
This volume is a cultural and historical analysis of the religio-philosophical policies of Shintō in the context of Japanese and East Asian modernism. The five chapters demonstrate the transformation and development of the mystical narratives of Ōkuninushi (the Great Lord of the Land) and Amaterasu (the Sun Goddess). These gods of the Izumo and Ise Shrines were usually depicted in the texts of the Divine Ages, such as the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters) and *Nihon shoki* (The Chronicles of Japan), which, from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, served as the ideological foundation of the new emperor-centered nation of the Meiji government. How did they interact with Japanese culture and thought? How did regional philosophies geopolitically affect the origin of modern Japan and imperial authority? How did Shintō shrines differentiate themselves from other religious traditions of Japan? What was the meaning of the visible and invisible worlds in the era of “nativism-as-nationalism”? In this volume, Yujiang Zhong explores the political adoption—Buddhism, Confucianism, Western science, and Christianity—of Japanese native deities that are in connection with the ancestors of the emperor. He argues not only that the resulting history of Shintō “provides a historical perspective beyond the delimited space of the Japanese archipelago” (p. 4), but also that the rival constructions of Shintō constituted Japan’s engagement with competing regimes of knowledge in transregional circulation during their colonial expansion.

In Chapter 1, the author explores the tradition of Ōkuninushi, a creator god who is first found in the narratives of the Japanese state of the eighth century, and how this deity shifted during the period when the Neo-Confucian or Confucian-Shintō synthesizers had social voice and influenced the formation of the premodern Japanese nation-state (1653–1667). The personal encounter of Kurosawa Sekisai (1612–1678) with a senior priest of the Izumo Shrine is seen as the beginning of a process by which “a Buddhist-informed ritual institution [was transformed] into a self-identified Shinto shrine” (p. 18). The main deity enshrined at the sanctuary of the Izumo Shrine was replaced by Susanoo, a god defined as the local manifestation of the Buddha to Ōkuninushi and thus portrayed as the Floating Mountain for the realization of Buddha’s will. The shrine’s “Buddhification” had formerly been tied to regional power and the struggles of warriors during the Warring States (1467–1600). The term hongan, a Buddhist following the Buddha’s Original Vow, was applied to the leader of the Izumo Shrine under warlord Amago Tsunehisa (1458–1541). However, the introduction of Catholic teachings and European astronomical knowledge
began to weaken Buddhism during the time when Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) was in power.

While the “One and Only Shinto (Yuitsu Shintō)” ideology of Yushida Kane-tomo (1435–1511) adopted Daoist or Neo-Confucian themes of yin-yang and substance-function, the “Principle-Mind Shinto (Ritōshinchī Shintō)” was another Neo-Confucian-Shintō combinatory theory developed by Hayashi Razan (1583–1657). Regarding the existence of a pre-Buddhist Shintō, Zhong presumes that Razan tried “to elevate Shinto to a doctrine not only independent of but superior to Buddhism” (p. 30). Izumo was then changed to a Shintō shrine and Ōkuninushi enshrined as the deity. The anti-Buddhist Confucian-Shintō ideology of Lord Matsudaira Naomasa (1601–1666) was supported by the financial sponsorship for the renovation and maintenance of the twenty-two shrines by the Tokugawa bakufu and the imperial court. The shrine (re)building (miya daiku) project was carried on by the efforts of Sakusa of the Kitajima house and Nagase of the Senge house in 1661.

Furthermore, the author maintains that the work of Yamazaki Ansai (1619–1682) on self-transformation into a Shintō shrine cannot be ignored as impetus for Izumo Shrine to be presented as superior to the Ise Shrine. In this regard, the architectures and objects of Buddhism were removed and the statue of Dainichi Nyorai (Mahāvairocana Buddha) was transferred to Shōrinji, a subsidiary temple of the Izumo Shrine. Thus, the resurrection of the Great Lord of the Land as a Shintō kami of the Izumo Shrine is demonstrated by the claim of “revival” in which Buddhist artifacts—the bell, the bell tower, the hall for the goma fire ritual, pagoda, and some Buddhist statues—were destroyed or removed in order to restore the god Ōkuninushi, who created the land and nurtured human life.

Chapter 2 explores the narratives of proselytization by Izumo Shrine, which affected “the rise of Ōkuninushi to nationwide popularity as a Shinto god of creation, blessing, and good fortune” (p. 8). The motivation for such preaching was likely the loss of economic and administrative power, even though Zhong does not provide clear evidence for this. The idea of kannazuki (“month without the Gods”) was the key theme of popular preaching from Izumo between 1600–1871. The teaching is interpreted as “there are no gods in the tenth month because they all go to the Izumo province” (p. 49). The story was connected with the position of Ōkuninushi, suggesting that all of the gods meet at Izumo Shrine in the tenth month for a grand divine assembly, where they work with the creation god (Ōkuninushi) to make knot-tying (en-musubi) decisions about all prospective marriages. Earlier combination with the deity Daikoku, one of the Seven Fortune Gods (shichi fukujin), increased the association of Ōkuninushi with the concept of good fortune.
However, Izumo Shrine endured significant financial hardship during the respective rules of Mori Terumoto (1553–1625), Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), and Matsudaira Naomasa (1601–1666). During this last period, Kitajima Hirotaka (1630s–1640s) introduced a new theory: “Because the winter solstice, when yin and yang start to interact again, falls in the eleventh month, the tenth month was considered the concluding and culminating moment of the year-long cycle of the life-generating yin-yang dynamic” (p. 55). With this new theory, the Kitajima house challenged the Senge house and their syncretic rituals, which were performed by Buddhist priests.

For Kurosawa Sekisai (1622–1671), domain scholar and disciple of Razan, the tenth month was predicted as yin, which meant “below,” while yang corresponds to “above,” Kami, or the god(s). The tenth month without yang was, therefore, seen as the Month without the Gods (Kami). Kitajima Sakusa claimed that the gods-departure ritual (Kamiage Jinji, the major ritual in the tenth month) confirms the existence of an annual meeting of all the gods across the archipelago at Izumo Shrine. In this regard, this chapter introduces the influence of the so-called oshi (respected teacher) who “was a merchant but received authorization from the Izumo Shrine as its franchised preacher” (p. 60). Tanaka Kazuma (1797–1862) was represented as one such oshi preachers in the diary Kusamakura Sansei Ki, while Sasa Seishō, another lay-preacher, redefined the role of Ōkuninushi from a god with a past to a god ruling at the top of the Shinto pantheon. Furthermore, his outreach exchanged the position of Ōkuninushi with Amaterasu, suggesting that the emperor ruled the visible world of humans but Ōkuninushi looked after the invisible world of the gods. Oshi gradually brought various regional images of deities to the Izumo Shrine, such as Daikokuten, Ebisu, Kotoshiroujushi, the Dragon-Snake God ( Ryūjajin ), and Kinoene, the Mouse God. These multiple modes of representation, in terms of religious pluralism, encouraged the basic belief of Ōkuninushi to grow in scope, making the deity not only the shrine god of creation and blessing, but also a god of fortune and protection.

Chapter 3, in a global historical context, analyses the Nativists’ reconstruction of the Shinto discourse against the knowledge of Western astronomy and the colonial expansion of Russia. How did scholars of nativism (kugakui, National Learning) promote Ōkuninushi to the pinnacle of a Shinto pantheon over the respective knowledge of Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism, Catholicism, and science? Zhong argues that the Nativist Shinto discourse that developed between 1792–1846 was “intrinsically connected to transregional flows of knowledge between Japan, China, and Europe transmitted by Catholic missionaries and Dutch and Chinese traders, as well as to European colonization in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (p. 89). Motoori Norinaga
(1730–1801) and Hattori Nakatsune (1757–1824) began to reconstruct the process of Shintō discourses, especially with the issue of death and the afterlife as well as the astronomical knowledge of the earth, sun, and moon. They reinterpreted the idea of kami to a metaphorical and generative principle, drawing especially on the name of the twin gods, Takami-musubi no kami and Kami-musubi no kami. The concept of kami was elevated to an autonomous agent responsible for the origin and operation of the natural and cultural worlds, which is against the teachings of Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism.

The non-Japanese astronomy was categorized as the knowledge of “visual things” created through observation and calculation. Yomi (the land of darkness) was associated with the moon, while heaven was conflated with the sun where Amaterasu is located. “Dutch Learning,” the arrival of Russians, and Catholic doctrine were the special concern of Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843), who taught that Ōkuninushi was superior to the Christian God, who was like the Deva-king Brahma (bonten) and king Enma. For Atsutane, Ōkuninushi presided at the Kitsuki Shrine and ruled on the invisible affairs of the kami. The shrines are imagined to link the world of the kami with the visible world of humans. Thus, human souls are imagined not to go to the yomi world of death, but rather to the invisible world of the Shintō pantheon to receive the judgement of Ōkuninushi. Although Iwamasa Sanehiko (1789–1856), the disciple of Senge Toshizane, disagreed with this idea afterward, he supported the idea that not only the elevation of souls to the status of kami secures a life “that could attain great divine accomplishment” (p. 125), but also that the popular fortune god (Ōkuninushi) gained a powerful institution and status as the savior of Japan.

Chapter 4 elucidates the confrontation between Ise and Izumo Shrines from the last four decades of the Tokugawa period (1600–1867) through the first eight years of the Meiji era (1869–1911). While these shrines represented two different forms of Shintō authority, Shintō itself was transformed at this time from a learning (gaku) to a doctrine (kyō). The early Meiji leadership, under the ideological momentum called Restoration Shintō (fukkō shintō), was able to announce a restored imperial polity founded on the doctrinal teaching of the kami. However, in his work New Thesis, Aizawa Seishisai (1782–1863), who was a nationalist thinker of the Mito School, promoted Amaterasu to the status of “heavenly ancestor” (tenso), utilizing the Confucian notion of the mandate of heaven, as well as rearranging the kami pantheon around Amaterasu. This new pattern was carried on by Ōkuni Takamasa (1792–1871), who promoted Japanese nativism via the notion of Shintō supremacy and, in the process, elevated Amaterasu to not only a divine ancestor but also the creator of the world. The role of the emperor was redefined as the “Supreme Lord of all Nations.
(sekai bankoku no sōō).” For Ōkuni, the invisible world ruled over the visible world, but the invisible world was imagined as multiple worlds, including the sun, the earth, and the moon.

On the other hand, Mutobe Yoshika (1806–1863), a Shintō priest in Kyoto, contributed the notion of tutelary gods (ubusuna no kami) with which the individual was unified under the command of the Izumo god Ōkuninushi. The ubusuna no kami were described as protecting the local community from the Buddhist gods that were imagined as having infiltrated many Shintō shrines and caused misfortune for the local people. Nevertheless, the thesis of the Unity of Ritual and Rule (saisei itchi) became the basis of the restored polity via the re-establishment of the Department of Divinity (jingikan). All Shintō shrines were organized into a nationalized ritual system with Ise Shrine at the top. Izumo Shrine received the rank of a large state shrine. Furthermore, Ono Jusshin (1824–1910), a Confucian scholar responsible for investigating foreign doctrine, submitted a proposal calling for the establishment of a “national doctrine” (kokkyō) against the sense of threat from Christianity. Ono’s The Essence of the Divine Doctrine (Shinkyō yōshi) was evaluated from the perspective that Amaterasu (the heavenly ancestor) was the supreme god of the Shintō pantheon and that “the virtuous power of the kami as a divine collectivity is condensed in the authority of Amaterasu” (p. 143). By that time, the government’s Department of Divinity had been reconfigured into the Ministry of Doctrine (kyōbusō). A divine hall for Amaterasu was erected at the center of the imperial palace and all state policies were decided in front of the hall.

When the Ministry of Doctrine issued regulations for establishing institutes nationwide, the Daikyōin Institute was established by Buddhists in Tokyo for the study of politics and customs of all countries from various perspectives, including Shintō, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Western knowledge. When the Meiji government confronted the threat posed to imperial authority by this Buddhist intervention, the Ministry of Doctrine was closed. But for Shintō, this episode served as a motivation to move from being a doctrine to a religion (kyō). In this regard, the popular propagation of the government had to be reconsidered in terms of state versus religion, private versus public, and knowledge versus belief. Jōdō Shinshū priest Shimaji Mokurai (1838–1911), in his Critique of the Three Standards of Instruction, proposed a Shintō without kami as a non-religion. This Shintō was defined as a set of rituals directed to the imperial ancestors. Shimaji also developed another set of private religious Shintō theories for the kami “in the context of the emerging discourse of Civilization and Enlightenment that permeated the whole county” (p. 157). Thus, Zhong maintains that the social innovation of the “separation of religion and governance” was promoted during the 1825–1875 period in the conceptual and institutional
context of religion, governance, popular propagation, divine imperial authority, and debates on the nature of the kami.

The last chapter focuses on the competition between the Izumo and Ise Shrines over the official recognition of the Meiji government and its outcome.

Contending from 1875 that Ōkuninushi as the god of creation and lord of the Shinto divinity should be enshrined together with the three creation gods and Amaterasu at the apex of the Shinto pantheon, the Izumo head priest Senge Takatomi mobilized the majority of the priesthood in direct confrontation with Tanaka Yoritsune, the unrelenting head priest of the Ise Shrine who responded by arguing that Ōkuninushi posed an ideological challenge to the imperial house.

The government then recategorised the Ōkuninushi confraternity as Sect Shintō, a private religious belief which was differentiated from the nationalized shrine ritual system directed by Amaterasu (Shrine Shintō). Senge Takatomi (1845–1918) opposed the elevation of Izumo Shrine above the rank of National Shrine (kansha). Instead, Ōkuninushi was recognised and enshrined as part of the three gods of colonization in Hokkaido, Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria. Among Ōkunitama, Ōnamuchi, and Sukunabikona, the first two deities “denote different divine feats of Ōkuninushi, first as ruler of the world and second as its creator” (p. 169). At the same time, Ise Shrine, or Ise Jingū, had an ongoing internal conflict between the Inner Shrine of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu and the Outer Shrine of the food god Toyouke. In this case, Motoda Naoki (1860s), the head priest of the Outer Shrine, proposed the prioritization of Amaterasu over Toyouke.

Eventually, by the effort of Urata Chomin (1870s), an active priest of the Ise Shrine, three halls for worshipping a representative trio of kami (Amaterasu, the imperial ancestral spirits, and the myriad gods) were established within the palace. However, even though the “Imperial Constitution claimed the unbroken imperial genealogy to be the foundation of the state, ... this divine authority was promoted as a secular, public authority of a modern sovereign” (p. 199). Zhong further explores the social status of the vanquished god Ōkuninushi in post-Meiji history through two case studies. The origin of the Izumo kami was connected with the Korean peninsula in order for the annexation of Korea to be perceived as a family reunion. As part of postwar political struggles to prevent the return of Japan to the emperor-centered authoritarian state, the Izumo kami was also “reinterpreted as the origin of the Japanese nation alternative to the imperial house” (p. 15). Thus, The Origin of Modern Shinto in Japan does not
just draw a picture of Japanese history from a military and political viewpoint; rather, it encourages readers to reconsider the intellectual knowledge of complex Shintō traditions as transmitted before 1945. Despite the notable absence of medieval imperial mythologies, this volume contains a collection of insightful materials for those scholars, students, and practitioners who are in Japanese studies, or the fields of history, philosophy, ethnology, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, and religious studies.

David W. Kim  
Australian National University, Canberra, Australia and Kookmin University, Seoul, South Korea  
david.kim@anu.edu.au