

Klaus ANTONI *

Izumo as the ‘Other Japan’: Construction vs. Reality

*SHINKOKU is the sacred name of Japan
– Shinkoku, ‘The Country of the Gods’; and of all Shinkoku
the most holy ground is the land of Izumo.
(Lafcadio Hearn)¹*

*... the case of Izumo reminds us that there were other chiefly hierarchies
across the archipelago that continued to display
distinct signs of autonomy.
(Piggott 1997: 54)*

1. Introduction

Since the exoticizing romantic reports of Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904), who lived in Japan towards the end of 19th century and who shaped with his books – until today – the western image of Japan, the region of Izumo is regarded as a perfect example of the “other,” in the sense of a true, authentic, “actual” Japan in contrast to modern times. Hearn’s enthusiasm for this ideal went even so far that he accepted Japanese citizenship after his wedding with Koizumi Setsu (1891) in Matsue 松江, and made the poetic name (*makurakotoba* 枕詞) of Izumo 出雲 – in memory of the time he spent there – his own²: *Yakumo* 八雲, the place where the “eight (= many) clouds” ascend. This expression also refers directly to the religion of Izumo, to the Great shrine (Izumo Taisha), because it is there – as the legend says – where those “eight clouds ascend” (*yakumo tatsu* 八雲立つ).³

But with Hearn’s romantic transfiguration of Izumo we do not enter the area of objective cultural and religious history of this region, but rather the complex realm of ideological identity discourses in modern Japan, which were to a great

* Professor, Tübingen University, Japanese Studies.

1. This sentence is the beginning of Hearn’s essay “Kitzuki 支豆支: The most ancient shrine of Japan,” being included in Hearn’s first work about Japan, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (Hearn 1997: 172-210, quotation p. 172).

2. Hearn was informed of his naturalization in February 1896 in an official letter by the Japanese government; he signed this letter with his new name Koizumi Yakumo for the first time. Cf. Hori 2002.

3. Cf. *Izumo-fudoki*, NKBT 2: 94/95 and 98/99, cf. p. 95, annotation 19.

extent sparked off by Izumo. It was nobody else than the *kokugaku* scholar Hirata Atsutane, who is known as the most important forerunner and ideologist of the modern restoration-Shintō of *bakumatsu* 幕末 times,⁴ who has crucially contributed to the picture of Izumo as a symbol of an archaic and “pure” Japan. We will turn our attention to this aspect later.

The belief in the special position of Izumo in the context of the development of Japanese culture, however, already runs through the history of Japan before Atsutane, from the mythical and archaeological beginnings up to the present regional identity and location discourses. In this view also the claim to stand for cultural autonomy was expressed, particularly in the notorious competitive behaviour of Izumo towards Ise, the spiritual and political centre of Japanese national thought, which can for instance be seen in the so-called “Pantheon dispute” (*saijin ronsō* 祭神論争) of the Meiji period. Since the first mythical reports in *Kojiki* 古事記, *Nibonshoki* 日本書紀 and *Izumo-fudoki* 出雲風土記, the culture and religion of Izumo were strongly orientated towards the continent, especially towards Korea. Because of this fundamental openness towards inter- and transcultural interconnections, Izumo stands out still today against the often seclusive self-understanding of “official” Japan.

Thus it is worthwhile and goes far beyond the limited area of regional studies on Japan to deal intensively with the history, culture and reception of Izumo, which is special and fascinating in many regards.

2. Senge Takatoshi and the *Izumo no kuni no miyatsuko*

Not long ago Izumo was brought to the consciousness of the Japanese public, when in spring 2002 the national media reported in detail on the death of a man who symbolized as no one else in the past 50 years the specific place of Izumo in Japan’s religious and cultural structure: Senge Takatoshi 千家尊祀, main priest of Izumo Taisha 出雲大社, passed away on April 17th 2002 at the age of 89. The reports on the death of Senge Takatoshi were of special interest due to the remarkable nature of his position. Senge was, as was reported, not only the high priest (*gōji* 宮司) of one of the most important shrines of the country, but also the 83rd holder of an office, which claims to go back to the Japanese mythical time of Gods, as bequeathed by *Kojiki* and *Nibonshoki*. This is the office of *Izumo no kuni no miyatsuko* or *Izumo kokuzō* 出雲国造, which means “territorial ruler of the land of Izumo.” Senge Takatoshi had taken up this office in hereditary succession in 1947, after his graduation from Kokugakuin University and his training as a Shintō priest at the most important shrines of modern Japan, namely Ise Jingū 伊勢神宮 and Meiji Jingū 明治神宮.⁵

4. Cf. inter alia Antoni 1998: 142-150.

5. *Asahi shinbun*, 19. 4. 2002; cf. online editions of the Japanese daily papers:

<http://www12.mainichi.co.jp/news/search-news/849553/90e789c6-0-2.html> (18. 4. 2002);

<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/getarticle.pl5?nn20020419c1.htm> (19. 4. 2002);

<http://www12.mainichi.co.jp/news/search-news/849553/90e789c6-0-1.html> (19. 4. 2002);

In the office of *Izumo no kuni no miyatsuko* Izumo's unmistakable claim to cultural, religious and often also political independence within Japan shows up still today. Unfortunately it is not possible to deal with the history of this office in detail here, but at least some historical basics should be mentioned.

Kuni no miyatsuko

We first turn our attention to Japanese ancient history. The organization of the Yamato 大和 state during the 6th century, i.e. before the Taika reform of 645, was characterized by a clear social and political order. Society was divided into the groups of *uji* 氏, *be* 部 and *yatsuko* 家つ子. In this system the *uji* clans, whose surnames had been derived from divine *ujigami*, represented the upper class. Their head was *uji* 氏 *no kami* 神, who also functioned as a priest. The *be*-corporations ("worker communities") were bound to the *uji* by their service; their areas of responsibility were handicraft, agriculture and war service (see the Mononobe). At the bottom of the social spectrum stood the class of *yatsuko* ("slaves"), who, however, constituted only approx. 5 % of the total population. During a continuous historical process local concentrations of *uji* federations developed, whose organization anticipated the principles of the subsequent feudalism in Japan: vassal *uji* and subjugated *uji* were affiliated to one main *uji*, their territories to a "country" or "state" (*kuni* 国) – after the Taika reform only "district" – and were administered by one territorial ruler, *kuni no miyatsuko* 国造.⁶ This office was held by members of the most important families in the district, who were in power because of their land properties.

The *kuni no miyatsuko* families were thus those local chieftains⁷ who originally held independent local power, and only later got into a feudal dependence on the new central power of the Yamato house. Usually they did not have a distinct sacral function, except in areas where important places of worship were situated, as in Izumo. Besides the *kuni no miyatsuko* there existed the so-called *tomo no miyatsuko* 伴造, with whom we will not deal further in this connection. With the Taika reform of 645 this system ended, but individual elements remained also in the *Ritsuryō* 律令 state. From now on the old *kuni no miyatsuko* families only functioned as district administrators of their former territories in hereditary succession, whereas the newly established provinces were governed by members of the high nobility. It is

<http://mytown.asahi.com/shimane/news02.asp?kiji=1935> (22. 4. 2002);

<http://www.asahi.com/obituaries/update/0418/005.html> (22. 4. 2002).

6. For the institution of *Kuni no miyatsuko* cf. Piggott 1997: 97; Niino 1981. – André Wedemeyer (1930: 235 ff.) already dealt with the work *Kokuzō no bongi* in his observations about Japanese ancient history. *Kokuzō no bongi* is said to have been written by Shōtoku Taishi and Soga no Umako and then integrated into *Sendai-kūji-bongi* as tenth book. Concerning the term *kuni* the author puts the stress on the differences in the conception of "kuni" before and after the Taika 大化-reform of 645 (p. 236).

7. André Wedemeyer (1930) translates this office with the German term "Hausknappe," meaning *mi-ya tsu ko* (*ie tsu ko* in the middle ages): "noble son, child," i.e. persons, who are dependent on a feudal family, later warriors for the feudal lords; cf. NKDJ 18: 666.

true that the subjugated local rulers had been confirmed in their positions, but they had finally accepted the central power. In just one region of Japan the old title of *kuni no miyatsuko* was maintained, connected with a demand for religious authority and independence from the imperial central power: in Izumo.⁸ And the reports on Senge Takatoshi's death show that the office and the implied demand exist until today, at least nominally.

The office of *kuni no miyatsuko* of Izumo was present during all historical epochs of Japan, so it does not belong to the circle of *invented tradition* and "traditionalism," which were widely spread in Meiji time.⁹ Since the Middle Ages, when there was a schism among the family of the old territorial rulers of Izumo,¹⁰ the two branches of the Senge and the Kitajima 北島 which emanated from this division held the office alternately, with the main line of the Senge having clear supremacy.

3. The mythical bases

The *kuni no miyatsuko* of Izumo derive their outstanding position from the religious and particularly from the mythical tradition of the country, since they claimed to be direct descendants of the deity Ame no Hohi no mikoto 天穗日命. As the historian Schwartz (1913: 533 ff.) already stated – following the historical-critical research of that time – the members of this family were originally the rulers of a tribe of probably continental origin. James Murdoch referred to the Kumaso 熊襲 of the legendary tradition in this connection.¹¹ As is well known the myths of Izumo represent their own cycle in the classical works *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*, which stand out clearly against the so-called Yamato and Tsukushi 筑紫 myth cycles which mainly concern the tradition of the imperial family. In the myths of Izumo there is distinct evidence of continental, i.e. Korean origins. An indication of this is given by the attribution of one of the main deities of Izumo, Susanoo no mikoto, to the continent.¹²

3. 1. *Izumo fudoki*

Beside the works mentioned, it is particularly the *Izumo (no kuni-) fudoki* 出雲(国)風土記, the provincial topography of Izumo (733),¹³ which provides a clear reference to the continental component of Izumo culture. Here the mythical

8. Cf. Naumann 1988: 122, 127, 173.

9. For the concept of "traditionalism" in the Meiji period cf. Antoni 1998: 250 ff.

10. Cf. Schwartz 1913: 539. For the history of *Kuni no miyatsuko* cf. *ibid.*: Appendix.

11. Schwartz (1913: 533, note) cites the author of *History of Japan* (vol. 1, 1910: 50): "The Idzumo State got settled by immigrants of Chinese extraction whose ancestors had settled among Korean Kumaso ... but had been driven to acquire the 'Korean Kumaso Language.'"

12. Nelly Naumann (1996: 123) too notes Susanoo's (Susa no Wo) "strange connection to Korea" in several mythical episodes of *Nibongi*.

13. For the text of *Izumo fudoki* cf. NKBT, vol. 2; a (in parts doubtful) translation is given by Michiko Yamaguchi Aoki (1971). At present the Swedish scholar Anders Carlqvist is working on various aspects of *Izumo fudoki*, cf. Carlqvist 2004.

episode of the “land pulling” (*kunibiki* 国引き) is the centre of attention, in which it is reported that the land masses of Shimane peninsula, the central area of the old Izumo province, had been drawn over from the continent in four parts by a deity in an enormous feat of strength and fastened to the country of Izumo. The first of these land pieces had been drawn over from the Korean kingdom of Shilla.¹⁴ In the *Izumo fudoki* it is stated already at the beginning:

The deity Yatsukamizu omitsuno no mikoto,¹⁵ who deigned to carry out the drawing of the land, said: ‘Is the country of Izumo, where the eight clouds arise, nothing more than a small strip of unfinished land? This country was created very small at the beginning. For this reason I want to create (more land) and attach (it to the already existing land).’ Thus the deity spoke. ‘If I look at the headland of the White Country, Shiragi 志羅紀 (Shilla), in order to see whether some redundant land might be found there, I see that there is (indeed) some land (kuni) left.’ Thus he spoke and took a spade formed in the shape of the breast of a young girl, drove this (into the land) as if he were pushing it into the gills of a large fish, sliced off the land like heads of billowing grass, and fastened it to a rope twisted from three strands. As he pulled and heaved with mighty strength the land resembled a riverboat. The land, which was thus drawn over and fastened (by the deity) who shouted ‘Come on, land! Come on, land!’ is that which stretches from the bay of Kozu 去豆 to the headland of Kizuki, the land of the pure spikes.¹⁶ (NKBT2: 99)

This first episode is followed directly by three further “land pullings” from other regions across the seas, until the Shimane peninsula is completed finally with altogether four parts.¹⁷ In the *Izumo fudoki* this deity *Yatsukamizu omitsuno no mikoto*,

14. Joan Piggott (1997:54) points on the trade relations between Izumo and S(h)illa during the reign of the “Great King Yūryaku” (“Izumonites were also well placed to maintain trading relations with the peninsula, especially with Silla”).

15. Katō (1997: 5) reads the name of the deity *Yatsukamizu-omizunu no mikoto*.

16. The *Kunib(h)iki*-Mythos occurs in several text editions of *Izumo-fudoki*: cf. NKBT2: 99-103; Katō Yoshinari 1997: 5-7; Kawashima 2001: 10-12; Namura 2001: 9-14; cf. the English translation (which is partly problematical because of being inaccurate) in Aoki 1971: 82-83.

17. Hearn (1997: 180-181) summarizes this “Shintō legend” as follows: “It is said that in the beginning the God of Izumo, gazing over the land, said, ‘This new land of Izumo is a land of but small extent, so I will make it a larger land by adding unto it.’ Having so said, he looked about him over to Korea, and there he saw land which was good for the purpose. With a great rope he dragged therefrom four islands, and added the land of them to Izumo. The first island was called Ya-o-yo-ne, and it formed the land where Kizuki now is. The second island was called Sada-no-kuni, and is at this day the site of the holy temple where all the gods do yearly hold their second assembly, after having first gathered together at Kizuki. The third island was called in its new palce Kura-mi-no-kuni, which now forms Shimane-gori. The fourth island became that place where stands the temple of the great god at whose shrine are delivered unto the faithful the charms which protect the rice-fields. Now in drawing these islands across the sea into their several places the god looped his rope over the mighty mountain of Daisen and over

which is hardly mentioned in other sources, appears as the main divinity of Izumo. In the courtly source writings on the other hand a trio of three deities appears, who are of high importance for the Izumo religion: Susano, Ōkuninushi – also known as Ōnamuji 大穴持 *inter alia*¹⁸ – and Sukunabikona 少彦名 毘古那 no mikoto.

3. 2 *The mythology of Izumo*¹⁹

The *Kojiki* contains a myth cycle about Susano 須佐ノ男 / 須佐乃鳥 and his descendant Ōkuninushi, the “ruler of the great country,” in which Amaterasu 天照大神 as an ancestress of the imperial house does not play any role. The complex narrative, which is woven into the strand of mythological chronology, is located in the landscape of Izumo. In the description of the otherwise wild and heady God Susano, the bad and violent aspects subside and he appears in a considerably friendlier light. His position as divine ruler of Izumo is finally taken over by Ōkuninushi.

The deities of the Izumo line appear in the sources as so-called “terrestrial deities,” whereas those of the Amaterasu line belong to the “heavenly deities.” The assembly of the heavenly gods decides to send a representative down to earth in order to demand heavenly rule on earth, an episode which is interpreted frequently in historical terms as a fight between the independent region of Izumo and the new central state of Yamato. Several divine messengers are sent, but Ōkuninushi is able

the mountain Sa-hime-yama; and they both bear the marks of that wondrous rope even unto this day. As for the rope itself, part of it was changed into the long island of ancient times called Yomi-ga-hama, and a part into the Long Beach of Sono.”

18. Ōkuninushi occurs in the myths under different names; in *Nibongi* it is noted: “A further name of Ohokuninushi no kami is Ohomono-nushi 大物主 no kami, again he is named Kunitsukuri Ohonamuchi no mikoto. Again he is named Ashihara no Shikowo. Again he is named Yachihoko no kami. Again he is named Ohokunitama no kami. Again he is named Utsushikunitama no kami. His children counted altogether 181 deities.” (NKBT 67: 128-129). On the identity of Ōkuninushi, Ōnamuchi and Ōmononushi no kami cf. Naumann 1988: 92-93.
19. A lot of research work on the mythology of Izumo has already been done; cf. int.al. Ishizuka Takatoshi (ed.) (1986), *Izumo-shinkō* (Minshū-shūkyōshi sōsho, vol. 15), Tokyo: Yūzankaku-shuppan; Itō Seiji (1973), *Izumo shinwa* (Nihon no shinwa, vol. 3), Tokyo: Matsumae Takeshi (1976), *Izumo shinwa*, Tokyo; Matusmura Takeo (1958), “Tenson-minzoku to Izumo-minzoku-kei shinwa,” in: *Kojiki-taisei*, vol. 5: 31-69, Tokyo; Mishina Akihide (Shōei) (1971), *Izumo-shinwa iden-kō* (Mishina Akihide ronbunshō, vol. 2. Kenkoku shinwa no shomondai), Tokyo; Mizuno Yū (1994), *Kodai no Izumo to Yamato*, Tokyo: Daiwa Shobo; idem (1972), *Kodai no Izumo* (Nihon rekishi sōsho, vol. 29), Tokyo; Piggott, Joan R. (1989); Satō Shinobu (1974), *Izumo-kuni fudoki no shinwa*, Tokyo; Senge Takamune (1993[1968]), *Izumo-taisha* (Nihon no shinwa, vol. 3), Tokyo: Gakuseisha; Shintō gakkai (1958), “Senke Takanobu sensei kanreki kinen Shintō ronbunshū (Izumo),” *Shintō gakkai 3/ 5/ 937*: 26pp; Shintō gakkai (ed.) (1968), *Izumo shintō no kenkyū*, Tokyo; Shintō gakkai (editor) (1977) *Izumogaku-ronkō*; Shintō gakkai (ed.) (1968), *Izumo shintō no kenkyū*, Tokyo; Torigoe Kensaburō (1977), *Izumo shinwa no seiritsu*, Tokyo; Watanabe Yasutada (1974), *Shinto Art: Ise and Izumo Shrines*, tr. Robert Ricketts. (The Heibonsha Survey of Japanese Art, vol. 3), Tokyo: Heibonsha.

to defy them all. Finally the subjugation succeeds: Okuninushi resigns and retreats into his palace in Kizuki. The Kizuki Shrine – today's Great Shrine of Izumo – is considered a historical relic of this divine palace.

After the subjugation of Ōkuninushi the crucial episode in the imperial legitimation follows. Amaterasu assigns her grandchild Ninigi to descend to earth and take over the rule. Thereafter no other lineage than that of the sun goddess was to hold the sovereignty. The Gods of the Izumo line were thereby downgraded for all times into a subordinated position.

But it is not only in a historical-allegorical regard that the religion of Izumo proves to be independent. A lot of indications and text references point to the close contacts which the religion of Izumo (*Izumo shinkō* 出雲信仰) kept to the continent – China and Korea – as well as the insular regions and religions of East and Southeast Asia. The connection with Taoist traditions, which is demonstrated in Nelly Naumann's research,²⁰ is obvious; but there are also the closest connections with the mythical and religious concepts of Southeast Asia. Here correspondence with conceptions of faith of the insular area (Indonesia) and the Ryūkyū islands can be seen, which ties the culture of Izumo closely to the so-called southern elements of the archaic culture of the Japanese islands.

A particularly significant example is the conception of the afterlife worlds, *Ne no kuni* 根の国 and *Tokoyo no kuni* 常世の国, which can be found in the Izumo myths. Above all the complex of ideas concerning the "land of eternity" (*tokoyo*) opens the access to essential areas of early Japanese religiousness.

Although the "land of eternity" is mentioned in the sources only sporadically,²¹ it may be supposed that in those historical sources of the 8th century dissociation from the subjects "Izumo" and *tokoyo* already had taken place. *Tokoyo* was then identified with Taoist conceptions of paradise by the compilers of the sources of the 8th century. In the later, "post-mythical" parts of the *Nihonshoki* it appears clearly as a paradise of Taoist type. Here it can even be proven that a passage of Chinese literature served as a model.²² But the Chinese-Taoist arrangement is only a relatively superficial, anachronistic updating of content that is highly archaic after all. *Tokoyo* has been recognized by researchers as a place of the life hereafter which spreads "vitality," in terms of "*mana*"; it is not a dark place of death like other places of afterlife in Japanese records (*yomi no kuni* 黄泉の国), but rather a land like the "life-giving islands," which we know in particular from the Southeast-Asiatic and oceanic wolds of faith.²³

This complex of ideas is most popular among the native peoples of the

20. Nelly Naumann has dealt with extra-Japanese elements within Izumo culture at some length and clearly points to Taoist conceptions in this context. (cf. Naumann 1971: 249; also 1996: 34, 139).

21. Cf. Antoni 1988: 133, annotation 260 (with detailed reference to sources), and idem 1994: 23-30.

22. Cf. *Nihongi*, Suinin 100/ 3/ 12 (= NKBT 67: 280); the annotations refer to a passage of the Chinese work *Lieh-hsien-chuan* (*Lieh-tzu*), cf. Bauer 1974: 245f.

23. Antoni 1982: 201-213, 296 f. (with detailed reference to sources); Antoni 1988: 89.

Malayan peninsula and Indonesian islands, whose cultures exhibit a close relationship with the early Japanese conceptions of religion and values within the context of so called “southern components” of Japanese culture.

But the specific character of the mysterious country beyond the sea in the Japanese mythology reveals itself only by the attributes of those mythical figures, who, as divinities, are linked to the land *tokoyo* in the sources. It is not possible to reflect this complex, self-contained, primarily lunar-mythological world of imagination here²⁴; but it may be stressed that in the centre of this cyclic world view there stand two deities of the Izumo pantheon: Sukuna(bikona) no mikoto and Ōkuninushi 大国主, alias Ōnamuchi, alias Ōmononushi – the main God of Izumo and also the divinity of Mount Miwa in Yamato, which is closely connected to Izumo, too.²⁵

Both of the deities Sukunanikona and Ōkuninushi are regarded as true divinities of creation and as culture heroes in the sources. As Japanese mythology records, they created the world in a joint effort. And they established methods of curing illness. For the scholars of “national learning” (*kokugaku* 国学) movement of the Edo period it was an unquestionable fact that the origin of medicine lay with the divinities Sukunabikona and Ōnamuchi. And it was the well known Hirata Atsutane who first drew attention to the etymological level in this context, i.e. the common root of *kushi*, “marvellous” and *kusuri*, “medicine.”²⁶ “Luck” and “blessing” came from those two Gods, who, since both act as alter ego of the other, are one in the end. Inextricably linked with this is the conception of the land *tokoyo*, which represents the source of this divine power as a land of eternity, situated beyond the sea. In addition to that both deities are brewers of a holy, intoxicating drink – *miki* 神酒 (or typically enough also *miwa* 三輪) –, which comes into this world as a gift of the gods to human beings, who are represented in the person of the ruler. Closely connected to this conception is the renewal of life in love, in sexuality – see for instance the Miwa legend – and in intoxication. In the intoxicating drink, which was prepared by the two divinities according to archaic chants, they manifest themselves. The songs tell of a drink that is not prepared by human beings, but by the divinities themselves.

This connection of the divinity to love and sexuality is preserved in the corresponding religious traditions. Ōkuninushi, the great God of Izumo, today is as popular as he was in the past – as Enmusubi no kami 縁結(びの)神, the divinity of the fateful bonds of love between two people.²⁷ All over Japan he is known for bestowing fortunate marriage. Among the shrines of Japan the Great Shrine of Izumo (Izumo Taisha) is of great importance in this connection, and the divinity of Izumo Taisha is regarded as a divinity of happy matrimony throughout the whole country. Therefore the shrine today also refers emphatically in its advertisements for its wedding-hall to the god Ōkuninushi as the one who ties the bonds of

24. Cf. Antoni 1982: passim.

25. Antoni 1988: passim; cf. Naumann 1988: 92 f.

26. Hirata Atsutane: *Shizu no iwaya*, in: *H. A. zenshū*, vol. 1, Tōkyō, 1911, p. 14.

27. Cf. Antoni 2001, see also Asahi Shinbunsha 1979: 5, 48.

marriage.²⁸ But this conception does not belong to the old faith of Izumo, but is a product of modern times, which goes back at the earliest to the “envoys of faith” (*onshi* 御師) of the Kizuki (i.e. Izumo) Shrine of late Tokugawa times.²⁹ Today commercial wedding services take advantage of the famous name of Izumo, offering ceremonies according to its Shintō rites, without being connected with Izumo Shrine or the region in any respect. Here “Izumo” becomes a punchy label for a product.³⁰ In this connection it has to be mentioned that the deity Daikokuten 大黒天, too, one of the Seven Divinities of Luck, is related to Ōkuninushi. But this constitutes rather a borrowing, being based on a mere similarity of name. The component *ōkuni*, “large/great country,” in the name of the God of Izumo is read *daikoku* in Sino-Japanese reading; in the end, the relationship between the two Gods is based simply on this seeming correspondence of names.³¹

4. Modern times

The local history of Izumo can be retraced by means of the office of *Kuni no miyatsuko* from antiquity up to today. This family of priests, as already explained, claims to consist of direct descendants of the divinity Ame no Hohi no mikoto, who, according to ancient sources, is to be regarded as an ancestor of the rulers of Izumo. Ame no Hohi no mikoto was a divinity, said to have been sent down to earth by the Sun Goddess Amaterasu to subjugate Ōkuninushi, but who then however “changed sides” and followed Ōkuninushi.³² In the *Nihonshoki* it is said that he was the ancestor of the aristocratic family of the *Izumo no omi*, i.e. of the rulers of the province of Izumo.³³ Due to their divine descent the historic family of priests (Senge) later demanded a privilege to which only the emperor was entitled, i.e. acceptance as a “living divinity” (*ikigami* 生神).

Already during the Edo period Izumo anticipated the ideology of “pure” Shintō. Whereas measures for separating Shintō and Buddhism, i.e. native *kami* and foreign Buddhas (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離), were only carried out in the rest of the country with the Meiji restoration of 1868, in a few places this already took place during the

28. Cf. URL <http://www.izumo.com/kustani/index.html>.

29. Cf. Inoue Nobutaka et al. 1994: 318.

30. The wedding hall Izumo-kaikan in Ōmiya, Tōkyō, for instance directly refers to the Great Shrine of Izumo on its homepage. The “Izumo-den group,” with its head office in Hamamatsu and representatives in the whole country, performs on an even larger scale. Their magnificent facilities enable the celebration of any kind of wedding; cf. <http://www.izumoden.co.jp/1st.htm>.

31. For Daikokuten cf. Ehrich 1991: 117-188; esp. p. 132.

32. *Kojiki*: NKBT 1: 112/113, cf. Florenz 1919: 61; cf. Naumann 1996: 130-141.

33. Schwartz (1913: 547) int. al. refer to Hearn’s descriptions (*Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*; cf. Hearn 1997) who reports that the Gūji Senge Takanori is paid reverence to as an *ikigami* (cf. inter alia Hearn 1997: 189; 1921: 203). Schwartz (l.c.) further notes: “The loss of this character of *Iki-gami* seems in many ways to be the explanation of the establishment in our own times of the Taisha Kyōkai, ‘Great Shrine Church.’”

Edo period. The Kizuki Shrine (today's Izumo Taisha) belonged to the few shrines around the country that put the so-called *shinbutsu bunri* of the Kambun era (1661-1673) into effect and kept to this also later.³⁴ Izumo was thus spared in the modern times a separation by force with anti-Buddhist excesses, like that which took place nationwide after 1868. At the same time the early elimination of syncretism, which existed in Izumo only for a short time, contributed to the modern image of Izumo as a place of archaic Japanese religiousness and culture that was particularly attractive for the politically radical *kokugaku* of Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤.

4.1 Hirata Atsutane³⁵

Hirata Atsutane, the most important and most radical ideologist of Restoration Shintō, astonishingly had picked up aspects of Christian thinking too, and modified these for his concept of Shintō³⁶; he saw a counterpart of Izanagi and Izanami in Adam and Eve, and his reading of Christian texts possibly influenced also his visions of a life after death,³⁷ the counterpart to the visible world, in which the deity of Izumo, Ōkuninushi, was the ruler. Hirata stated, that Shintō ranked before all other religions and that the divinity Musubi no kami 産霊神 (i.e. Takamimusubi 高皇産霊) was the creator of all things – for him the main divinities of other religions were nothing but local manifestations of this Japanese deity of creation.³⁸

Hirata Atsutane's view of the world contributed decisively to the development of the romantic-nativistic view of Izumo in modern Japan,³⁹ and can also be seen behind the romanticism of Lafcadio Hearn. In his work *Yūgenben* 幽顯弁 Atsutane remarks on the relationship of the divinities (Takami) Musubi and Ōkuninushi:

“When one grows old and dies, one's body will return to dust, but one's spirit (*tamashii* 魂) will not disappear. Returning to the Hidden Realm (*kakuriyo* 隠り世), it will be subject to the reign of Ōkuninushi no ōkami, accept his commands, and from Heaven it will protect not only its descendants but all those related to it. These are the 'hidden matters' (*kakurigoto* 隠り事) of man, and this is the Way established by Musubi no Kami and governed by Ōkuninushi no Kami. It is for this reason that the (*Nihon shoki*) states: 'The hidden matters constitute Shintō.' ...”⁴⁰

34. Cf. Antoni 1998: 65-66. Schwartz (1913: 540) states: “Another important figure in this senior Senge line of priests was the 68th, the *Kokuzō* Takamitsu. He held office for only 13 years, beginning in 1660, but they were eventful. At the order of the *Daimyō* Matsudaira, Buddhist rites were abolished in 1662, and the precincts were enlarged by digging.”

35. Cf. Antoni 1998: 147-148.

36. Cf. Odronic 1967: 34.

37. For this topic cf. also Harold Bolitho's observations (2000).

38. Cf. Odronic 1967: 35.

39. Cf. esp. the work of Hara Takeshi (1996: 36-66), in which he deals with Hirata Atsutane's contribution to the development of the “ideology of Izumo” in detail.

40. Quoted according to Kamata 2000: 305; cf. Hirata Atsutane: *Yūgenben*, p. 267-270.

4.2 *Pantheon dispute*⁴¹

After the Meiji Restoration the followers of Hirata Atsutane argued with the followers of Ōkuni Takamasa 大國隆正, who himself had been an initiate of Hirata. And after 1875 the so-called Pantheon dispute (*saijin ronsō*) split the community of Shintō priests.⁴² The then high priest of the Great Shrine of Izumo, Senge Takatomi 千家尊福 (1845-1918),⁴³ had attacked the supremacy of the ancestor shrine of the emperor house, Ise Jingū, and demanded the inclusion of the main divinity of the Izumo Shrine, Ōkuninushi no mikoto, into the official pantheon as master of the underworld, according to the theology of Hirata Atsutane. His counterpart at Ise Jingū, Tanaka Yoritsune (1836-1897), rejected this request. From this emerged a dispute that split the world of Shintō into two rival factions.

As Muraoka Tsunetsugu (1988: 217) explains, Senge Takatomi – the 81st Kuni no miyatsuko of Izumo,⁴⁴ also known under his spiritual name Sompuku –, pleaded for Ōkuninushi no kami to be admired together with the three divinities of creation and the Sun Goddess; this way he tried to correct the fundamentals of the official confession of faith of Shintō and establish the position of Izumo as equivalent to that of Ise, i.e. to the Imperial House itself. His opponent Tanaka Yoritsune 田中頼庸 and others who represented the position of Ise Jingū had their doubts about this question, and in particular Tanaka was of the opinion that Hirata's conception of Ōkuninushi no kami as a divinity of the hidden world was a mere imitation of Jesus Christ! In view of the anti-Christian policy of the Meiji government this was a gross reproach and an obvious reference to the Christian aspects in Hirata Atsutane's thinking.⁴⁵

To settle the debate this case was presented to the Tennō in January 1881. His answer, however, was not what had been expected. Instead of making a decision for or against the integration of the Izumo divinity into the national pantheon, he ordered that priests above a certain rank were forbidden to work further as teachers of ethics or to do services in the parish, like for instance funerals according to Shintō rite. The logic behind this astonishing decision was that for a priest who did not conduct a funeral service there was no reason to ask which divinity ruled over the underworld.⁴⁶

41. For a detailed discussion of this subject cf. Hardacre 1989: 48-51; cf. Antoni 1998: 205-213.

42. Cf. Hardacre 1989: 49.

43. Hearn always writes "Senge Takanori" in his works.

44. Cf. Schwartz 1913, appendix.

45. In his work *Shintō yōshō ben* Ochiai Naoaki (1852-1934) criticized Senge Takatomi's *Shintō yōshō* ("The key points of Shintō"), because the Izumo-divinity Ōkuninushi had been equated with the sun goddess and ancestor deity of the imperial family there. Also Tokoyo Nagatane, who first agreed with Senge Takatomi, later disassociated from his theory, which had no basis in the historical tradition in his opinion (cf. Muraoka 1988: 219).

46. Cf. Hardacre 1989: 49.

The effect of this decision was striking. Many shrine priests first refused to conduct funerals – on the one hand because they saw themselves as liturgists and not as spiritual advisers, and on the other hand because they regarded dealing with death as something impure; this being a central idea of all Shintō theology. The Tennō's decision was all right with them. But a number of priests protested against the restriction of their activities to mere ritual acts – in vain. After that Senge Takatomi, the high priest of Izumo Taisha, focussed upon the *Izumo taisha kyō*, which he had founded in September 1874. Up to the end of the Pacific War *Izumo taisha kyō* belonged to the thirteen official churches of the so-called “Sect Shintō.”⁴⁷

Thus the Tennō himself had intervened in the conflict, not as a theologian but as a politician. Although the result was disastrous for Senge Takatomi, the shrine of Kizuki was included in 1882 in the national great shrines to which belonged also Ise and Yasukuni 靖国. Ceremonies at these places of worship were perfected and made an important pillar of State Shintō. But the interest of politically responsible persons in Shintō matters diminished thereafter. In 1887 it even came to a revision of governmental allowances to the large shrines.

After those events the idea of a specific religion of Izumo remained limited to the *Izumo taisha kyō*, which had been founded by Senge Takatomi. Astonishingly Takatomi, apart from being the head of Taisha-kyō, also continued leading the Great Shrine of Izumo, now one of the most important national sanctuaries. It was obviously his opinion that only in this personal union could the special position of Izumo and its religious leader, the Kuni no miyatsuko, be preserved. After the end of the Pacific War and the following denationalization of Shintō shrines, Izumo Taisha got back its independence. Today the great shrine and *Izumo taisha kyō* exist in symbiosis with each other. As the reports on the occasion of Senge Takatoshi's death in April 2002 showed, the idea of the *Kuni no miyatsuko* of Izumo is unbroken within this context.

5. Lafcadio Hearn and the western idea of Japan

It was Lafcadio Hearn who made the name of Izumo known in the wider world and who made it a synonym for the pure, authentic, genuine Japan.⁴⁸ Particularly his euphoric diary-like descriptions in the first volume of his work on Japan (*Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894), created a picture of Izumo that makes one think of the description of a dreamlike fairy land. If one regards his report in detail, it becomes clear that it not only consists of Hearn's own opinion, but was inspired

47. Cf. Schwartz 1913: 548-555 (“The Taisha Kyōkwai; Great Shrine Sect”). On the teaching of the sect the author gives the following remarks (1913: 553), “that all of its tenets might be deduced from the writings of Hirata. As I was told at Kizuki, it is almost impossible to do anything without being indebted to Hirata Atsutane. However the chief peculiarity of the sect lies undoubtedly in its intense ancestor-worship” – Detailed material on Taisha-kyō in Schwartz 1913: 559-681 (Appendices).

48. Cf. int. al. Hori 2002.

by a literary model which showed the way into the mysterious antiquity of “pure” Shintō. It was the *Kojiki* in Basil Hall Chamberlain’s translation that led him to such a romantic transfiguration of the land of Izumo.⁴⁹

In regard to the history of ideas this detail cannot be overestimated at all, because here fundamental lines of the so called “etic” and “emic” reception of Japan,⁵⁰ i.e. fundamental lines of ideas within and outside Japan, meet at one point and in one person – Lafcadio Hearn. It is not possible to consider the complex relationship between Hearn and Chamberlain in detail here, but a few substantial facts shall be outlined. The combination Hearn – Chamberlain,⁵¹ with the *Kojiki* as literary-documentary linchpin, includes substantial aspects of the Japanese as well as non-Japanese reception of Izumo and Japan in general. The *Kojiki* takes centre stage. As is generally known it had been the *kokugaku* scholar Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長, who made this source readable again by his philological studies and submitted it to a profound textual criticism.

Without Norinaga there would have been no modern reception of *Kojiki* and in the end no modern Shintō. His successor, the aforementioned Hirata Atsutane, radicalized *kokugaku* to a political ideology of Japanese superiority, which was based on a nativism that one would nowadays designate as fundamentalist, regardless of his own theological eclecticism. Hirata differed from Norinaga in a substantial point: he did not place Amaterasu in the centre of his theology, but Takamimusubi; and, as has been said before, he drew special attention to the meaning of Ōkuninushi as a divinity of the underworld.

Thanks to Norinaga and Atsutane the *Kojiki* found its way into the modern times and thus became the “Bible” of Shintō in the Meiji period. In this form the first foreign experts and scholars who worked for the new government of Japan during the Meiji period became acquainted with it, most notably B. H. Chamberlain, W. G. Aston and Karl Florenz. Particularly Chamberlain is of great importance in this context. He made available a translation of the whole *Kojiki* in English, which is of high value still today. The writer and journalist Lafcadio Hearn met this great scholar, who arranged an employment at the school of Matsue for him. Strongly impressed by Chamberlain’s erudition, Hearn took his translation of the *Kojiki* with him on his trips around Izumo – as signpost and travel guide –, and tried to identify the mythical places described there in reality. Thus Hearn bridged the gap between the mythical time of Gods and the present. Without being aware of it, he thus acted exactly according to the concept of *kokugaku* nativism, which also assumed a literal authenticity of the archaic traditions. The link between the positions of Hearn and *kokugaku* was provided by Chamberlain’s English translation of the *Kojiki*.

Now it seems almost ironical that Chamberlain himself treated the traditions

49. Cf. int. al. Hearn 1997: 20, 172.

50. For concept and meaning of “emic” and “etic” reception of Japan cf. Antoni 2001b.

51. For differences of Hearn and Chamberlain cf. Antoni 2001b: 641; Antoni 2002: 290-291; Hori 2002.

with unusually sharp textual criticism.⁵² As a critical scholar, he was not at all imbued with devout enthusiasm for a constructed antiquity, like Atsutane or Hearn. In the preface of his *Kojiki* translation the author points out the historical problems concerning the reception of the myths. But obviously Hearn skipped Chamberlain's scholarly commentary when reading the work and let the text take effect on him in a romantic, direct manner. It was *inter alia* because of these incompatible positions that it came later to a quarrel between Chamberlain and Hearn. The one – Chamberlain – became more and more radical in his rejection of what he called, due to his exact historical knowledge, the “invented religion” of the Meiji bureaucrats⁵³; the other – Hearn – was more and more roped into the official cultural propaganda of that time and spread his picture of an archaic and allegedly pure Izumo which functioned as a civilization-critical counterpart to Japanese modernity in the West.

With Hearn and Chamberlain two antagonistic poles in the Western reception of Japan emerge, and they are linked together by the perspective of the *Kojiki*, in particular through the passages of the Izumo myth cycle. Though he probably did not know it himself, Hearn moved very close to Atsutane's position and spread it throughout the world as the “truth about ancient Japan.”⁵⁴

Hearn's influence on the western image of Japan remains undiminished until today, as the continuous popularity of his books about Japan shows. Chamberlain's scientific, historical-objective criticism on the other hand was not able to do much against the power of the exotic and romantic images that Hearn offered his eager public. Thus Hearn's Izumo is also a didactic example for the suggestive power of image in our perception of “the other,” which is so often much more colorful than the uninspiring, ambivalent and contradictory nature of reality.

6. Izumo and “spiritual Japan” today

In present day Izumo, i.e. the relevant part of Shimane Prefecture, one becomes aware of the region's historical peculiarities in respect of discourses on identity and location. To this testifies for instance the magnificent building of the historical Prefecture Museum in Matsue, in direct proximity to the prefecture's administration building. Here *inter alia* the results of extensive archaeology and research are presented in a spectacular and attractive way, designed for public appeal. Thereby an image of Izumo's uniqueness is molded which verges on “auto-exoticism.” Such projections are intended to stimulate domestic tourism and arouse interest in the remote and economically weak prefecture of Shimane. But intentions seem to go far beyond this. The archaeological presentation of Izumo Taisha provides a meaningful example. From Heian-era sources, it may be gathered that in this epoch the main building was of an even more impressive architectural

52. For Chamberlain as critical historian and observer of the political developments in late Meiji Japan cf. Antoni 1998: 304 ff. and 2001b, 2002: 290 f (cf. also Horii 2002).

53. Cf. Chamberlain 1927, appendix: “The Invention of a New Religion”

54. Ota 1998: 163.

appearance than today's, which dates back to 1744 and is about 24 meters high. Today it is estimated that the former height of the building was 48m. A gigantic ramp is said to have led to the shrine building, that was called "Eight fathoms palace" by Nelly Naumann (1971).⁵⁵

Next to Izumo Taisha, a small exhibition can be viewed which contains architectural models of the shrine buildings and gives instructions of how they developed and changed in the course of time. Here particularly the model of the archaic, tower-like original shrine attracts the attention of the visitor.

Posters with illustrations of this reconstruction (see Figure) can be found throughout the region; they show an archaic shrine, embedded in a magical-mystical scenery, which makes the viewer think of esoterically-inspired pictorial representations, for instance of the pyramids in Egypt or of Central America.

The message of such pictures is clear: The main shrine of Izumo was in antiquity not only the tallest building of Japan – it is always stressed that this building was higher than the Tōdaiji 東大寺 in Nara⁵⁶ –, it was also a place of its own archaic religiousness, which appears to us modern humans as mysterious and exotic.

Similar intentions can also be seen in the official poster of the historical museum of Matsue. It shows the reconstruction of a richly decorated horseman in front of an oversize full moon in the centre of the picture. Again the beholder is reminded of the exotic and esoteric pictorial representations of the ancient past.

The fact that such an "auto-exoticism" in connection with New Age ideas is widespread among the intellectual discourse of contemporary Japan has been clearly demonstrated. The type of "spiritual intellectual," which was brought up for the first time by the scholar of religious studies, Shimazono Susumu (1993, 1996), and has been described by Lisette Gebhardt (1996, 2001) and Inken Prohl (2000),⁵⁷ is the centre of an "old Shintō" (*koshintō* 古神道)-movement⁵⁸ which constructs the



Figure: Izumo Poster

55. "Acht-Klafter-Palast" means a palace that is eight fathoms high.

56. Cf. int.al. Shimane-ken kyōiku iin-kai (editor) 1997: 166, fig. 144.

57. In this context too Hirata Atsutane's works always play a significant role, cf. Gebhardt 1996: 159; 2001: 84, 97, 135, 137; Prohl 2000: 31, 95.

58. Cf. *Koshintō no bon* 1994: passim; Prohl 2000: 72 ff.

image of a pre-Buddhist, pre-Confucianist and therefore allegedly authentic and “pure” Shintō. This stands in the tradition of *kokugaku*, particularly of Hirata Atsutane’s interpretation.

One of the main exponents of these “spiritual intellectuals,” Kamata Tōji,⁵⁹ places Izumo and its divinity Ōkuninushi in the centre of his works, and clearly stands in Atsutane’s tradition. Thus this whole complex can be seen in the context of New Age spirit(ual)ism in contemporary Japan. Also the “auto-exoticism” (regarding oneself as an exotic other) in the current tourism and location advertisements of Izumo finds fertile ground there.

It shows that the strength of the image of “Izumo” is unbroken in present-day Japan, which in many respects seems to turn to an intellectual nativism again. This analysis is also corroborated by the fact that in the *koshintō* circles of Japan, which are assembled primarily in the International Shintō Foundation in order to spread their picture of a once pure Shintō in foreign countries, Lafcadio Hearn enjoys great popularity whereas the historical-critical Chamberlain encounters rejection.

7. Summary

The wheel thus comes full circle. Izumo’s peculiarity is used by contemporary idealists and ideologists as the image of an original and authentic Japan, which was still in harmony with the old deities. There is little consideration that this image itself is a modern construct, which goes back primarily to the theological and political speculations of Hirata Atsutane. The historian Hara Takeshi dealt with these questions and presented a monograph with the title *‘Izumo’ to iu shisō*, “An ideology named ‘Izumo’,” in 1996. From the present-day point of view with regard to the history of ideas, it would be highly rewarding to pursue this matter further.

But the topic “Izumo” itself raises a lot of fascinating questions also beyond images and constructions and confronts us with a multitude of unresolved problems. The reality of Izumo, a local culture which is really “different” from the rest of Japan in many respects, thus appears to be not less exciting than the romantic-ideological constructions of Hirata Atsutane, or of that unfortunate stranger Lafcadio Hearn, whose ideas are still omnipresent today. Today the region seems to be striving to re-establish its connections to the continent, in particular to Korea. As James H. Grayson in his profound study on “Susa-no-o: a culture hero from Korea” (2002) points out, “It is clear that the Shimane area of Western Japan had sustained contact in antiquity with the south-western part of the Korean peninsula.”⁶⁰ This process forms a distinct contrast to the seclusive centralism of modern Japan. At the geographical edges, like for instance in Okinawa and also

59. On Kamata Tōji (and his Hirata-studies) cf. Gebhardt 2001: 96 - 99; Prohl 2000: 28-32.

60. Cf. Grayson 2002: 465. The author further on states: “It is also worth noting that the nautical distance between the modern cities of Ulsan and Izumo is one of the shortest routes, if not the shortest route, between the Korean peninsula and Honshū island” (Grayson 2002: 483).

here in Izumo/Shimane, Japan's modern *sakoku* 鎖国 begins to disappear. This is a process contrary to the romantic-ideological nativism of the new "spiritual intellectuals," who want to use "Izumo" for their own purposes.

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