korean shamanism, which included rites involving singing and dancing, recalled the legend of Ame no Uzume. Before Susanoo’s expulsion from the heavenly realm, the story goes, Susanoo got into rounds of conflict with his sister, the sun goddess Amaterasu. Amaterasu became angry at Susanoo, and she retreated into a cave. With the sun goddess gone, the world became dark. Ame no Uzume energetically danced in front of the cave to lure Amaterasu out, causing a loud gathering of many gods. When Amaterasu peeked out of the cave to see the commotion, another god pulled her out, restoring sunlight to the world. Hakuseki suspected that ancient Japan’s historical domination of Korea, including Susanoo’s descent, had something to do with the cultural similarities. But Hakuseki was not entirely sure. He notes:

Did [such customs originate] here and transfer there or did it transfer here from over there? Or did such customs of the East [Japan and Korea] emerge simultaneously by chance?  
(AHZ 3: 361–362)

There is no question that this theory of the Korean origins of Japan was based on a speculative reading of source materials. Hakuseki also criticized it by noting

that, while he entertained such views before, he no longer does so because they function as preconceptions in evaluating historical materials (AHZ 3: 362–364). At the same time, however, one could not easily dismiss the theory. Given the extant narratives suggesting connections between ancient Japan and Korea, scholars continued to contemplate on the nature of that connection in history. More importantly, such theories on the origins of Japan threatened the traditional understanding among the Japanese that Japan's history has been autochthonous in its beginnings.

Like the theory that positioned the legendary Chinese sage Taibo as the first progenitor of the Japanese imperial house, the notion of the Korean origins of Japan also threatened the idea of Japanese uniqueness that supposedly existed before the influx of foreign modes of thought and behavior. Tō Teikan 藤貞幹 (1732–1797) expanded upon the theory to argue for the Korean origins of just about everything Japanese through his interpretation of the legend of Susanoo. Building upon his understanding of Susanoo, Teikan also denied the divinity of Amaterasu, the most central Shinto deity and the mythical ancestress of the Japanese imperial house.

Beyond merely speculating on suppositional similarities between ancient Japan and Korea, Tō Teikan wanted to unquestionably “prove” the origins of these similarities by closely analyzing the legends of Susanoo. According to the Age of the Gods narratives, Susanoo is a son of the creator god Izanagi and a brother of the imperial ancestor Amaterasu. But a careful reading of Susanoo's story suggests the possibility that Susanoo may have had a life before his “birth,” and his actual origin may be the reason why Susanoo did not get along with his family, the ancestors of the Japanese imperial house. For instance, Susanoo conflicted with his father because he wanted to return to his “country of roots.” According to the *Kojiki*:

[After appointing Amaterasu to rule the heavenly realm and Tsukuyomi to rule the country of night, Izanagi] ordered Susanoo to rule the seas. While the others ruled the places designated to them, Susanoo did not rule the country assigned to him. Instead, he wept until his beard grew down to the pit of his stomach. His weeping withered green mountains and dried up rivers and seas. The sounds of evil gods pervaded like summer flies and caused all sorts of calamities. Izanagi asked Susanoo, “Why are you crying and not ruling the country designated to you?” He answered, “I am crying because I want to go back to my deceased mother's country of roots.” Izanagi became furious and said, “If so, you must not live in this country!” [Izanagi] immediately expelled him. (*Kojiki*, 54)

The *Nihon shoki* also presents similar narratives linking Susanoo's discontent living in the heavenly realm to his probable alien origin. The main narrative

of the *Nihon shoki* notes Susanoo's disaffected outbursts in the heavenly realm that caused much death and destruction. His parents thereby expelled Susanoo to his "country of roots." Despite the apparent significance of the "country of roots" in the plot, the extant narratives do not clarify the place's exact location. But Susanoo's descent upon Korea following his expulsion from the heavenly realm suggests that Korea may be the "country of roots" for Susanoo.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Susanoo once refers to Korea as the "homeland Korea" in a variant narrative of the *Nihon shoki* (NS 1: 127).

Stating that the "country of roots" is ancient Korea, Tō Teikan declared that Susanoo was the conduit through which the civilization from Korea was imported wholesale to Japan (*Shōkōhatsu*, 253). In addition to suggesting the aforementioned "evidence" of observable cultural similarity between Korea and Japan, Teikan also reminded the reader that even the seemingly indigenous Japanese customs such as *waka* 和歌 (classical Japanese poetry) was in fact an "ancient Korean custom" that Susanoo brought from Korea (*Shōkōhatsu*, 250–251).<sup>5</sup> Viewing Susanoo as the medium that spread the customs and culture of ancient Korea to Japan, Teikan declares, "[All] things and the language [of Japan] are therefore [derivatives] of Korean customs" (*Shōkōhatsu*, 258).

Teikan's rearrangement of the Age of the Gods narratives centering around Susanoo's purportedly Korean origins undermines the traditional interpretations of the ancient past centered on Amaterasu that emphasized the indigenous characteristics of Japanese history and civilization. Teikan mentions the story of Amaterasu's hiding and how the goddess Ame no Uzume sang and danced to lure her out. By construing Ame no Uzume's dance as an ancient Korean custom, Teikan proposes that this story is yet another example of cultural transmission from Korea: "It is an ancient custom of ancestral rites for a god. It is also [an aspect of] shamanism introduced from ancient Korea" (*Shōkōhatsu*, 248).

More importantly, Teikan interprets this story as a metaphor for the funeral of Amaterasu. Teikan first argues that burial practices in ancient times radically differed from that of early modern Japan:

In more recent times, death came to be considered as defiling. Burial also became defiling. This was not so in ancient times [when] the burial mound was

4. The adjectives used to describe the "country of roots" in the texts also suggest that the "country of roots" is a distant, likely overseas, location. For instance, the main narrative of the *Nihon shoki* describes the "country of roots" to be "faraway" (*enteki* 遠適), and one of the variant narratives of the same text notes that the "country of roots" is "extremely faraway" (*kyokuken* 極遠). By emphasizing the great distance, the Age of the Gods narratives mostly imply that the "country of roots" is likely a foreign land (NS 1: 89).

5. Susanoo is credited with leaving behind the oldest extant *waka* in Japanese history, recorded in both the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* (COMMONS 2016, 221).

considered a shrine, and a separate shrine was not built. Every year, when flowers bloomed, [people] sang and danced in ancestral worship. (*Shōkōhatsu*, 247)

To further illustrate this point, Teikan quotes the part of the *Nihon shoki* that describes Japanese Emperor Ingyō's 允恭天皇 (r. 412–453) death and burial. According to this source, emissaries from Korea came to express condolences regarding the emperor's passing. Having arrived in Japan, "some of them cried, and some of them danced and sang" in condoling the emperor's death (NS 1: 449). Teikan links such customs to Ame no Uzume's dances: Ame no Uzume danced to mourn Amaterasu's death.

Teikan also reconstructed the legend of Ame no Uzume by redefining several concepts in his favor. After Amaterasu came out of the cave, the creator god Takami musubi ordered the building of a "divine fence" and a "stone boundary" for the worship of the dead. In the same scene, Amaterasu gives a "sacred mirror" to her son Ame no oshihomimi, ordering him to "look at this sacred mirror as you look at me" (NS 1: 153). Teikan wrote the following commentaries, reinterpreting the abovementioned story of Amaterasu's hiding as the funeral of Amaterasu:

The reading of this ["divine fence"] as "*himoroki*" is a borrowed Korean word. The "burying" is also the Korean sound "*himoroki*."

"Stone boundary" refers to the tomb. It means that the body cannot come back once it is buried, and the interlocking of stones signifies the obstruction of the boundary through which spirits can come and go. Borrowing the [Chinese] characters "stone" and "boundary," it is read as "*iwasaka*."

The casted mirror [of Amaterasu] was worshiped and enshrined where the "divine fence" was installed. This is a recording of worship rites at the tomb [of Amaterasu].

(*Shōkōhatsu*, 249)

In sum, Teikan radically reorganized the Age of the Gods narratives by making Susanoo the leading protagonist of ancient Japan who imported all aspects of Japanese customs and civilization from Korea. Moreover, Teikan shunned the traditional interpretation of early Japanese history based on the divinity of Amaterasu and her descendants of the Japanese imperial house. Transforming the Amaterasu-centered, autochthonous history of early Japan to the Susanoo-centered history that emphasized the purportedly foreign origins of Japanese culture, Teikan's work appears to have attracted considerable attention among contemporaries (ŌKAWA and MINAMI 1934–1935, 1: 490–491).

Motoori Norinaga, who also studied the early history of Japan at the time, wrote a scathing and angry letter of rebuttal directed at Teikan in defense of the conventional Amaterasu-centered account that cast Japan as independent in its history (MNZ 8: 273–300). Of course, Norinaga's scholarly *oeuvre* was not directed at refuting Teikan or those who speculated on the possible ancient



Korea connection per se. However, Norinaga did produce interpretations that deliberately severed ties that may have existed between ancient Korea and Japan. In doing so, Norinaga showed that his scholarly agenda was not limited to the expulsion of the “Chinese mind” in reading and understanding ancient Japan. He was also determined to erase any signs suggesting ancient Korean influence upon Japan.

### *Japanizing Susanoo*

Susanoo’s unexplained discontentment living in the heavenly realm and his explicitly stated wishes to go back to his “country of roots,” combined with the records of Susanoo’s stays in Korea following his expulsion from the heavenly realm, enabled scholars such as Tō Teikan to argue that Susanoo’s “country of roots” is Korea. Susanoo’s connections overseas had to be refuted to defend the traditional interpretation of ancient Japanese history centered around the sun goddess Amaterasu and her descendants ruling over an independent Japan *ab initio*. Norinaga thereby rewrote Susanoo’s origin story through commentaries to sever such ties and “Japanize” him. To do so, Norinaga recalled an older interpretation by Urabe Kanetaka 卜部兼方 (fl. thirteenth century) to argue that the “country of roots” had to be somewhere underground.

Kanetaka had argued in his study of the Age of the Gods narratives that “one name of the ‘country of roots’ is the netherworld” and that the two places are “in fact identical” (*Shaku Nihongi* 1: 193). Norinaga also adamantly proclaims that the “country of roots” is the netherworld. “Like the roots of plants and trees,” Norinaga argues, “the [Chinese character] root in the ‘country of roots’ is named as such because it is located underground.” Any other opinions, he notes, are “examples of biased Chinese thought” (MNZ 9: 303). By insisting that the “country of roots” is the underground netherworld, Norinaga could expunge the interpretations that suggested Susanoo originated from Korea.

To strengthen his point, Norinaga even insisted that the word “country of roots” in the *Kojiki* is incorrect and that one ought to use a different Chinese character. In the *Kojiki*, the “country of roots” is recorded as *Ne no katasu kuni* 根之堅州国. Instead of the character *su* 州, which signifies an administrative division and does not express a place of another realm, Norinaga insists that one should use the homophone *su* 洲, which denotes an entirely different landform. Norinaga writes, “As for the character *su*, the usage of *su* in all copies [of the *Kojiki*] is definitely erroneous. It must be amended as described above” (MNZ 9: 445). While Norinaga does not explain why the character is erroneous and should be changed, his rationale is clear. To sever Susanoo’s Korea connection and render Susanoo fully Japanese, Norinaga even sought to alter the original texts of the *Kojiki* itself.

Most modern scholars of Japanese classics have registered their skepticism regarding this interpretation of the “country of roots” as the netherworld. Some modern-day scholars, such as Matsumura Takeo, have remarked that the “country of roots” may refer to the dimly remembered original homeland of the Japanese people, retold through the stories of Susanoo (MATSUMURA 1954–1958, 4: 361–396). Looking over the stories of Susanoo, Donald Philippi notes that it is “rather odd” that Susanoo refuses to rule his designated territory and instead wants to return to the “country of roots.” Philippi also explains that Susanoo, who was “regarded with suspicion and mistrust by the heavenly deities” at the heavenly realm, assumes “an entirely different role, as a national culture-hero” after his expulsion. According to Philippi, such aspects of Susanoo further suggest the possibility that Susanoo really is of alien origins and initially had no connection with his “family” in the Age of the Gods narratives (PHILIPPI 1969, 402–403).

Kurano Kenji also voices his suspicion by stating that the “country of roots” and the netherworld “have been separate worlds from the start” (KURANO 1973–1980, 2: 341). Tsugita Masaki writes in his commentaries on the *Kojiki* that the “country of roots” is most likely an overseas land considered to be the native place of the gods (TSUGITA 1977–1984, 1: 73–74). Kanda Norishiro also suggested that the two places are separate (KANDA 1992, 15–24). Yamaguchi Yoshinori and Kōnoshi Takamitsu also shared their skepticism regarding the reading of the “country of roots” as the netherworld in their annotation of the *Kojiki* (*Kojiki*, 55). Despite the doubts raised by earlier scholars, however, more recent publications follow Norinaga’s suggestion. Yamada Hisashi, for example, largely agrees with Norinaga that the “country of roots” is the netherworld (YAMADA 2001, 134–180). The American Japanologist Gustav Heldt also accepts Norinaga’s interpretation and translates the “country of roots” into “the land that lies beneath the hard earth’s roots” in his 2014 English translation of the *Kojiki* (HELDT 2014, 19).

Furthermore, Norinaga sought to strengthen his somewhat inconclusive claim regarding Susanoo’s place of origin by conflating Susanoo with Tsukuyomi into one god. According to the Age of the Gods narratives, the Japanese creator god gave birth to the “three precious children”: the sun goddess Amaterasu, the moon god Tsukuyomi, and Susanoo. Irrespective of the apparent clarity regarding the number of children in the original texts, Norinaga nevertheless insists that there were only two: “There are many things that suggest Tsukuyomi and Susanoo were originally a single god.” Regardless of this claim’s interpretative feasibility, identifying Susanoo as the moon god Tsukuyomi, along with Norinaga’s insistence that the moon is the netherworld, strengthened Norinaga’s avowal that “the country of roots” is not Korea but the netherworld:

First, [the part of] Tsukuyomi's [name] *yomi* refers to the netherworld, and it is the name of the country to which Susanoo returned to. "The country of roots" is therefore the netherworld. (MNZ 9: 388)

This interpretation appears to have been endorsed and strengthened by Norinaga's students and successors. For example, Hattori Nakatsune 服部中庸 (1757–1824), a student of Norinaga, also insisted on this point in his 1791 treatise, the *Sandaikō*, an explication of Japanese antiquity. Norinaga held this work in high esteem and even incorporated the *Sandaikō* in its entirety in the *Kojiki den*. Nakatsune diagrammed Norinaga's interpretations by presenting a cosmological vision of the tripartite universe made of the earth, heaven (sun), and netherworld (moon), supporting the argument that Susanoo is Tsukuyomi and the moon is the netherworld. Nakatsune explained that "when Tsukuyomi and Susanoo are looked at as one god, confusion regarding its origin disappears, and all things become clear" (MNZ 10: 309).

Why the amalgamation? No scholar has explained why Norinaga and his students insisted on reducing Izanagi's number of children from three to two. Kōnoshi Takamitsu, in his multi-volume work on the *Kojiki den*, merely notes that Norinaga was "hesitant in forming a conclusion" regarding the conflation of the two gods. He also states that it was only Hattori Nakatsune who "insisted [on the conflation] with certainty" (KŌNOSHI 2010–2014, 1: 165–166). However, not only did Norinaga endorse the *Sandaikō* and permit it to be part of the *Kojiki den*, but Nakatsune also cites Norinaga in the *Sandaikō* in making his argument:

As for the reason why the "country of roots" is the netherworld, the ninth volume of my teacher's *Kojiki den* first suggested many things that indicate Tsukuyomi and Susanoo are a single god. (MNZ 10: 308)

Norinaga does state that "it cannot be easily concluded at the moment" that the two gods are one (MNZ 9: 388). Behind his gilded caution, however, Norinaga still claims that Tsukuyomi is of the netherworld, the netherworld is where Susanoo returned to, and the netherworld is the "country of roots." Norinaga's hypothesis is clear and integral to his exegesis regardless of his tone. This hypothesis removes the interpretative possibility that Susanoo could be from Korea. To suggest an alternative place of origin, Norinaga and his successors chose the moon, which they interpreted to be the netherworld. In this framework, the moon god Tsukuyomi had to be Susanoo, and Susanoo had to be Tsukuyomi.

This interpretation seemingly became an orthodox position for Norinaga's followers. Norinaga's self-proclaimed successor, Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843), repeats the same argument through which Atsutane sought to create "a newly edited ancient historical text by integrating [materials] conveyed by different classics [of ancient Japan]" (SHAZ 7: 96). In this work, Atsutane alters the

following line by Izanagi in the *Kojiki*, transforming “[I have] finally obtained three noble children,” into “[I have] finally obtained two noble children,” synthesizing Tsukuyomi and Susanoo into one for good (SHAZ 1: 29). He adds:

[The claim] that Susanoo and Tsukuyomi are the same god is argued in the *Kojiki den* and also in the *Sandaikō*. It is an eternally indisputable assertion.

(SHAZ 7: 132)

### *Peripheralizing Izumo*

As previously noted, Susanoo moves to the Izumo region of western Japan after his stay in Korea. Once settled, Susanoo becomes a largely peaceful and seemingly indigenous god primarily concerned with ruling Izumo. This aspect of Susanoo’s legend is reinforced by the extant local gazetteer from ancient Izumo, the *Izumo no kuni fudoki* 出雲国風土記, which depicts Susanoo as a god specific to Izumo with no ties to Amaterasu or Japan at large. Susanoo’s “provincial” characteristics strengthen the claims of his alien origin, as his seemingly contended stay in Izumo vis-à-vis his violent displeasure living in the heavenly realm suggests that he may have little to do with the ancestors of the Japanese imperial house.<sup>6</sup>

More importantly, Susanoo’s provincial characteristics strengthen the claim for a Korean origin of civilization in Japan. A variant narrative from the *Nihon shoki* suggests exactly this process, in which Susanoo’s importation of “seeds” from Korea to Izumo marked the beginning of agriculture across Japan:

When [Susanoo and his son] Itakeru first descended [to Korea], Susanoo brought with him many seeds of plants and trees. However, he did not plant them in Korean lands and instead brought them all back [to Izumo]. From Kyushu and throughout Japan, there was not a place where seeds were not sown and mountains did not become green.

(NS 1: 127)

Such depictions of Izumo threatened the traditional claims of total independence in Japan’s historical development as well as the traditional notion of *ab initio*

6. Many scholars believe that such representations of Susanoo as a local indigenous god without ties to Amaterasu in the *Izumo no kuni fudoki* may constitute an earlier prototype of Susanoo’s myth. The other aspects of Susanoo’s story, including Susanoo’s “birth” as a son of Izanagi and a brother of Amaterasu, may have been later additions created in the process of absorbing recently conquered territories in Izumo into the central polity by integrating regional mythology into the “national” mythology. Michiko Yamaguchi Aoki makes this point in her introduction to the *Izumo no kuni fudoki* (AOKI 1971, 3–73). Furthermore, based on archaeological evidence, several scholars suggest that Izumo most likely existed as an independent polity with a distinctive cultural foundation into the sixth century (MATSUMOTO 2006; WATANABE 2018).

unity of Japan. In addition to rewriting the legend of Susanoo, Norinaga also sought to further integrate, and in effect peripheralize, Izumo's history to close off the interpretive possibility that ancient Izumo may have been a fundamentally disparate place vis-à-vis the rest of Japan and a gateway of foreign influence. To change the understanding of ancient Izumo, Norinaga reinterpreted the *Izumo no kuni fudoki*.

Norinaga recognized the *Izumo no kuni fudoki* as one of the earliest Japanese texts, largely contemporaneous with the *Kojiki* and therefore an authentic source of Japanese antiquity (KANEOKA 2012). Given the text's irrefutable value, Norinaga sought to change its interpretation by providing new commentaries. First, he reinterpreted Izumo's distinctive foundation myth as an extension of the national myths recorded in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*. Perhaps aware of the infeasibility of this task, Norinaga is uncharacteristically self-doubting in his commentaries. He writes, "The above text [part of the *Izumo no kuni fudoki*] has very ancient words here and there, and there are also many places [where the meaning is] difficult to understand." He therefore would have to "force an interpretation" (MNZ 1: 308–309).

The *Izumo no kuni fudoki* features a unique foundation myth specific to Izumo, the mythical process of "land pulling" (*kunibiki* 国引き). After noting that Izumo initially was a "young country" that was "initially created small," the creator god enlarges the region by transplanting parcels of land from different places to augment Izumo. This process, similar to how Susanoo moved from Korea to Izumo on a "ship" made of soil, also began with moving some soil from Korea to Izumo (*Fudoki*, 134–138).<sup>7</sup> Solely relying on the expression "young country," which describes something of a "work in progress" in the *Izumo no kuni fudoki*, Norinaga argues that the creation myth of Izumo is identical to the national creation myths recorded in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*:

Both the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* have [the expression] "young country," which reminds one where it comes from. [The phrase] "I have created a small country in the beginning" [in the *Izumo no kuni fudoki*] refers to the two great gods Izanagi and Izanami [of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*], who created small [pieces of land] when they first created [the world]. These gods created the northern region of Izumo to be insufficient like a slender cloth, making the country narrow and thin. It was called "young country" because the creation was not yet completed. (MNZ 1: 309)

In the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*, the expression "young country" appears as "when the country that was young." Despite the similarity in wording, the

7. Izumo also features several local myths, place names, and shrines that suggest a historical connection to Korea (MIZUNO 1987, 2: 19–25; GRAYSON 2002).

processes mentioned in the two texts and the *Izumo no kuni fudoki* are incongruous. The relevant passages of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*, respectively, read as follows:

When the country was young, it floated like oil on top of water and roved like jellyfish. (Kojiki, 28)

Back in antiquity when the country was young, it floated like oil on top of water. (NS 1: 77)

There is no mention of land-pulling in either the *Kojiki* or the *Nihon shoki*, making the two sets of myths incongruous. Norinaga's argument here appears to be forced and motivated by his interest in removing the interpretative possibility of Izumo's independent founding. He wanted Japan to have been fully unified from the beginning.

Norinaga also attempts to peripheralize Izumo in other ways. One method involved reinterpreting Susanoo's song. It is the earliest extant *waka* in Japan, and both the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* recorded the song with only a slight variation. Susanoo reportedly sang it when he was building himself a palace in Izumo. The song goes:

In eight-cloud rising  
Izumo an eightfold fence  
to enclose my wife  
an eightfold fence I build,  
and, oh, that eightfold fence! (SHIRANE 2007, 31)

As previously noted, this song came to signify the divine origins of the traditional Japanese song. Many scholars who studied Japanese classics treated it in high regard. For example, Keichū 契沖 (1640–1701) believed its connection to Susanoo gave it extramundane value (NOSCO 1990, 56). Norinaga also believed that ancient Japanese songs “retain and transmit the heart of the Age of the Gods” (MNZ 2: 154). As Susanoo's song was the first of such songs, its prime symbolic importance was obvious.

Norinaga's commentary on the song focuses on dispelling the conventional understanding that the place name, Izumo (“rising cloud”), had already existed by the time Susanoo sang it:

I think that [the expression] *yakumo tatsu* 八雲立つ (“eight clouds rising”) comes from seeing the rise of clouds and reciting *i yakumo tatsu* (“multiple clouds rising”). As for “Izumo,” even the gazetteer [the *Izumo no kuni fudoki*] notes that the place name originates from this song. The song therefore does not recite the place name; it merely [describes] the rising cloud. It is wrong to consider Izumo as the place name and *yakumo tatsu* as an epitaph.

(MNZ 2: 93)

At a glance, it is unclear why this issue even matters. But Norinaga is quite adamant that the place's name, Izumo, did not exist before Susanoo's song. He implores his readers:

In interpreting the meaning of this song, there have been many farfetched theories in the past. There is no need to discuss these, as they all stem from past ignorance. One must not be fooled by such misleading theories.

(MNZ 2: 93)

Norinaga's insistence that Izumo as a place name did not exist before the song is related to his refusal to acknowledge the independent founding of Izumo. According to the *Izumo no kuni fudoki*, the local god Yatsukamizu omizunu is the founder of Izumo. He not only performed the "land pulling" to create the place but also named it Izumo: "The reason why it is called Izumo comes from Yatsukamizu omizunu's statement of 'eight clouds rising.' This is why it is called *yakumo tatsu Izumo*" (*Fudoki*, 130).

Yatsukamizu omizunu also appears in the *Kojiki* with the shortened name Omizunu. But Omizunu in the *Kojiki* is described as a descendant of Susanoo. Since Susanoo chronologically preceded Omizunu (Yatsukamizu omizunu) in the *Kojiki*, Norinaga insists that the place's name, Izumo, did not exist before Susanoo's song. Susanoo had to have named the place to peripheralize Izumo and defend the *Kojiki* against possible charges of incongruence with a contemporaneous ancient text, the *Izumo no kuni fudoki*:

Yatsukamizu omizunu later ordered [the place to be named Izumo] due to this song. This means that the province came to be called [Izumo] through Susanoo's reciting of *yakumo tatsu Izumo*.

(MNZ 9: 411)

Scholars of early Japanese poetry and literature have accepted Norinaga's insistent rendering of *yakumo tatsu Izumo* 八雲立出雲 as "multiple clouds rising, clouds rising." Michael Marra, for example, notes Norinaga's interpretation as an "excellent example of Norinaga's hermeneutics," depicting his exegesis as something driven solely by Norinaga's quest for the "truth" (MARRA 2007, 25–28). However, as I have shown here, Norinaga's interpretation of Susanoo's song was also driven by his goal to peripheralize Izumo and its history by erasing potentially subversive traces of foreign influence and reaffirming the notion of Japan's *ab initio* unity.

### Conclusion

The scholarly interest in the Age of the Gods narratives in early modern Japan generated unprecedented debates surrounding the early history of Japan. Motoori Norinaga is often considered to be the great consummator of *kokugaku*, an early modern school of Japanese philology and philosophy that worked to

steer Japanese scholarship towards research into early Japanese history and culture. Often positioning their work as a critical discourse against traditions imported from China, Norinaga and the other *kokugaku* scholars collectively emphasized the need to rediscover aspects of Japanese culture before the influx of Chinese modes of thought and behavior. Therefore, modern interpreters of *kokugaku* generally treat the idea of “foreign” in *kokugaku* to exclusively mean China.

As I have shown, however, the Korea factor constituted a salient element in how scholars of ancient Japanese texts analyzed the Age of the Gods narratives and the history of ancient Japan. The primary texts in question, most notably the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*, positioned the ancient Korean polities as subdued, tributary polities of the more powerful Japanese state. But some early modern Japanese scholars have used the same materials to overturn the presumed nature of the relationship between Japan and the polities of the Korean Peninsula. By attributing the origins of ancient Japanese culture and customs to Korea, these scholars placed Korea as the birthplace of Japan itself. There is no question that such theories involved speculative readings of the source materials. With that said, Norinaga’s efforts to overturn such interpretations also involved selective reading of the texts that even involved altering the original wording of the *Kojiki*.

Norinaga remains a vibrant presence to this day. His ideas and interpretations continue to shape scholarship on early Japanese language and literature more than two centuries after his death. While many recognize Norinaga’s occasional xenophobia and irrationalism, they continue to see value in his efforts to locate aspects of indigenous Japanese culture vis-à-vis the traditions from China. But as I have shown, Norinaga’s seemingly predetermined beliefs about ancient Japan went beyond his well-known revulsion against the Chinese influence. An essential facet of his work involved eliminating interpretative possibilities that suggested ancient Korean influence through parts of western Japan, which challenged not only the notion of an entirely autogenous civilization but also the idea of inherent unity in the Japanese archipelago.

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- MNZ      *Motoori Norinaga zenshū* 本居宣長全集. Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801). Ed. Ōno Susumu 大野 晋. 23 vols. Chikuma Shobō, 1968–1993.



- NS *Nihon shoki* 日本書記. Trans. and eds. Sakamoto Tarō 坂本太郎 et al. 2 vols. Iwanami Shoten, 1965–1967.
- SHAZ *Shinshū Hirata Atsutane zenshū* 新修平田篤胤全集. Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776–1843). Ed. Hirata Atsutane Zenshū Kankōkai 平田篤胤全集刊行会. 21 vols. Meicho Shuppan, 1976–1981.

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