

The Land of Yomi
—On the Mythical World of the Kojiki—

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INTRODUCTION

After giving birth to the fire deity the goddess Izanami no Mikoto died and was buried in Mt. Hiba. Her husband, Izanaki no Mikoto, was not satisfied, however, and "desiring to see her, went to the Land of Yomi" (*Kojiki*, p. 36).

The characters 黄泉 (meaning literally "underground spring") used to write the word "Yomi" are simply a translation of the word into Chinese. "Yomi" is, however, a Japanese word, used to indicate a mythical land (it is pronounced "Yomo" in its conjugated form), and we should not make the mistake of taking the Chinese characters used to write it too literally.

Most commentaries agree in considering the Land of Yomi to be located under the ground.¹ The general interpretation is that it is a part of a triad of locations, composed of "Takaamanohara," which is in the sky, "Ashihara no Nakatsukuni," which is on earth, and "Yomotsukuni," which is underground.

I have some doubts concerning this interpretation, however, from more than one perspective. To begin with, I am not convinced that Yomi is indeed an underground land, and I am also not sure that "Yomi" should be thought of as fitting, along with Takaamanohara, into a world view that involves a three-layered structure. Stated baldly, I find these interpretations to be in error.

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1. This is the case with a good number of modern commentaries. Specifically, see the version of *Kojiki* in the *Nihon koten zensho* series, Kurano 1974, Saigo 1975, the *Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei*, and the *Nihon shisō taikēi* versions of *Kojiki*.

This essay will deal primarily with the question of the location of the Land of Yomi in its role as a mythical world.

Let us first clarify some basic premises. The Land of Yomi as a mythical world presents problems that should not be considered in the overall context of Japanese mythology, or even in terms of the central chronicles of that mythology, *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. Considerations of Yomi should be limited to the *Kojiki* volume on "The Age of the Gods."

Japanese mythology was systematized from an early age, as can be seen from works such as *Kojiki* or *Nihon shoki*. Each of these works has its own individual structure, and each creates a mythical world of its own. Seen from this context we must agree that the "Land of Yomi" is not really a part of the plan of *Nihon shoki*. If one follows the main text of *Nihon shoki*, one finds that events are recounted like this: Izanami and Izanaki first give birth to the land, then to natural features of it such as oceans, rivers and mountains, then decide to produce children "who can become the rulers of the world." At this they produce deities of the sun and the moon, and then Hiruko and Susanowo. The story immediately goes into the anti-social behavior of Susanowo, ending at the point that the sun goddess conceals herself in the cave Ame no Iwato.

The episode concerning Izanaki's visit to the Land of Yomi can be found nowhere in this version of the story. We must therefore agree that the Land of Yomi has no part in the mythical world the compiler of *Nihon shoki* was attempting to construct.

There are, of course, variant stories in *Nihon shoki* that tell of the visit to Yomi. These are variants 6 and 10, but they are after all variants, and cannot be connected to the world view that rises from the structure of *Nihon shoki*. *Kojiki*, on the other hand, clearly intended to construct a mythical world that would incorporate the Land of Yomi. Seen thus from the perspective of the differences in these two documents, we must come to realize that the

Land of Yomi poses an academic problem only insofar as it is apprehended as a mythical world unique to *Kojiki*.

YOMI AS DEPICTED IN KOJIKI

The Land of Yomi, then, must be understood in the context in which it appears in *Kojiki*. More concretely, this land is described in the episode of *Kojiki* that begins with the words, "Then, wishing to see Izanami no Mikoto once again, he [Izanaki no Mikoto] went to the Land of Yomi" (p.36) and ends with "This was thus called Yomotsu Hirasaka, and it is now the place in the province of Izumo called Ifuyasaka" (p.40). The episode as a whole is the story of Izanaki no Mikoto's visit to the Land of Yomi.

When modern editors assign subdivisions to the text of *Kojiki* they are nearly unanimous in referring to this section as the "visit" to Yomi. Most certainly, Izanaki does go to Yomi. Put in the words he uses there to Izanami no Mikoto, he has come from the "land which we have made" (p. 37), or the land designated as "Ashihara no Nakatsukuni," which is the land given birth to by Izanaki and Izanami after they receive their charge from the council of deities at "Takaamanohara": "Go and make solid that floating land" (p.27). This "Ashihara no Nakatsukuni" is a different land from that of Yomi, where Izanaki first comes to see his dead wife, and from which he finally must flee. And when he flees from the forces of Yomi at Yomotsu Hirasaka and blocks that slope with a large rock, Izanaki has separated the two worlds so that they are no longer linked together.

In short, a world has been constructed here of two mythical worlds which stand in some type of relationship to each other. The coordinate from which we must view this world is that of "Ashihara no Nakatsukuni." The center of this universe is and will always be with Izanaki no Mikoto. The business of Izanaki's world going to the Land of Yomi, then fleeing from that world, serves to locate it within the mythical framework of the universe, and this is its sole purpose.

The question is the same for all such worlds of the

dead in *Kojiki*, be they "Ne no Katasukuni" (see Kōnoshi 1984) or the Land of the Sea, "Watatsumi no Kuni." The description of a trip from "Ashihara no Nakatsukuni" to one of these other lands, and the return from that land, serves to validate the location of "Ashihara no Nakatsukuni" in this world. Put in another way, it gives existence to "Ashihara no Nakatsukuni" in a multi-dimensional, mythical universe.

We must concern ourselves with this overall picture of the universe as it is constructed in *Kojiki*. Indeed, the problem can be approached in reverse: it is impossible to understand the nature of any of the single component parts—including, for example, the land called "Ashihara no Nakatsukuni"—in terms other than their relative relationships with one another. The Land of Yomi comprises one edge of this relativistic universe, and it is on this part that I would like to focus my attention here.

Given this basic premise, then, the questions that must be dealt with are the manner of universe that the Land of Yomi is, and the type of relationship it has with "Ashihara no Nakatsukuni." From this follows another important question, namely, the kind of world view (structurally speaking) that grows from this relationship.

At this stage we must consider the theory that Yomi is really nothing more than a reflection of the so-called hillside burial practices of ancient Japan.

That the tendency to understand the description of Izanaki's trip to the Land of Yomi as reflecting the ancient hillside burial funeral system has been a strong one is testified to by the frequency with which it appears in notes to *Kojiki*. One of the earliest advocates of this interpretation was Tsugita Jun, in his 1924 work *Kojiki shinkō* ("New discussions of *Kojiki*"). Tsugita interpreted the "door" of the hall at which Izanami greets Izanaki as being the stone that would have blocked off the entrance to the tumulus, and the "hall" itself the entranceway into the tumulus. He saw "Yomotsu Hirasaka" as a passageway from the tumulus, and the stone that Izanaki uses to block this

slope as the stone used to seal the tumulus.

In one form or another, this interpretation has become the mainstream view of the episode. Some scholars, such as Kurano Kenji, have held that "the hillside tumulus theory is an important foundation" in understanding the story, but that "it is not the whole thing" (Kurano 1974, p.269), but even allowing for such qualifications, the theory finds itself reflected in a good number of notes to various editions of *Kojiki*.

This is certainly a rational explanation, but it does not seem to do much to explain the structure of the mythical world unique to *Kojiki*, nor does it explain the overall structure of the universe which follows. One cannot help but feel that it represents a reading of *Kojiki* that overlooks the very essence of the work.

This theory has, of course, not been without its criticism. We should not, for example, overlook the criticism of Matsumura Takeo (Matsumura 1955). But Matsumura accepts the theory as being valid up to a point, then remarks, "This, however, is only a partial explanation, and overall this phenomenon is based on a perspective made from the world of the living" (p.398), and goes on to criticize the theory as being overdone. He also gives examples of the world of the dead as it is portrayed in a variety of cultures, and deals with the problem in a more general way, from the perspective of myth studies as a whole: "In any event, this story was at its most primitive level developed independently from any connection to a burial system" (Matsumura 1955, p.401).

With this Matsumura avoids making any approach that will help us see the Land of Yomi as a unique part of the overall view of the mythical world as presented in *Kojiki*, and embraces the tumulus theory as being valid in part.

Even Saigo Nobutsuna, whose *Kojiki chūshaku* is one of the few commentaries to reject this explanation,² does

2. The version of *Kojiki* in the *Nihon koten zensho* series also does not use the tumulus theory, but it does not criticize the theory either.

little better, for he simply substitutes another rationalized explanation for tumulus, holding that the episode "is nothing other than an explanation for the origin of *mogari* [pre-burial rites]" (Saigo 1975, p.175).

What I would like to stress is that any such approach—whether one accepts the tumulus thesis as is, accepts it as being a partial explanation, or substitutes it totally with some other similar explanation—ultimately robs *Kojiki* of its meaning by overlooking the particular world view that is its essence. The "door of the hall" at which Izanami meets Izanaki is above all else a "door" to Izanami's "hall," and this will not change no matter how strongly one argues that it is the stone which blocks the entrance to a tumulus. When one crosses the slope called "Yomotsu Hirasaka" one will find oneself in a world different from this one, the world of Yomi, which controls the deaths of the human beings that live in this world. If Yomi is not thus seen in terms of its relationship to this world, then it has certainly not been understood in its context in *Kojiki*.³

THE LOCATION OF YOMI

So Yomotsukuni, or the Land of Yomi, is that world beyond the Yomotsu Hirasaka. This, at least, is how it is described in *Kojiki*, and the question is whether we should see it as being an underground land, as opposed to the ground level "Ashihara no Nakatsukuni." In my opinion, such interpretations of Yomi do not correctly reflect the world view constructed by *Kojiki*.

It was Motoori Norinaga who firmly established the interpretation of Yomi as being an underground world. In his *Kojikiden* he writes:

If we then consider the words of the ancient prayer...
and the question of Susanowo no Mikoto...it is obvious

3. A step in this direction is made by Ōbayashi Taryō when he says, "The interpretation of [Yomi] as being the reflection of an ancient burial system needs some rethinking. What is important here is a specific view of the universe" (Ōbayashi 1972, p.145).

that we must see this Land of Yomi as being located under the ground (p.238).

Norinaga uses two points here as proof for his theory. The first is the fact that the *norito* ("prayer") for the pacification of the spirit of fire says that a land which is taken to correspond to Yomi is a "lower country," and that the land of Izanaki is an "upper country." The second of these two points concerns Susanowo no Mikoto. Though I omitted a fairly long section from the passage quoted above, which must be supplemented here to some degree, Norinaga interprets the "nakihaha" ("dead mother") of Susanowo's phrase "Nakihaha no kuni, Ne no Katasukuni," as being Izanami no Mikoto. He thus sees "Ne no Katasukuni" as being the same as "Yomotsukuni," and goes on to interpret the word "Ne" (literally, "root") as "something which is underground" (*Kojikiden*, p.303). From this he concludes that Yomotsukuni, the Land of Yomi, is also "underground."

Kurano Kenji (Kurano 1942, pp.99-100) and others accept Norinaga's note as is, and argue that Yomi is an underground world, and we can safely say that this has come to be the standard interpretation offered in notes to *Kojiki*. This interpretation has been further reinforced by considerations of the meaning of the characters used to write "Yomi," which mean "underground spring" (see, for example, Arakawa 1981, pp.117-125).

I do not believe, however, that this is sufficient evidence on which to base an interpretation of Yomi as an underground land. The first objection that can be made encompasses both the words of the *norito* and the meaning of the characters used to write "Yomi," and is that it is not really possible to introduce such matters directly, with no form of intervention, into an interpretation of the world view of *Kojiki*. Above I stressed the fact that the view of Yomi presented in *Kojiki* is unique to that work and should be thought of as separate from works such as *Nihon shoki*. We must above all else investigate the world view of *Kojiki* in terms of *Kojiki* itself.

The words of the norito, then, or the meaning of the characters used to write "Yomi," must be seen as purely secondary, as having meaning only as indirect evidence. And, indeed, even as indirect evidence they present problems, for the words of the norito, for example, tell us only the relative positions of Izanami and Izanaki in relationship to one another. Izanaki is seen as being in an "upper" world, and Izanami in a "lower" one, and we cannot necessarily infer from this that one is above ground and the other below ground.⁴ And in the case of the character used in writing "Yomi," it is quite possible that this should not be taken as meaning "underground" at all, but only that it has no other meaning than indicating a death. Thus, neither of these pieces of evidence can be interpreted as being clearly indicative of underground associations.

It is also necessary to briefly consider the meaning of "Ne" in the expression "Ne no Katasukuni," which is a major factor in understanding the mythical world of *Kojiki*. Here Norinaga uses the term "Nakihaha no kuni" ("Land of the dead mother") to associate "Ne no Katasukuni" with "Yomi," but to do so, in my opinion, is to ignore the world view of *Kojiki*, where these are clearly described as different lands. It seems quite reasonable to assume that they have been given separate names precisely because they are different lands. Yomotsukuni is the land over which Izanami no Mikoto rules as the "Yomotsu Ōkami" ("Grand deity of Yomi"; p. 39), and "Ne no Katasukuni" is "the land where Susanowo no Mikoto lives" (p. 62), or the land which Susanowo rules. They should not be thought of as a single place.

Indeed, even if for the sake of argument we granted that Yomotsukuni and Ne no Katasukuni are in the same line because they are both lands of "dead mothers," then we would still have to come to grips with the meaning of

4. In the Land of the Sea, Ashihara no Nakatsukuni is referred to as the "upper country" (*Kojiki*, p. 103). It would stand to reason that the Land of the Sea would thus be a "lower country," and I would like to note that it is by no means an underground land.

the word "Ne." This can be thought of as representing not an underground land, but rather simply a "distant" land (see Kōnoshi 1984, pp.60-62), and it is therefore not the root of an argument that can lead us to the conclusion that Yomi is an underground land.

For the reasons noted above, then, I believe that it is an error to consider the Land of Yomi as an underground world, because this interpretation does not accurately reflect the world view of *Kojiki*.

In fact, an entirely different approach is necessary if we are to understand the relationship between these two lands which are, in *Kojiki*, connected by Yomotsu Hirasaka.

This essay is not the first to recognize this fact. Matsuoka Shizuo, for example, in his *Nihon kogo daijiten* ("Dictionary of classical Japanese"), says this:

Myths concerning the Land of Yomi do not convey even the slightest feeling of describing an underground country. The narrative gives one the impression that when one crosses Yomotsu Hirasaka from Izumo the motion is on a level plain (entry under "Yomotsukuni").

And Matsumura Takeo says:

As described in the central chronicles, the land of Yomi would appear to be an underground country, but even so, one also has the impression of it being on the same level at and a great distance from Ashihara no Nakatsukuni. The location of Yomotsu Hirasaka makes one think this way, and we must not overlook the description in *Kojiki* of Ōkuninushi. Susanowo no Miko-to is said to have chased him to Yomotsu Hirasaka, then to have called out to him, and this would appear to be a description of a place on the same level as the ground (Matsumura 1958, p.349).

Neither of these statements has been fully accepted because they are obviously impressionistic and not based on any evidence. On the other hand, in the context of *Kojiki*,

at least, I believe that these represent a more correct way of approaching the problem.

And we do not have to rely merely on impressionist criticism. Satō Masahide has recently published a lucidly argued essay in which he focuses his attention on the meaning of the word "sakamoto" ("base of the slope") as it appears in the stories concerning Yomotsu Hirasaka (Satō 1982). The quotation in question is as follows:

When he had arrived at the base of the slope of Yomotsu Hirasaka, [Izanaki no Mikoto] picked three different peaches growing there and used them as weapons, and the attackers all turned back to the slope and fled.⁵

Here the phrase "sakamoto" refers to the foot of the slope. As Satō argues, this slope should be one that goes **down** if we think of the Land of Yomi as being an underground country, but this does not square with the description. If one were to go down from the "base" of Yomotsu Hirasaka, one would be in Ashihara no Nakatsukuni. Satō says:

Izanaki no Mikoto flees downwards from Yomotsu Hirasaka, and when he reaches the foot, he blocks it with a large boulder (Satō 1982, p.76).

Surely this is the way the action must be understood.

I am in full agreement with Satō's well thought out arguments, and think we have to acknowledge the fact that if one goes down from Yomotsu Hirasaka one will reach

5. There is a textual difficulty here that must be dealt with. The phrase rendered as "they all turned back to the slope and fled" is written in the Shinpukujū text with characters that would indicate a reading of "attacked and returned," and it is possible to interpret this as "the peaches attacked and repelled all of the eight thunder deities and the army of Yomi and turned them back" (see Kurano 1974, p.258). I cannot help but feel, however, that this is a somewhat forced interpretation. *Kojikiden* and other sources interpret the passage as "turned and fled." The character 攻 (rendered as "attacked") in the Shinpukujū text closely resembles the character 坂 (rendered as "slope"), and if we speculate from the fact that other texts have 坂 it is not difficult to conclude that the 攻 in the Shinpukujū text is actually a mistake for 坂. (There are many such errors in the Shinpukujū text.)

Ashihara no Nakatsukuni, while if one goes up he will reach the Land of Yomi. It is time we recognized that the theory that Yomi is an underground land is untenable.

This position is supported by indirect evidence already noted by Matsumura, the question of the way that Susanowo no Mikoto calls out to Ōkuninushi from Yomotsu Hirasaka. This must be called indirect evidence because it comes in a story not directly concerned with the Land of Yomi, and therefore should not be used as direct proof in any argument concerning Yomi. The quote is as follows:

Then, when [Susanowo no Mikoto] reached Yomotsu Hirasaka, he gazed about him into the distance, and called out... (p.65).

The question here concerns the phrase, "gazed about him into the distance" (*haroharo ni misakete* 遥望).

The implication in this phrase is that Yomotsu Hirasaka is a place that overlooks Ashihara no Nakatsukuni, and not a place that leads to an underground land. This point can be firmly established if we survey the instances in *Kojiki* in which the character read "misaku" 望 appears. I will list these below:

1. The quoted example.
2. Once, when the Emperor has made an imperial visit to the land of Chikatsu Ōmi, he stood over the plain of Uji and looking out over the plain Kazuno, made this poem... (p.186, reign of emperor Ojin).
3. When he reach the riverbank and was about to board the boat, he looked out over the decorated place... (p.194, reign of Emperor Ojin).
4. From a high tower, the Emperor looked out while Kurohime's boat floated off, and made a poem... (p.206, reign of Emperor Nintoku).
5. From Awaji Island he looked out into the distance and made a poem... (p.207, reign of Emperor Nintoku).

6. When he reached Hanifu Slope he **looked down** and saw that the flames were still burning (p.220, reign of Emperor Richū).
7. Then he climbed to the top of the mountain and **looked down** over the land... (p.240, reign of Emperor Yūryaku).
8. While she was **waiting** for the Emperor, many years had already passed (p.243, reign of Emperor Yūryaku).
9. Then the Emperor **looked down**... (p.248, reign of Emperor Yūryaku).
10. Manda no muraji Komochi (p.265, reign of Emperor Keitai).

Except for numbers 8 and 10 above (and 10 is only a personal name, so I hesitate to use it; only example 8 is an exception in terms of meaning), all of these instances have meanings of looking out over a distance. The word is used when one looks over a wide expanse, and example 6 is a case of looking down from a slope or high place. Seen from this perspective, the first example quoted must be understood as a case of looking down toward Ashihara no Nakatsukuni from Yomotsu Hirasaka.

I believe that this indirect evidence can be used to bolster Satō's argument, but I do have some reservations concerning certain of his other points. Satō considers Yomotsu Hirasaka to be a mountain slope, and thereby believes that the Land of Yomi is a mountain country. To support this theory he uses linguistic arguments, following a theory which postulates a sound change from the word "yama" ("mountain") to "yomi" and on to "yomo" (Ide 1960, pp.47-50). This, I think, moves us away from the central point of the question.

The Land of "Yomi," as established in *Kojiki*, is on the other side of Yomotsu Hirasaka, and has no more meaning than that. It is sufficient to show that the Land of Yomi is

not an underground country, but that it is on the same level as is Ashihara no Nakatsukuni. While I recognize the necessity to pursue the question of the meaning of the word "Yomi" (or "Yomo"), I feel uneasy about any attempt to trace it through postulated vowel changes, especially after arguing that certain theories that have been popular since the medieval period, such as linking it to "yomi" ("to see the night") or "yami" ("darkness") are difficult to prove.⁶ It is best, at this point, to avoid pursuing the question through considerations of the meaning of the word.

Any attempt to generalize the question by tying it to mountains is apt to fail to clarify the essence of the unique mythical world view of *Kojiki*. In my opinion, there are more important points that should be considered when viewing the problem from the perspective of world view.

THE MEANING OF "KUNI"

There are two such points that deserve particular mention. The first of these is the necessity to understand the question in terms of the concept of "kuni" ("land"), and the second is the fact that we must view the problem in light of the world view (structural) that is established through the return to Ashihara no Nakatsukuni.

Let us speak more concretely.

As is well known, *Kojiki* begins with the words, "When the heavens and earth first started, the name of the first deity to appear in Takaamanohara was..." (p.26). The area

6. The "yomi/see the night" theory was originated by Norinaga, but this will not hold up when we judge it from the perspective of modern linguistics, because the "yo" of "Yomi" and the "yo" of "yoru" ("night") were of different families. There is no such difficulty when we think of the "yami/darkness" theory and some scholars have accepted it, but it is postulated on the theory that Yomi is a land of darkness, and thus the same as the "yomi/see the night" theory. But as Satō (1982, p.74) has argued, Izanaki is said to have lit a single torch, which must have been because the hall was dark, and not because the land itself was a land of darkness. I thus find the "yami/darkness" theory difficult to accept.

called "Takaamanohara" was, then, created from the beginning with no limitations. On the other hand, conditions for the creation of the "kuni" were different. The *Kojiki* narrative goes on as follows: "Next, the land was young, and was floating like oil, formless like a jellyfish..." (p.26), which shows the "kuni" as not having yet been formed as an inhabitable world. It was not yet a place that could properly be called a "kuni."

According to Norinaga, "The land was first given birth to by Izanami no Mikoto and Izanaki no Mikoto, and at this stage there is yet nothing there" (*Kojikiden*, p.134). It is referred to as a "kuni" in this opening passage of *Kojiki*, according to Norinaga, because "the name for what it was to become was borrowed here in order to describe the first conditions of the world" (*Kojikiden*, p.134). This is, according to Saigo, "a response to" the world of "kuni" which would eventually be made, and a "prediction of it" (Saigo 1975, p.81).

The world of "kuni" stands in relationship to the world of "ame" ("the heavens," or "the sky") which is the location of Takaamanohara. At the beginning of *Kojiki* the "kuni" has yet to be formed as a world, and as a step in the direction of this formation, deities appear one after another in "Takaamanohara." In other words, the opening passages of *Kojiki*, which describe "Takaamanohara," are told from the perspective of the world of the "kuni," and lead up to the appearance of the deities Izanaki no Mikoto and Izanami no Mikoto, who are the ones that are to definitively create the world of "kuni." The development of "Takaamanohara" is of importance because it is what enables the eventual existence of the "kuni" (see Kōnoshi 1983, especially pp.90-107).

The "kuni" is thus a world that postulates the necessity of a "Takaamanohara" for its own existence, and is created when the deities there order Izanaki and Izanami to "go and form this floating land" (*Kojiki*, p.27). The remainder of the "Age of the Deities" volume in *Kojiki* goes on to relate the steps by which this land was created. The "Age

of the Deities" should be read as a history of the world of "kuni" as it was formed by deities who came from "Taka-amanohara"; in other words, it is an attempt to insure the integrity of the real world by locating it within a mythical world view.

This world of "kuni" is represented by none other than "Ashihara no Nakatsukuni." "Ashihara no Nakatsukuni" is inevitably seen in contrast with "Takaamanohara," and its development is described in terms of impediments and gifts that come from that world. The basis of the mythical world view here is the conflict between the world of "ame" and the world of "kuni."

And "Yomotsukuni," the "Land of Yomi," must be considered as being in the dimension of the "kuni."

There is a variety of worlds of "kuni" standing in opposition to the sky world of Takaamanohara. A list of worlds that should be apprehended as being "kuni" in the sense of mythical world view would include Ashihara no Nakatsukuni, Yomotsukuni, Ne no Katasukuni and Watatsumi no Kuni (the land of the sea). This is made quite clear by the fact that all of these places have names which include the word "kuni."

The Land of Yomi, then, is the world which brings about the deaths of human beings (*Kojiki*, p.39)—when she becomes the Grand Deity of Yomi (Yomotsu Ōkami), Izanami vows to Izanaki, "Each day I will take the lives of 1000 of the human grasses of your land" (p.39). In this way the land of Yomi is formed as a "kuni" in relationship to Ashihara no Nakatsukuni.

Having thus understood Yomi as a "kuni," we must see the question of "kuni" in terms of the return to Ashihara no Nakatsukuni.

Everything in this mythical world revolves around the axis of Ashihara no Nakatsukuni. *Kojiki* relates the birth and subsequent construction of Ashihara no Nakatsukuni, then contains a number of tales, commencing with that of Yomi, about the leaving of Ashihara no Nakatsukuni and the eventual return to it. These lands are thus given signi-

ficance in terms of their relationship with Ashihara no Nakatsukuni. The Land of Yomi has no particular meaning in its own right. As Suzuki Shigetane has noted in his comments on the norito for the Grand Purification:

There is no account of which deities made the Land of Yomi, or how they went about it, so we cannot know these things....Thinking on the matter, it would seem that this land could not have been created separately (Suzuki 1979, p.616).

This seems to me to be a correct observation. The same could also be said for the Land of the Sea.

The very existence of Ashihara no Nakatsukuni as a separate world is expressed through the description of Izanaki's trip to Yomi, and this trip also expresses the value of Ashihara no Nakatsukuni. When Izanaki returns from the Land of Yomi he exclaims, "Indeed, I have returned from an unclean, polluted land" (p.40), and we must recognize that these words also contain an assessment of the value of Ashihara no Nakatsukuni.

So the Land of Yomi, "Ne no Katasukuni," the Land of the Sea—all of these places appear in relationship with Ashihara no Nakatsukuni, and all guarantee the existence of Ashihara no Nakatsukuni as the central point in the world of the "kuni." This is due to the return to Ashihara no Nakatsukuni.

I would like to pay some attention to the blocking off of Yomotsu Hirasaka in these terms as well. This presents a question similar to that involved in the case of the Land of the Sea. In that instance Toyotamabime "blocked the entrance to the sea and returned to the sea" (p.105). Relationships between two lands are by no means carried over for long periods of time. The relationship is closed off, and the only land whose existence is protected by it is that of Ashihara no Nakatsukuni. Such is the world view of *Kojiki*.

I have said that all of the "kuni," including the Land of Yomi, revolve around the axis of Ashihara no Nakatsukuni. One reason that this can be said is the fact that within the

structure of the world here, Ashihara no Nakatsukuni is a "nakatsukuni," or a "central land." The world of "ame" is equivalent to "Takaamanohara," and opposed to this the world of "kuni" is one in which Ashihara no Nakatsukuni must become the center; this is why it is called a "nakatsukuni." It is the center of the world; the Land of Yomi and others are on its edges.

Here we have a meaning of "Ashihara" ("reed plains") which serves as a guarantee of the fertility of rice (see Kōnoshi 1983, pp.121). The fact that this land, called Ashihara no Nakatsukuni, has value is what gives rise to this structure and world view.

Beyond doubt this Ashihara no Nakatsukuni is a problem to Takaamanohara. As the center of the world of "kuni" it is a world that must be ruled over by the descendants of the sky world, which is important when it is seen as a land which has links to the real world.

Seeing the Land of Yomi in its relativistic position, as one part of the whole of the world view constructed here, will enable us to understand the question of Yomi properly for the first time.

And if we view the Land of Yomi in its proper *Kajiki* context, it is evident that there is no support for the theory that postulates a three-tiered division of the world based on "Takaamanohara," "Ashihara no Nakatsukuni" and "Yomotsukuni."

The crumbling of this theory can be seen first when it becomes clear that the Land of Yomi cannot be taken as an underground world. An even more fundamental reason, however, is that, as I have noted above, it is not correct to see "Takaamanohara" as having been created in the same way as were Ashihara no Nakatsukuni or Yomotsukuni. The contrast between Takaamanohara and Ashihara no Nakatsukuni is one between the sky and the land, between "ame" and "kuni," and it is on an entirely different dimension than that of the conflict between Ashihara no Nakatsukuni and Yomi, which are both "kuni."

To think of these places as all having taken form as

one is simply not correct (see Kōnoshi 1983, pp.111-114). The theory that Takaamanohara is an "upper" world, and Yomi is a "lower" one, with Ashihara no Nakatsukuni in the "middle" might sound correct, but if we look at it in the context of other "upper, middle, lower" classifications in Japanese mythology, we can see that the very principles of this view of the world will not permit its application in this case.

Other instances of this type of division are used in cases such as "upper branches, middle branches, lower branches," or "upper rapids, middle rapids, lower rapids," and it should be unnecessary to point out that the object of division in these cases is inevitably a single whole. This would mean that a single "kuni" should be classified in the divisions of "upper land, middle land, lower land." To make a division which includes an area such as Takaamanohara, which has entirely different properties from the "middle land" is, ultimately, a meaningless endeavor.⁷

Furthermore, it is also clear that any division that fails to take into account other lands which also exist in the dimension of "kuni" and stand in some relationship with Ashihara no Nakatsukuni, such as "Ne no Katasukuni" or the Land of the Sea, is untenable. I would like to repeat once again my conviction that we must approach the world view of *Kojiki* from a position separate from that of the three layer theory.

Thus it is important to view the question of the Land of Yomi in terms of the overall mythical world view of *Kojiki*. I believe that this article has laid the foundation for such an approach.

7. According to Saigo, "The Land of Yomi and the Land of Ne are two different manifestations of the same underground world" (1972, p.128); he attempts to subsume "Ne no Katasukuni" in this category also. It is unnecessary to note that Yomotsukuni and Ne no Katasukuni are seen by some as the same place. I have touched in this essay on some of the reasons that this interpretation is forced and should be abandoned, and it must be said that it is the source of the "three level" world view theory held by many scholars.

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