Mythology in 21st Century Japan: A Study of Ame no Uzume no Mikoto

THESIS

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Abstract

Japan’s eighth-century mythic texts, the *Kojiki* (712 CE) and the *Nihon shoki* (720 CE), share enough with other world myth systems and warrant their discussion in a broader theoretical context. Japanese myth, which cannot be limited to its religious, political, literary, or any other single intellectual or academic dimension, requires an interdisciplinary approach. Also, the significance of Japanese myth neither exists in the hypothetical mythic past nor is it restricted to the eighth century contexts of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. Its meaning extends from the past to the present in patterns of both continuity and change. People continue to invent, maintain, or deny Japanese myth’s potential significances and perpetuate its authority as a form of discourse.

Through analysis of recent scholarship on the myths of the goddess Ame no Uzume no Mikoto, as well as a detailed look at the eighth-century mythic texts, this thesis seeks to describe a microcosm of mythology in 21st century Japan that is unique and yet representative of modern myth scholarship. We find strong themes of resistance to Japan’s wartime nationalism, sometimes contrasted with efforts to use myth in constructing a new Japanese identity – one that is either unique or situated it in its global context. These myths are especially associated with Japanese traditions and contain thematic elements that allow for speculation about notions of spirituality, sexuality, and gender. Now, as in most of history, the myths are an authoritative base from which scholars attempt to make statements about Japan historically and in the present.
Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude towards my Japanese acquaintances and friends who, through professional knowledge or personal interest, contributed to my early research. Personal meetings with clergy at Tsubaki Grand Shrine and faculty at Kogakkan University were particularly stimulating, and I feel especially indebted to my former colleagues and students at Yokkaichi Maryknoll School who were a major source of inspiration and feedback as I developed my research interests and began this process.

I could have done nothing without the generous support of The Ohio State University and the fellowships that allowed me to study full time. I also sincerely appreciate the patience and flexibility of my advisory committee during the long process of devising an interdisciplinary thesis amidst my many other responsibilities. Naomi Fukumori’s expert instruction and personal attention allowed me to engage with the ancient texts while her enthusiasm drew me into the world of classical Japan. Sarah Iles Johnston encouraged me to believe that relevant discussion about myth can be had across cultures. Finally, when I had questions, Melissa Anne-Marie Curley always gave me more questions, and questions are often the most valuable thing to an aspiring scholar.

I am indebted to my family too, for the many sacrifices and discomforts they endured to allow me to pursue this research.

Thank you.
Vita

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# Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgments .................................................................................................. iii

Vita .............................................................................................................................. iv

List of Tables ............................................................................................................. vii

List of Figures .......................................................................................................... viii

Chapter 1: Introduction .............................................................................................. 1

The Argument ............................................................................................................ 3

Why This Topic? A Limited Discussion Situated in Larger Whole ......................... 4

Methods and Chapter Outline. .................................................................................. 7

My Contribution ........................................................................................................ 9

Chapter 2: Selected Mythological Theories ................................................................. 11

Organizing Approaches to Myth ............................................................................. 12

Myth and Truth ......................................................................................................... 14

Marginalization, Mythologization, and Demythologization ..................................... 17

Myth and Comparison .............................................................................................. 19

Summary, Myth as Ideology ..................................................................................... 22

Chapter 3: Myth in the Japanese Context ................................................................. 24

The “Gods” of Japanese Myth .................................................................................. 26

Mythic Texts: The Kojiki and Nihon Shoki ........................................................... 27
List of Tables

Table 1: Honko's 10 explanations of myth ................................................................. 12
Table 2: Various orthographies of Ame no Uzume no Mikoto .................................. 56
Table 3: Zeami's Etymology of Sarugaku................................................................. 79
List of Figures

Figure 1: Lincoln's “myth cube” .......................................................... 16
Figure 2: Periodizations of Japanese History ........................................ 33
Figure 3: Empress Jingū in Korea. Woodblock by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, 1880 .......... 40
Figure 4: Empress Jingū on the one-yen bill, 1881 ........................................ 40
Chapter 1: Introduction

With regards to Japanese myth, the second decade of the 21st century is an eventful time. Already in this decade Japan has experienced three significant anniversaries pertaining to its mythic tradition. First in 2012, Japan’s oldest mythic text, the *Kojiki*, celebrated the 1300th anniversary of its compilation, an event marked by renewed interest in its narrative contents and commentaries. The following year, the completion of the 62nd *Shikinen Sengū*,¹ the regular 20-year renovation of Ise Shrine, drew resources of lumber, stone and labor from all over the country and attracted the attention of the Japanese people to a custom that is said to date back to the year 690². Also, more than 70 years, close to the average Japanese lifespan, now stand between the present and the Second World War. There are fewer and fewer people alive who remember the war firsthand, and for some the association between Japanese myth and the discourse of the Japanese Empire’s wartime nationalism may be weakening.

Looking towards the future, Japan’s other great mythic record, the *Nihon shoki*³ will also pass the 1300-year milestone in 2020, the same year that Japan is slated to

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¹ This thesis uses modified Hepburn style for Romanization of Japanese words. Long vowels are indicated with a macron and two consecutive vowels are written individually when a word or kanji border exists between them. I preserve other authors’ transliteration styles when I quote them directly.
² All dates are CE unless otherwise noted.
³ To make longer Japanese words more easily readable to non-Japanese speakers, I tend to transliterate them broken into smaller units. Therefore, I Romanize this title as two words: *Nihon*, “Japan” and *SThoki*, “chronicle.” However, many others refer to the text as the *NihonSThoki*, a convention I preserve in quotation.
provide the arena for the Olympic Games. This will likely generate another wave of interest in Japan’s history and traditions, including myth, as the island nation gets ready to welcome guests from around the world. In such a context, the contemporary position of Japanese myth warrants investigation, but it is far from a clear-cut topic. Both “Japanese” and “myth” stand to be problematized: what is myth after all, and how much does Japanese myth really represent Japan?

We should first acknowledge just how complicated a term “myth” is. Myth is a genre (though even a genre of what, it is hard to say for sure). Like any other genre, it is “a class of like objects or ideas having several subordinate classes or species… an umbrella concept that allows many disparate, and often related, concepts to be conveniently divided and subdivided.”4 It is nebulous and expansive, and therefore influential theories of myth have been advanced by scholars in the fields of literature, language, history, anthropology, sociology, psychology and religious studies, among others, but little interdisciplinary consensus exists. What seems to be myth to one cultural unit or academic discipline may be considered something else – history, science, revealed truth – by another. Even if we limit our definition to something like traditional, fictional narrative, groups may lack a distinction between myth, legend, folktale and so forth. This differentiation between narrative and folk genres is “necessarily relative, hazy, and variable.”5 Being that there is no easy definition of myth, we cannot be certain that myth is a universally applicable category for examining various cultural products from across the globe; the concept of myth may be relevant only in certain contexts. Likewise, we may try to avoid a universal definition of myth, preferring to define it only within a specific context, but then that definition and significance does not easily extend outside of those limitations; i.e. we may be able to say something about the myths of a certain people, but our conclusions may only be relevant to what we at the outset defined as the object of study.

So far we have associated Japanese myth with three things: the content of the texts \textit{Kojiki} and \textit{Nihon shoki}, the practices and institutions of Shinto religion, and the imperial rhetoric of the Japanese nation, specifically during World War II. These are all meaningful associations, and to a greater or lesser extent, they will factor into the investigation that follows, but they do not encompass all the areas onto which Japanese myth overlaps. Japanese myth can be associated with a great many things, but to what extent are those associations genuinely informative or spurious?

\textbf{The Argument}

This thesis will promote several points. First, I propose that Japanese myth, defined loosely as the narratives in the \textit{Kojiki} and the \textit{Nihon shoki}, has enough in common with other world myth systems to warrant a discussion of Japanese myth in a broader context. Japanese myth is a viable subject for illumination by scholarship of myth in general, and is suitable for comparison with similar stories from different cultures and regions. Second, I hold that Japanese myth has multiple levels of significance, and a comprehensive investigation of Japanese myth cannot be limited to the religious, the political, the literary or any other single intellectual domain or academic discipline. While far from exhaustive, this thesis will be an interdisciplinary synthesis of several schools of thought. Finally, the significance of Japanese myth neither exists only in the past nor extends unchanged from the past to the present. Like any other tradition, it maintains certain aspects as it grow and adapts, representing patterns of both continuity and change. How scholars continue to invent, maintain, or deny myth’s various potential significances is relevant in and of itself and continues to perpetuate the authority of Japanese myth as a form of discourse.

\footnote{Ineoka Koji et al. “Shinmei jiten.” \textit{Bessatu kokubungaku}, No. 16, \textit{Nihon shinwa hikkei. Gakutōsha}, 1982, pp. 173. The \textit{Shinmei jiten} is a “God Name Encyclopedia” which lists six types of ancient sources: \textit{Kojiki}, \textit{Nihonshoki}, \textit{Kogoshū}, \textit{Sendai kuji hongi}, and the various \textit{Fiūdōki} (regional gazetteers) and \textit{Norito} (prayers). \textit{Kojiki} and \textit{Nihon SThoki} are by far the most commonly cited and influential accounts of Japanese myth.}
These three propositions then represent three themes of this thesis: the status of Japanese myth in the worldwide genre of myth, the cultural significance of Japanese myth within Japan, and the continuing process of Japanese mythologizing. However, to examine these three themes in the entire body of Japanese myth would represent a project of much larger scale. Therefore, we will explore how these are evident in the myths and recent myth scholarship focusing on a single figure, the goddess Ame no Uzume no Mikoto (hereafter Ame no Uzume). It is not the position of this thesis to argue that Ame no Uzume is the key to understanding all Japanese myth. However, as a fourth goal of this thesis, I will argue that the variety and details of Ame no Uzume’s myths represent one very useful microcosm in which to examine and reveal some possibilities of Japanese myth. The further reasons for selecting her will be explained in greater detail in the next section.

Why This Topic? A Limited Discussion Situated in Larger Whole

I endeavor to present a critical view of the ideology of myth study, and therefore my own ideological motivations as a scholar of myth are now suspect. We are not able to overcome the limitations of our perspective, but perhaps by acknowledging how we are situated in relation to what we study with as much honesty and transparency as possible, we may produce scholarship that is fair and useful to others by also providing a clear understanding of our perspective and orientation.

Early in my undergraduate education I made the dramatic jump from Greco-Roman classics to Japanese and East Asian studies. The two disciplines of classical mythology and Japanese would only be united ten years later while teaching in Japan at a Catholic high school for girls. I became intrigued by how the school consciously and frequently used the Catholic figure of Mary as an ideal and model for the character development of its female students, and I took it upon myself to find out what sort of

comparable female figures exist in the Japanese religious tradition. That investigation rested on the tentative presupposition that such comparative study is relevant, but the arguments I found Japanese scholars to be making and the connections they drew between myth and contemporary society resonated with my own empirical experience of Japan. The depth and volume of the scholarship I encountered in Japanese and its underrepresentation in the English language, the increasing challenges of approaching the classical Japanese language in which the mythical texts were written, as well as my conviction that this investigation was significant were the primary motivations for the course of study that ultimately culminated in this thesis.

Originally interested in how myth reflects cultural ideas of gender roles and social structures, a multi-disciplinary study of myth revealed how myth is used to either appeal to or reject authority on many levels. After exploring myth in a broader sense, the vastness of the field of mythology in turn forced me to narrow the focus back to just one goddess in particular and mainly to scholarship published in the 21st century. It is important to note that Japanese myth scholarship is an ongoing process, but it may be divided into several significant eras. So far, the 21st century is certainly part of a larger postwar period of scholarship. And though the focus of this thesis will be the most recent trends in mythology, earlier contributions will necessarily figure into the analysis, particularly when considering the work of mature scholars who have been active in both the 20th and 21st centuries. Likewise, Ame no Uzume also exists in a narrative context, interacts with other characters, and is influenced by events of greater scale than those in which she participates directly. I endeavor to give this context due acknowledgement while restraining the discussion to a manageable size.

Ame no Uzume was selected as the subject of examination for two main reasons: the content of her myths themselves, and the variety of ways in which her myths are treated by contemporary scholars. Ame no Uzume appears in only three stories, a relatively small number. These myths are sometimes pivotal and at others inconsequential; they contain themes in common with other world myths but are rich in
unique detail; they hint at connection to other aspects of Japanese culture, but sometimes defy clear explanation.

If we take for granted the political motivations for the writing of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*, but allow that the myths may also contain some details not directly related to legitimatizing the Imperial Family, Ame no Uzume’s myths represent a balance of these two orientations. In many ways they are clearly linked to establishing a cosmic order that supports imperial rule, but they also have aspects that are not necessary for such a task, and cannot so easily be connected to imperial ideology. It is these details that fluctuate between textual versions of her stories and are treated with great variation in modern scholarship. It is not my intention to excuse all of Japanese myth from the label of imperial propaganda; we should always be wary of how political ideology is present in the narratives of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. However, without denying this political dimension, it is the object of this thesis to highlight what other types of messages these stories may also contain.

With regards to scholarship about Ame no Uzume, it is sometimes deeply devoted but it is also often cursory, disinterested, or bowdlerized. Scholars who address her seriously do so from many directions: literary, religious, linguistic, psychoanalytic and in the interest of gender studies. They seem to have a variety of motivations for taking up her research, but even those who disregard her also have their ideological motivations for doing so.

To address the significance of female figures in Japanese myth, Ame no Uzume was selected from among several worthwhile candidates. The supreme deity of the Japanese pantheon, Amaterasu Ōmikami has garnered a lot of attention for her political implications as the imperial ancestor. Recently, scholars have argued that myths about her were strengthened, emphasized or completely invented. Also, comparative mythology suggests that stories of her lineage crossed to Japan from the Korean

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8 Saijō Tsutomu, “Kōso Amaterasu Ōmikami no seisei” *Nihon joseishi ronshū 5: Josei to shūkyō*. Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1997, pp. 3-19
Peninsula\textsuperscript{10}. In addition, the figure of Izanami no Mikoto, the first female deity and one of the agents in the creation of the world, has stimulated a lot of thought in recent decades and creates a significant context for the presentation of gender in myth that will be addressed in Chapter 6. In selecting Ame no Uzume I have passed over these arguably more potent figures, but it is also Ame no Uzume who is often overlooked in favor of more major players, especially in scholarship outside of Japan. Therefore, it is also in an effort to make the Japanese language scholarship about Ame no Uzume available to a wider audience that she was selected here.

As a final disclaimer, I must reveal a very personal connection to the goddess. In 2007 I took my wedding vows at Tsubaki Ōkami Yashiro Betsugū Tsubaki Kishi Jinja, a shrine dedicated to Ame no Uzume, though I admit that I knew little about her at the time. I cannot claim to be impartial with regards to my belief that Ame no Uzume has some significance in modern Japan, however I have strived to the best of my ability towards impartiality in my investigation of what that significance may be.

**Methods and Chapter Outline.**

The three themes of this thesis -- mythological study in general, the nature of myth in the Japanese context, and modern approaches to the significance of myth -- are represented by slightly different methods. They can be thought of as representing three areas of research: theoretical study, investigation of primary sources and their scholarly history, and critical qualitative analysis of recent secondary-source scholarship.

Mythological theory will be addressed in detail in the following chapter, but some issues bear mentioning with regards to the methodology of the theoretical study of myth.

\textsuperscript{10} The import or diffusion of certain myths from Korea to Japan is a common topic in postwar mythology. Some scholars from diverse backgrounds and with various interpretations who have made extensive use of this theory are:
The first is that there is little consensus about myth. Many disciplines address myth, but there is as much disregard for the wok in other fields as there is cross-pollination of ideas. Second is that despite this lack of consensus, many scholars of myth say similar things in slightly different ways. They are trying to account for the same phenomena using the toolkits of their respective disciplines. Concerning theory, the method used here has been to not situate the research in one discipline alone, but to look as broadly as possible at many distinct approaches to myth, to synthesize similar perspectives and utilize unique insights for an approach that is useful to the task at hand, flexible, and conscious of recent critical thought about mythology.

An understanding of the commonly accepted basis of Japanese mythology is necessary before undertaking an investigation of what aspects are contested. Chapter three describes the canonical texts of Japanese myth and their established historical contexts. Though the significance of this history is weighted differently inside and outside of Japan, there is little difference between English and Japanese scholarship with regards to the historical narrative of Japanese myth since the writing of Kojiki and Nihon shoki.

On the other hand, to approach the contents of the myths in English, translation is a problematic issue. This is especially true with regards to Ame no Uzume, whose stories are often censored of their more questionable and licentious elements or abridged in retellings. Approaching the original texts is essential, and for that reason I will provide my own annotated translations of the relevant texts in Chapter 4.

Finally, the focus of this thesis is not just the contents of Japanese myth, or the history of its scholarship, but the ways with which myth is currently being engaged. The final sections will make extensive use of recent Japanese publications from a number of sources: academic papers, scholarly books and articles, and books produced for a more popular audience. Peer-reviewed scholarly publications are a reliable source of detailed data, but they do not represent the only voice on the matter. The ultimate goal is to analyze the variety of Japanese mythologies, not construct a unified vision of Japanese myth or further privilege one view over others.
My Contribution.

My intended contributions are threefold: first, review Japanese scholarship pertaining to Ame no Uzume in the 21st century; second, investigate how the study of myth, even when skeptical, is itself participation in mythologizing by investing the narratives it with significance; third, give an example of studying myth in a “living tradition.” A tradition is something that is connected to the past and the present. It invokes notions of the old, but is a description mostly relevant to the world now. Calling something “traditional” is a rhetorical device that juxtaposes that thing with what is labeled as “non-traditional” or “modern” and invests it with the authority of the past. By this logic, what we now call tradition should conceivably have been considered “normal” at some hypothetical point in the past. Therefore, traditional forms may exist relatively unchanged through time, but the value associated with tradition is assigned in the present and is subject to change.

Japanese myth can be thought of as a living tradition, a loaded term, granted, but one that I define in three ways: by the continued existence of its cultural products, the persistence of its forms of praxis, and the reengagement of people with its ideological significance. First, the forms of myth, the texts of the Kojiki and Nihon shoki, their visual representations, and thousands of shrines dedicated to the mythical gods remain, in some places largely unaltered from what they were centuries or millennia ago.11 Second, these inanimate cultural products do not exist as archives or museum pieces, but are contacted in regular religious praxis by Japanese people at events like seasonal festivals.12

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11 Kirimura Eiichirō, (Hōjōdō Shuppan, 2013) discusses the specific shrine complex at Hana no Iwaya Jinja, a religious site dating back to Paleolithic times and mentioned in the Nihonshoki. That the shrine itself is old is undisputed, but Kirimura considers the possibility that modern festivals are revivals based on textual sources, not continuous traditions.

pilgrimages,\textsuperscript{13} and Kagura dance performances,\textsuperscript{14} as well as more personal and spontaneous practices such as visits to local shrines, ceremonies for purification, weddings, or the blessings of new houses or automobiles. Oftentimes, texts and sites keep their old shapes, and the ways that people interact with them shift over time. The complex cultural and religious significance of contemporary Shinto practice is the topic of several other studies, but let it suffice to say that though interaction with elements of the mythic narrative is not a daily activity for most Japanese people, it is also far from non-existent. The same could be said for other things often given the label of “traditional” Japanese culture – performances like Kabuki or practices such as martial arts, tea ceremony, and flower-arranging. These activities are perpetuated for their intrinsic merit as well as their perceived value as representations of traditional Japanese culture. Finally, the myths are still put to use to effect certain ideological influences. It is the ways that the ideological power of Japanese myth is still alive in Japan that will form the bulk of this investigation.


Chapter 2: Selected Mythological Theories

Before addressing mythology specific to Japan in Chapter 3, this section will focus on theoretical approaches to myth in general. Not all-encompassing, this section will focus only on theories that will be immediately useful in later analysis. Furthermore, rather than investigating the methods that various scholars have used to interpret myths, for example by looking for an underlying structure or interpreting mythic symbolism, our concern here is how scholars have sought to understand the genre of myth and its connection to people and their culture.

Most of the non-Japanese scholars whose theories will be covered here are not yet well-represented in Japanese mythological scholarship. It is not my intention to establish or perpetuate a dichotomy between Japanese mythological study and that of other countries, or to assume that myth scholarship inside and outside of Japan represent two distinct and homogenous wholes. If this section seems structured along such lines, it is only reflective of trends in mythology. Many Japanese mythographers do not cite the work or foreign theorists and scholars of myth outside of Japan rarely mention Japan or even draw on Japanese myth for examples. Furthermore, “outside of Japan” almost invariably refers to the United States and Europe, regions whose scholars communicate with each other, but largely seem to be unaware in theoretical work outside these regions. The lack of dialogue between Japanese scholars and those outside of Japan has been noted in other branches of the humanities and social sciences as well. In anthropology, Gordon Mathews attributes this rift to American scholars considering their work “superior” to that being done in other counties, and Japanese anthropologists seeing

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outside developments as “foreign, and thus irrelevant.” Similar biases seem so exist in other fields as well.

**Organizing Approaches to Myth**

Just as the definition of myth poses a great problem for scholars, so does the organization of theoretical approaches to myth. In one potential framework for mythological viewpoints, Lauri Honko identifies the following 10 major explanations of myth historically used by mythographers in the past.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approaches to myth from antiquity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Mythographic</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Philosophical</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Pre-scientific</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Allegorical</td>
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<td>5 Allegorical²</td>
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<td>6 Etymological</td>
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<td>7 Historical</td>
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<td>8 Euhemeristic</td>
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<td>9 Sociological</td>
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<td>10 Psychological</td>
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Table 1: Honko's 10 explanations of myth

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These categories are not clear divisions, but rather descriptions of perspectives that help us more easily identify the standpoint of scholarship. It is also important to note that these explanations relate to mythology, and not myth. Thus euhemeristic mythology examines how mythic stories may have grown out of historical events and historical mythology tries to chart the movements of myths in history, not the historicity of their contents. Though these 10 classical explanations are still visible in modern scholarship, Honko further outlines four sub-groups of contemporary scholarship -- historical, psychological, sociological and structural. These four sub-groups are in turn comprised of a total of 12 distinct approaches of varying similarity and differentiation. At this point it is neither concise nor entirely necessary to list and explain each of Honko’s categories, but let it serve as evidence of the pains to which scholars have gone to understand and categorize all the methods for approaching myth.

With regards to myth itself, Honko suggests four criteria for its definition and analysis: form, content, function, and context. For Honko, mythic form is verbal narrative, mythic contents are important creative events, myth’s function is to provide examples and models, and myth’s context is ritual, either being performed as part of ritual or transforming regular space into ritual space by its performance. Scholars may disagree with Honko’s definition, but his criteria are useful in identifying theoretical differences in definition. For example, Bruce Lincoln’s view of myth as “ideology in narrative form” which will be discussed later in this chapter matches Honko’s definition in terms of myth’s narrative form and its function as an example and model, but is much broader in its view of mythic content and context.

As suggested by Honko’s four modern sub-groups of mythology, one can also try to organize mythological scholarship by discipline. However, scholars and their theories do not lend themselves to clear boundaries. Take for example Claude Lévi-Strauss, an anthropologist influenced by Saussure’s structural linguistics who in turn had a strong

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18 Ibid. pp. 6-7
19 Ibid. pp. 10
impact on structuralism in sociology. With regards to his mythological theory, Lévi-Strauss’s *mytheme*\(^{21}\) is functionally comparable (though fundamentally different) to the Jungian *archetype* – a word which in turn is also utilized in a different sense by Eliade\(^{22}\). It is difficult to draw distinct boundaries between fields, and there is no guarantee that scholars within a given field agree about myth; there may be more significant divisions inside disciplines than between them.

One example of an introduction to mythology along disciplinary lines which is impressive but, by the author’s own admission incomplete at more than 300 pages, is Eric Csapo’s *Theories of Mythology*. Csapo’s book is divided into five sections: Comparative Approaches, Psychology, Ritual Theories, Structuralism, and Ideology.\(^{23}\) Csapo ends his book with a discussion of the ideological view of myth, a particular set of interpretations outside of a single discipline that represents both relatively recent scholarship, the synthesis of past approaches, and consciousness of their critiques. In the end, the methodological interpretation of myth as ideology will be a recurring theme in this thesis, but before addressing it, I would first like to turn to three other themes in myth study: truth, demythologization, and comparison.

### Myth and Truth

Many scholars connect the authority and status of a myth to notions of truth. Indeed, myth in general English usage can simply mean a commonly believed falsehood.\(^{24}\) This connection is imbedded in the word myth’s Greek origins, and Bruce Lincoln gives a detailed historical account of the process by which *mythos* was unseated from its position as privileged authoritative discourse in favor of *logos*\(^{25}\). However, a


\(^{22}\) Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. xxix. Eliade acknowledges this overlap and clearly states that he is not using *archetype* in the Jungian manner, but in a sense that means “exemplary model.”

\(^{23}\) Eric Csapo’s *Theories of Mythology*, Blackwell, 2005.

\(^{24}\) For examples of this use of the word myth, look no further than the title of your nearest internet clickbait listicle, which may read something like *Stop believing these 10 myths about (insert topic of popular interest).*

myth, as Yves Bonnefoy points out, is a story related to truth in the sense that it tells how real things came to be and often serves to justify human action, despite its past association with the thought of “primitive societies,” children, the mentally ill, dreams, and other marginalized groups and states.26

In Discourse and the Construction of Society, Bruce Lincoln differentiates myth from other forms of narrative by three criteria: credibility, truth claims, and authority. How Lincoln uses these terms is somewhat specialized, so each criterion warrants further explanation. It is also important to note that these criteria exist in the interaction between the audience and the narrative, and are a reflection of people’s perspectives on the stories, not only the narrative’s contents.

Truth claims are contained in the narrative, but are not limited to explicit declarations of truth; they often take the form of a connection to a specific place or time that grounds the story in reality. Credibility, on the other hand, is not merely whether a story is believable or not, but also refers to whether it is necessary to believe the story for it to be relevant. To clarify, Lincoln’s definition of a legend -- a story lacking credibility but possessing truth claims -- helps to illustrate the differences between these two criteria. A legend lacks credibility because it does not need to be true or even credible to nonetheless be a meaningful part of a specific locale’s cultural landscape. However the legend’s claim to have occurred in a certain spot or at a certain time links it significantly to the real world, differentiating it from other narratives by its own internally attested connections to real places and times. The final criterion, and the unique determinant of myth is authority, which can be thought of as a kind of ideological power. Myth here is defined against history, which ideally should be objective and scientific in its pursuit and presentation of facts in a way that is free from ideology. It is not that history lacks the potential to be authoritative, the important distinction in Lincoln’s definition is that when a person attempts to use the authority of a historical narrative for ideological purposes, it becomes a myth by Lincoln’s definition.

Lincoln represents these three criteria as axes forming a cube. Interestingly, the graphical representation encourages theoretical expansion in the consideration of what sort of narratives occupy the unlabeled corners. Hypothetically, a *parable* might occupy the rear lower left corner, devoid of credibility and truth claims, but still possessing authority. The myths of Japan and other modern, rational, “demythologized” peoples might be thought to occupy the rear lower right corner. They lack credibility, but possess truth claims in their connection to specific times and places as well as authority that is sometimes called upon by individuals in their ideological pursuits. It is to this process of demythologization and how people navigate their relationships with the credibility and authority of myth that we turn our attention next.

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Marginalization, Mythologization, and Demythologization

Statuses of authority and marginalization relate to myth in two ways: how paradigms and perspectives of privileged center and marginalized periphery are expressed in the myth, and how people treat, label and associate with myths in real society. Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty draws attention to the fact that myths are often stories about “others”: animals, spirits, women, children, and the ultimate others -- gods. 28 In reading myth, we should be conscious of what is seen as “other,” how these others are grouped together, and whether they are presented as a threat or a source of utilizable power. We should think critically about what is being normalized in contrast to them. Marginalization is most relevant to the analysis of mythic contents, but it also relates to the role of myth in society in general.

Individual stories and the entire genre of myth are also subject to changes in their status from authoritative narrative to marginalized fallacy. With regards to people’s relationship to the truth, falsehood, and significance of myth, Honko writes about the process of “demythologization.” He describes three ways in which stories are demythologized. First, there is terminological demythologization, in which a story is kept, but the label of myth rejected. Honko gives the example of Christians avoiding labeling their stories as myth, preferring such terms as “sacred narrative” in order to invest them with greater authority and disassociate them from thematically similar stories in different religions, which they see as completely false. He also lists total and compensatory demythologization in which myth is rejected for logic and science completely replaces myth’s explanatory functions in society, and partial and interpretive demythologization in which myths, though not treated as expressly true, are seen as allegorical representations or symbols. 29 This partial and interpretive form of demythologization is a compromise seen in many modern approaches to myth which seek to salvage some semblance of meaning. If myth were completely irrelevant, it would not be worth studying.

O’Flaherty elaborates on the idea of demythologization, describing stages of a group’s attitude towards myth. This involves the investment of myth with meaning as well as the processes by which myths are disassociated from greater significance and reimagined as art, reduced to empty ritual, or discarded entirely. She defines four categories in this human-myth relationship: 1) un-mythologized, or never indoctrinated with myth, 2) un-demythologized, which is still mythologized and possibly devoutly religious, 3) demythologized humanists, rationalists and academics who seek to go beyond a naïve acceptance of myth, 4) re-mythologized, a reaction to secularism and relativism, and intentional movement towards mythologization.30

Combining Honko and O’Flaherty’s ideas of demythologization we acquire a hypothetical progression in which people are un-demythologized at the outset. By some sort of stimulus, perhaps the intrusion of a competing belief system or the skeptical effects of reason, they become demythologized, either labeling their beliefs as something other than myth, rejecting mythic beliefs outright, or reframing myth as a kind of allegory than can be simultaneously true and untrue. People born in this context are un-mythologized, but there is the possibility that they may seek to be re-mythologized, seeking new meaning in myth once again. Though it is unlikely that every individual or society’s relationship to myth actually progresses in such a clear-cut, linear manner, these ideas can help us to understand the multiple and dynamic ways that people approach and reevaluate myth. Furthermore, this semantic exercise and the power of the label of “myth” function in both directions, up and down the scale of authority; calling a story a myth can affect it in two ways: it can either devalue it as a falsehood or invest it with a greater symbolic significance. Likewise, to deny a story the label of myth can be a strategy to assert that it is completely true or completely false, denying it even symbolic value.

30 Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty (Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988), pp. 120.
Myth and Comparison

Though there are many myth scholars who do not concern themselves with cultures outside of their specialization, the remarkable similarities between the myths of different peoples have long been of interest to some. They reason that if myth exists as a relevant category, looking beyond individual narratives to the totality of a people’s myths should reveal something more about those people. Similarly, looking beyond the myths of a single culture to the myths of a great many groups should teach us something about humanity in general. The variety and prevalence of these approaches warrants their inclusion in the consideration of mythology. However, to address the comparative study of myth, we must acknowledge its caveats. Four major trends in comparative mythology summarize the ways that scholars have attempted to explain similarities between the myths of different people:

(1) Some account for mythic similarities by transmission or diffusion, claiming that myths travel from one place to another as people and ideas migrate, retaining commonalities but taking on unique details.

(2) Rather than being a flow between two contemporaneous cultures, similar myths of different peoples may be related to each other through a common ancestor, growing more distinct as the branches of the family tree grow farther from the trunk.

(3) Universal explanations account for similarities by understanding them as the result of some hidden, transcendent, collective form or universal pattern common to the thinking and social arrangement of all humanity.

(4) Similarities can be explained as the result of independent invention due to similar environmental, technological and social circumstances. This is similar to the universal explanation because it assumes that people in similar situations will inevitably behave in the same way and make the same kinds of things.31

31 This outline of the various explanations of comparative mythology is a based on those presented by Bruce Lincoln, Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars. University of Chicago Press, 2012, for explanations 1, 2, and 3 and Nick Allen, “Athena and Durga: Warrior Goddesses in Greek and Sanskrit Epic.” Athena in the Classical World, edited by Susan Deacy and Alexandra Villing, Brill, 2001, pp. 367-382, for
Explanations (1) and (2) are highly likely in certain instances, especially when it is reasonable that cultures were in contact with each other. However, accounting for similarities between the myths of people separated by natural barriers such as great distance, geography, and time poses more of a challenge, hence the emergence of theories in groups three and four. Bruce Lincoln critiques the first three approaches adeptly. First, all of these types are focused on similarities and gloss over differences which they view as “a complicating development of considerably less importance.” For Lincoln, this is effort poorly invested, because “…real interest emerges only as one pays attention to differences.” Furthermore, each group of theories is marred by internal flaws and potentially for detrimental implications for the cultures involved.

(1) Explanations by diffusion often implicitly rank the societies involved, attributing superior value to culture of origin over the culture of adoption. Rarely is this process imagined as one of mutual exchange, but rather one of conquest and domination of a more-advanced culture over a less-advanced one.

(2) Studying similarities and attributing them to common ancestry also potentially values the original form over the latter developments, and ascribes a special prestige to that which is oldest. Also, it frequently relies on a hypothetical and unattested original form which must be reconstructed detracting attention from the real societies in question.

(3) Of the universal types, numerous counterexamples impact the credibility of these theories. As Lincoln observes, “there are no true universals, save at the level of generalization so high as to yield only banalities.” If something is truly universal, it is probably not very insightful.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{32} Bruce Lincoln (University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 122
(4) To Lincoln’s critique of (1), (2), and (3), we should add that theories of independent invention can be negatively impacted by assumptions of unilinear evolution. If it is assumed that people under similar circumstances develop culture in the same ways, then they may do so in the same order. If Culture A resembles the Culture B of the past, Culture A may just be “behind the curve.” This in turn leads to notions of cultures being “advanced” and “primitive” in their entirety rather than identifying isolated aspects of culture, e.g., technology or political infrastructure, that are not as developed as others.

However, to their credit, such comparatist stances, despite their shortcomings, are often rooted in an optimistic view of humanity - that we are more alike than different, that we can understand each other, and that our disparities can be reconciled. Furthermore, in some cases, it simply may be true that culture diffused or came from a common source. In such instances, we may not be able to deny one culture displacing another, but also we need not assume violent conquest or valorize the original possessors of a certain cultural item as civilizing heroes. Likewise, a pattern observed in one culture, while not strictly universal, may be generalizable or adaptable to another culture. Independent invention is also possible, and consideration of it may be useful if it accounts for differences among groups and grants greater emphasis on external stimuli than internal hardwiring.

Also, these four views of comparison are overly concerned with explaining the mechanisms and reasons behind similarities, a question that may only be able to be answered theoretically or hypothetically. Rather than explain why things are alike, it is also possible to turn our focus to the significance of those similarities, and address the differences that those similarities highlight. Though critical of “strong” comparison, Lincoln wishes to salvage the comparative enterprise and proposes four guidelines for what he calls “weak” comparison:

(1) compare a small number of things that can be investigated in depth,
(2) give equal weight to items of similarity and difference,
(3) respect the accomplishments and competence of all parties involved,
(4) pay attention to the social, historical, religious and political contexts of what is
being examined.

With these four methodological considerations in mind and with consciousness of
the potential dangers of comparatism, comparison of myth can be a useful tool.

Summary, Myth as Ideology

The subject under examination here is not only myth, but mythology itself. More
than the contents or contexts of classical narratives, we will examine the scholarship
about those narratives and the stories that are being told by scholars today about the
world that created and passed the myths down. In *Japanese Myth: Hermeneutics on
Scripture*, Jun’ichi Isomae[^34] rightly asserts about mythology that “what can be
understood from an interpretation is in the end less about the text itself than about the
worldview of the interpreter.”[^35] Under critical examination, any commentary on myth
tells us much about the agenda of the scholar as it does about the original text.

In a similar vein, Bruce Lincoln, whose thought has contributed much to this
section, develops “a view of myth as *ideology in narrative form*.”[^36] He also concedes that
scholarship is also a form of myth; it is “interested, perspectival, and partial, and … its
ideological dimensions must be acknowledged.”[^37] Just as many myths claim to represent
a true account of the origin and order of the cosmos, much mythological scholarship
makes bold claims about the origin and order of the people and societies who recorded
and passed along those myths. Even if we doubt that mythic narrative represents things
as they really were, we may be able to assume that the narratives represent things as their
tellers thought they ought to be. Even if we doubt the conclusions a scholar makes, we

[^34]: In this thesis, Japanese names are given in the standard Japanese order of family name – given
name, unless the author has published in English with a different order. Historical names, which were
often taken later in life and follow various conventions, are presented in their standard Japanese order.
[^37]: Ibid, pp. 208
can learn much about the worldview he or she holds and the effects he or she hopes that the scholarship will have.
Chapter 3: Myth in the Japanese Context

Describing myth on a worldwide scale is a monumental endeavor, and limiting the context of our discussion to Japan makes the task somewhat more manageable. Certainly, many of the themes addressed by theories of world myth are present in both the mythic narratives of Japan and subsequent mythology. Among other widespread patterns, we can see scholarship about symbolism of natural phenomena and human psychology, issues of order and transgression, and appeals to supernatural authority for social or political aims. However, to our benefit, some of the problems facing mythologists are not of immediate concern when dealing with only Japanese vocabulary and sources. The field is delineated geographically, linguistically, and through historical time, and we need to consider fewer exceptions. Of course, Japanese myth presents its own unique challenges, particularly the narratives’ close relationship to the politics of the emperor system. These issues have proven to be so problematic that some scholars, both in Japan and abroad, use the word “myth” with trepidation when discussing these stories, or strongly qualify the label in the Japanese context. For example, John Breen and Mark Teeuwen use the term “court histories.” From the perspective of Lincoln’s mythology, this denies the stories the authoritative aspect of “myth” and removes the objective credibility of pure “history” by qualifying them as the subjective product of the court.38 Also, Iwao Yoshii refers to the narratives of the Kojiki and Nihon shoki as 政治神話 seiji shinwa, literally “political myths” to emphasize their political origins and aims and to presumably to differentiate them from such things as “national myth,” “folk myth,” or

“religious myth” that might have other kinds of significance.39

This chapter has three main goals. First is to describe myth and its relative components in the specific context of Japan. For the purposes of this thesis, Japanese myth will be defined initially as the narratives of the two eighth-century texts the Kojiki and Nihon shoki, but in the end this definition will be problematized, and the discussion also includes consideration of the hypothetical folk traditions that may have contributed to the texts as well as the texts’ subsequent interpretations. The second goal is to give a brief account of the reception and interpretation of the Kojiki and Nihon shoki and their relationship to religion and society in Japanese history up to the Second World War. Finally, as WWII marks a significant turning point defining the modern status of Japanese mythology, this chapter will conclude with an analysis of two main camps of Japanese mythological scholarship that took shape in the latter half of the 20th century and continue to influence work on myth today. Though postwar scholarship is here divided into two groups, this division is also a somewhat arbitrary intellectual tool; there are many issues upon which contemporary mythologists agree, and each side contributes much to the overall understanding of myth in Japan today.

It is the position of this thesis that Japanese myth is a relevant and unique conceptual entity, but not an exclusive and singular one. It is wise to be skeptical of any interpretation that posits the existence of an authentic, essential Japanese mythological narrative. However, that does not mean that the ideological content of statements based on such a view should be ignored. Even for the most skeptical, “Japanese myth” is still a meaningful category, but terminologically, it may be better to think of Japanese myths and mythologies in the plural, a conceptual whole encompassing a diversity of origins and interpretations. We cannot be certain to what extent the myths of the Kojiki and Nihon shoki represent pure fabrications of the eighth-century political elite or collections of a genuine folk tradition. However, this thesis operates under the assumption that these stories represent both the political agenda of the early imperial court and the folklore that

preceded it, that both approaches can inform our understanding of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, and that there is something more to Japanese mythology if one scratches the surface.

The “Gods” of Japanese Myth

The difficulty associated with defining the word myth is somewhat mitigated in the Japanese language. The word in question is 神話 *shinwa*, literally “god stories.” This term is currently applied to the narratives contained in the canonical texts of Japanese myth as well as to the classical myths of Greece, the *Vedas* of India and so forth. The word *shinwa* effectively narrows the definition of myth and eliminates confusion between myth, legend, and other folk narrative; myths are stories about gods, the others are not. However, it replaces the difficulty of defining myth with the complexity of understanding the word here translated as “god,” *kami*.

Though analyzing the construction of the characters used in Japanese can only reveal so much about the words themselves, it is a useful place to begin, and the character 神 *kami* does prove to be rich in symbolic meaning. Like most characters borrowed from Chinese, it has at least one imported Chinese reading and at least one domestic Japanese reading. In this case, *kami* is the most common Japanese reading, and *shin* is the Chinese-based pronunciation used in compounds such as *shinwa* or *Shinto*. The “way of the gods.” The character is in turn comprised of two parts. The left side is 巖, a simplified version of 示 which has the meaning “to show” or “to demarcate.” It is a pictograph of a ritual altar, and is used in many characters with religious connotations such as 祈 “to pray,” 祝 “to celebrate,” and 社 “shrine.” The right side is 雷 which on its own can mean to speak humbly and is associated with the monkey in the Chinese Zodiac, but is in turn a simplified version of 雷, meaning lightning.

Just by analyzing the character, we can see nuances of religious ritual, demarcation (perhaps that between the sacred and the profane), as well as humble speech and the awesome natural power of lightning. However, the character is an ideographic
approximation meant to represent a concept greater than sum of the symbolic associations the glyph can encompass, and it is important to consider that the meaning of kami in Japan is not identical to the Chinese word that shares the character, though the understanding of the nature of kami is not uniform throughout Japan or Japanese history. Mitsuhashi Takeshi describes four features of kami that have been more or less historically consistent and widely accepted:

1) There are said to be ya-o-yorozu (8 million) kami, though this number is usually interpreted to mean “a great number” and is often translated as a “myriad.”

2) The kami do not show their forms, but can take up residence in or possession of material or natural objects.

3) They inspire awe in humans that come in contact with them.

4) They are associated with specific geographic locales.\(^{40}\)

Not every natural object is a kami, but many are. Also, certain remarkable individuals from legend and history are considered kami and are enshrined as such. However, instead of thinking that a rock or tree or great person might be deified and achieve status as a kami, it is perhaps more appropriate to think that things are revealed to be kami by their awe-inspiring qualities. It is in this way that kami may be different from the absolute transcendent entity suggested by the word “God” or “god” in English. Some scholars prefer to use the word “deity” as a gloss, or consider kami a distinct enough concept to leave in Romanized Japanese. Here, “god,” “deity” and “kami” will be used interchangeably, bearing in mind the implications of these words in context. In summary, “myth” in Japanese refers to a story about the kami, entities always multiple and awe inspiring, either anthropomorphic or resembling natural phenomena, and supernatural but often not completely transcending the material realm.

**Mythic Texts: The Kojiki and Nihon Shoki**

Though their interpretation has varied throughout history (the topic of the next section), what are now widely considered to be the myths of Japan were first recorded in

two texts: the *Kojiki* or *Record of Ancient Matters* (712 CE), and the *Nihon shoki* or *Chronicles of Japan* (720 CE). These books have unassailable value as some of Japan’s earliest literature (in the case of the *Kojiki*, the earliest extant text to approximate Japanese vernacular). Also, it can be argued that they fulfill myth’s function as religious scripture because their narratives begin with the creation of the cosmos and provide an explanation for the origins of the earth and its population. However, for the majority of people and for most periods of Japanese history, their authority is generally not comparable to that of scripture in other religions. In addition to these elements, each narrative spans from the time of creation into the historical era, linking the mythic past and the society in which they were written. Though the tales of the prehistoric period are embellished with fantastic details and long lifespans, the narratives are generally considered to contain useful hints about ethnic migrations and political struggles before recorded history.

Despite all these aspects, no one can deny the texts’ roles as political propaganda as well. Both were commissioned by the royal court in the newly-unified Japan, part of an ongoing consolidation process including several pre-literate and pre-historic centuries and climaxing in the establishment of the first permanent capital in Nara in 710. Given that the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* were produced by imperial decree in the first decade of the Nara period, they can be seen as one part of the new government’s plan to establish a centralized, structured state with a unified history and cosmology. Though the narratives in each book were ostensibly collected and compiled from extant traditions, they are neither anonymous products of an invisible “folk” nor the work of neutral scholars. We know the names and affiliations of the aristocratic courtiers involved in their construction, and the authors’ intention in unifying various accounts and telling the “history” of the imperial house is overtly stated in each book’s introduction.

Though there is some criticism of the scholarly practice of considering these two texts together as comparable accounts of mythological canon, because of their

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numerous similarities, much can be said that applies to both texts. The narratives are similar enough that they are often discussed in conjunction, collectively referred to as the Kiki. However, several major distinctions exist that differentiate the two. First, the content of the Kojiki, according to the Kojiki’s own introduction, was transcribed by Ō no Yasumaro from the oral recitations of Hieda no Are, a bard of sorts, who gathered stories from various traditions, processed the material internally, and then performed it at court. The orator, Are is a somewhat mysterious and legendary figure about whom little is known. Her association with the Sarume no Kimi, a clan whose ritual task it was to send shamanic priestesses to capital, has led some to hypothesize that she was a woman, though there is no conclusive proof in either direction as to Are’s gender. In contrast to the Kojiki’s dictated style, the Nihon shoki was collected from various accounts by the writer, the same O no Yasumaro credited with transcribing the Kojiki, and his supervisor prince Toneri.

Perhaps because of differences in the method of collection, the structure of each text is different as well. The Kojiki tells one rich version of each story and includes several fantastic, erotic, grotesque and morbid details. The Nihon shoki has a main version of each tale, but these are supplemented by several alternate accounts, the number and relative length of which vary. It is generally understood that in the Kojiki, Are was attempting to create a single cohesive and comprehensive version of the story. In the Nihon shoki, Yasumaro may have selected the most reliable or most politically useful account first and annotated the differences. Thus, as an appeal to authority, the Kojiki attempts to validate the story by internal consistency and the elimination of contradictory accounts. The Nihon shoki attempts to validate the author and the general events of history through rigorous presentation of multiple versions, which though contradictory in minor details, also somewhat constitute corroborating evidence. Telling multiple versions of the story might hurt claims to one absolute definitive interpretation, but was

42 記紀 (Kiki) takes the final character, each distinct but read ki, from 古事記 (Kojiki) and 日本書紀 (Nihonshoki).
perhaps intended to represent scholarly thoroughness. Though reading so far into the motivation of the authors is a speculative endeavor, it is not uncommon to find the differences between the two textual structures interpreted in such this way.

A further difference between the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* is that of language and orthography. Because Japanese did not develop its own phonetic script until centuries after the introduction of writing from China, Yasumaro was presented with a considerable challenge when it came to directly rendering the vernacular language of Are’s *Kojiki*. As a result, the book was written in a very complicated style; in some places it uses Chinese characters to write in standard classical Chinese, but in others it uses these *kanji* phonetically to approximate vernacular Japanese. In yet others, it uses a mixture of the two systems. Not only is the *Kojiki*’s writing system complicated, it is not even internally consistent. The *Nihon shoki* on the other hand, is written entirely in classical Chinese, using characters phonetically only to represent domestic names and vernacular poems.

Reading the *Kojiki* requires a knowledge of the unique peculiarities of the text itself, but the *Nihon shoki* would have been accessible to any educated person in East Asia at the time. Therefore, the intended audience of the texts constitutes the fourth major difference between these two works. Though assumptions about the author’s intent in this regard too are somewhat speculative, the differences in each text’s orthography had a de facto effect on who read them. This, and the relatively toned-down fantastic content of the *Nihon shoki*’s main account have led scholars to infer that the *Kojiki* was intended for domestic audiences already familiar with the bizarre details of the myth and the *Nihon shoki* was meant for those outside of Japan. However in reality, because it was simply easier to read, the *Nihon shoki*, was also favored in Japan as well for most of the millennium following the two texts’ completion.

**Reception and Interpretation of the Kiki in History**

The appearance of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* in the eighth century represents a distinct turning point in the history of Japanese myth, its reception, interpretation and
utilization. However, the significance of these two works has been far from uniform in the intervening centuries. Views towards Japanese myth are certainly not what they were 100 years ago, but they do not exist in a contextual vacuum either. Modern interpretations are as much informed by past analyses as they are by currents in our contemporary intellectual and social paradigms. Though it is difficult to do justice to 1300 years of history and textual commentary in just a few pages, it is the goal of this section to familiarize readers with significant stages in the reception of the Kiki narratives and introduce past interpretations and historical developments that influence contemporary thought on the works.

Referring to the Kojiki and Nihon shoki as “canonical texts” or “sacred scripture” necessarily runs the risk of assuming that these texts and stories serve the same functions in Japan as myth, canon, and scripture do in the English-speaking world, something which they do not entirely do. Modern understanding of the Kiki is at least somewhat influenced by investigations of Japanese religion from modern Western-centric theological perspectives that assume the Kiki to be an authoritative text-based origin for religious thought and praxis in Shinto.44 Most study of religious text is based on Protestant approaches to scripture that attempt to understand the sacred as it is revealed in a text without much concern for the social processes that lead that text to be considered sacred in the first place.45 However, it is inaccurate to assume that Shinto is a religion based on the revelatory quality of the Kiki texts. In the postwar period the narratives have come to be seen myth, less as religious canon and more as a kind of folklore, meaning that scholarly attention has been allowed to shift from relatively static narrative content to dynamic personal interpretation and include a historical investigation of how Buddhism, Confucianism, native studies, and western philosophy have shaped the perceived authority of the texts.46

This history is long and complicated, and though one trend in thought about the Kiki texts may have been primary at any given time, rarely has one interpretation

46 Ibid, pp. 1
completely dominated the arena to the exclusion of others. Rather, it has often been the case that multiple threads of mythological thought coexist and intersect. Despite this complexity, scholars who do attempt a detailed historiography of *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* interpretation generally divide that history into three periods. According to the analysis of Thomas Kasulis, the history of Japanese myth and religion began with a primitive and formative period leading up to the transfer of the imperial capital from Nara to Kyoto in 794. This was followed by a flexible and, as Kasulis says, “existential” period from 794 to 1801, a stage marked by relatively free interpretation and syncretism between Shinto, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. Finally, Shinto experienced a more “essentialist” and rigid period of national studies, war and ultimately confusion from the beginning of the 19th century up to the present.47

Jun’ichi Isomae also divides the history of *Kiki* reception into three roughly equivalent periods. First was the “ancient” period in which the *Kiki* were *national history*. This was followed by what Isomae labels the “medieval” period, a time in which the texts were understood as part of Shinto, which he considers to be an indigenous spiritual system that was defined in contrast to and blended with religions imported from the continent. Finally are “modern” times in which the *Kiki* stories came to be thought of as *myth* in the contemporary international sense – the product of a distinctly Japanese cultural unit, unique in its details, but with parallels in the folklore of other civilizations.48 Isomae does not provide dates for his periodization, but the transition from his “ancient” to “medieval” periods can be assumed to have occurred during Japan’s classical period (538-1185), and the shift from “medieval” to “modern” must have taken place during Japan’s early modern period (1603-1868), making his timeline roughly equivalent to that of Kasulis. The details of three periods that these two scholars suggest are as follows.

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48 Jun’ichi Isomae (Equinox, 2009), pp. 11
The earliest period of Shinto religion and Kiki mythology was one that culminated in the civilization of the eighth century and the first settled capital in Nara. This was the era in which the Kojiki and Nihon shoki were written, and these texts are thought to have served multiple functions. First was as history. The Nihon shoki (but not the Kojiki) is included in a group of six texts of official national history called the Rikkokushi, a unified historical record intended to regulate independent clan accounts and subordinate them to the national versions.\(^50\) Second, the texts justified not only national unification, but unification under imperial rule. The narratives emphasize the roles and primacy of the

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\(^{49}\) The period name Heian comes from the alternate name for the capital city Kyoto. The historical period begins in 794 when the capital was moved there.

\(^{50}\) Ibid, 23
Shinto Kami from whom the imperial family claimed descent. However, Shinto was not the only religious authority to which the imperial regime appealed for validation. In the seventh century, Buddhism became the official state religion, and the 17 Article Constitution (c. 604) stressed Buddhist morality as well as imperial authority. The later ritsuryō legal codes (implemented between 645 and 757) were highly Confucian in their wording and morality, but they also emphasized absolute obedience to the emperor.51

There are links between the ritual-like actions of characters in the Kiki myths and religious and political rituals that were carried out in this time period. These connections will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5, but with regards to history, after the tenth century, the Engishiki (c. 927) came to serve as the official guide to the timing and format of ritual, and the Kiki were relegated to the mythic justification and the account of the origins of the practices.52

The Engishiki is an example of the typical approach to the Kiki in the subsequent “medieval” period, a time marked by extensive commentary and secondary scholarship as well as syncretism with other religious systems. The Kojiki, due to its complex orthography, was mostly overlooked and left alone, but the Nihon shoki was edited and added to in a series of lectures and commentaries called the Nihongi kōshō.53 These commentaries served the interests of the editors, and their audience was invariably the social and political elite.54 The individually motivated nature of medieval criticism served to isolate interpretations and lead away from a single, widely-accepted meaning of the mythical narrative. The original texts were not unimportant, but secondary analyses, notes, commentaries, and lectures came to be the preferred method of understanding the message and worldview of the primary sources.55 Japanese scholars at this time took a

51 Thomas Kasulis (University of Hawai‘I Press, 2004), pp. 86-89
52 Jun’ichi Isomae (Equinox, 2009), pp. 23.
53 Ibid, pp. 19.
54 Ibid, pp. 24-25.
comparative approach and highlighted the similarities between the contents of the *Nihon shoki* and Confucian and Buddhist philosophies. This can be seen as an attempt to legitimate the *Kiki* accounts through their consistency with other authoritative doctrines as well as assert Japan’s equality with neighboring nations such as India and China on the basis of their similar cultural products.\(^{56}\)

Probably the most significant development in myth interpretation during the medieval period came from esoteric Buddhist metaphysics which read the earliest portions of the *Kiki* as local allegorical retellings of Buddhism’s transcendent truths.\(^{57}\) There were many convenient overlaps between the esoteric Buddhist worldview, introduced in Japan by monks like Kūkai (774-835) and Saichō (766-827), and the universal order presented in the *Kiki*. In each thought system the world is deeply interconnected and vibrantly animated by spiritual energy. Humans are consistently encouraged to be sensitive and receptive and to cultivate a pure heart that is sympathetic to the world around them.\(^{58}\)

Even the anthropomorphic *kami* of the *Kiki* were accepted by Buddhism as symbolic expressions of Buddhist philosophy. The theory of *Honji suijaku*, “original ground and trace manifestations,” proposed that Buddhist deities had appeared in the past as Japanese *Kami* in order to more easily save Japanese people. This philosophy made Shinto just one of many possible manifestations of Buddhist universal truth, assigning Shinto a status secondary to Buddhism, but it also validated its mythic symbolism. Furthermore, it supported the emperor system, which associated the imperial ancestor and sun goddess Amaterasu with the Central Sun-Buddha Dainichi.\(^{59}\) In the 14th century, some would attempt to invert this paradigm and suggest that the Japanese *kami* were the basic forms and the Buddhist deities only manifestations, but this line of thinking never held as much sway as the original *Honji suijaku* configuration.

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\(^{56}\) Ibid, pp. 60.
\(^{57}\) Jun’ichi Isomae (Equinox, 2009), pp. 27.
\(^{58}\) Thomas Kasulis (University of Hawai’I Press, 2004), pp. 97-98.
\(^{59}\) Ibid, pp. 95.
The two and a half centuries during which Japan was ruled by the military
government of the Tokugawa Bakufu (1603-1868) is considered to be the bridge between
medieval and modern periods. In relative peace and isolation, Japan at this time saw
massive population growth, especially in urban areas, as well as an expansion in domestic
economy, education, and literacy.\textsuperscript{60} Print culture flourished, and for the first time the
\textit{Kojiki} and \textit{Nihon shoki} were mass produced (1667 and 1682 respectively) and made
available to the general public.\textsuperscript{61} The control of the military government was nearly
complete and the imperial family, without any real political power, faded from
significance. Also, as merchants and other non-aristocratic, non-samurai families
accumulated wealth and knowledge, a new class of affluent, educated, but politically
marginalized scholars emerged to study and interpret these texts. The \textit{Kiki} then became
distinct from royal authority, and myth became the intellectual property of all Japan.\textsuperscript{62}

The ruling military class and the Shogun’s government favored the hierarchical
morality of Neo-Confucianism to the non-materialist, egalitarian values of Buddhism,
and as the authority of Buddhism faltered, so did its \textit{Honji suijaku} support of Shinto’s
mythic worldviews. The response of Shinto to this ideological shift was two-fold. One
option was an acceptance of Neo-Confucianism and an emphasis on loyalty,
unquestioning service, and whole-hearted devotion to one’s duty, ethics that would later
come to be associated with \textit{bushidō}, the “way of the samurai.” The other response was a
rejection of Neo-Confucian thought and the emergence of the discipline of \textit{kokugaku}, or
national studies.

National studies provided a new interpretation of the texts within the changing
social context of the military government. Arguably the most famous and influential of
all national studies scholars was Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) whose work is the basis
of nearly all modern myth interpretation, particularly that of the \textit{Kojiki}.\textsuperscript{63} Norinaga was
a member of the emergent class of wealthy and highly educated commoners. He lived

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, pp. 107.
\textsuperscript{61} Jun’ichi Isomae (Equinox, 2009), pp. 120.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, 119.
\textsuperscript{63} Klaus Antoni (The Center for the Study of Japanese Religions, 2011), pp. 3.
most of his life in a provincial area not far from the Shinto religious complex of Ise, but was educated in classics, philology and medicine in the old capital of Kyoto. His thought was not limited to mythology, but has far-reaching implications for many aspects of Japanese national identity in the modern age. Norinaga sought to isolate and identify the unique characteristics of the Japanese tradition. For him that meant going back to _furugoto_, the “old ways” of an idealized past before Chinese influence, and developing sensibilities he believed were first revealed in works such as the _Kojiki_. He promoted aesthetic qualities of intuition, emotion, and compassion over reason, duty and obligation. Perhaps most important of his theories is that of _mono no aware_, the “pathos of things.” Norinaga asserted that this pathos, an emotional sensitivity and ability to be moved by the world, was the most human of qualities and that it was exquisitely expressed in the spirit and tradition of Japan. He believed the _Kojiki_ to be the best way of accessing these ancient Japanese values because it was both the oldest text to be rendered in the vernacular, and unlike the _Nihon shoki_, it remained relatively unchanged since its original composition. Norinaga’s evaluation of the _Kojiki_ is of course over-zealous, and to suggest that this text is without Chinese influence is absurd. It was, after all, written completely in Chinese characters well after the introduction of Buddhism and Confucianism from the continent. However, despite the flaws of his textual literalism, Norinaga’s interpretation of the _Kojiki_ and his theory of _mono no aware_ continue to be immensely influential.

To compensate for this influence of continental thought, Norinaga promoted eliminating what he called _karagokoro_, or “Chinese mentality.” It is easy to be critical of the nationalistic and anti-Chinese overtones in Norinaga’s philosophy when viewed from our post-World-War-Two context; statements about the purity and superiority of Japan are inextricably tied to the aggression of the Japanese Empire during the first half of the 20th century. Norinaga’s ideas no doubt influenced this later rhetoric, but they must have

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64 Jun’ichi Isomae (Equinox, 2009), pp. 108.
meant something different in the context of 18\textsuperscript{th} century Japan. At that time, Norinaga’s theories were a criticism of contemporary Japanese society, the samurai ruling class, and their rigid Confucian social hierarchy that failed to recognize talented individuals like Norinaga regardless of their ability.\textsuperscript{67} It is inaccurate to translate karagokoro, as “evil Chinese spirit,” as Klaus Antoni does (emphasis mine).\textsuperscript{68} Norinaga says of the effects of karagokoro, “the heart that knows the ways of old\textsuperscript{69} is unclear. If you ask why people are mistaken in this, it is because they have their hearts led astray and obstructed by karagokoro.”\textsuperscript{70} Karagokoro was primarily an inauthentic mentality found in Japanese people who preferred to order the world by Confucian hierarchy rather than by the aesthetic principles of the Japanese vernacular tradition.

Norinaga’s scholarship can therefore be understood as an attempt to draw on the mythic authority of the Kojiki in order to make a statement about his contemporary society, to delegitimize the dominant political and social structures and offer an alternative model for how people should behave and interact. He moved the focus of myth away from the imperial family and to ordinary Japanese people who then, for the first time, could access the mythic narratives contained in the Kojiki and Nihon shoki and claim them as their own. As Kōnoshi Takamitsu writes, “Norinaga does not focus on the legitimacy of the imperial system as found in Nara and Heian discourse, but on the Japanese people inside and outside that imperial world order, a people united by furugoto.”\textsuperscript{71} Norinaga was not attempting to create an ideology for the political purposes of state, but for the identities of individuals within a of a community. This vision of the relationship between the Kiki and the Japanese people that endures in some places to this day.

Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) succeeded Norinaga in his role as the foremost national studies scholar, but he did not much follow Norinaga’s academic ethos or

\textsuperscript{67} Jun’ichi Isomae (Equinox, 2009), pp. 114.
\textsuperscript{68}Klaus Antoni (The Center for the Study of Japanese Religions, 2011), pp.15. My emphasis.
\textsuperscript{69} 古の道の意
\textsuperscript{70} Motoori Norinaga, Uiyama Bumi. Translated (to modern Japanese) by Shiraishi Yoshio, Kodansha Gakujutsu Bunko, 2009, pp. 119. English Translation is mine.
\textsuperscript{71} Kōnoshi Takamitsu (Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 63.
aesthetic sensibilities. Philosophically, Atsutane was even more opposed to corrupting “outside” influences on Japanese myth and Shinto, and he rejected the contributions of esoteric Buddhism on interpretations of cosmic order. Turning away from Buddhist teachings about the afterlife as well as the Honji suijaku paradigm that emphasized Amaterasu, Atsutane was left with several theological vacuums that he then tried to fill exclusively by the narrative of the Kojiki. Atsutane proposed that another, earlier deity, Ame no Mi-na Nushi no Kami was actually the impetus for the creation and order of the universe. These interpretations were based on passages of the Kojiki, but are far from explicit and were not present in earlier commentary. In reality, the Kojiki had never needed to answer these cosmic questions because it had never existed outside of the context of Buddhist supplementation. However, Atsutane’s interpretations represent an important step in creating a comprehensive worldview based solely on Japanese myth, and the treatment of the Kojiki as pure religious scripture rather than legendary history.

Norinaga, Atsutane, and the other national studies scholars likely did not foresee the dramatic changes to Japanese society that would begin in the second half the 19th century. Wealthy private citizens, intellectuals, and provincial nobles were already dissatisfied with the rigid structure of the Shogun’s military dictatorship, and large populations of peasants also strained under taxes and political oppression. With the forced opening of Japan by America in 1854 not only was the Shōgunate unsatisfactory to its citizens domestically, it was also clearly insufficient to guard against foreign threats. What happened next would have ordinarily been called a revolution, but since political power was in the hands of the Shogun, all that was necessary to topple the old government was to “restore” the Emperor to power. The Meiji Restoration of 1868 created a completely new Japan, but did so with the ancient authority of the emperor. Japan emerged as a constitutional monarchy and a modern nation state, but as such, it required a new sense of national identity, and that need caused the new government to seek out the canon of national studies.

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72 Thomas Kasulis (University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), pp. 124.  
73 Ibid, pp. 131-132.  
74 Kōnoshi Takamitsu (Stanford University Press 2000), pp. 63.
In the Tokugawa Period, the stories of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* had been utilized as inspiration for popular art and drama. This practice continued into the Meiji period, and below is an image of an 1880 wood-block print depicting the legendary Empress Jingū (supposedly lived 169-269) as she invades Korea, an event that is presented as “Japanese history.”

![Empress Jingū in Korea](image)

**Figure 3:** Empress Jingū in Korea. Woodblock by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, 1880

These themes were also taken up by the government in the symbolism of its official publications and documents, and Empress Jingū’s was also selected to grace the one-yen bill in the following year.

![Empress Jingū on the one-yen bill](image)

**Figure 4:** Empress Jingū on the one-yen bill, 1881
The Kiki myths were just part of the new image of Japan that claimed both the authority of antiquity and the relevance of modernity. However, as Japan continued to define itself against the outside world, myth became, once again, a political tool. Put very simply, the nationalistic elements of kokugaku came to the front, the Kiki were treated as both scripture and history, and the mythic themes of imperial lineage and conquest came to justify the divine right of the emperor and the manifest destiny of Japan to rule Asia.

While acknowledging that myth played a part in Japanese actions during the war years (1894-1945), this thesis avoids investigating this complicated relationship in great detail. A cursory treatment of myth alone would exaggerate its role and suggest that this era’s events and their tragic consequences were primarily the products of a mythically-inspired religious zeal, when in fact countless other factors were involved. It is impossible to properly address wartime mythology without doing so in its context of other significant, political, intellectual, and economic factors that are well beyond the scope of this thesis. More significantly, the theoretical content of state-sponsored, myth-based propaganda has been almost completely rejected and does not represent a significant contribution to post-war scholarship. The consequences of this half century and the links of myth to imperialism certainly do continue to have influence in the post-war period. However, at present, the details of wartime approaches to myth are relevant mostly for the danger they represent, not for their contributions to mythic interpretation. For the most part modern scholars reach back to Norinaga and before for inspiration. Readers interested in more information about mythology during the war years should consult the works referenced in this section. Kōnoshi Takamitsu’s *Constructing Imperial Mythology: Kojiki and Nihon shoki*75 is a particularly useful resource.

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75 Kōnoshi Takamitsu (Stanford University Press, 2000)
Themes in Postwar Mythology

Scholars and mythologists after World War II generally agree that we cannot ignore the political aspects of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, but there are varying opinions about the extent to which the political aims of the *Kiki* compilers dominate the narrative; did the need for authoritative political history produce the myths, or do the *Kiki* represent a real folk tradition? Are the gods in the stories indicative of real ancient religious beliefs and practices? How much do these myths actually represent a primitive and disparate but somehow culturally unified Japanese people?

Though any dichotomy risks being flawed by its over-simplicity, the major currents of mythology in the past 70 years can be divided into two camps of skeptics and believers. These categories are not clear-cut, homogenous or exclusive; the “skeptics” range from those who deny the legitimacy of any sort of Japanese cultural identity to those who are willing to make many concessions about the possible meanings of mythic details while choosing to avoid speculative statements and interpretations themselves.

Grouping all others into a category of “believers,” on the other hand, creates an even broader group, ranging from those who have actual religious faith in a cosmic order similar to that put forth by Hirata Atsutane, to those who could be considered moderates, pursuing potential scenarios to explain the myth, but doing so with rigorous academic interest. Most are “believers,” not in the fundamentalist sense of Norinaga and Atsutane who put faith in the literal word of the *Kiki* myths, but scholars who operate under the presupposition that there is something more to the stories than eighth-century political propaganda. In general, their investigations either seek to uncover what is concealed and overlooked in the narratives themselves or to investigate another aspect of prehistoric Japan using the *Kiki* texts as two sources among many.

These two attitudes are not focused in particular times, nor are they dominated by scholars of certain nationalities. It is true that recently the majority of non-Japanese researchers happen to be skeptical, but some of the most flowery prose about Japanese

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myth comes from scholars outside of Japan. For example, Claude Levi-Strauss has called Japanese myth, “the most faithful reflection that has come down to us of the great primordial myth – Urmythus ... a perfectly elaborated synthesis of elements found elsewhere in dispersed order.”77 Japanese mythologists too, can be found making significant contributions to either camp. Regardless of nationality and interpretational inclination, the most compelling scholarship is that which acknowledges both perspectives and uses them to bolster its positions and conclusions. Most importantly, as mythology and interpretation invest myth with new meaning, it becomes part of the mythmaking process. This section will examine not only some of the theories put forth in the past 70 years, but also explore the potential ideological implications of those analyses.

Kōnoshi Takamitsu is one highly-regarded contemporary scholar whose work is available in both English and Japanese languages and will serve as a representative of the “skeptical” perspective. Kōnoshi is critical of the Kiki and its analyses in three major ways: he addresses the motivation for the texts’ composition, he denies the existence of a single original mythic narrative, and he questions the very existence of the narratives before the eighth century. He argues that these texts represent, more than anything else, the Yamato Dynasty’s efforts towards self-establishment.78 He criticizes myth scholarship that emphasizes plot and isolated contents while overlooking the context of the Kiki’s writing and the overall worldviews they contain. He asserts that because the accounts of the Kojiki and Nihon shoki are so different, they are not indicative of a singular, authentic tradition, and any notion of a unified Japanese myth must have come after their composition.

With regards to the Kiki’s basis on material which existed prior to the eighth century, his view has been flexible. In 1995 he claimed that the Kiki, “…are not a written

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78 Kōnoshi Takamitsu, (Gakutōsha 1995), pp. 9.
version of something that existed before,“ but in 2000 he conceded that some content may be derived from previously extant stories, saying that, “some older narratives no doubt preceded and are contained in these two texts, but they take on completely different meaning within the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*. It is thus futile to use these two to postulate the original forms of these mythological systems.” His academic stance however, remains the same; regardless of the origins of the stories, the meaning of the *Kiki* should not be assumed to extend outside of the political contexts of their composition, nor can anything be reliably said about the narrative’s hypothetical previous incarnations.

Kōnoshi makes very relevant points, but in some ways his reasoning is flawed. First he rightly states that we should not focus exclusively on plot, but on overall worldview and, most importantly, context. Indeed, story elements and their arrangement may be similar to other myths and indicative of certain symbolic meanings, but the contexts in which they are written and presented *in the narrative* are potentially of greater significance. This is valid, and overemphasis of content, plot, and structure is the great caveat of structuralist and comparatist mythology. Close attention to context is, after all, one of the guidelines presented for Bruce Lincoln’s “weak comparison” discussed in chapter Two, and any thorough analysis of mythic content requires an investigation of the context as well.

However, Kōnoshi and other skeptics make a mistake when they conflate, a) the consistency of *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* texts with, b) a single authentic folk tradition and, c) the existence of the narratives prior to their recording, arguing as though refuting one of these disproves all three. Kōnoshi holds that the difference between the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* is evidence that they are not part of pre-existent folklore, but this is a point about which he is ultimately ambivalent. Many other scholars, while emphasizing the role of politics, take a position towards the mythic narratives similar to that of Michael Como who writes, “mythic paradigms of the post-Tenmu court were not created ex-

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79 Ibid, pp. 10.
81 Kōnoshi Takamitsu, (Gakutōsha 1995), pp. 9.
82 Emperor Tenmu reigned from 673 to 686.
nihilo but through the appropriation and transformation of pre-existing mythic and ritual resources.”

Furthermore, if we allow the standard interpretation of the *Nihon shoki* as a collection of multiple versions of stories from various sources, these narratives do exhibit *multiple existence* and *variation*, which were for folklorist Alan Dundes, the hallmarks of folklore. Dundes was an advocate for a liberal definition of his craft, and while he wrote the following in defense of photocopied office jokes as a folklore genre, his words are equally relevant for the narratives of the *Kiki*.

But are these items folklore? We submit that they are. They are traditional insofar as they manifest “multiple existence,” one of the principal characteristics of a folklore form. These items exist in multiple versions and in more than one time or place—just as all folklore does…

One result of multiple existence is variation, another indication that one is dealing with folkloristic material. As an item moves from person to person, change is almost inevitable. Each person (and ultimately each society) makes the item of folklore his own by consciously or unconsciously placing his personal interpretative stamp upon it.  

We should therefore accept Kōnoshi’s insistence on understanding context in our interpretations of myth. Also, Kōnoshi is right to criticize the idea that one authentic version of the Japanese mythic narrative existed before it was compiled in the *Kojiki*. The inconsistencies between the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, make it difficult to believe in a single version of Japanese myth predating the eighth century, but they do not indicate that the texts are something other than a written version of a diverse oral tradition. To the contrary, their multiple existence and variation are completely in line with established understandings of folklore. Therefore, the *Kiki*’s narratives should be considered part of a legitimate folk tradition from preliterate and prehistoric Japan precisely because several

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versions of the mythic accounts seemed to have existed in various places in the Japanese archipelago, with different details and also apparently different worldviews.

To argue that “Japanese myth” is a relevant category predating the Kiki does not always mean to insist, as Motoori Norinaga did, that the single version of myth contained in the Kojiki is that myth’s truest and original form. The idea of Japanese myth as a plural tradition until its consolidation in the eighth century is one shared by many scholars. Mostly, it is Kōnoshi’s assertion that it is “futile” to speculate about the forms preceding the Kojiki and Nihon shoki that differentiates him and other skeptics from those who seek to discover more from the Kiki narratives.

There is tremendous variety in the attitudes and theories of scholars and interpreters who seek meaning beyond the text of Japanese myth, but Umezawa Isezo’s 1976 essay, “Nihon shinwa no seiritsu to kōzō” (“The Development and Structure of Japanese Myth”) gives a clear outline of the assumptions, methods and theories that such an approach entails. Umezawa begins by acknowledging the Kiki as products of the eighth century, but he takes the discussion in a very different direction from there. He argues that we should not see the Kiki as the entirety of Japanese myth, but understand Japanese myth as something broader, extending beyond the limited context of the eighth century. It is common to think of the Kojiki and the Nihon shoki as the starting point of Japanese mythology, but insofar as the Kiki represent stabilized narratives that have not changed much in 1300 years, it may be more appropriate to consider the eighth century as a significant point of conclusion in Japanese myth making. He writes,

As for the Kiki myths, they were not the starting point – we must not forget that they were in fact the final destination or the return point… The eighth century was the time in which they were completed, but that is not to say that the contents (in this case myths) were entirely products of the eighth century.

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86 Ibid, pp. 150.
87 Ibid, pp. 152.
In other words, the Kiki are obviously flawed and contextualized documents, and scholarship of them is only scholarship of a piece of what might be considered Japanese myth. Furthermore, myth study that begins with the Kiki focuses on a static textual entity, and ignores the dynamic processes by which the narratives may have come to be.

The timeline for Umezawa’s history of Japanese myth, therefore, runs in the opposite direction from the one presented earlier in this chapter. Presenting only the history of Kiki interpretation, we did not consider what may have led up to the texts’ compilation in the eighth century. Addressing this earlier period, Umezawa proposes a myth history divided into four periods:88

1) **The Primal Period** (原始期) in which Japanese myth was not unified and various narratives entered Japan from different sources.89

2) **The Pre-Consolidation Period** (國家的結集以前) in which professional bards called kataribe developed, distributed, and adapted artistically complex and detailed oral narratives.90

3) **The Early Consolidation Period** (國家的結集初期) in which collection of diverse elements began on the national level and regional variations were gathered as clan histories.

4) **The Completion Period** (國家的結集完成期) in which contradictions were removed and the focus of the narratives was directed towards the imperial lineage.91

Therefore, Umezawa’s Completion Period extends from the writing of the Kojiki to today. The Kojiki is the most complete “national myth” and the Nihon shoki, though written 12 years later, actually represents an earlier developmental stage.92
Umezawa suggests two methods for going back and examining the narratives that existed before the *Kiki*: comparative mythology and close textual analysis. For textual analysis, *Nihon shoki* is preferable due to its diversity. Umezawa’s “comparative mythology” is, for the most part what can be labeled as “historical,” tracing the origins and derivations of myths by comparing one group’s narratives to another’s.

Speculation about the migration of myth into Japan saw its heyday the 1970s as Umezawa’s writing coincides with Yoshida Atsuhiko’s *Nihon shinwa no genryū* (Origins of Japanese myth), an extensive comparison of Japanese myth to that found elsewhere in East Asia. While Yoshida’s work attempted to account for almost all of Japanese myth in its investigation of the potential ways by which mythic themes and plot elements potentially entered Japan, more recent investigations using these methods are significantly more focused. One such example is Kirimura Ei’ichirō’s 2013 study of the relationship between a) a limited selection from the *Nihon shoki*, b) very similar myths from Southeast Asia, c) history and religious praxis in the Japanese region of Kumano, and d) a number of shrines in that area. In such investigations, the *Kiki* texts are only one part of an explanation that combines several other historical and archeological references.

Modern skeptics are resistant to identifying the *Kiki* as even somewhat indicative of a legitimate folk tradition, but ideologically, from where does this resistance come? Jun’ichi Isomae gives a frank and succinct answer. He states, “As long as we seek to identify culturally with the *Kiki*, we cannot deny the possibility that, depending on the circumstances, we may once again be politically captured by the imperial system.”

Even though the imperial family has virtually no political power in the 21st century, like the *Kiki*, it still possesses cultural and historical authority. Much of postwar skepticism is

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96 Jun’ichi Isomae (Equinox, 2009), pp. 125.
a reaction to WWII in a time when, as Isomae says, “painful memories lingered of the Japanese who were unable to oppose imperial fascism.”

Though neither Kōnosu nor Isomae say so outright, this resistance may not be merely political, but also cultural, humanitarian, and in the interest of civil rights and social justice. To claim that the Kiki is representative of all Japan creates an exclusive definition of Japanese identity. In reality, Japanese nationality is far from homogenous, and even the Kiki speak of the Emishi and Tsuchigumo, cultural groups in the Japanese archipelago who were only assimilated into the empire after the texts’ completion. Several groups of people, including Ainu, Okinawans, returnees with Japanese ancestry, and immigrants of many other ethnicities all constitute minorities in Japan whose connection to the mythic texts is not clear. It is not just in resistance to imperial fascism, but also possibly in opposition to ethnic nationalism and in defense of these minority groups that scholars should reject an essential, exclusive concept of Japanese identity based on mythic authority.

Isomae goes so far as to say, “surely what the term ‘Japan’ constitutes at any given period cannot be imagined as anything other than a phantasmal discourse.” Any concept of a nation is, in the end, an ideological construct. However, Japan, like many other nations, is also made of people who share, to a greater or lesser extent, complex, diverse, detailed, and fascinating culture. They share experiences and symbolic ways of interacting with each other and their environment. The Kiki, as two artifacts of this culture, are not representative of the totality of Japan for all time, but they are a very significant part of its history and development, are indicative of a crucial stage when Japan as we know it began to emerge, and are continually incorporated into culturally-framed systems of symbolic expression.

Rejection of the existence of a single, original myth goes hand-in-hand with the rejection of the notion that this original myth represents the essence of Japanese culture. However we do not need to go so far as to reject Japanese myth under a different

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97 Ibid, pp. 127.
98 Ibid, pp. 10.
definition – as a collective, diverse, and trans-textual category. A promising direction for modern comparative mythology in Japan takes the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* as two sources that can be compared thematically with Ainu and Okinawan folk traditions, creating a holistic and inclusive re-conceptualization of “Japanese myths” in the plural. Similarly, theories about the derivations of Japanese myth emphasize Japanese culture’s multiple origins in China, North Asia, Korea, or Southeast Asia. To approach Japanese myth with the belief that it has significance beyond the political *Kiki* texts also allows for a vision of Japan as part of an Asian network of diverse and interconnected groups sharing cultural products and making unique creative developments. This certainly cannot be easily reconciled with imperialistic notions of Japanese homogeneity and ethnic purity. If anything, this approach to Japanese myth deconstructs nationalistic isolation and strengthens Japan’s relationship with other peoples and cultures.

Attention to the unique cultural and ideological products of any nation can also be considered a reaction to the encroachment of external hegemony. In the modern case of Japanese myth, it can be a response to the trend of seeing all of East Asian civilization as derivative from the cultural hegemony of China. Investigations in historical mythology break up this paradigm, emphasizing that Japan, while not a unique and homogenous entity, represents a distinct combination of peoples and cultures from various areas. Application of comparative, structuralist, and psychoanalytic methods for myth interpretation reveals that Japanese myth fits presupposed “universal” patterns in some ways, but in others it diverges, providing a critique of supposedly universal theory that is invariably of Western origin.

To address the continued possibilities for the interpretation of Japanese myth, we can apply principles of reception aesthetics to mythology. In her study of Japanese myth, Isabel Barroso holds that texts do not have meaning in-and-of themselves, but that their meaning is always determined by the experiences and values of their audience. Myths may be written in the rhetoric of the powerful, but they lack absolute meaning and are

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99 Ibid, pp. 10.
always subject to popular interpretation.\textsuperscript{100} Myth, as Bruce Lincoln asserts, is the best way to legitimate and structure society because it is an appeal to higher, if not the highest authority.\textsuperscript{101} Just as myth can be used to justify the rigidity of social structure, it can also be used as a means for change.\textsuperscript{102} A dramatic example of this can be seen in the Meiji Restoration, where political authority was removed from the Shogun and returned to its “rightful” place with the emperor, resulting in one of the fastest periods of industrial and technical growth in human history. Though we must always be wary of the political implications of the Kiki myths, some Japanese will inevitably continue to turn to myth as they create and recreate identity for themselves and their country. The remainder of this thesis will investigate how some mythologists attempt to do just that.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Bruce Lincoln (Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 3.
\item Ibid, pp. 5.
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\end{footnotesize}
Ame no Uzume appears in three *Kiki* myths in total. In the *Nihon shoki*, she plays a significant role in the myths of the “Heavenly Grotto” (Ama no iwayato) and the “Divine Descent” (Tenson kōrin). In the *Kojiki*, she is present in these two myths as well as a third, the much shorter myth of the *Sarume no Kimi* which immediately follows the “Divine Descent.” Any retelling of a mythic narrative necessarily leaves out or abbreviates some details while emphasizing others, and it is easy to paraphrase a myth in a way that privileges one interpretation. Therefore, whenever possible, myths should speak for themselves. In this chapter I will provide my own translations of the relevant sections of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* and address the similarities and differences between the accounts. I will save most discussion of interpretations for the fifth and sixth chapters, but translation always includes a dimension of interpretation, especially for texts so old and foreign, so there are a few issues with translation worth mentioning before attending to the stories.

In modern scholarship, there are debates in both the Japanese and English languages when it comes to rendering the names of places, objects and characters in the *Kiki* into modern script. In the case of some characters in the *Kiki*, such as that of Amaterasu Ōmikami, the Chinese characters used to write the name are consistent between the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*. However, for a great many other mythic figures, and Ame no Uzume belongs to this second category, the different texts use different orthographies. This is significant because we cannot always be sure if a glyph was selected to represent the name for purely phonetic purposes, or if it was chosen for the idea it represents. It is generally assumed that the names of the gods mean *something*,
and the meanings associated with the kanji characters are well attested. However given classical Japanese’s penchant for homophony and wordplay, what is meant by phonetic readings is open to interpretation.

Japanese writers take one of two approaches. At shrines, which generally draw their lineage from either the Kojiki or the Nihon shoki, names are written with the characters used in the relevant text. In scholarship also, when addressing only one version of the narrative, it is common to use the kanji characters in the text being examined. Some scholars enthusiastically promote the use of traditional characters in representing the names of mythic figures. A representative of this way of thinking, Chikusa Kiyomi puts forth the argument that reading a name with pictographic and ideographic characters gives us an idea of the meaning behind the name. If we want to understand who and what a kami is, the first step is to look closely at his or her name. For example the name of the “moon god” Tsukuyomi literally means “Moon Reading.” This yomi is also found in the word koyomi, “calendar” and reveals the historical importance of the moon in reckoning the passage of time.103

However, when writing about a figure as he or she appears in multiple texts, it is common for scholars to write names in the phonetic katakana syllabary devoid of ideographic semiotic connotations. As all katakana readings are identical, this is technically the same as if someone were speaking out loud about the god or goddess; the sound of the name is primary, the characters are secondary. Before addressing the possible semiotic and ideological implications of using katakana to write the names of kami, we need to acknowledge the very practical reasons for doing so. First is the above-mentioned problem of multiple conflicting ways of writing a name in Chinese characters, an issue for which the phonetic script is an easy compromise. Also, many of the Chinese characters used to write names in the Kiki are not part of the regular-use kanji104 or the readings are non-standard, and therefore would require a gloss (“ruby”) or other notation

104 The jōyō kanji are 2136 Chinese characters identified by the Japanese Ministry of Education as those used most commonly to write modern Japanese, and knowledge of them is required as part of compulsory education.

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to indicate their pronunciation to modern readers. More importantly, using *katakana* allows scholars to treat the texts equally; choosing one *kanji* version over another may inadvertently grant greater authority to the text in which that version of the name appears.

Despite these practical concerns, there are at least two other subtler effects of writing the names of *kami* in a phonetic script that did not exist when the *Kiki* were first recorded. The first is that by referring to a figure not as he or she is found in one specific text, but phonetically as an identity that encompasses multiple texts, we are asserting that this figure exists as a trans-textual character, a synthesis of multiple sources and iterations. Scholars that write Ame no Uzume’s name in *katakana* strongly imply that an ideal form of her *character* exists in some abstract dimension not limited to a single text.

This implicit assertion of a mythic figure’s existence on the ideal level may then be picked up sub-textually by the reader, and even though rendering a god’s name in *katakana* in one sense asserts the essential existence of the figure in a realm outside of specific historically-grounded texts, it may also serve to separate the character from that which is typically “Japanese.” In modern Japanese language, recent loanwords and foreign names are almost invariably written in *katakana*, and the impression a Japanese reader not initiated into *Kiki* scholarship gets when he or she sees Japanese mythic figures written in this syllabary is that they seem foreign and distant.  

Rendering the names of the *kami* in *katakana*, just as the gods of Greek, Hindu, and other world myths are when written in Japanese, complements the apparent goal of some Japanese mythologists to use comparative mythology as a bridge between Japan and the rest of the world. However, despite these potential implications, we should not overstate the ideological side of using *katakana*; for most, it is primarily a practical decision.

In English-language scholarship there is a similar issue. In the *Kiki* myths, it is not always clear what words are regular nouns, descriptions, or given names. Even if were are convinced that something is an epithet, it remains to be decided whether to translate it into English or just transliterate it into Romanized Japanese. For example, the

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105 Though not a universal reaction, this is something anecdotaly observed through countless casual conversations.
name Amaterasu Ōmikami can be interpreted as a name, or a phrase containing a relative clause. It can easily and literally be translated as “the great revered god who illuminates the heavens.” Surely, Japanese people have always been conscious of the obvious meaning behind the name. However, in other instances the meaning may not be so apparent, and multiple interpretations may be possible or even intentional due to classical Japanese’s aforementioned homophony and wordplay. Some English-language scholars leave many words in the original pronunciations, including place names and the names of inanimate objects. This retains some of the flavor of the original language and does not assert one interpretation over others. However, for the casual reader of myth in translation, the multiple meanings of Japanese mythic names may be inaccessible. For this reason other scholars translate everything, a practice to which I am not wholly opposed, but I feel it makes the translation bulky and most importantly, rules out alternative interpretations. With all of these approaches in consideration, it seems best for a serious discussion of Ame no Uzume in English to include a careful examination of her name in its multiple iterations. English being phonetic allows us to speak of the goddess without privileging one interpretation of her name, but we should keep in mind its multiple possible meanings.\footnote{In my translation that follows, I have tended to follow these guidelines:
1) Render the names of gods, including epithets, in Romanized Japanese. With time, hopefully even non-Japanese speakers will come to appreciate the frequency of honorific titles.
2) Write place names in their original pronunciation. Places such as Hyuga and Ise exist to this day. Fantastic realms such as \textit{Takamagahara} (the High Plain of Heaven) and \textit{Toyo-Ashiura no Nakatsu Kuni} (Rich Reed-plain Middle Kingdom) are exceptions, and I have translated them because their meaning is clear.
3) For names of places and items that include an identifier, \textit{yama}, \textit{kawa}, \textit{kagami} etc., transliterate the whole name \textit{and} translate the identifier. Thus \textit{Ama no Kayama}, in which \textit{yama} means “mountain,” is translated somewhat repetitively as “Mount Ama no Kayama.”
4) For other issues, use a footnote.}

\textbf{Ame no Uzume: Behind the Name}

The \textit{Kojiki} and \textit{Nihon shoki} render the name of Ame no Uzume no Mikoto differently.
There are commonalities in the parts of the name that may be thought of as titles or epithets, standardized phrases that are not unique to this goddess. The initial character 天 is read ama or ame in vernacular Japanese. It means “sky,” or by extension “heaven.” This is an extremely common way of beginning names in Kiki myth.

命 is here read Mikoto, but a more common reading for this character is inochi, meaning “life.” Phonetically, Mikoto is a combination of the honorific prefix mi and the word koto, meaning “word,” “deed,” or “thing.” Mikoto, is also sometimes written 尊, a character meaning “precious,” and is used for several gods in the Kiki with the connotation of “venerable presence.” Along with Ōmikami, Ōkami, and Kami it appears after a god’s unique names. In each instance no is an implied possessive particle found between two nouns showing that the latter belongs to the former.

The variations in the orthography appear in the portion of the name that can be thought of as the goddess’s unique personal moniker, Uzume. In this, the Kojiki appears to be using characters phonetically with little concern for their meaning. 宇, a pictographic representation of the eaves of a building, means a “vast open area,” and is present in the modern Japanese word uchū, meaning “outer space.” However, it is also commonly used to represent the sound う in location and personal names as well. 受 is

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107 The reading is ame when the word stands alone and ama in bound compounds like Amaterasu. The same e – a pattern is seen in other words like te hand and me, eye each of which switches vowel to an a in some compounds.

56
read zu or ju in Chinese-derived pronunciation, or as the Japanese verb uku, in each instance meaning “to receive.” Likewise, 買 and its simplified form 売 mean “to sell,” but are used phonetically in many Kiki names to represent the sound me. Thus, a literal translation of the characters in the Kojiki version of the name would be “receive and sell an open space,” a name that seems to have nothing to do with the goddess’s actions. Therefore, the orthography is most likely phonetic.

The Nihon shoki may be more revealing. Me here is written with the character 女 meaning woman. Me was the classical Japanese word for woman appearing in words like hime, “princess” and otome, “maiden.” Uzu is represented by 鈿 meaning “hairpin” or other metal hair accessory. This is commonly explained by the fact that the Sarume no Kimi and the miko, female ceremonial performers tracing their origins to Ame no Uzume, wore such decorations during their dances. However, unlike 女 regularly being read as me, 鈿 is not commonly read as uzu, nor does uzu on its own mean “hairpin.”

If me is taken to mean woman, the meaning of the uzu portion of the name is the only part that remains to be decoded. To summarize, the meaning of Ame no Uzume no Mikoto is most likely something akin to “the venerable presence of the uzu-woman of heaven.” As for the meaning of uzu, there are several possibilities.

1) 髮華  uzu – a wreath made of flowers and branches and worn as a crown. Ame no Uzume does in fact wear a wreath crown in one myth, and there may be an association between a plant-wreath crown and a metal hairpin.

2) 濃  uzu – a spiral or twist. Ame no Uzume and the miko that emulate her “twist” their hair up and pin it in place.

3) 珍  uzu – precious or splendid This would make her the “splendid woman of Heaven” Explanation 1 is the most convincing, but these meanings do not need to be mutually exclusive. The uzu wreath may be so named because branches and vines are woven together in a spiral pattern. These three meanings are further complicated by the
explanation given by the 9th century *Kogoshū*, a later commentary on the mythic gods and goddesses. According to this text, *uzu* is a shift from the older form *ozu*, meaning strong or fierce, and some hold that this is the true derivation of her name, making her the “fierce woman of heaven.” It is for all these reasons that, in his 2014 translation, Gustav Heldt rendered her name as, “the mighty one Wreathed Woman of Heaven,” including many of the potential component parts. However, with so many possible interpretations of the name Ame no Uzume no Mikoto, I have elected to leave it as it was in the various texts, transliterating it phonetically without translating it, but also keeping in mind the trans-textual implication this has. Ame no Uzume is a character that exists in multiple texts and stories and may therefore demonstrate inconsistencies between them.

The Myths of Ame no Uzume: 1) The “Heavenly Grotto”

Ame no Uzume’s first appearance in both the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* is in the myth of the “Heavenly Grotto” (*Ama no iwayato*). This is arguably the most famous and frequently reproduced of all Japanese myths, either in anthologies of world myth or in drama and visual art from Japanese history. The story begins in the High Plain of Heaven, a celestial realm of the gods, similar to but distinct from the realm of the earth. The sun goddess, Amaterasu Ōmikami had lost an *ukei*, a form of divination or wager, with her brother the storm god Susano’o. This particular *ukei* involved the siblings exchanging personal items and producing children from them. In celebration of his victory, Susano’o went wild and committed several heinous acts, the last of which was to skin a horse backwards and throw its body into Amaterasu’s weaving room. In the *Kojiki* version, Amaterasu’s weaving maiden jumped up in surprise at this, accidentally stabbed her genitals on the loom’s shuttle, and died. The *Kojiki* continues,

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58
Therefore, Amaterasu Ōmikami saw this and was horrified\textsuperscript{110} by it. She opened the door of the Heavenly Grotto\textsuperscript{111} and hid herself inside. Thus heaven became completely dark, and earth was totally enveloped by gloom.\textsuperscript{112} And because of this, a perpetual night dragged on. Then everything was filled with the voices of the myriad gods\textsuperscript{113} like the buzzing of flies in summer, and all countless manner of disaster arose. At this, the myriad gods gathered in a Godsmoot\textsuperscript{114} in the plain by the river Ama no Yasukawa\textsuperscript{115}, and set the son of Takami Musuhi, Omoikane no Kami\textsuperscript{116} to thinking\textsuperscript{117}, and\textsuperscript{118} gathered the long-crowning Naganakidori birds of the Eternal Realm\textsuperscript{119} and set them to crowing. They extracted the Heavenly Ores from the headwaters of Ama no Yasukawa, and took iron from Mount Ama no Kanayama, seeking Amaatsu Mara as a smith. They set Ishikoridome no Mikoto to making a mirror. They set Tama no Oya to make the Yasaka no Magatama’s\textsuperscript{120} string of 500 jeweled beads. They called Ame no...

\textsuperscript{110} 見畏む (mikashikomu) is a compound verb made of miru, “see” and kashikomu, a complicated word having nuances of experiencing fear and awe or being sobered by a new understanding or realization. In the Kojiki, this word was also used to express Izanaki’s reaction to seeing the rotting corpse of his dead wife in the underworld. It may be that after tolerating the outrageous behavior of her brother, Amaterasu finally “sees” how dangerous and intolerable his actions are.

\textsuperscript{111} 天石屋戸 (Ama no Iwayato) - Ama is “heaven.” Iwa means “large rock,” and ya means “house” or “room.” To is “door.” Iwaya, also written as 岩屋 or 窟, is specifically a cave, grotto, or hollow in rock, often used for religious purposes. Though it seems to be a proper noun, referring to a specific place, it is not always necessary to differentiate between the cave portion and the door portion, and the story is also called Ama no Iwaya or Ama no Iwato.

\textsuperscript{112} For the darkness in heaven, the text uses the character 暗, and for earth 隙, but both are read as the adjective kurashi, “dark.” By the characters themselves, I interpret 暗 as meaning the absence of sun (日) and 隙 as a darkness like that within an enclosed space (門).

\textsuperscript{113} Here 萬神, 10,000 gods; below 八百萬神 8,000,000 gods. I translate both figuratively as “myriad.”

\textsuperscript{114} 神集(kamutsudoi) a gathering of the gods. 集 is used twice consecutively, first as a noun and next as a verb.

\textsuperscript{115} 天安河 (Ama no Yasukawa) the Peaceful River of Heaven

\textsuperscript{116} 思金神 (Omoikane no Kami) Omoi is “thought,” this god is a wise planner. Kane here is “metal,” “gold,” or “money.”

\textsuperscript{117} 令思 (omowashimu) the causative 令 immediately precedes the verb 思, indicating that the council of gods made Omoikane think of a plan. Causatives are used for each of the actions of the gods.

\textsuperscript{118} This section also makes extensive use of the conjunctive character 而 emphasizing almost simultaneous consecutive action.

\textsuperscript{119} 常世長鳴鳥 (Tokoyo no Naganakidori) Though inflected parts are not expressed in the kanji text, the traditional reading of this figure ends the verb “to crow” in the continuative form naKI, not the terminal form naKU. Also the initial consonant of the following noun tori (meaning “bird”) is voiced as Dori. Both are indications of a compound word. Thus, the reading naga naKI Dori suggest this is the name of the birds. The descriptive “birds that crow for a long time” would be read (nagaku naKU TOri or naganaKU TOri). Similarly, many of the characters who follow have names that resemble the tasks they perform in the narrative.

\textsuperscript{120} 八尺勾 (Yasaka no Magatama) Magatama is a comma-shaped jewel or bead. The Yasaka no Magatama first mentioned here will become one of the three imperial regalia of Japan. Saka is a unit
Koyane no Mikoto and Futodama no Mikoto and set them to remove the shoulder blade of a great stag from mount Ama no Kaguyama, and take the wood of the mountain cherry from mount Ama no Kayama and provide a divination. They uprooted 500 great sakaki trees and in the upper branches hung the Yasaka no Magatama’s string of 500 jeweled beads, and in the middle branches hung the Ya’ata no Kagami mirror, and in the lower branches draped white cloth and blue cloth.

Futodama no Mikoto held these various things as offerings and Koyane no Mikoto intoned prayers. Ama no Tajikarao no Kami stood hidden by the corner of the door, and Ama no Uzume no Mikoto draped over herself a sash made of ground pine that grew on mount Ama no Kayama and wore a crown of spindle tree boughs. She took in her hands streamers woven from the bamboo grass of mount Ama no Kayama. By the door of the Heavenly Grotto she turned over a barrel, and giving it booming stomps she became possessed, exposing her of measurement about a foot long, and *ya-saka* literally means “eight saka.” This item is also described as being a *misumaru*, a string of beads. The common interpretation is that when strung together, the 500 beads are eight feet long.

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121 天香山 (Ama no Kayama or Ama no Kaguyama) A mountain associated with pleasant olfactory or visual sensation.

122 波波迦 (hahaka) is the old name for the *uwamizu-zakura* tree (*prunus grayana*) a variety of cherry three that grows in higher altitudes in Japan and China.

123 Animal bones were frequently used in divination. The bone was burned in a fire of Hahaka wood and the cracks in the bone were examined by the augurs.

124 五百津眞賢木 (ihotsu masakaki) though branches are not mentioned, some interpret this as a single tree with 500 branches rather than 500 trees. Either way, it makes for a grandiose spectacle.

125 眞賢木 (masakaki) also 榊 (sakaki) (*clevera japonica*), the tree most strongly associated with Shinto.

126 八尺鏡 (Ya’ata no Kagami) The mirror that Ishikoridome made, also one of the imperial regalia, is here referred to by its name, lit. “eight-ata mirror.” The *saka* in Yasaka no Magatama and the *ata* in Ya’ata no Kagami sometimes use the same character but the text tells us to read them differently. To what exactly these measurements refer, the diameter or circumference of the mirror, is unclear.

127 天宇受賣 (Ame no Uzume) a seemingly phonetic representation of her name.

128 日影 (hikage) These characters are lit. “sun shade” or “shadow cast by the sun” but are substitutes meant to represent a plant of homophonous name, the hikage, (*lycopodium clavatum*) which is a spore-bearing vine-like plant that resembles a conifer, but is unrelated to true pine trees.

129 眞拆 (ma-saki) is spindle tree (*euonymus japonicus*). The *Nihonshoki* has Ame no Uzume’s crown made of 眞坂樹 (ma-sakaki) the same tree on which the beads, mirror, and cloth were hung. However, it is difficult to get the reading *ma-sakaki* from these characters in the *Kojiki*, especially considering that in the *Kojiki*, *ma-sakaki* was written differently just a few lines earlier. Though quite different by modern taxonomy, *ma-saki* and *ma-sasaki* are both broad-leafed evergreen trees.

130 神懸 (kamugakari, kamigakari) Lit. “set upon by a god,” possessed. Ame no Uzume is herself a god, and it is unclear by which god she is possessed; this leads some to interpret this word as “entered a trance,” but the characters and their reading unambiguously point to divine possession.
breasts and pushing the cord of her robe down to her genitals. In this way the High Plain of Heaven resounded as the myriad gods joined in laughter.

At this, Amaterasu Ōmikami began to think things suspicious. She narrowed opened the door of the Heavenly Grotto and asked within, “Because I am hiding in here, I think the Plain of Heaven is dark, and the Reed-Plain Middle Kingdom is also dark, so why is it that Ama no Uzume is making music and the myriad gods are all laughing?”

To this Ame no Uzume said, “It is because a noble god that surpasses you is here that we rejoice and laugh and play.”

While she was saying this, Ama no Koyane no Mikoto and Futodama no Mikoto held out the mirror. When they showed it to Amaterasu, she thought it even stranger. When she finally went out the door and was gazing on it, Tajikara no Kami who had been hiding there took her by her honorable hand and pulled her all the way out. That instant, Futodama no Kami took a sacred rope and pulled it across her august behind. He said, “You may not go back in any further than this.” Therefore, when Amaterasu Ōmikami had come out of the cave, the High Plain of Heaven and the Reed-Plain Middle Kingdom naturally were able to be illuminated.

The Nihon shoki also contains this story in its main section with three alternate versions. However, Ame no Uzume only appears in the main section. In the alternate versions...
accounts, different gods use various other means to entice her out of the cave. The lead-up to the story is similar; Susano’o had been committing several dastardly deeds in the High Plain of Heaven including throwing a skinned horse into Amaterasu’s weaving room. In this version it is Amaterasu who injures herself in surprise, though where is unspecified. *Nihon shoki* Section 7, Main text reads,

> Because of this, she became angry, promptly entered the Heavenly Grotto, closed the stone door, and stayed put. Therefore, all within the realm was in perpetual darkness, and there was no change of day and night. At this time, the myriad gods gathered by the banks of the river Ama no Yasukawa, and considered the way in which they should pray. Omoikane no Kami pondered deeply and let his thoughts reach far. Finally, he gathered the Naganakidori of the Eternal Realm and had them crow in turns. Also, he had Tajikarao no Kami stand by the side of the rock door. He had the ancient ancestor of the Nakatomi Clan, Ame no Koyane no Mikoto and the ancient ancestor of the Inbe Clan, Futodama no Mikoto dig up 500 true sakaki trees, and in their upper branches hang the five hundred strung beads of Yasakani, in their middle branches hang the *Ya ata no Kagami* mirror, and in the lower branches hang blue cloths and white cloths. They then prayed together.

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139 發慍 Lit. “to issue forth resentment,” with instructions to read as *ikaru*, “get angry” a contrast to her frightened response in the *Kojiki*.
140 八十萬神 Here the number is literally 800,000 gods.
141 In many instances the names of the gods and locales are the same as in the *Kojiki*.
142 思兼神 (Omoikane no Kami) The *omoi* is the same as above, but here *kane* means “to perform two functions.”
143 深謀遠慮 Lit. “plan deeply and consider far.” I have prioritized the adverbs over the verbs. Unlike the *Kojiki*, there is no causative marker here to indicate that Omoikane was made to think of a plan. I therefore take him as the leader giving instructions, and the subject of the causatives that follow. There is no indication of Omoikane’s gender either, though this god is typically thought to be male.
144 中臣連遠祖 (Nakatomi-muraji no tōki oya) The *Nihonshoki* specifically mentions the clans that claimed descent from these gods, all of which held strong political connections to the emperor in the 8th century.
145 真坂樹 (ma-sakaki) the orthography is different, but this is the same *sakaki* tree as the *Kojiki* version.
146 八坂瓊 (Yasakani) here the name of the jeweled beads is slightly different with one more syllable *ni* at the end.
147 八咫鏡 (Ya ata no Kagami) Once again the name of the treasured regalia is slightly different.
Furthermore, the ancient ancestor of the Sarume no Kimi,\textsuperscript{148} Ame no Uzume no Mikoto, promptly took in hand a yew-wrapped spear.\textsuperscript{149} She stood in front of the door to the Heavenly Grotto and made a skillful performance.\textsuperscript{150} She also made a crown of true sakaki trees and made a sash of ground pine.\textsuperscript{151} She set a fire in the fire place, put out a barrel, and became possessed.\textsuperscript{152}

At that time, Amaterasu Okami heard this and said, “Now I am concealed in this Grotto. I think that the Rich Reed-plain Middle Kingdom\textsuperscript{153} must naturally be in a state of perpetual night. Why is it that Ame no Uzume plays like this?” Presently, she narrowly opened the rock door with her honorable hand and examined what was going on. Then Tajikarao no Kami respectfully took Amaterasu Okami’s hand, and humbly pulled her out.\textsuperscript{155} Then the god of the Nakatomi and the God of the Inbe promptly barricaded the door with a sacred rope.\textsuperscript{158} They quickly made a request saying, “Do not go back again, please.”

In each case, Ame no Uzume’s performance is the key element, or at least the climax, of the gods’ efforts to bring Amaterasu out of the Heavenly Grotto, but there are

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{148}猿女君 (Sarume no Kimi) The name of a clan with political and religious influence in the 8\textsuperscript{th} century. It was initially the duty of the Sarume no Kimi Clan to send women to the court to serve a ceremonial function as priestesses.
\item \textsuperscript{149}茅纒之矟 (chimaki no hoko) 茅 is thought to be plant called kaya in modern Japanese, \textit{torreya nucifera} or Japanese nutmeg-yew. 纒 here \textit{maki}, is also a \textit{matoi}, a “decoration on a pole.” 矟 (hoko) is a polearm.
\item \textsuperscript{150}俳優 (wazaoki) Though these characters are used in modern Japanese with the Chinese-based reading \textit{haiyu} to mean actor, the exact nature of Ame no Uzume’s \textit{wazaoki} performance in this text is unclear.
\item \textsuperscript{151}蘿 (hikage) once again, the plant’s name is written differently from the \textit{Kojiki}, but includes a note that it is to be read in the same way.
\item \textsuperscript{152}顯神明之憑談 (kamugakarī) While we are instructed to read this word phonetically as the same word for possession in the \textit{Kojiki}, it contains a much more information: to “make clear,” \textit{顯} and \textit{明}; a “god,” \textit{神}; to “approach,” “depend on” or “be possessed by,” \textit{憑}; and also to “communicate” and “advise,” 談.
\item \textsuperscript{153}豐葦原中國 (Toyo-Ashihara no Naka-tsukuni) the name for the earth is the same as in the \textit{Kojiki} with an added epithet \textit{toyo}, “rich” or “fertile.”
\item \textsuperscript{154}瞹樂 (tawamure tanoshimu) These words suggest almost frivolous play, which has not been suggested by the description of Ame no Uzume’s behavior.
\item \textsuperscript{155}奉承天照大神之手 (Amaterasu Okami no te o uke-tatematsuru) This sentence uses a humble form of the verb \textit{承} (uku) plus a humble modifier \textit{奉} (tatematsuru) usually associated with \textit{offering} one’s action to a superior.
\item \textsuperscript{156}引而奉出 (istikte idashi-tatematsuru) the same humble verb modifier \textit{tatematsuru}. Though Tajikarao is forcing her out of the cave, the language is very respectful.
\item \textsuperscript{157}界 (sakai su) Lit. make a boundary.
\item \textsuperscript{158}繩 (shiri kume na) the text gives us a note on the specific reading of the this character which ordinarily means only “rope.”
\end{itemize}
subtle and intriguing differences between the versions. First, the *Nihon shoki* has no mention of genitalia, either in the injury leading up to Amaterasu’s retreat into the cave, or in Ame no Uzume’s dance. The items with which Ame no Uzume equips herself are slightly different; in each she adorns herself with plants and uses a barrel as a stage, but in the *Nihon shoki*, she also has a polearm and builds a fire. These implements, as well as the mirror, beads, and *sakaki* trees seem to be ceremonial or ritual objects with some symbolic significance. If so, there is room to debate the possibility of differing meanings in the symbols. Furthermore, the *Nihon shoki* does not mention the laughter of the gods in response to Ame no Uzume’s performance, nor does Ame no Uzume have a chance to answer Amaterasu before the sun goddess is pulled from the cave.

Yoshii Iwao notes that the single narrative of the *Kojiki* contains nearly all the different methods of bringing Amaterasu out of the Heavenly Grotto that are mentioned in the various *Nihon shoki* versions, implying that the *Kojiki* version was a later construction produced by combining several pre-existing tales recorded individually in the *Nihon shoki*. However, particularly with regards to Ame no Uzume, the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* include unique details that are not found in other sources. It is therefore not sufficient to think of the *Kojiki* as a fusion of the *Nihon shoki* accounts, but we must consider each a valuable source of original mythic material in its own right. In fact, the peculiar details of the *Kojiki* version - the recurring theme of female genitalia, the laugher of the gods, Ame no Uzume’s response to Amaterasu’s query and her mention a god more precious than Amaterasu - are all elements of the story that defy simple explanation and have repeatedly been taken up by scholars in their interpretations of the myth.

**The Myths of Ame no Uzume: 2) The “Divine Descent”**

Later in the narrative, it is determined by the celestial deities that a descendant of Amaterasu should depart from heaven and establish divine rule on the earth. Though the

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160 天孫降臨 (Tenson Kōrin) *Ten* is “heaven.” *Son* is “grandchild,” or by extension, “descendants.” *Kōrin* represents the action, “to descend,” literally from a high place to a low but also with the social
means of determining who, what, when, where and how this should happen is complicated and varies in the accounts, it is eventually decided that Amaterasu’s grandchild should be the one to take up the task. Ame-nigishi Kuni-nigishi Amatsuhiiko Hikoho no Ninigi no Mikoto, Amaterasu’s grandchild, accepts the mission. Accompanied by several other gods who had a role in the “Heavenly Grotto” myth, he sets out. However, the presence of an imposing figure on the road between heaven and earth gives the gods pause, and provides another opportunity for Ame no Uzume to perform in service of the gods. The Kojiki tells us,

Thus Hikoho no Ninigi no Mikoto, when he was about to descend from heaven, came to the Crossroads of Heaven. There was a god in that place who illuminated the High Plane of Heaven above and the Reed-Plain Middle Kingdom below. Therefore, by the orders of Amaterasu and Takagi no Kami, it was decreed to Ame no Uzume, “Though you are a gentle lady, you are a god who wins when she faces off against other gods. Therefore go straight away and ask...”

and religious nuance of “to deign to visit,” and is used to for various gods in their descents from heaven to earth. The use of “Descent” in my translation of the title of this myth is meant to evoke both English meanings: genealogical “descent” and “descent” of the gods to earth.

161 Interpretations vary, but the majority of this name is understood as titles or epithets: Ame-nigishi – Gripping Heaven, Kuni-nigishi – Gripping the Realm, Ama tsu hiko – Prince of Heaven, Hikoho – Rice-ear Prince, and he is usually referred to as just Ninigi no Mikoto or Ninigi.

162 天之八衢 (Ama no Ya-Chimata) Lit. “The Eight Crossroads of Heaven” Crossroads are auspicious places in many cultures, Japan included. The eight is generally taken to be figurative, meaning many. The exact nature of this place where heaven and earth converge is the subject of much speculation.

163 高木神 (Takagi no Kami) Lit. “god of the tall tree.” Is another name for Takami Musuhi no Kami, one of the original three gods to appear in the Kojiki, the parent of Omoikane no Kami, and the grandparent of Ninigi on his mother’s side, Amaterasu being Ninigi's paternal grandmother. Of an even more ancient generation than Amaterasu, he has an authoritative role in heaven. In many versions of this story, he is either solely responsible or jointly responsible with Amaterasu for ordering the divine descent.

164 虽有手弱女人 (taoyame ni ari to iedomo) The meaning of the word taoyame, lit. “hand-weak woman” is the subject of scholarly debate, and will be addressed in Chapter 5. I choose to think of it as sort of formal address, like “lady” as the counterpart of “gentleman,” rather than a true statement about her metacarpal strength. It is certain that 虽 iedomo is a concessive conjunction, so taoyame should be understood as a contrast to the later description of her competence.

165 與伊牟迦布神 [自伊至布以音] 面勝神 (imukafu kami to omokatsu kami) Lit. “a god who face-wins against opposing gods.” Once again, the meaning is unclear, and details of various interpretations will be addressed in chapter 5, but by my understanding, a less literal translation of the beginning of this address to Ame no Uzume would be, “This is not the sort of thing to ask of a lady, but since you are so skilled at persuasion...”
who it is that stands in the road on which our honorable child is about to descend from heaven.”

And when thus asked, he replied, saying, “I am a god of the realm. My name is Sarutahiko no Kami. The reason I have come out here is that I heard the honorable son of heaven is descending, and therefore I have humbly come to meet him and offer my services to his vanguard as he makes his way...”

Sarutahiko joins the procession. The various gods and their roles are enumerated, including Ame no Uzume as the ancestor of the Sarume no Kimi Clan. Ninigi is instructed to take the three Imperial Regalia, the curved jewel, the mirror, and the sword and honor them on earth, and he descends through the clouds and over the floating bridge of heaven to Takachiho in Hyūga (or Himuka in modern-day Miyazaki Prefecture) where he builds his palace. The narrative of the Kojiki flows from one story to the next, but here it reaches some level conclusion, and in closing, Ninigi addresses Ame no Uzume,

...Therefore, he decreed to Ame no Uzume no Mikoto, “That servant of my vanguard, Sarutahiko no Okami, you who revealed his identity, see him off. Also, bear that god’s name and serve him.” It is because of this that the Sarume no Kimi bear the name of this male god, and call their women the Sarume no Kimi.

As in the myth of the “Heavenly Grotto”, here Ame no Uzume cannot be called the main character of the narrative; the “Heavenly Grotto” myth is about Amaterasu and the “Divine Descent” is about Ninigi. However, though Ame no Uzume plays a secondary and helpful role, her actions are crucial in resolving an impasse and advancing

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166 国神 (Kuni-tsu-kami) Lit. Kami of the Realm. These are a group of kami associated with the earth in contrast to the Ama-tsu-kami of heaven. They are generally presented as subordinate and inferior to the Ama-tsu-kami, though they are always given dignity and respect.

167 猿田毘古 (Sarutahiko) Though the Chinese character for monkey is used to represent the saru in this name, this is typically thought to be purely a phonetic relationship. Saru probably has some other meaning and is not an indication some monkey-like nature on the part of this god. Likewise with ta, here “rice field” Hiko is represented phonetically by two characters but is taken to mean something like “prince,” the male equivalent to hime.

168 送奉 (okuri-tatemasure) The order for Ame no Uzume to see Sarutahiko off explains why her cult and the Sarume Clan are centered in Ise (modern-day Mie Prefecture) but Ninigi settles in Hyuga.

169 負（ofu）Lit. “to bear, carry.” It is generally interpreted that the two gods are thus married.
the story. In the case of the “Divine Descent”, it is the Nihon shoki that gives the fuller explanation of just how Ame no Uzume negotiated with Sarutahiko at the crossroads. The ninth section of the Nihon shoki tells the story of Ninigi’s descent in one main version and a total of eight alternates. It is in the first of the alternate accounts that Ame no Uzume appears. As in the Kojiki, Ninigi has gathered his divine retainers and set out,

When he (Ninigi) had already begun his descent, the person who went ahead and cleared the way came back and said, “There is a god. He is in the Crossroads of Heaven.” The length of his nose is seven ata. His height is in excess of seven saka, or I should say seven hiro! Also, the corners of his mouth shine brightly. His eyes gleam like the Yata no Kagami and resemble the red winter cherry.”

He promptly sent gods who served him to inquire of this figure. At that time eight hundred thousand gods were there. All of them were stared down and unable to ask anything. Therefore, he made a special decree to Ame no Uzume saying, “You are the one whose gaze can best this person. By all means, you go and ask.” Right away, Ame no Uzume bared her breasts, pushed the cord of her robes down below her navel, and laughed mockingly as she stood facing him.

At that time, the god of the crossroads inquired, saying “Ame no Uzume, what is the reason for what you are doing?” She answered, saying,

170 天八達之衢 (Ama no Ya-Chimata) The characters used here differ from the Kojiki, including 達 which means “to stand” or “to reach a destination” but does not affect the reading in this case.
171 咫 (ata) is a unit of length about 8 in. or 20 cm. This may be taken as figurative language, and though Sarutahiko is often depicted with a long tengu-like nose, it is not usually a full 57 inches long.
172 尺 (saka, shaku) a “foot,” about 30 cm by modern standards.
173 寻 (hiro) a “span” or “fathom,” about six feet. Again his height should be understood as figurative. He is just very tall.
174 The source of Sarutahiko’s radiance, his mouth and eyes, is made clear in the Nihonshoki. A comparison to the Ya-ata no Kagami suggests an awesome, possibly solar brightness.
175 赤酸醤 (aka kagachi) Aka is “red” and kagachi is another name for hōzuki (physalis alkekengi). The red eyes of the Yamata no Orochi, a terrible serpent monster are also described this way.
176 目勝 (mekachi) “eye-winning” is used to refer to staring contests by children and in drunken revelry. It can inform our understanding of omokatsu “face-win” in the Kojiki.
177 脘 (hoso) “navel,” not to be confused with genitals, hoto.
178 咲噱 (azawarafu) Ame no Uzume’s naked display is again associated with laughter but this time it is her own disrespectful and loud derisive laughter.
179 衢神 (chimata no kami) Because of this appellation in the Nihonshoki, Sarutahiko is considered one god of travel and crossroads in Japan, but certainly not the only such spirit.
“Who is it that stays here in the road on which the descendant of Amaterasu Ōmikami travels? I ask.” The god of the crossroads answered, saying,

“I heard that the child of Amaterasu Ōmikami just now makes his descent, and therefore am waiting to humbly welcome him. My name is Sarutahiko no Okami.” At that time, Ame no Uzume again asked, saying,

“Will you set out first and lead us, or shall we set out and go ahead of you?” He answered, saying,

“I will go first and make the way for you.” Ame no Uzume asked again, saying,

“Where will you go? And where will the Divine Descendant go?” He answered, saying,

“It is surely best for the child of the heavenly gods to go to Kujifuru Ridge in Takachiho in the realm of Hyūga in Tsukushi. It is best for me to go to the headwaters of the Isuzu River in Sanada of Ise.” He then said, “The one who revealed me was you. Therefore, you should see me off.” Ame no Uzume returned and made her report. The Divine Descendant departed from Ame no Iwakura, pushed through the eight layers of heavenly clouds and made his way through the sacred road that was cleared, and descended from heaven. Finally, just as had been decided earlier, the Divine Descendant arrived at Kujifuru Ridge in Takachiho in the realm of Hyūga in Tsukushi.

Sarutahiko no Kami arrived at the headwaters of the Isuzu River in Sanada of Ise. Surely, Ame no Uzume accompanied Sarutahiko as he had requested. At that time, the Divine Descendant decreed to Ame no Uzume, “You must take for your clan the name of the god that you revealed.” And then he gave her the name Sarume no Kimi. Therefore, among the Sarume no Kimi men and women are both called “Kimi” because of this.

The Myths of Ame no Uzume: 3) Sarume No Kimi

The final myth in which Ame no Uzume plays a major role is recorded only in the Kojiki. It continues immediately after the myth of the Divine Descent as Ame no Uzume takes up her new position in Ise as Sarume no Kimi. The distinction between one story

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180 猿田彦 (Sarutahiko) The Nihonshoki uses a different character for saru, but still one with simian connotations. Here hiko is the single character usually associated with virtuous men and princes.

181 皇孫 (Sumemima) Ninigi is referred to by this official title for the remainder of the narrative.

182 筑紫日向高千穂槇觸之峯 (Tsukushi Hyuga Takachiho Kujifuru no Take) an even more specific location than in the Kojiki.

183 伊勢之狹長田五十鈴川上 (Ise Sanada Isuzu-kawakami) The Isuzu River flows by Jingū in Ise, the main shrine of Amaterasu and most sacred site in Shinto.

184 The authority to give and change names was long the privilege of the imperial household.
and the next is not always clear in the *Kiki*, and because it is so brief, this may also be considered an epilogue or side story to the “Divine Descent”.

Then, when Sarutahiko was in Azaka,\(^{185}\) he was fishing and got his hand stuck in a giant clam.\(^{186}\) He sank into the tide and drowned. Thus, when he sank to the bottom, his was called by the name Sokodoku Mitama.\(^{187}\) When the tide splashed, he was called by the name Tsubutatsu Mitama.\(^{188}\) When the sea foam burst, he was called by the name Awasaku Mitama.\(^{189}\) At that, she returned\(^{190}\) having seen Sarutahiko off. She promptly gathered together all of the wide-finned fish and all of the narrow-finned fish and put them to the question, “Will you offer your service to the child of the heavenly gods?” When she asked, all the fish said, “We will serve.” When they spoke, only the sea cucumber\(^{191}\) did not speak. Thereby Ame no Uzume no Mikoto said to the sea cucumber, “This mouth, it’s a mouth that doesn’t answer!” And she slit its mouth open with her dagger. That’s why the mouth of a sea cucumber is slit even now. This is also why in the many ages, when the swift imperial offerings are made from the islands, they are also distributed to the Sarume no Kimi.

This short story lacks the grandeur and world-changing consequences usually associated with myth, and its themes are certainly not as momentous as the catastrophic absence of the sun that we see in the “Heavenly Grotto” or the political-religious regime change of the “Divine Descent”. Taking the narrowest view of the myth, it can be said to explain the physiology of one rather insignificant sea creature and the division of

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\(^{185}\) Azaka Village and the ruins of Azaka Castle are in Matsuzaka City, Mie Prefecture, formerly in the Province of Ise.

\(^{186}\) 比良夫貝 (hirabugai) This seems to be a name of a specific kind of clam, but to what species this refers is unclear. *Hira* means “flat” or “wide” and this must have been a very large creature to entrap and drown the physically imposing Sarutahiko.

\(^{187}\) 底度久御魂 (Sokodoku Mitama) *Soko* is “bottom.” We are told to read *doku* phonetically, it may mean fast or accomplished. *Mitama* is “venerable Spirit”

\(^{188}\) 都夫多都 (Tsubutatsu) The same four characters are used phonetically for his name and for the verb *tsubu-tatsu*, “to produce small parts,” in this case bubbles or spray.

\(^{189}\) 阿和佐久 (Awasaku) Similarly, the characters for his name are also the verb describing the action of the sea.

\(^{190}\) Presumably to Hyuga from Ise

\(^{191}\) 海鼠 (ko) also, *namako*. Specifically, a “sea cucumber” (class *Holothuroidea*), though some translate it with the blanket term “sea slug” which refers to several unrelated categories of sea gastropods. See O no Yasumaro, *An account of Ancient Matters: Kojiki*. Translated by Gustav Heldt, Columbia University Press, 2014, pp. 51.
tribute to the Sarume no Kimi clan. The relative unimportance of the myth can justify it being omitted from the *Nihon shoki*. Also, Hieda no Are, who was a descendant of the Sarume no Kimi and a collaborator on the *Kojiki*, but not the *Nihon shoki*, may have pushed for the inclusion of the story to promote the Sarume Clan.

**Political and Non-political Elements**

In all three stories, elements of political ideology are intermixed with other less politically-charged details. The significance of the heavenly gods their descendants, and their connection to the human rulers of Japan is obvious. Amaterasu Ōmikami’s link to the imperial family is clear, but other noble clans their ancestral deities, and their support of the imperial house also constitutes a recurring theme. However, political expedience cannot account for the entirely of the narrative.

The “Divine Descent” clearly draws a connection between the gods of the celestial realm and the rulers of earth, and this myth can easily be considered the primary example of mythic justification for both imperial rule and the major support for the interpretation of the Kiki as primarily politically-motivated texts. The “Heavenly Grotto”, on the other hand, does not possess such a clear association with the government of the earthly realm and it is difficult to deny the myth’s possible symbolic expression of sun-related natural phenomena. However, that does not stop some scholars from emphasizing the political in this myth too. Yoshii Iwao, for example, notes that both the earth and heaven were affected by Amaterasu’s retreat into the cave, and he suggests that the primary motivation for including this myth before the heavenly descent showcases the importance of Amaterasu’s happiness for the wellbeing of the earth and sets the groundwork the legitimacy of her supposed descendants.  

Not only is the lineage of Amaterasu, Ninigi, and the mortal emperors emphasized, but the divine ancestry of other powerful clans is repeatedly mentioned throughout the *Kiki*. In the myths translated here, specifically the Inbe, the Nakatomi and the Sarume no Kimi clans are mentioned, and the same gods that played major roles in

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192 Yoshii Iwao, (Gakutōsha, 1982), pp. 92.
the “Heavenly Grotto” accompany Ninigi to Earth. This reinforces the link between the pivotal events of Japan’s most famous myth, the “Heavenly Grotto”, the political significance of the “Divine Descent”, and the political reality of the eighth century in which these clans were also active. However, the shape of the power structures created at this time were far from permanent. The roles of these clans were mostly religious and ceremonial, and without a claim to other kinds of power, they were subject to marginalization. However, many details of Ame no Uzume’s myths fail to be explained by purely political interpretations. The themes of possession and trance, nudity, dance, laughter, competence, and gender invite other considerations. It is to the various interpretations of these elements that we turn in the next chapter.
Chapter 5: Ame no Uzume, Religion, and Performance

This chapter will deal with how scholars analyze Ame no Uzume’s actions in the Kojiki and Nihon shoki, and how, in conjunction with other textual and material sources, they hypothesize about both the deeper meaning of the myths as well as certain aspects of Japanese society, historically and in the present. Though these areas overlap significantly, it will be helpful to divide them into three groups: the function of dance and possession in historical religious practice, the connection between mythic accounts and performance traditions, and the symbolic expressions of nature and fertility religion.

The “Heavenly Grotto” myth is one of the most popular and well-known of Japanese mythic stories. The Kiki provide many details about the deities’ actions in this time of crisis and perpetual darkness, details which stimulate audiences’ imaginations and invite various scholarly interpretations. Discussions of literal or symbolic significance surround nearly every object and action included in the story, and Ame no Uzume’s part represents several particularly ambiguous themes. Some scholars deal with this myth extensively, but avoid in-depth analysis of this goddess’s role. For example, Michael Como devotes an entire chapter to the story of the “Heavenly Grotto” in his book Weaving and Binding, Immigrant Gods and Female Immortals in Ancient Japan, but he gives no more attention to Ame no Uzume than to describe her actions as a “lewd dance.” This is typical; the goddess’s naked dance is a detail often overlooked, downplayed, or bowdlerized in retellings; Post Wheeler retreats to Latin “mons veneris”

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in translating that her robe was pushed down to her hoto, genitals.\textsuperscript{194} While scholarship that does not straightforwardly address Ame no Uzume’s function may contribute greatly to understanding other portions of the narrative and its context, the “Heavenly Grotto” myth is likely one that operates in several symbolic dimensions, and there is much such scholarship leaves out by failing to consider this goddess’s actions in detail.

Though consideration of Ame no Uzume is not always present in discussions of the “Heavenly Grotto” myth, this story is generally central to analyses of her. There are even scholars who hold Ame no Uzume’s performance to be the centerpiece of the narrative. Nagafuji Yasushi claims that, “…it is not a mistake to say that without Ame no Uzume’s shocking actions we cannot understand the true nature of the story structure contained in this myth.”\textsuperscript{195} If this myth functions on multiple levels, political, religious, artistic, and so forth, Ame no Uzume may be significant in many ways. However, when the details of this story alone are not enough to completely answer questions about Ame no Uzume’s role, many scholars turn to other sources – for instance, Ame no Uzume’s depictions in other myths as well as archeological and later textual evidence – in order to more fully understand the nature of the goddess, her position among the myriad kami, and the meanings her myths may have in various contexts. Investigations focused on Ame no Uzume’s role in the “Divine Descent” and Sarume no Kimi myths do exist as well, but in most analyses details from these two stories are used in a supportive capacity.

**Mythic Accounts of Dance and Possession**

First and foremost, the actions of Ame no Uzume in the “Heavenly Grotto” myth have close parallels to ritual dances carried out in ancient Japan. It is certain that in the eighth century, at least in the Imperial Court, young women performed dances with ritual implements in order to affect the spiritual health and wellbeing of the emperor and the realm. The ritual process was called 魂振 tama-furi (spirit “shaking” or invigoration)


when it aimed to heal an ailing ruler or infuse the land with prosperity and vitality. 魂鎮
*tama-shizume* (spirit pacification or quelling) was a similar but opposite rite; its goal was
to subdue violent spirits and prevent disaster and misfortune. These rituals were
collectively known as *tama*-*shizume* (the Chinese-based reading of the characters used in
*tama-shizume* with their order reversed), and were performed mainly at the *Chinkon-sai*,
a yearly court/religious ceremony held around the winter solstice.\(^{196}\)

At the time that the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* were written, these dances would
have been performed by female members of the Sarume no Kimi Clan, a political family
unit which claimed descent from Ame no Uzume herself. The Sarume no Kimi and their
genealogy are attested in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, but there is no mention in either text
of the performative role of the Sarume no Kimi. An explicit connection between the
“Heavenly Grotto” performance and the dances for *tama-furi* and *tama-shizume* only
comes from the *Kogoshūi* of 807. However, by that time, the Sarume no Kimi had been
replaced in their official ceremonial capacity by *miko*, female shrine attendants of various
family backgrounds.\(^{197}\) Perhaps in the time of the *Kiki* it was not necessary to explicitly
connect the myth and the dance, but as the Sarume no Kimi were marginalized (and the
historical reasons for this are unclear) it became ideologically desirable to justify the
*miko*’s dance by a connection myth. Though the *miko* may not have claimed a genetic
relationship to the goddess as the Sarume no Kimi did, their craft could still be explained
as a ritual function derived from hers.

A further development in the connection between ritual dance performance and
the “Heavenly Grotto” comes from the *Uetsufumi* of the 13th century, which slightly
modified the content of the mythic narrative from the *Kiki* originals. In the *Uetsufumi*
version of the story, Ame no Uzume danced before Amaterasu’s cave with eight divine
princesses and the accompaniment of a heavenly orchestra, both elements unknown in the
*Kojiki* or *Nihon shoki* versions. In actuality, this arrangement mirrors the *Yaotome mai*, a

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\(^{197}\) Terence Lancashire. “From Spirit Possession to Ritual Theater- A Potential Scenario for the
dance that had come to be performed ceremonially at that time.\textsuperscript{198} In the \textit{Uetsufumi} we therefore find an account influenced by both the familiar mythical text and contemporary culture.

When examining myth in the context of ritual, it is easy to become involved in a chicken-and-egg style debate about which of the two is original and which is a later adaptation; at the extremes of this debate, either ritual begins in order to reenact a pre-existing myth, or myth is devised to explain ritual action. However it is possible to look at both without prioritizing either, with the attitude that myth and ritual “perform distinct but intricately interdependent functions” in the society in which they are found.\textsuperscript{199}

Though the exact state of religious, ritual, and mythological affairs in Japan before the eighth century is unknown, the case of the \textit{Kogoshūi} and \textit{Uetsufumi} suggests a dynamic interplay between the ritual performance and mythic narrative. With slight modifications to the myth, writers were able to grant prestige to the \textit{miko} in the ninth century and to the \textit{Yaotome mai} in the 13\textsuperscript{th}. Likewise, the reality of religious practice in the societal context of the \textit{Kogoshūi} and \textit{Uetsufumi} influenced their writers’ ideas about the content of the myth and its significance.

However, despite the apparent significance of dance in the history of Japanese religious ceremony, Yoshida Shūsaku draws attention to the fact that the \textit{Kiki} texts do not use either of the contemporary words for dance, \textit{odoru} or \textit{mau},\textsuperscript{200} when referring to Ame no Uzume’s actions. The \textit{Nihon shoki} uses the word \textit{wazaoki}, a “skilled performance,” and the \textit{Kojiki} calls it \textit{asobi}, a complicated word that can mean religious performance or enjoyment through music, hunting, drink or sex.\textsuperscript{201} Though what these words meant in the particular context of the eighth century is the topic of debate, it is unlikely that contemporary ceremonial dances account for the entirety of the mythic content.

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid, pp. 90.
\textsuperscript{200} 踊/躍 \textit{odoru} was to dance with an emphasis on jumping and stomping. 舞 \textit{mau} (the root of \textit{mai} in \textit{Yaotome Mai}) was a to dance with the emphasis on spinning.
\textsuperscript{201} Yoshida Shūsaku, “‘Kamigakari’ and ‘Wazawoki’: Ame-no-uzume’s Dancing in the Myths of Ama-no-iwato and Tenson-kōrin” \textit{Japanese Literature} 60(2). Japanese Literature Association, 2011, pp. 1.
A second and more puzzling aspect of the “Heavenly Grotto” myth is Ame no Uzume’s possession. Both the Kojiki and Nihon shoki myths suggest that Ame no Uzume was not merely in a trance, but that she was literally taken over by another god. However, by which god she was possessed is not explicit. Yoshida suggests that it was Amaterasu herself that Ame no Uzume channeled. He reasons practically that it would have been difficult for Amaterasu to communicate through the rock walls of the Grotto, but even if myth is not limited by such practical concerns, the use of mediums to communicate the will of supernatural beings in times of distress is also a persistent phenomenon in Japan. Mediums appear in sources as varied as the Kojiki and Nihon shoki, The Tale of Genji, 16th century Jesuit accounts, and even modern practices in western Japan. Though male mediums did exist as well, in each of the above instances, a female medium is entered by a spirit, and through a question-and-answer dialogue relays a message from a god, spirit, or ghost to a human audience. In sources after the Kiki, the invigorating functions of chinkon dances and revelatory abilities of female mediums are distinct spiritual practices with different performers and very different venues, but Ame no Uzume seems to be accessing both of these abilities simultaneously.

**Myth and Performance Traditions**

The final real-world performance activity often linked to the “Heavenly Grotto” myth is drama, and it is likely that traditional Japanese drama forms are in part derived from earlier practices of chinkon and possession. Structurally, the question-and-answer format of possession is also found repeatedly in forms such as Nō and Kagura. In plays such as Aoi no Ue (based on events in The Tale of Genji), the plot focuses around an actual spiritual possession, but even when possession is not present, almost all Nō dramas are divided into a relatively normal human waki roles and troubled supernatural shite

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202 Rendered in the Kojiki as 神懸 and the Nihonshoki as 顯神明之憑談
roles. Nō scripts generally contain question-and-answer sessions in which the mundane waki ask the mysterious and awesome shite to explain themselves and the reasons for their distress. So strong are the similarities between Nō and this form of possession that Iwata Masaru borrowed the terms waki and shite from Nō in his scholarship of spirit mediums.205

The connection between myth and drama is not limited to this structural similarity; most accounts of the origins of Japanese drama include an explicit acknowledgement of the Japanese myth of the “Heavenly Grotto.” For example, *Traditional Japanese Theater: An Anthology of Plays* contains the following statement in its first few pages, indicative of the general way this myth is associated with the later dramatic tradition.

The earliest recorded Japanese performance, a sacred event depicted in the *Kojiki* (712) and *Nihonshoki* (720), occurred in the mythological age of the deities. To induce the Sun Goddess to come out of a cave where she had hidden herself in anger at her brother’s misbehavior, a female deity named Uzume put on a costume, stamped on an overturned bucket, became possessed, and, according to one version of the story, revealed her genitals.206

No one today believes that this story describes a real historical event, yet Ame no Uzume’s dance is here considered the “earliest recorded performance.” While extant drama forms do not derive directly from Ame no Uzume’s dance, this association is not the creation of modern scholarship, but represents a consistent association found in the oldest treatises on drama in Japan. The philosophy of the playwrights Kan’ami (1333-1384) and his son Zeami (1363-1443) provided the first ideological and technical framework for Nō drama as an emergent art. Part of that framework was an intentional link between drama and the *Kiki* myths, and ideological connection that modern accounts of the origins of drama perpetuate. In addition to *Kiki* references, in Zeami’s 14th-century writings we find statements about the special sensitivity of the Japanese people to the power of mythic and dramatic expression, statements which were echoed by the national

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205 Ibid, pp. 93.
studies scholars in the centuries to follow. Though a discussion of how Zeami used myth to construct his artistic theory represents a digression from this chapter’s theme of 21st century scholarship, an understanding of his ideas will prove relevant to other later interpretations.

In the Fūshikaden, Zeami’s collection of dramatic treatises, the playwright gives a brief account of the mythic history of Sarugaku, the tradition from which he derived Nō. Zeami claims that “Sarugaku is said to have begun During the Age of the Gods,” and as justification, he tells us the familiar story of the “Heavenly Grotto”. His version is nearly identical to that in the Nihon shoki, except he adds one small detail; when Amaterasu emerged from the cave, the land was illuminated and “the faces of the gods became bright white.”

Furthermore, though it is likely that Sarugaku is etymologically related to Sarume, the nature of that relationship is not clear and it is not certain if Sarugaku was the craft of Sarume. However, after his mythic history, Zeami also gives an account of the linguistic origins of the word Sarugaku, something which he attributes not to Ame no Uzume or the Sarume no Kimi, but to the culture hero Prince Shotoku (574-622). The dramatic forms Kagura and Sarugaku are written with very similar characters. To distinguish the dramatic tradition of Sarugaku from Kagura, which Zeami defines specifically as “Shinto music and dance,” Prince Shotoku supposedly removed the left portion of the character for kami found in Kagura. This left only the right portion which sometimes means “to speak,” and also represents the monkey, saru, in the Chinese Zodiac. The gaku portion of the word, Zeami interprets as meaning “pleasure.” Thus Sarugaku, literally “speaking pleasure,” is derived from Kagura, and like religious ritual, it is also said to possess the power to bring peace, health, and prosperity to the realm.

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207 Ibid, pp. 98.  
208 Ibid, pp. 100.  
Table 3: Zeami’s Etymology of Sarugaku

With this mythic history and curious etymology, Zeami is attempting several things. First, he is secularizing the performance tradition. As explained in Chapter Three, the radical \( \neq \) is the religious component of the character for \( \text{kami} \). \( \text{Kagura} \) and the Sarume no Kimi, by Zeami’s understanding, would have been associated with political and religious institutions, their entrenched structures, and systems of authority. \( \text{Sarugaku} \) borrowed from the imagery and traditions of \( \text{Kagura} \) and myth, and shared their fantastic, awe-inspiring power, but Zeami distinguished \( \text{Sarugaku} \) as a popular art form that was open to change and innovation, and over which he could claim authority. By popularizing performance, he was not taking its power away, but granting everyone access to its inspiring effects.

Also, the Nō play \( \text{Miwa} \) which is attributed to Zeami concludes with a retelling of the “Heavenly Grotto” myth, once again much simplified in comparison to the \( \text{Nihon shoki} \) or \( \text{Fūshikaden} \) iterations, but nonetheless including Zeami’s unique detail of the white faces of the gods. “The impenetrable dark cloud brightens with the light of the sun and moon, making all the faces appear white… How amusing the gods’ songs!”

“Amusing” here is \( \text{omoshiro} \), written using the same characters as white faces, \( \text{omote shirojiro} \). For Zeami, \( \text{omoshiro} \) was a major theoretical concept upon which he elaborated in an essay on performance, the \( \text{Shūgyokutokka; something truly omoshiro} \) was not so because we consciously judged it to be interesting, but rather because it

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activated a “spontaneous perception by which something is regarded as interesting.”

This was one of the appeals to which Zeami aspired in his art, and overall, the Miwa is rife with statements about the power of myth and the unique sensitivity of the Japanese audience. Elsewhere we find,

Chorus: Ancient myths of the gods
teach mankind throughout the ages;
stories of various kinds
are a means to salvation for the world.

Shite: Especially in this island country
where people are filled
with reverence and awe
the power of the deities is great.

Miwa is not only a play telling a story in its own right, but also a commentary on the power of story, mythmaking and drama. Performance, be it ritual dance and possession, or artistic drama, has likely always existed in an interplay with myth by which performance shapes the interpretation and retelling of myth, and myth serves to justify and reinvigorate dramatic expression. Also the mythic origins of performance constitute part of the mythology of performance itself - that it represents not just the creative efforts of artists in a particular age, but an extension of an expressive impulse stretching back to a hypothetical mythological time. Though alive and well in the modern day, this is not an exclusively modern phenomenon. Performance has consistently been associated with Kiki myths throughout history; the Kogoshūi and Uetsufumi linked the myths to dances in the ninth and 13th centuries, and the connection between “traditional” drama and the Kiki myths can clearly be traced back to treatises on Nō from the 15th century. Ideas contained in these historical commentaries about the

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212 Zeami (East Asia Program, Cornell University, 1990), pp. 34.
connections between performance, myth, and spirituality continue to influence scholarship of drama, as well as other interpretations of the myths themselves.

**Nature and Fertility Cults**

Unlike the preceding discussion about the connection between myth and attested ritual and artistic performance, this section will present various *symbolic* interpretations of the “Heavenly Grotto” myth ranging from those comprised of relatively simple natural imagery to those utilizing more complicated associations between mythic contents and abstract notions like sex and gender. The various theories and their evidence are presented in highly condensed form, but in most instances, the scholars discussed took advantage of sources outside of the *Kiki* in order to analyze these texts together in context with material evidence of religious practice.

The story of the “Heavenly Grotto” may be considered a “pre-scientific myth” potentially addressing multiple natural phenomena relating to the literal sun, which are expressed symbolically through themes of the weakening, seclusion, and eventual glorious return of the sun-deity. The sudden, irregular disappearance of the sun is reminiscent of an eclipse, and just as the conflict between Amaterasu and her brother Susano’o brought about the events in this myth, sibling rivalry between personified celestial deities is also featured in eclipse myths from Southeast Asia.\(^{213}\) Comparative mythology also draws attention to the many structural similarities between the “Heavenly Grotto” and other myths of seasonal etiology such as the Greek myth of the rape of Persephone.\(^{214}\) However, neither the *Kojiki* nor *Nihon shoki* account includes an explicit association between the myth and the yearly solar cycle. Although there may be little overt textual evidence in the *Kiki* to make this connection, when examined against other evidence of ancient Japanese religious practices, many find it appropriate to link this myth firmly with the cycle of solar variation and the solstice, the change of seasons, the yearly renewal of life, and agricultural as well as human fertility. The previous section

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discussed the myth’s possible connection to the Chinkon-sai, a court solstice ritual, but the potential symbolic implications of the myth are much more numerous.

The Kojiki places the events of the story near the foot of Mt. Ama no Kaguyama. Mountains by this name exist in various locations in Japan, but one such site can be found near the ancient capital of Nara. At present, there is an Ama no Iwato Jinja (Heavenly Grotto Shrine) at the western base of the mountain. Nakanishi Susumu, president of the KOSHINOKUNI Museum of Literature, observes that from the perspective of the shrine and the adjacent plain, the sun seems to rise from the mountain itself, and there is a strong association between the “Heavenly Grotto” myth and this shrine’s rituals and festivals concerning the winter solstice.\(^{215}\) Though Nakanishi concedes that the historicity of the Ama no Iwato Shrine in Nara and its ritual practice cannot be confirmed to predate the written version of the myth, and may in fact be based on and inspired by the Kiki, there are other more ancient mountain sites that suggest possibilities for widespread prehistoric religious practice. Though their forms and locations vary greatly, many mountains have at least one holy spot that serves as a focal point for religious activities. These sites often contain stone structures called hoto (the same word used for Ame no Uzume’s genitals in the myth). Most significantly, whether natural or man-made, these stone edifices are frequently located in a place that receives the first rays of the sun on the winter solstice.\(^{216}\)

Concerning the morning of the winter solstice, on this day the sun also rises directly behind the torii gate and Ujibashi Bridge that serve as the entrance to Amaterasu’s main shrine at (Ise) Jingū, a sight that draws large crowds each year. Through qualitative interviews with shrine attendants as well as her own personal reflections, Kōgakkan University professor Chikusa Kiyomi, interprets the significance of such practices as expressions of gratitude for the sun.\(^{217}\) Though their interpretations include highly subjective and speculative elements, writings of both Nakanishi,\(^{218}\) and


\(^{216}\) Ibid, pp. 46-47.


Chikusa\textsuperscript{219} emphasize the idea that spiritual perpetuity in Shinto is not found in a notion of constant and unchanging divinity, but in the cycle of birth, death and rejuvenation, a cycle epitomized in the return of the sun on the solstice.

The association between solar energy, life force, and fertility may not be explicit in translations of the myth, but these concepts may have been automatically conflated in archaic Japanese and represented by the single word \textit{hi}. \textit{Hi} is still used to refer to the literal sun and its light, and Amaterasu is sometimes called \textit{Ōhirume} (The Great Woman of the Sun). However, we also find \textit{hi} in the names of several \textit{Kiki} deities not associated with solar energy per se, but with the basic force of creation, Takami Musuhi and Kamu Musuhi.\textsuperscript{220} These two were among the primordial gods who appeared spontaneously at the beginning of creation and are credited with initiating the formation of the cosmos. Saijo Tsutomo elaborates:

Some take the rendering of Musuhi as \textit{産巣日} in the \textit{Nihon shoki} to mean that it is some kind of solar deity, and this view, though it engenders doubts when one thinks of it as a literal deification of the sun, is a sufficiently viable idea as long as it takes \textit{hi} to be the deification of the internal essential function of the sun to generate the life of everything in the world.\textsuperscript{221}

Therefore, in the context of classical Japanese language, the sun and the basic creative life force may have been implicitly connected, and Ame no Uzume’s dance may also factor into these associations between the myth and solstice-related religious practice.

Both the \textit{Kojiki} and \textit{Nihon shoki} are vague in describing the exact nature of the calamities that arose as a result of Amaterasu hiding in the Heavenly Grotto. We are told

\textsuperscript{220} The etymology of these names is subject to speculation. It is likely that this \textit{musu} is a verb which means “to bear,” or “to bring into being,” as in the words \textit{musuko}, “son” and \textit{musume}, “daughter.”
that the world was in a state of perpetual night, but there is no explicit mention of cold temperatures, withering plant life, or other phenomena that might be associated with winter. Life-force imagery through plants, however, does appear in the costume Ame no Uzume dons while she dances. Toru Itaya interprets the role of the costume in myth, as well as in tama-furi dances as follows,

… the dancer adorned herself with vines as a kind of contact magic, using the spiritual power (tama) contained in the plants to seize the weakened life force (tama) of Amaterasu… Wearing and holding plants that contained spiritual power enabled Amenouzume to capture that power in the empty bucket and bestow it on Amaterasu.222

This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the specific plants Ame no Uzume equips herself with may have symbolic associations with life-force. The Kojiki has her carrying streamers of sasa, bamboo grass. In the Nihon shoki, she takes up a spear wrapped in torreya nucifera, a conifer. She wears a crown of euonymus japonicus in the Kojiki, or cleyera japonica in the Nihon shoki, and both are broad-leaved evergreens. In both texts, she wears a sash of lycopodium clavatum, a spore-bearing vine sometimes called “ground pine” due to its outward resemblance to conifers. Of these five plants, three are true evergreens, one is a vine that looks remarkably like one, and the other is a kind of bamboo, well known for its fast growth and resilience. Specific symbolic meaning of these plants other than cleyera japonica, the official holy tree of Shinto, is not substantiated, but there is a pattern in what was selected; these are not plants highly regarded for their beautiful flowers or for their use as food crops, but rather for their resilience and ability to stay alive through the winter.

Claiming that the aim of Ame no Uzume’s performance was to create a connection between herself, her actions, the things she carried, and the revitalization and

return of the sun, a complicated series of symbolic associations guides some scholars in their further interpretation of Ame no Uzume’s performance. Yoshida, Nagafuji, and Kawai claim that the activities of the Heavenly Grotto myth are akin to funeral rites, and the grotto itself represents something like Amaterasu’s grave. After all, for the ancient Japanese, the afterlife was associated with a subterranean world and immediately before retreating to the cave, Amaterasu’s servant dies (Kojiki) or Amaterasu herself is injured (Nihon shoki). This has implications for Ame no Uzume and explains her possession, a means by which it was possible to communicate the will of the deceased. She also becomes a goddess who always appears at the boundary of two worlds. If Heavenly Grotto in fact symbolizes a grave or the underworld in which Amaterasu temporarily resides, Ame no Uzume thus performs at the boundary of life and death. Likewise, the Crossroads of Heaven, where she appeared in the myth of “Divine Descent,” constitutes the space in between heaven and earth, and even in the short myth of the Sarume no Kimi, the goddess goes forth and extracts oaths of loyalty from fish, the denizens of the undersea world.

However, just as the realm inside the earth symbolized the land of the dead, for these interpretations, it was also the soil from which new life sprang. The Heavenly Grotto by Mount Kaguyama was, therefore, also a sacred mountain hoto, an earthly womb that housed Amaterasu and the birth canal from which she was reborn. The plants that Ame no Uzume carried were associated with the weakened but persistent life force of Amaterasu, and Ame no Uzume’s literal genitals were bared in order to open the symbolic stone hoto of the Heavenly Grotto.

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226 The two names for the land of the dead are 黄泉の国 (Yomi no Kuni) “Realm of the Brown Spring” and 根の堅洲国 (Ne no Katasu Kuni) “The Hard-Banked Root Realm.” Brown is the color of the earth, and both springs and roots suggest the subterranean. Nakanishi Susumu (Kyodo Insatsu Kabushiki Gaisha, 1998), pp. 198.
227 Yoshida Shūsaku (Japanese Literature Association 2011), pp. 5.
228 Nagafuji Yasushi (Shibundō 2004), pp. 24.
Also, in the *Nihon shoki* account of the “Divine Descent”, Ame no Uzume’s sudden baring of her body “opens” the road which was barred by Sarutahiko. In these two accounts of Ame no Uzume’s sudden disrobing, there is consistency in that her actions result in the clearing of obstruction and opening of a path. She, as a goddess of overcoming barriers, transgressing or communicating across boundaries, is thereafter paired with Sarutahiko who exhibits multiple characteristics of boundary gods.\(^\text{229}\)

Nagafuji interprets Ame No Uzume’s action as a form of sympathetic magic, and this also allows him to explain the laughter of the gods. The mouths of the *kami* in attendance were opened just like the rock door, by the enchanting power of Ame no Uzume’s body. He points out that the character used in this story for the word “laugh,” is not 笑, but 叱, a character now used to represent the blossoming or “opening” of flowers.\(^\text{230}\)

Nakanishi suggests that Ame no Uzume’s entire body functioned as symbol like the plants she carried, representing life force. Only women carry and bear new human life, so female bodies were once viewed with a special reverence and believed to possess enchanting magical powers. He argues that this possible interpretation is overlooked in modern society, “in an age when sexuality has lost its magical power, we can easily imagine how this (naked dance of Ame no Uzume) became nothing more than a silly act.” More than just a “lewd dance” or an attempt at cheap laughs, Nakanishi imagines Ame no Uzume’s dance as a statement about the potential power and significance the female body. He uses this textual account to suggest that in Japan there was an ancient cult of the female form, a hypothesis supported by the *dogū*, clay figures of naked, possibly pregnant women that are excavated from various prehistoric sites in Japan.\(^\text{231}\)

Fukazawa Kanako presents a similar interpretation of the myth in her comparison of male and female genitalia in ancient Japanese text and media. She states that male genitalia are never mentioned in the text sources of the *Kiki*, whereas female genitals


\(^{230}\) Nagafuji Yasushi (Shibundō, 2004), pp. 25.

\(^{231}\) Nakanishi Susumu (Chikuma Gakugei Bunko, 2013), pp. 145.
appear in four different *Kiki* stories.\(^{232}\) Also, sculptural depictions of phallic symbols are almost always disembodied, but *dogū* featuring female reproductive organs usually depict the entire body.\(^{233}\) She suggests that this pattern in material culture as well as in the myth of Ame no Uzume is indicative of a different evaluation of male and female sexuality; whereas male genitalia were certainly revered as a form of power and potency, there was an emphasis on the positive and generative aspects of female sex as well as a greater integration of this power into the whole of the female individual.\(^{234}\)

Questions of why a goddess dancing naked adorned with plants was the centerpiece of divine efforts to bring back the sun and re-illuminate the world are to some degree answered by these various interpretations of the “Heavenly Grotto” myth. Furthermore, these analyses incorporate several other forms of evidence to create an image of the ancient religious context that may have produced and shaped this myth. Ideologically, there are two main trends in these interpretations – two kinds of statements that scholars are making about the structure of Japanese society.

First, interpreters such as Nakanishi and Chikusa draw on evidence ranging from prehistoric archeology to modern practice without necessarily differentiating the two or analyzing the intervening historical processes that lead from one to the other. They focus on similarities, and imagine the history of Japanese religion as a cohesive unit in which present day practice should obviously be consistent with evidence of that of the past. They assume that though details of ritual and festival may change, the underlying motivations and inherent sense of spirituality are the same. Japan is presented as a geographical whole, with regional variations not being contrasted, but conflated in the construction of one coherent image of Japanese myth belonging to an imaginary, homogenous Japan. These scholars reference Frazer\(^{235}\) and use terms like “sympathetic

\(^{232}\) Fukazawa Kanako, “*Description of private parts in Japanese mythology (Kiki shinwa ni okeru seiki no byousha – kakareta hoto to kakarenakatta haze).*” Gakushūin Daigaku jinbun kagaku ronshū XXIV. Gakushūin University, 2015, pp. 187.

\(^{233}\) Ibid, pp. 212.

\(^{234}\) Ibid, pp. 213.

\(^{235}\) Nakanishi Susumu (Chikuma Gakugei Bunko, 2013), pp. 145.
indicative of somewhat old-fashioned comparatist style. Though limited to the various manifestations of religion in the main islands of Japan, they attempt to find a unified spiritual view to explain Japanese religion. Unlike ritual approaches to this myth, their conclusions are not limited to a historical context, but rather emphasize the persistence of these mythic symbols or even seem nostalgic for the society that created them.

However, though these scholars are attempting to create an image of Japanese religious beliefs, the modern-day practices at places like Ise Jingū and Ama no Iwato Shrine in Nara would still exist without their work, and their theories are only indicative of larger social trends regarding Japanese spirituality. They are not dictating modern practice, only attempting to assign it meaning and authority by placing it in a mythic context. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to prove or disprove the veracity or plausibility of these interpretations, or to address the psychological motivations for people engaging in religious activities, but whatever forces draw people to Shinto sites and practices on a larger scale, may also be responsible for the production of this variety of mythology.

Finally, many of these interpretations involve significant statements about women and the meaning of female gender in ancient Japan. Some scholars are content with presenting and celebrating a simplistic (albeit positive) view of Ame no Uzume as an idolized fertility symbol, but others problematize this image of femininity. Fukazawa concludes her analysis by claiming that the depiction of Ame no Uzume and her role, bringing back the sun by means of the life and fertility symbolism of her naked body, is typical of a patriarchal view of women that places their value primarily in their sexuality and reproductive labor. The fact that Ame no Uzume is a woman is significant to almost any analysis of her role in myth, but the major implications she has for gender will be explored in the final chapter.

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237 Fukazawa Kanako (Gakushūin University, 2015), pp. 217.
Chapter 6: Notions of Gender

In each of the preceding sections, gender is one issue that is tied closely to the myths of Ame no Uzume and their interpretations. The earliest ritual and dance traditions that were said to derive from Ame no Uzume were performed exclusively by women and later performance genres also maintained clear gendered divides between styles. Possession and divination too, though performed by both genders, was distinct in its forms based on the sex of the medium. Interpretations of the myths based on natural symbolism, though presenting a positive attitude towards what they describe as feminine imagery, nonetheless emphasize qualities such as fertility, receptiveness, and vitality, and in the end this image is mostly limited to “traditional” female roles; the value and identity of female persons then is inextricably tied to their female-gendered bodies and reproductive capacity. This has not been overlooked by scholars, especially in Japan, where many have used the myths of Ame no Uzume to make statements about gender in the eighth century context of the Kiki and in Japan today.

Overall, the Kojiki and Nihon shoki, present complicated and diverse views of gender that cannot be easily interpreted as favoring one sex or the other. In the Kojiki, the initial kami were genderless, and deities clearly distinguished as male and female only came about in subsequent generations, and then did so simultaneously. A male and female pair of gods, Izanaki and Izanami, were responsible for the creation of the world as we know it, a feat which they accomplished for the most part through the normal human processes of sexual intercourse and birth. In the dominant narratives of each text, the first hints of male chauvinism appear when Izanami and Izanaki’s initial attempts at reproduction and creation fail. This is blamed on the goddess’s sexual precociousness; and both texts explicitly state that women should not speak first to initiate sexual intercourse. However, this clearly misogynistic detail can only be found in three of the
twelve versions of this myth that are contained in the *Kiki*. Furthermore, the existence of so many different variations of this story suggest that the ideas about the roles of each gender and the values of sex were far from uniform.\footnote{Kawai Hayao, *Shinwa to Nihonjin no kokoro*. Iwanami Shoten, 2003, pp. 53.} Similarly, immediately preceding the “Heavenly Grotto” myth, Amaterau and Susano’o perform an unusual wager-like ritual in which they each produce children to determine the purity of Susano’o’s intentions. In the *Kojiki* version, producing female children indicates Susano’o’s innocence and allows him to win the wager, but in the *Nihon shoki*, boys are the sign of Susano’o’s innocence. Which gender of child should be valued more is inconsistent, and is just one detail of the myths that leaves us to question the true valuation of gender in the eighth century.

**The Hand-Weak Woman**

Interestingly, the word used in the *Kojiki* to describe Susano’o’s virtuous daughters is *taoyame* (手弱女) “hand-weak woman,” the same expression used to describe Ame no Uzume before she confronts Sarutahiko in the myth of the “Heavenly Descent.” Regarding the nuances of this word, in the early modern period, *taoyame-buri* (acting like a *taoyame*) was how Motoori Norinaga referred to his ideal human sentimentality and “mindful heart” in *all* people.\footnote{Thomas Kasulis, *Shinto, the Way Home*. University of Hawai’I Press, 2004, pp. 117.} Because *taoyame* is strongly gendered and associated with statements of value over a long period of Japanese history, many scholars have taken up an investigation of its use in the most ancient contexts of *Kiki* myth. Yoshida Shūsaku examines this term’s appearance in many texts including the *Kiki* and *Man’yōshū*, the oldest collection of Japanese poetry representing works from approximately 600 to 759.\footnote{Yoshida Shūsaku, “‘Kamigakari’ and ‘Wazawoki’: Ame-no-uzume’s Dancing in the Myths of Ama-no-iwato and Tenson-kōrin” *Japanese Literature* 60(2). Japanese Literature Association, 2011, pp. 6.} According to Yoshida, this word is used to describe several mythic female figures in addition to Ame no Uzume and the daughters of Susano’o; Amaterasu before she equips herself with weapons and armor and confronts her brother;
Oshisaka no Onakatsu Hime when she retires from an official appointment; and Empress Jingū before she invades Korea. In each of mythic use, with the exception of Susano’o daughters, these women’s status as a taoyame is contrasted with their decisive action, administrative responsibilities, or military mobilization. Particularly for Amaterasu and Empress Jingū, this display of military authority is accompanied by a temporary adoption of a masculine appearance.

Further, Yoshida argues that in the Man’yōshū, taoyame is always used in consideration of the perspectives of men. Takakuwa Emiko elaborates on this Man’yōshū analysis and demonstrates that taoyame is not a word that men use to praise their female lovers, but is a way for a woman to speak of herself that emphasizes her powerlessness; she either does not know what to do or fails to act at all. For Takakuwa, there is a strong contrast between a woman’s identification as a taoyame and displays of confidence, competence, and domination, such as that of Ame no Uzume as she meets Sarutahiko.241 Takakuwa’s favored etymology of Ame no Uzume’s name is that from the Kogoshūi which reads, “This goddess, called Ame no Ozu-me in old language, was strong, wild, fierce, and hard.”242 This interpretation, which sees Uzume as a transition from ozu-me, “strong woman” emphasizes the goddess’s power.

A great deal of other statements about women and femininity exist in the classical literature of Japan. However, focusing on scholarship of Ame no Uzume and the term taoyame produces an interesting perspective on gender. On the one hand, the virtue of female gender is most associated with the passive and “hand-weak” taoyame. However, in the texts, members of the female sex are not necessarily restricted to feminine behavior as it is defined by taoyame; woman are capable of any manner of action if they are willing to eschew their expected outward feminine presentation and demonstrate a masculine appearance or persona. Ame no Uzume is somewhat of an exception in that she is called a taoyame then performs dynamic actions that include the most basic display of her female gender, the exposure of her naked body.

242 Ibid, pp. 49.
The study of gender in sociology can inform our understanding of taoyame, a term which seems to be used in the Kiki myths at times that we should be conscious of how gender influences the narrative. In their influential paper Doing Gender, Candice West and Don H. Zimmerman define gender as “… a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment.” It is a display of social competence, done by individuals, but always within a relevant context of observation by others.243 Taoyame, thus functions as a flag word in Kiki myths; a way to acknowledge the socially expected presentation of “weak” femininity immediately before a woman does something that might be conceived as a violation of the gender divide. In modern scholarship, Yoshida and Takakuwa present taoyame in such a way as to simultaneously acknowledge traditional gender roles in Japan, but to challenge the notion that this gender binary was something held to be essential to the authors of Japanese myth.

Changing notions of gender in the modern period have a history of association with Kiki myth. Chapter 3 of this thesis introduced two artistic products of the late 19th century relating to the Empress Jingū. Hypothetically, the popularity of Empress Jingū and her mythic military and political competence could have been used to argue for the improvement of the status of women in society. Unfortunately, it was not, and it seems that Jingū’s conquest of Korea was what most appealed to those in power. However, Hiratsuka Raichō (1886-1971), a famous figure in the Japanese women’s movement, famously alluded to Amaterasu, the sun goddess and chief deity of the kami pantheon in her 1911 essay, “In the Beginning, Woman Was the Sun.” Though Hiratsuka did not pursue the metaphor far, this turn of phrase drew attention to the peculiar disparity between a seemingly matriarchal cosmology and the decidedly patriarchal society of her time.244 Much has changed in the intervening century, but there are still many ways that modern mythologists continue to use mythic images of women to address the social issues of today.

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244 Hiratsuka, Raichō. In the Beginning, Woman was the Sun. Translated by Teruko Craig, Columbia University Press, 2010.
Ame no Uzume and Psychoanalysis

The influences of psychoanalysis on the study of myth are widespread and are present in the approaches of several otherwise isolated scholarly communities. In general, those who take this approach to mythology view myth as a symbolic expression of hopes and fears present in the individual and community, and they sometimes use mythic narrative to illuminate the tension between one’s psychology and his or her social context. In Japan, Ame no Uzume is one figure that psychanalytically-minded mythologists (and myth-interpreting psychoanalysts) have invested with considerable significance.

This body of Japanese mythology is remarkable in two respects. First is that much of psychoanalytic myth interpretation in Japan is produced by practicing clinical psychotherapists. Their conclusions often make correlations between Japanese mythic themes and trends in contemporary society, and are based on both the presuppositions and theoretical backgrounds of psychoanalysis as well as the qualitative data these scholars have gathered from countless patients during years, or even decades, of counseling. Second, though there are interpretational differences typical of the rift between Freudian and Jungian thought, these scholars are largely unified by their attention to and respect for the work of Kawai Hayao (1928-2007), a former commissioner of Japan’s national Agency for Cultural Affairs and arguably the most influential figure in the psychanalytic approach to myth in Japan. As Japan’s first Jungian psychologist, Kawai applied and modified the supposedly universal theory of psychoanalysis to Japanese patients. While emphasizing the role of culture in constructing symbolic associations and patterns of thought and behavior, he developed a

246 Freudians tend to see myth negatively, as an expression of unconscious fears and suppressed desires, whereas most Jungians approach myth positively, as a means for recovery and integration. Ibid. 166.
view of Japanese psychological processes that are both culturally unique and connected to larger trends in the human experience.\textsuperscript{247}

Psychoanalytic views of Ame no Uzume are largely based on Kawai’s interpretation of the \textit{Kiki} that examines her role in the larger narrative’s presentation of female figures and specifically contrasts her with two other goddesses, Izanami no Mikoto and Amaterasu Ōmikami. In short, the challenges faced by these three goddesses, their relationships to each other, and their actions in myth are indicative of various aspects of feminine consciousness within the Japanese cultural context. The Great Mother Izanami, the warrior virgin Amaterasu, and the carnal, shamanic dancer Ame no Uzume represent for Kawai a basic triad of female archetypes, and the myths in which they participate tell the story of maturation, disillusionment, and eventual integration of the feminine psyche.\textsuperscript{248} Regarding terms such as “feminine psyche,” it is important to note that for Kawai, “in actuality, human existence is something to which it is most difficult to apply binary division” of gender.\textsuperscript{249} He viewed gendered associations as essentially arbitrary social and cultural constructs, but constructs with an important role in social signification and ego development. Personal and social notions of gender had for Kawai a relevance for mental health and individual identity within a cultural framework, a framework he felt was well described in myth.

According to this perspective, the story of Ame no Uzume begins with the story of Izanami. Though \textit{Kojiki} and \textit{Nihon shoki} accounts differ in their details, this is of little concern to most psychoanalytic mythologists who largely disregard inconsistencies in the source texts and focus on the many various details that may be received by audiences.\textsuperscript{250} The details relevant to this style of analysis are that Izanami and her brother-husband Izanaki were the first gods to be fully differentiated into male and female, and as the first


\textsuperscript{248} Kawai Hayao. (Iwanami Shoten 2003), pp. 171-175.

\textsuperscript{249} Ibid. pp. 55.

couple they were charged with the creation of the earth. Izanami produced the islands of Japan and myriad natural deities in rapid succession until she gave birth to the god of fire, and in the process burned her genitals and died. Izanaki traveled to the underworld to retrieve her and finish their mission. There, she told him to wait without looking at her as she negotiated her return to life. However, he grew impatient and peeked in on her, revealing that she had begun to rot and was covered in maggots and terrifying spirits. Izanaki fled in terror, and Izanami, ashamed and angry, set various demons after him. He narrowly escaped the underworld, and over the newly-established boundary between the mortal and deathly realms, they made an uneasy peace. She thereafter became Yomotsu Ōkami, the Great God of the Underworld.

According to Kawai, what Izanaki saw in the underworld was the dark side of the Great Mother, a force of great productivity, but also a great threat of destruction. Kirimura Eiichirō’s interpretation of this myth also stresses this dual nature of the Great Mother and the importance of her sacrifice to produce nearly everything in our world. Tying this mythic interpretation and theme of goddess-sacrifice to real-world archeology, Kirimura and Fukazawa Kanako link this story to root-vegetable agriculture in southeast-Asia as well as Japanese dogū, clay sculptures of female forms which are almost always found in pieces, likely intentionally smashed and sewn in the ground ceremonially. Fukazawa further identifies a consistent pattern in Japanese myth in which femininity is associated with sexuality and reproduction, and also strongly linked to death. In the Kiki, three distinct goddesses die from wounds to the genitals, a trend which Fukazawa claims represents sexuality as a special vulnerability unique to women. This myth, therefore, sets a meaningful precedent for the later stories of Ame no Uzume.

The most detailed psychoanalytic investigation of Izanami was carried out by Freudian psychologist Kitayama Osamu and Japanese classicist Hashimoto Masayuki.

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251 Kawai Hayao. (Iwanami Shoten 2003), pp 82.
253 Fukazawa Kanako, “Description of private parts in Japanese mythology (Kiki shinwa ni okeru seiki no byousha – kakaretō hoto to kakarenakatta haze).” Gakushuin Daigaku Jinbun Kagaku Ronshū XXIV. Gakushuin University, 2015, pp. 193
254 Ibid, pp. 190-197
According to Kitayama, the myth of Izanami – and several Japanese folktales featuring animal wives – resemble patterns he has encountered in personal and family psychology. In these stories, women are consistently presented as productive and plentiful, but also secretive, vulnerable, and easily injured or killed. In myth, Izanaki shows insatiable libido and causes Izanami to give birth to an incredible number of islands and gods; she produces so much through her labor that she literally burns out her sex organs and dies, but still her husband pursues her into the afterlife desiring more. Izanami is willing to continue responding to her husband’s desires as long as he does not look at her and bring to light the fact that her role as producer is destroying her. In real life, Kitayama claims to have treated many women that he describes as “self-destructive caregivers,” women like Izanami who allow themselves to be annihilated in their service to their husbands and children. In turn, those who were raised by self-destructive caregivers tend to become them, and feel shame if they allow those for whom they care to see their pain and become disillusioned. Also, just as Izanami forbade Izanaki to look at her, there exists a societal taboo against ever bringing this issue out into the open.

Of course, this phenomenon is not limited to Japan, and many people in other cultures likely experience similar things. It is precisely this potentially widespread manifestation and seemingly universal quality to Izanami’s story that caused Kawai and Kitayama to conceptually connect her death to the Christian doctrine of Original Sin. “Original Sin” is 原罪 genzai in Japanese, and Kawai intentionally alluded to this when he coined the phrase 原悲 genhi to name the tragic outcome of Izanami and Izanki’s myth. Hi, in this instance is “sadness,” but in Buddhist contexts it can include a connotation of “compassion” as well. A decade later, Kitayama and Hashimoto acknowledge Kawai’s pioneering association between this myth and the fall of man.

256 Ibid. pp. 50.
257 Ibid. pp. 46.
258 Ibid. pp. 47.
259 Ibid. pp. 21.
261 Osamu Kitayama and Masayuki Hashimoto. (Kodansha Gendai Shinsho, 2009), pp. 22.
Their book 日本人の＜原罪＞ literally translates as *Original Sin of the Japanese People*. For them, Izanami’s death in childbirth and Izanaki’s subsequent violation of her prohibition represent a self-perpetuating cycle of sacrifice, desire, disillusionment and guilt in Japanese society comparable to the sin that some Christians believe all people acquired at the fall.

In contrast to Kitayama and Hashimoto, Kawai’s original formulation of *genhi* was more optimistic; he argued that the conflict symbolized by Izanaki and Izanami was somewhat resolved by an “artistic sense” of compassion. According to Kawai, the beauty in sadness and tragedy, which Motoori Norinaga promoted as *mono no aware*, the “pathos of things,” had its archetypal beginning in Izanami. We subsequent generations cannot reconcile this “original tragedy,” but we can continue to be moved by it and learn to find special value in that which is ephemeral.262

A gruesome death in childbirth was the fate of the first woman in Japanese myth, and though this narrative reaches some level of conclusion, as the *Kiki* progresses the characters continue to be affected by the implications of the story of Izanaki and Izanami. Kitayama and Hashimoto limited their investigation to Izanami, but continue to investigate the mythic development of the feminine psyche left in limbo when Izanami died. The next major goddess to take the stage was Amaterasu. In some versions, she emerged from Izanaki’s eye after he returned from the underworld, and in others she was born from Izanami before she died. Either way, Izanaki quickly recognized his daughter’s greatness and gave her command of heaven, assigning her brothers Tsukuyomi and Susano’o to the realms of night and sea respectively. Amaterasu and Tsukuyomi obeyed, but Susano’o refused, crying for his mother and angering his father who quickly banished him to the earth. Before leaving heaven, Susano’o went to bid his sister farewell, but believing that he had come to steal her kingdom, she dressed for battle and confronted him. He proposed to prove the purity of his intentions through a strange sort of divination – he and Amaterasu exchanged personal items and produced children from them. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the outcomes vary across the

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262 Kawai Hayao. (Iwanami Shoten 2003), pp. 97-98
versions, but in each case Susano’o claims victory and runs amok in heaven, a rampage that culminates in him throwing a skinned horse into Amaterasu’s weaving room and causing the death of her servant (Kojiki), or the injury of Amaterasu herself (Nihon shoki). This in turn leads to Amaterasu’s retreat to the Heavenly Grotto and the versions of the myth translated in Chapter 4.

For Kawai, Amaterasu is a complex figure. She is a goddess with no connection to her mother, literally born from Izanaki’s head in the Kojiki version. She is acknowledged by her father as his greatest child and is chosen to rule after him, manifesting masculine qualities of leadership and military prowess. Even her children, the mythic ancestors of the imperial line, were produced through a vague asexual relationship with her brother. Kawai associated the feminine archetype of Amaterasu with the “father’s daughter,” a phenomenon of emotional turmoil which manifests in some modern-day professional women when they feel that in order to succeed in male-dominated careers they must deny some aspect of their femininity. Amaterasu does not demonstrate typical feminine qualities, particularly the maternal productivity and vulnerability associated with the female sexuality of Izanami, until Susano’o invades her weaving hall, one of the few traditionally female domains with which Amaterasu is associated. In the Kojiki version, Amaterasu’s servant dies when she wounds her genitals on the weaving shuttle. In the Nihon shoki, it is Amaterasu herself who is injured. This leads Kawai to conflate Amaterasu and her servant symbolically, and to suggest that this myth tells the story of how Amaterasu, despite her efforts to protect herself and her position by denying her femininity, eventually falls victim to the same female-specific sexual trauma as Izanami. Amaterasu’s retreat to the Heavenly Grotto then mirrors Izanami’s confinement in the underworld.

Ame no Uzume, with her unabashed display of both the spiritually-connected shamanic side of femininity and the most overtly female aspects of her body, provides the perfect foil for the dignified Amaterasu. It is precisely Ame no Uzume’s abundant femininity and her refusal to allow her sex to be a weakness that lets her overcome the

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vulnerability of Amaterasu and extract the sun goddess from the Heavenly Grotto. Amaterasu is returned and light is restored to the world when Ame no Uzume performs, and femininity can once again be celebrated, not denied or hidden.\textsuperscript{264} Also, when she goes forth naked and brings Sarutahiko into Ninigi’s service, Kawai equates her with the sacred prostitutes of Sumeria, and the sexuality of the young woman that subdued and civilized the wild man Enkidu in the \textit{Epic of Gilgamesh}.\textsuperscript{265} Ame no Uzume in these functions represents the shadow of Amaterasu, all the sensitive, sensual, and carnal aspects of femininity that the great goddess had rejected, and the myths of Ame no Uzume demonstrate how these fractured aspects of femininity can be re-synthesized.

Hirosawa Aiko develops this interpretation further in her extensive investigation of the relationship between the myths of Izanami, Amaterasu, and Ame no Uzume and the psychological distress of modern career-oriented women. For Hirosawa, women who feel out of touch with some part of their femininity, be it spiritual, sexual or otherwise, can learn from Ame no Uzume in their approach to self-actualization. The strength of Ame no Uzume and the key to this process is what Hirosawa calls “assertive receptiveness” (主体的受容性).\textsuperscript{266} This is a reconciliation of conflicting social pressures that expect receptiveness, deference and sensitivity from women, but value integrity and independence as prerequisites for social status for all people. Hirosawa argues that by deliberately choosing to enact some forms of traditional femininity, particularly those associated with receptiveness in interpersonal relations, women can maintain their individuality and agency while participating in established social forms; to live as both subject and object.\textsuperscript{267} Hirosawa’s interpretation encourages the application of an assertive femininity modeled after Ame no Uzume to address the psychological difficulties of her patients in creating female identity in their societal context. Though Hirosawa does not explain it as such, her “assertive receptiveness,” like Ame no Uzume’s

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{264} Ibid, pp. 147-148.
\textsuperscript{265} Ibid. pp. 172-173.
\textsuperscript{266} Hirosawa, Aiko. “‘Gendai josei no jikojitsugen’ to ‘Joseisei ni yoru iyashi’ ni kan suru ikkosatsu shutaiteki juyosetsu o megutte~.” \textit{Annals of Education Studies} Vol. 7. Osaka University, 2002, pp. 183.
\textsuperscript{267} Ibid. pp. 187.
\end{footnotesize}
naked dancing, is an intentional performance of gendered signification that, ideally, builds confidence instead of creating vulnerability.

**Synthesis**

These psychoanalytic interpretations, though popular, are not without criticism. As mentioned in Chapter 5, some argue that the myths, rather than empowering women, objectify them as fetishized images in accordance with male desires and are limited to certain specific roles related to sex and procreation. Konoyu Nakamura draws attention to the larger context of the myths when she criticizes Kawai’s interpretation, saying that “Kawai misunderstood the figure of Amaterasu-oh-mikami, specifically regarding how she was distorted by a patriarchal agenda.” Kawai’s goddess-centric evaluation of the Kiki excludes or downplays the roles of male figures, and does not consider the context of how myths may have developed or shifted in meaning. She claims that “both Kojiki and Nihonshoki were written by men, and their anima images were projected onto the goddess figure.” The story of Izanami, Amaterasu, and Ame no Uzume is not one of goddesses in isolation, but if it is a consistent narrative, then it is one of female interaction with and repeated victimization by men. In the end, she concludes that “there is no problem of women in Japan without men.” Nakamura believes that study of myth and consideration of goddess images can produce positive effects in Japan, but not in accordance with Kawai’s understanding. She calls for a “disenchantment” with these traditional interpretations in order to move forward towards a better society. This is similar to Kitayama and Hashimoto’s conclusions about Izanami, that Japan as a society must break the don’t-look taboo, bring these issues into the open, and correct the way that myth is lived out in Japan.

269 Ibid. pp. 246.
270 Ibid. pp. 247.
271 Ibid. pp. 248
272 Osamu Kitayama and Masayuki Hashimoto. (Kodansha Gendai Shinsho, 2009), pp. 90-92.
Nakamura’s criticisms are very potent, and in some cases, accurate. Mythic interpretations like those of Kawai and Hirosawa are full of traditional stereotypes of femininity, and while they are excellent at highlighting problems women face and the difficulty of enacting traditional expectations of femininity while being a fully actualized individual, they fail to address that the origins of these conflicts and inconsistencies can be found in society’s conceptions and expectations of gender. In the end, that is the difference between a psychoanalyst and a social activist like Hiratsuka Raichō who used the inconsistencies of myth to criticize the culture that produces them. A psychoanalyst is often content to describe archetypal figures for patients to identify with so that they might assuage their inner psychological turmoil and reconcile their psyche with their environment.

However, as much as Nakamura pans Kawai’s partial view of myth and indifference to contradictory details, she herself does the same in her critique. She states that Amaterasu is driven into hiding by the actions of a male god. However Amaterasu is also drawn out of the cave by a coalition of deities, among whom a goddess is a significant, if not the most significant figure. Nakamura unfortunately does not address the role of Ame no Uzume or her relationship to Amaterasu, factors that when given consideration make it difficult to argue that the events of this myth are completely orchestrated by men. Nakamura also believes that the eighth-century context of the Kiki was strongly patriarchal, ignoring that both Kojiki and Nihon shoki were completed during the reigns of Empresses and that Hieda no Are may have been a woman.

We must acknowledge instances in the Japanese tradition of women, both legendary and historical, holding positions of power, including the highest seat of imperial authority. An early Chinese historical account of Japan from 57 CE claims that Japan was ruled by a shaman-empress called Himiko. There is also Empress Jingū’s reign and military expedition in third century. In total, Japanese written records report 10 female leaders, including empress Suiko who took the throne in 592 and was the first historical ruler of either gender. Therefore, in terms of numbers, women warriors and politicians were few, but it was not unheard of for women to take an active role, and
some were able to rise to great heights. It is not the intention of this thesis to argue that Japan was a matriarchy, but we should be skeptical of the explanation of Japanese myth as a projection of patriarchy, a belief that is itself as much a myth of modern scholarship as Kawai’s idealized goddesses. The historical reality of reigning of Empresses, the contributions (even if only legend) of figures such as Jingū and Himiko, and the various evaluations of gender expressed in the myths of Izanaki, Izanami, Amaterasu and Susano’o give ample reason to suspect that the circumstances of gender in the eighth century were nuanced and complex.

Also, it is certainly true that the female figures in Japanese myth are idealized constructs of the eighth century, but so are the male ones, and so are any concepts of gender at any time in any society. According to West and Zimmerman, in all cultures, gender itself “is a socially scripted dramatization of the culture’s idealization of masculine and feminine natures.”273 The present trend to look for notions of gender in the figure of Ame no Uzume and the myth of the “Heavenly Grotto” may be due to the fact that ideas about gender are now changing rapidly. Many people realize that the limited views of femininity that dominated past discourse are no longer appropriate or desirable, but they are unsure of how to define their identities and relationships without them. It may or may not be the case that in the eighth century, a time when a woman actually ruled Japan, society was in fact more egalitarian, but whether or not that is historically true, it is evident that some people today draw on mythic authority to subtly or vocally encourage or condemn social structures and patterns as they attempt to form and express their own new images of gender.

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Chapter 7: Conclusion

35 years ago, Masuda Katsumi identified two major categories in Japanese thought about myth. First was what Katsumi called 現代の神話 “modern myth,” a contemporary attitude towards myth as a metaphorical or symbolic expression of ideas that are present in, but run contrary to modern civilization and transcend our ordinary consciousness. This group of mythological interpretations was complimented and contrasted by examinations of 神話そのもの “myth itself.” Though a wide variety of approaches fall into this second category, they are defined by a focus on the form, contents and recurring themes of myth. The first pattern of thought can be called “modern” because its subscribers reason that, whatever myth’s significance – be it spiritual, social, or psychological – this meaning is not limited to the time in which the myths were conceived or written, but extends to the present as well. Discussions of “myth itself,” when it does consider something outside of the text of the myth, is limited to the specific historical context of the narratives’ compositions or reiterations. In other words, “modern myth” represents the ways in which we are still mythologized, still under the sway of mythological thoughts and associations, though we may not be conscious of them. On the other hand, “myth itself” represents some level of demythologization, as myth is viewed as an object of study distinct from the observer.

Recently, many scholars have taken a more balanced approach to myth, particularly with regards to context, but even for Masuda there was something that united these two perspectives. This was 神話的想像力 shinwa-tekishōzōryoku, “mythic imagination,” Masuda’s somewhat poetic term for a concept roughly equivalent to

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“ideology.” Myths themselves often feature momentous creative events or significant changes to the order and structure of the world. The composers of mythic accounts engage in a similar creative process when they craft stories about how the world and its order was made, essentially expressions of their imagination, but also of their ideological views. Mythologists, too, use their own deeply-rooted associations of value as well as a certain amount of imagination to uncover patterns and craft arguments in their research. Therefore, scholars of any camp are utilizing a “mythic imagination” as they describe their object of study, give it coherent structure, and relate it to the universe around themselves. Of course, an important distinction exists between scholarship and myth as means of giving structure to the world; myth may derive from a variety of inspirations, but scholarship needs to be based on and in conversation with the established work of academic peers. As Bruce Lincoln said, “If myth is ideology in narrative form, then scholarship is myth with footnotes.”

However, there are several other views of myth in addition to the ideological perspective, and several of these are particularly relevant and frequently utilized in Japanese myth scholarship. These include approaches that link myth to historical rituals, both those of political ceremony and spiritual or religious practice. There are also strong reasons to believe that the myths of Japan are, in places, representative of natural phenomena and humanity’s relationship to cycles such as the seasons. Comparative mythology allows scholars to hypothesize about the historical origins of the Japanese people and their culture in the framework of greater patterns of migration and exchange in Asia. And even within an ideological interpretation, focused investigations specifically reveal the myths’ elements of political propaganda, evidence of social structures, and even possibly expressions of personal psychological experience.

Japanese myth can be considered in accordance with Lincoln’s three mythic criteria: truth claims, credibility, and authority. They are often situated in real locations and linked to historical time. In the past, the truth value and credibility of the myths has

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been discussed, either as legendary versions of history or as expositions of religious worldview in contrast to other theological systems. At present, to what degree the myths represent a legitimate Japanese folk tradition, and thereby their authority in relating what is truly “Japanese” is debated, but nonetheless, many utilize the myths as a source for understanding characteristics of Japanese culture. Japan is a thoroughly modern, scientific, and by Honko and Doniger’s terminology, “demythologized” nation, but certain members of society may be passing through a phase of “remythologization” as they devise new meanings for the myths in their contemporary context.

The greatest caveat of this postwar return to myth, and a conscious fear of many mythologists, is the association between the Kiki narratives and the imperialism. The Kiki establish an order in heaven that is mirrored on earth by reverence toward the emperor. Though the emperor is a peaceful and politically marginalized figure now, no one knows what developments future circumstances and charismatic and ambitious political movements might bring about if they were to appeal to imperial authority. Just as Motoori Norinaga’s originally sensitive and aesthetic treatises were adopted by an evolving ideology of violent nationalism in the 19th century, seemingly innocuous statements about Japanese myth today may be reinterpreted in the future. However, the authority that the Kiki have as some of Japan’s oldest texts and their status as the canonical works of Japanese myth can potentially be used to foster peace, inclusion, and international understanding as well. An expanded definition of Japanese myth and careful and conscientious comparison in mythology may strengthen connections between the interrelated cultures of Asia and break down ideas of essential Japanese uniqueness while still providing an opportunity to learn about the historical contexts and social structures of Japan that are genuinely distinctive.

There seems to be a desire among a portion of the Japanese population to frame religious experiences and to express spiritual sentiments thorough the mythic language of the Kiki. The myths also provide a forum for discussing contemporary issues of personal psychological health and social concerns such as gender equality. For the most part, interpreters avoid making conclusions or recommendations based on the myths, but rather
address the myths because they are indicative of patterns elsewhere in society. Given recent popular trends and the upcoming 1300-year anniversary of the *Nihon shoki*, it is likely that Japanese myth will continue to draw attention and new interpretations will emerge. The texts are somewhat static, but their meaning for audiences is always subject to change. Therefore, the best way to understand Japanese myth is to keep abreast of new trends and developments within the *Kiki’s* modern social context.
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