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### **Month without the Gods: Shinto and Authority in Early Modern Japan**

As part of a larger project which examines the history of a Shinto god called Okuninushi who challenged and compromised the authority of the imperial ancestor the Sun Goddess in early modern and Meiji periods, this paper traces the rise of Okuninushi to national popularity as the Shinto god of creation, protection and fortune in eighteenth and nineteenth century Japan. This national popularity translated into a divine authority in contrast to and in competition with that of the Sun Goddess. Propelling this phenomenal development was the constant pressure on the Izumo Shrine, where Okuninushi was enshrined, to raise funds for shrine renovation, rebuilding, and liturgical performance. The Izumo Shrine's financial situation took a downturn during the final decades of the sixteenth century as the proprietary and administrative powers of the Izumo Shrine was consistently encroached upon by warlords in consolidating their regional and national authorities. The gradual dissipation of the Shrine's power was precipitated by a major, serious blow in 1591 when Mori Terumoto, the warlord controlling the Izumo region, conscripted more than half of the Izumo Shrine's sizeable landholding to sponsor the then hegemon Toyotomi Hideyoshi's military campaign of invasion into the Korean Peninsula. Left with the annual revenue of a little over two thousand *koku* of rice (1 *koku* is roughly the amount consumed by an

adult in a year), the Shrine was unable to conduct necessary repairs, let alone rebuilding, of its buildings, and even had difficulty in maintaining regular liturgical schedules.

The dramatic reduction in economic and administrative power led to long-term changes of the Izumo Shrine in means of raising funds, resulting in the development of popular preaching, and transformed fundamentally the ways in which the Shrine related itself to society and political authorities. The shift in the Shrine's primary means in securing its economic basis from depending on land-based resources to active popular preaching translated into the emergence of preaching strategies that combined folk ideas and beliefs with the newly canonized texts of *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* in active construction of a doctrinal discourse that linked the whole nation to the creation and fortune god Ōkuninushi. At the center of this discourse was the popular idea of *Kannazuki* 神無月 or the "Month without the Gods," meaning that there are no gods in the tenth month because they all go to the Izumo province, an idea that was further articulated with popular beliefs in gods of fortune and protection. By the early nineteenth century active theological construction and nation-wide preaching had successfully promoted Okuninushi to a nationally renowned god that entered the lives of people across the Japanese archipelago. The nation-wide popularization of Okuninushi as the god of creation, blessing and fortune not only brought in economic benefit to the Izumo Shrine but at the same time consolidated a form of cultural authority that was articulated vis-à-vis and in displacement of that of the imperial house. The discursive and preaching activities of the Izumo Shrine exemplifies the intriguing modes of authority construction, through mobilizing both popular beliefs and intellectual discourses, which marked the early modern transformation of Shinto that cannot be reduced to the emergence of the imperial genealogy as prehistory of the modern nation.

## A Weakening “Great Shrine”

The Kitsuki Taisha or the “Great Kitsuki Shrine,” as the Izumo Shrine was known during the medieval and early modern period, experienced in the sixteenth century a progressive loss of hold on power and authority it previously possessed. The administrative and judicial powers of the medieval period fell into the hands of warlords, first the Amago through the 1560s and then the Mori to the 1600s, each of which maintained extended periods of control of the Izumo region and made consistent efforts in consolidating their power as regional overlords. Besides inserting Buddhist rituals into the Shrine’s liturgical schedule and constructing Buddhist architectures, another strategy deployed by Amago Tsunehisa in controlling the Izumo Shrine was instituting the post of *hongan*, the post in control of the most important business of the Shrine: its periodical rebuilding. In the capacity of *shasō*, or a Buddhist priest affiliated with a Shinto shrine, the *hongan* was given enormous administrative power by the Amago. He was responsible for organizing fund-raising proselytization, managing the funds so raised, managing the project of rebuilding, negotiating with warlords with regard to shrine rebuilding, and even daily administration of the Shrine including its forests.<sup>1</sup> In tandem with the weakening of the head priests’ authority resulted from these domesticating strategies was the increasing independence of the farmers affiliated with the Shrine. A development reflective of a large trend in pursuing autonomy and self-rule by farmers amidst incessant, disruptive warfare and lack of centralized political control, farmers of the Izumo Shrine organized communal agricultural activities under the leadership of local farmer-warriors (*ji-samurai*), displacing the control from the Izumo Shrine.<sup>2</sup> The situation worsened to such an extent by the final decades of the sixteenth century that the Shrine needed the warlord Mori Terumoto, who defeated the Amago and took control of

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<sup>1</sup> *Taisha chōshi*. Vol.1, 759.

<sup>2</sup> *Taisha chōshi*. Vol.1, 750. Also see *The Cambridge History of Japan*, Vol.3: *Early Modern Period*.

the Izumo region in 1566, to confirm in 1572 its possession of the “twelve towns and seven beaches” it controlled since the early medieval period. In other words, the Izumo Shrine’s centuries-old ownership of its considerable amount of land, cultivated by farmers living in these towns, and the beach areas near the Shrine, had become increasingly nominal.<sup>3</sup>

The Izumo Shrine’s reliance on the Mori subsequently enabled the latter to exercise effective control of it as the Central Shrine (*ichi no miya*) of the province and by way of that, to control the whole Izumo region. That control was realized through a variety of means. But most significantly, as in the case of the Amago, it was by way of managing the rebuilding of the Shrine. The project of shrine rebuilding of 1577-1580 was entrusted by the Shrine to the Mori as it could not raise funds on its own.<sup>4</sup> Mori Terumoto levied a rebuilding tax (*zōei dansen*) in the provinces under his control and appointed three Buddhist priests including the hongan, now in its third generation Bun’yō, to a rebuilding committee which took complete control of the project. Yūkō, one of the committee members, was promoted by Mori to the abbot of both Shōrin-ji and Shosan-ji, two temples affiliated with the Izumo Shrine. Jusan, the third priest, served Mori as his close aide in association with Yūkō.<sup>5</sup> Upon the completion of the new sanctuary, the kokuso head priests of the Izumo Shrine hosted the rituals of transference of the god from the old sanctuary to the new one in the eleventh month of 1580 but beyond that they had no say in the whole project of shrine rebuilding, even in deciding which carpenters to hire.<sup>6</sup>

The worst, however, was yet to come. In 1592 and again in 1598, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598), the overlord who succeeded Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582) in putting the whole Japan under control, waged twice military campaigns in invading the Korean Peninsula with the

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<sup>3</sup> *Taisha chōshi*. Vol.1, 749-750. *Izumo kokusō ke monjo*. “Mōri ke geji jō.” 193.

<sup>4</sup> *Taisha chōshi*. Vol.1, 756-757.

<sup>5</sup> *Taisha chōshi*. Vol.1, 758.

<sup>6</sup> *Taisha chōshi*. Vol.1, 757.

ultimate goal of conquering Ming China. The impact generated by the eventually failed Korean invasions was far-reaching for Japan, Choson Korea and Ming China, causing the devastation of the Korean Peninsula and what Nam-lin Hur called “regimes changes” in both Japan and Ming China, referring to Ming’s replacement by the Manchu Qing in China in 1644 and the establishment of the Tokugawa bakufu in Japan in 1600.<sup>7</sup> At a more local and concrete level, the impact of Toyotomi’s military campaign was most acutely felt at the Izumo Shrine even before the campaign took place. Providing largest troops (30,000 soldiers) for both invasions was Toyotomi’s close ally Mori Terumoto who drafted great number of farmers from the Izumo region.<sup>8</sup> He initially made a request in the tenth month of 1591 to the Izumo Shrine for “borrowing” its farmers to stuff his army, but when the Shrine refused by citing the reason that its farmers never participated in military fighting, Mori went ahead confiscating all the landholding of the Shrine for use, as he claimed, only through the duration of the campaign.<sup>9</sup> In return for conscription of the land, the value of which amounted to 5450 *koku* of rice in total, Mori reassigned to the Shrine in the twelfth month a much reduced amount of tax-exempt land that stood at the value of a little over 2000 *koku*.<sup>10</sup> The ostensibly temporarily conscripted land and the farmers attached to it, however, were never returned even after the campaign was called to end in 1598. Through the early modern period until the 1850s, although the Shrine received donations from domain lords and the bakufu, its landholding never went much beyond 3000 *koku*.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Hur Nam-lin. 1997, ‘The International Context of Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s Invasion of Korea in 1592: A Clash between Chinese Culturalism and Japanese Militarism’, *Korea Observer* 28: 687-707.

<sup>8</sup> Nakano Hitoshi. *Bunroku Keichō no eki*. 2008. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Nishioka, Takeshi. “Izumo Taisha no oshi.” In *Izumo Shinko*, edited by Ishizuka Takatoshi. (Tokyo: Yuzankaku, 1986), 106.

<sup>10</sup> *Taisha choshi*. Vol.2, 24-25.

<sup>11</sup> The Izumo Shrine received donations of approximately 440 *koku* of rice value from the Matsue domain lord respectively in 1857 and 1863, making its overall landholding to exceed 3,500 *koku*. *Taisha choshi*.

The conscription put severe strain on the capability of the Shrine in maintaining regular liturgical schedule. The 1590s saw the termination of four of the major, communally performed rituals (on 1/7, 5/5, 7/7, 9/9) that structured the Shrine's annual liturgical cycle in correspondence with the agricultural and social life of the province, a ritual scheme that spelled out the function of the Shrine as the anchoring Central Shrine (*ichi no miya*) of the province.<sup>12</sup> With the disappearance of these major rituals, the relationship of the Shrine with the society and the political power underwent a transformation. Indeed, as the Mori proceeded in its political consolidation of the region, the rituals of the Izumo Shrine were not just reduced and restructured; their very nature was fundamentally redefined. When Mori Terumoto allocated the reduced amount of land to the Izumo Shrine, he not only designated land to be used to finance performance of specifically designated rituals, but further decided the amount of rice value for these rituals. The landholding authorization edict (*ateokonai jō*) he issued for the Kitajima head priest house, one of the two houses comprising the Shrine's head priest genealogy, on 12/8 of 1591 specified these content.<sup>13</sup> The edict allotted the Kitajima family a stipend of a thousand *koku* in landholding value, but prescribed only fifty *koku* of rice for each of two rituals that headed the list of six rituals, a skeleton form of the Kitajima's traditional ritual repertoire, mostly performed in even-numbered months. The first of the two was *Sangatsu-e*, performed in the first three days of the third month, with the third day hosted by the Kitajima house. This was the largest ritual event at the Shrine; like the Amago, Mori Terumoto arranged sutra chanting

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Vol.2. 58. During the rule of Matsudaira Naomasa, the Shrine also received donations and its landholding increased to 2730 *koku*, among which 336 *koku* was designated specifically for performing rituals. *Izumo kokuso ke monjo*. "Matsudaira Naomasa kishinjo utsushi." 367. *Taisha choshi*. Vol.2. 77.

<sup>12</sup> *Taisha choshi*. Vol.1, 764.

<sup>13</sup> The Izumo head priest genealogy can be traced back to a strong local clan that was eventually co-opted by the Yamato court into its political structure in the eighth century. The genealogy broke into two when a succession dispute between two brothers in the 1340s led to the establishment of two competing houses, a situation continuing till today.

sessions during the event. The second ritual, referred to in the edict as ritual for the *Kami-aritsuki*, or the Month with the Gods, was performed in the tenth month. Following the two rituals were four more which received as little stipend as one to three *koku*.<sup>14</sup>

The Mori prescribed a similar ritual and stipend scheme for the Senge house, another house of the head priest genealogy.<sup>15</sup> With nominal amount of rice stipend, the ritual performance of the Izumo Shrine and by extension the very sustenance of the Shrine itself came to be dependent upon the Mori's support, a fact rendering the Shrine under the Mori's complete control. An appeal letter from the documents of an Izumo Shrine mid-level priest house foregrounds this dependence. The Shrine had to submit the letter to plead Mori for another thirty *kan* of coin and twenty-five *koku* of rice to perform its most important, three-day ritual *sangatsue* of 3/1-3, known as the "ritual of thousand *kan* and thousand *koku*" which however in this year (in the 1590s) had to be performed on the radically shrunk budget of fifty *kan* and thirty *koku*.<sup>16</sup>

The ultimate goal of the Mori was to transform the very nature of the Izumo Shrine's rituals and incorporate them into its power structure. While as the Central Shrine of the Izumo province during the medieval times, the Izumo Shrine performed rituals to evoke the help of the gods to secure successful agricultural activities and good harvest, the rituals, however, now under the control of the Mori, were performed to secure the longevity and the luck of the Mori house (*buun chōkyū no okinen*).<sup>17</sup> Sources show the Shrine was repeatedly urged and sometimes ordered to earnestly pray for Mori's welfare and safety. Praying had long been embedded in the

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<sup>14</sup> *Izumo kokusō ke monjo*. "Mōri ke bugyō renshō ateokonai jō." 197-199.

<sup>15</sup> *Izumo kokusō ke monjo*. 200.

<sup>16</sup> *Taisha chōshi*. Vol.1, 763.

<sup>17</sup> *Izumo kokusō ke monjo*. "Suetsugu Motoyasu shojō." 189. Demands for ritual praying for the benefit of the Mori house, rather than of an agriculturally oriented local society, are a constant theme running through the source materials. The phrase *kinen* or the word *inori*, both meaning "pray," appear in many documents issued by the Mori to the Shrine. See *Izumo kokusō ke monjo*, 165, 175, 176, 177, 187, 189, 198, 223, 230, 252, and passim.

Shrine's ritual schedule and praying session for a specific purpose, e.g., praying for warlords' recovery from disease, was also held on an irregular basis. The Mori however was keen in redefining the rituals as a constitutive component of its political rule rather than letting them remain within the earlier framework of anchoring the communal life of the region and securing agricultural production. Furthermore, Mori Terumoto did not seem to attach much importance to the Shrine's own scheduled rituals as he did to the Buddhist sutra-chanting rituals performed by the Gakuen temple priests at the Izumo Shrine. In one case, Terumoto asked the Shrine's priests to submit only the records of sutra chanting performed as the report of the *sangatsue*.<sup>18</sup> This could be interpreted as another step in controlling the Shrine by reducing its most important ritual to a Buddhist definition.

The control of the Mori, however, did not last long. Mori Terumoto after the death of Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1598, which brought the Korean invasions to end, stood at the forefront in fighting Tokugawa Ieyasu who was braced to replace the Toyotomi as the overlord of entire Japan. Ieyasu's victory at the decisive battle of Sekigahara in 1600 secured his success at the expense of Mori Terumoto whose territory was subsequently reduced to two provinces of Suo and Nagato to the west of the Izumo province. In place of Mori Terumoto, Ieyasu transferred another former rival Horio Yoshiharu into Izumo, who constructed the small village Matsue, roughly 31 miles from Izumo Shrine, into his castle town and with that the domain came to be known as Matsue. In 1633 the bakufu reassigned the Matsue domain to Kyōgoku Tadataka after Horio Tadaharu died without a male heir. The Kyōgoku house similarly failed to produce a successor and did not maintain itself. As a result, in 1638 Matsudaira Naomasa, the grandson of Tokugawa Ieyasu, moved in and initiated the Matsudaira house which ruled the domain until the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Neither the Horio nor the short-lived Kyōgoku seemed to have tried

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<sup>18</sup> *Taisha chōshi*. Vol.1, 764.



to put the Izumo Shrine under its firm control, and both reaffirmed the Izumo Shrine's landholding and probably also ritual stipends determined by Mori Terumoto.<sup>19</sup> So after the Mori was gone, the Shrine did not see improvement in its economic situation and continued struggling to make ends meet. Matsudaira Naomasa donated several hundred koku of land to the Shrine but that did not significantly improve its financial situation.

The need to share the limited resources aggravated the perennial tensions between the two head priest houses. Indeed, the 1620s-1630s saw an escalation in the contestations between the two. In chapter one I introduced how this escalated infighting contributed to the creation of the kokuso as a divine genealogy. In trying to make most out of the restructured, severely underfunded ritual schedule, the Kitajima house spearheaded the efforts from the 1600s in reconfiguring its rituals so as to rearticulate their importance for society and political power and based on that, making claims for orthodoxy as the authentic kokuso genealogy. As we will see in this chapter, ritual reconfiguration was closely tied to the development of popular preaching by the Izumo priests across the country. Those reconfiguring efforts started from promoting the *kamiarisai*, or the Gods-at-Izumo Ritual, performed in the tenth month, above the *sangatsue* ritual of the third month. Although the latter was given equal amount of stipend, it was performed by the Kitajima as an insertion into a three-day ritual event that was administered by the Senge, in an odd-numbered month for which the Senge was the ritual host. As such the *sangatsue* could not serve nearly as good a platform for redefining rituals and developing anti-Senge theories as the Gods-at-Izumo Ritual, performed solely by the Kitajima and in an even-numbered month, that is, a temporal segment allotted to and “owned” solely by the Kitajima.

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<sup>19</sup> *Taisha choshi*, or “the History of the Taisha [Izumo Shrine] Town” which gives extensive coverage for the Izumo Shrine, only mentioned in passing the two houses. *Taisha choshi*. Vol.2, 54-5.

## Promoting the Tenth Month

In a formal statement of 1604 on the amount of its landholding and its distribution as stipend for rituals, the Kitajima house rearranged the rituals prescribed by the Mori in 1591. At the top of the list was the ritual for the Month with the Gods (*kamiaritsuki*), followed by the *Sangatsue* ritual, both supported by fifty koku of rice. Following these two were four rituals performed respectively on 4/8, 6/28, 10/11 and 12/27, even though the amount of rice stipend assigned to these rituals did not follow this order.<sup>20</sup> That is, different from the Mori's edict which ranked the rituals in terms of the participation of Buddhist priests, the Kitajima set out to formulate an annual liturgical structure that gravitated toward the tenth month, rather than the third month. The attempt was clear: the Kitajima tried to displace both the influence of Buddhist insertions and the Senge house by creating the definitive ritual scheme for the Izumo Shrine.

Four years later when the Izumo Shrine was in the midst of another rebuilding, the then head priest from the Kitajima house, Hirotaka, seized the chance to tie the Shrine symbolically to what he argued as the anchoring importance of the tenth month. The symbol he used was the shrine crest. He sent a memo to two domain officers in charge of the rebuilding, reminding them of the importance in putting on correct shrine crest. First pointing out that “the crest of the *Taisha* is the character *u* 有 (to be or to have) within a tortoise shell-shaped [hexagonal] rim (*kikkō ni u moji nari* 亀甲に有文字也),” not the character *sa* 左,<sup>21</sup> Hirotaka explained that the character *u* 有 was actually the written form of *jūgatsu* 十月, i.e., the tenth month of the lunar year

<sup>20</sup> *Izumo kokusō ke monjō*. “Kizuki Taisha shinryō Kitajima bun chūmon.” 269-270.

<sup>21</sup> Today Izumo Shrine's crest is  whereas Hirotaka's version was . While sharing the basic motif of an outer hexagon, they stand for two major types and each crest will see minor variations depending on where and how they were used. Both were used in the Tokugawa period. I have seen them used on cosmetic box and containers from the period in the Treasure Hall of the Izumo Shrine. The latter version of the crest is used now at the Kamosu Shrine near the Matsue city, a shrine historically connected to the Izumo Shrine. The hexagon or the tortoise-shell shaped outer border line characterizes the crests of majority of shrines in the vicinity area of the Izumo Shrine.

and this knowledge originated from the fact that the Izumo Shrine was located in the direction of *ken* 乾.<sup>22</sup> According to the Chinese zodiac and ying-yang (*onmyō* in J.) theories, *ken* marks the northwest quarter of space as seen from the center, or in the case of the Izumo Shrine, the northwest direction from the imperial court in Kyoto, a direction corresponding to *gai* 亥 of the twelve zodiac, in a correspondence system used in East Asian societies to value and measure both time and space. In this temporal-spatial scheme, *gai* at the same time refers to the tenth month in the lunar calendar. By thus connecting the symbol of the Shrine to the tenth month (*ken-gai*-tenth month), Hirotaka went on to claim that the tenth month was the focus of the activities of the Izumo Shrine, which constituted the “profound knowledge of Shinto” (*shintō no jinmitsu nari*).<sup>23</sup>

Hirotaka applied this identification theory in his fight against the Senge kokuso. In 1639, he appealed to the new domain lord Matsudaira Naomasa for an official discrediting of the Senge as the legitimate successor of the kokuso genealogy. He started by outlining the kokuso genealogy which started from its ancestral god Amenohohi in the age of the gods (*jindai*). The single-line genealogy however branched into two when Kiyotaka established a “private” Senge house. Hirotaka then stated that the orthodoxy of the Kitajima house was able to be verified by official documents certifying the rituals performed by the house in the even-numbered months as the authentic rituals of the Izumo Shrine. This was due to the fact that “the tenth month is the month of culmination (*kiwamaru no tsuki* きわまるの月) of Shinto, that is, the revolution of yin and yang (*tenchi no ryōgi* 天地の両儀). This is the profound reason why my house hosts the rituals of the tenth month (*tōke saiban no gi shisai kore ari* 当家裁判之儀子細有之).”<sup>24</sup> By culmination, Hirotaka was referring to the temporal scheme formed by the yin-yang dynamic

<sup>22</sup> “Kokusō Kitajima Hirotaka oboegaki an,” in *Izumo kokusō ke monjo*. 278-279.

<sup>23</sup> “Kokusō Kitajima Hirotaka oboegaki an.” In *Izumo kokusō ke monjo*. 278.

<sup>24</sup> “Kokusō Kitajima Hirotaka sojō an.” In *Izumo kokusō ke monjo*. 369-371.

mapped on the twelve months of a year. Because the winter solstice, when the yin-yang starts to interact again, falls in the eleventh month, the tenth month was considered the concluding and culminating moment of the year-long cycle of the life-generating yin-yang dynamic. Hirotaka's further identifying this culmination with Shinto was probably borrowing the legitimating power of the emerging discourse of Shinto, like the Principle-Mind Shinto of Hayashi Razan, which tried to ground discussions of the gods (*kami*) on neo-Confucian themes and theories particularly the idea of the dynamic yin-yang interaction.

At the same time when Hirotaka mobilized the zodiac and yin-yang theories to foreground the tenth month, he was introducing another discursive thread to tie the tenth month to what he argued as the profound truth of Shinto. In another letter of appeal submitted to Naomasa, Hirotaka gave a more detailed account of the divine origin of the kokuso lineage, the "illegitimate" establishment of the Senge house, distributions of rituals and shared administration of priests between the two houses. In his explanation of rituals, he emphasized the vital position of the tenth month in the Shrine's annual ritual scheme; a month bringing the gods throughout the land to the Shrine. The nexus idea mobilized by Hirotaka this time was *kannazuki* or the Month without the Gods. "What for the Taisha is the tenth month is for the province the month with the gods (*kamiarizuki*). In turn, for all other provinces it is the month without the gods (*kannazuki*). That means throughout Japan all the gods without exception [come to the Izumo Shrine]. The profundity of Shinto is thereby revealed through this month. ... The fourth month is the second time [after the tenth month] to enshrine all the gods.... In Senge's months, which one is nearly as important as the tenth month? There are rituals in the first, fifth, and ninth months; they are however conducted by Buddhist priests. They cannot reach the gods (*jingi* 神祇) at all."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Izumo kokusō ke monjo*. "Kokusō Kitajima Hirotaka oboegaki an narabi sojō an." 328.

In other words, the tenth month was important because it was the time when all the gods came to the Shrine, which was the profound truth of Shinto. In contrast, the Senge's rituals were mixed with performances by Buddhist priests and because of their mixed or adulterated nature could not have any relevance with the gods. Consequently the Senge could not possibly be the authentic and legitimate head priest house serving the gods of Shinto. If in the case of the zodiac and yin-yang theories Hirotaka was mobilizing authoritative yet specialized knowledge in formulating arguments to discredit the Senge house, we see here a case of actively domesticating popular discourses in constructing a new, "Shinto" form of authority for authenticating the Kitajima house and for the Izumo Shrine. Whereas the zodiac and yin-yang theories provided Hirotaka an intellectually more sophisticated form of authority articulation, the ideas of the Month with(out) the Gods helped him to link the tenth month and thereby the Kitajima' house's rituals to daily social life and build a popular form of knowledge and authority. In other words, in his challenging of the Senge, Hirotaka was mobilizing the legitimating power of popular culture. Indeed, the ideas of the Month with(out) the Gods could be traced back to as early as the twelfth century and had become widely popular by Hirotaka's time, even though the ideas had never so far been consciously employed by the Izumo Shrine as a discursive strategy.

The origins of the ideas of the Month with(out) the Gods are unclear. The idea that there are no gods in the country in the tenth month because they all go to the Izumo province first appeared in a literary work on Japanese poetics entitled *Waka dōmōshō* that is attributed to the twelfth century courtier poet Fujiwara Norikane (1107-1165), "In the tenth month all the gods go to the province of Izumo. That's why this month is called the Month without the Gods (*Kannazuki*).” The first mentioning of the specific term of the Month with the Gods can be traced to a dictionary titled *kagakushū* compiled in 1444 which briefly states, "In the Izumo province it

[the tenth month] is called the Month with the Gods (*kamiaritsuki*).”<sup>26</sup> It appears then that these two ideas were mutually referential. But these ideas, while being about the Izumo province, were only occasionally specifically associated with the Izumo Shrine. Most references stayed satisfied with mentioning that the gods went to the Izumo province or *Izumo no kuni*. When attempts were made to pin down the specific destination, there was no agreement. Besides the Izumo Shrine, the Sada Shrine, about 20 miles from the Izumo Shrine to its east, was identified as another destination. One theory further argued that the gods went to the Ise Shrine where the god of food and the Sun Goddess were enshrined.<sup>27</sup> By the sixteenth century, however, that the gods go to the Izumo Shrine in the tenth month seems to have gained an unparalleled popular recognition even if disagreement continued in literary and philological discussions. This popularity is substantiated by theatrical performances of the time. Among them was a Noh play entitled none other than *Taisha*, as the Izumo Shrine was known at the time. In the play, two pilgrims were on their way to the Izumo Shrine in the tenth month. While journeying toward the Shrine, they told the audience that “in the Izumo province this month is called the month with the gods (*kamiaritsuki*). All the gods come here. The affairs of the gods are at its best so we are now paying this visit to the Izumo Shrine.”<sup>28</sup>

No sources, on the other hand, show that the Izumo Shrine related itself to the ideas until the contentions between the two kokuso houses pushed Hirotaka to make the connection in the 1630s. The agricultural nature of the Shrine rituals through the medieval period arguably contributed to the lack of need in making the linkage. It was a liturgical framework temporally

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<sup>26</sup> Ishizuka, Takatoshi. “Izumo shinkō no enkaku” in *Izumo shinkō*. 1986. (Tokyo: Yuzankaku shuppan kabushiki kaisha), 72

<sup>27</sup> Ishizuka, Takatoshi. “Izumo shinkō no enkaku” in *Izumo shinkō*. 1986. (Tokyo: Yuzankaku shuppan kabushiki kaisha), 75-78.

<sup>28</sup> “Taisha” in *Hangyo bunko*, an online database on Tokugawa-period literature texts created by Takahashi Akihiko, a professor at Kanazawa College of Art. Last accessed 2/13/2011. <http://www.kanazawa-bidai.ac.jp/~hangyo/utahi/text/yo018.txt>

cyclical and spatially delimited to the Izumo province because as the central shrine of the province the Izumo Shrine served the political and administrative purposes of the province, most importantly to secure agricultural production thereby tax for the imperial court first and foremost by securing gods' protection through ritual performance. In this cyclical framework, the major ritual in the tenth month, *Kamiagejinji* or Gods-Sending-Off Ritual, was paired with the rituals of the third and fourth months including the *Sangatsue* Ritual. While the spring rituals welcome the gods from mountains and seas to the paddy fields to protect planting and harvesting, the rituals in the tenth month were performed to express thanks and send these gods back to mountains and seas.<sup>29</sup> Such a ritual framework worked without the need to distinguish Izumo from the rest of the provinces, the very distinction structuring the twin ideas of the month with(out) the gods. Associated with this ritual rationale was the status of the Shrine as the Central Shrine of the province, a status officially affirmed by the imperial court from the ninth century. This official status arguably contributed to the disinterest of the Shrine in making appeals to the popular or plebeian idea of the Month without the Gods. When Hirotaka brought the twin ideas into his formulation of arguments against the Senge, he also introduced to the Izumo Shrine a mode of discourse with which its identity and authority could be articulated in relation to the idea of Japan or Nihon. Indeed, after Horotaka, the month with(out) the gods became the necessary discursive strand for foregrounding the tenth month in self-representations of the Izumo Shrine. Along with this shift to self-identification with popular culture, the Izumo Shrine started to transform from a ritual institution defining its purpose and practice in terms of an earlier form of political state, the *ritsuryō* state of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, to a shrine that depended on and catered to the interests and needs of the general populace.

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<sup>29</sup> *Taisha chōshi*. Vol.1. 467-471.

When Kurosawa Sekisai the Confucian-Shinto official of Matsue in 1653 conducted his inspection tour of the domain and composed the gazetteer, he was equally interested in determining the meaning of the month with(out) the gods as the idea provided him a device to forward his agenda of remapping the domain as the land of the gods rather than of the Buddha, an agenda he shared with his teacher Hayashi Razan. In his gazetteer *Kaikitsudan*, he extolled the Izumo province as the place where the god liked to gather and as such it commanded a prestigious central position in the whole land of Japan because it exemplified the sentiment of reverence for the gods no longer found elsewhere due to the infiltration of the foreign, folly Buddhist teaching.<sup>30</sup> Such a prestige enjoyed by Izumo would certainly be reinforced by the idea of the Month without the Gods when all the gods indeed would come every year to meet at the Izumo Shrine. In his gazetteer *Kakitsudan*, he devoted several pages in introducing different theories for the idea of the Month with(out) the Gods (*kannazuki* and *kamiaritsuki*) only to discredit them as unfounded.<sup>31</sup> Kurosawa apparently was trying to bridge the gap between the neo-Confucian qualms in recognizing and defining the existence of the gods on the one hand and the fundamental category *kami* that grounded his promotion of Shinto based on textual exegesis of, among others, *The Chronicle of Japan (Nihon shoki)* on the other. By negating those theories that took existence of the gods as literal truth, Kurosawa meant to explain the Month with(out) the Gods in terms of neo-Confucian yin-yang theory, that is, by unifying the two theories that Hirotaka mobilized in promoting the tenth month.

So Kurosawa explained that because the tenth month was the month of extreme yin before yang started to resume after the winter solstice in the eleventh month, it was the month without yang. Because yang corresponded to “above,” or *kami* 上, in contrast to yin which meant

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<sup>30</sup> Kurosawa, *Kaikitsudan*. 391-2.

<sup>31</sup> Kurosawa, *Kaikitsudan*. 388-389.



“below,” and “above” can be transcribed as *kami* 神, or the god(s), eventually the tenth month which was without yang or “above” (*kami*), came to be known as the month without the gods (*kami*).<sup>32</sup> Quoting the phrase *yang-zhi* 陽止, or literally “the ending of yang,” from the *Book of Poetry* (*shi jing*), one of the Confucian classics, Kurosawa argued that the tenth month could be read either as the month with or without the gods.<sup>33</sup> Thus walking around the thorny issue of defining the gods, Kurosawa went on in his introduction of the Izumo Shrine a few pages later to praise the Izumo province as the especially divine place in the divinely created Realm of the Sun (Japan) – as the divine land “where yin-yang starts and ends, and where is located the Kitsuki [Izumo Shrine] at which all the gods assemble.”<sup>34</sup>

After the major rebuilding in the 1660s of the Izumo Shrine with the resurrection of Okuninushi as its main god, the tenth month as the time of a divine assembly at Izumo was adopted as part of the representational reconfiguration of the Shrine into a Shinto shrine. Sakusa Yorikiyo, the *jōkan* priest of the Izumo Shrine who conversed with Kurosawa during the latter’s visit to the Shrine in 1653 and led the efforts in rebuilding the Izumo Shrine in the 1660s, introduced the Month with the Gods in his *Izumo mitsuharu zuihitsu*, a culminating text of 1694 in comprehensive redefinition of the Izumo Shrine as a Shinto shrine, providing a whole set of explanations for the Shrine: the head priest genealogy, rituals, and composition of the shrine complex, which all cohered into the main god enshrined in the main sanctuary, Okuninushi. Now with the centrality of Okuninushi in defining the Shrine, Yorikiyo related Okuninushi to the idea of the Month with(out) the Gods while at the same time bolstering his legitimacy claims with the power of tradition. “Japan is a divine country and Izumo is the most divine land in Japan because in Izumo is located the Hisuminomiya [the Izumo Shrine] where Onamuchi [another name of

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<sup>32</sup> Kurosawa, *Kaikitsudan*. 389.

<sup>33</sup> Kurosawa, *Kaikitsudan*. 389.

<sup>34</sup> Kurosawa, *Kaikitsudan*. 434.

Okuninushi] is enshrined and in Izumo all the gods meet every year. . . . All things return to their roots in the tenth month. Following this deep, ageless truth the Izumo Shrine conducts the Gods-in-Izumo Ritual (*kamiarisai*) from the eleventh to the seventeenth in this month. During this period small snakes with exquisite bodily patterns arrive at the Kizuki beach amidst sudden thunderstorms. They are met by formally attired priests and enshrined before the god of the Shrine. This is the age-old custom of our divine land. Isn't it a sure proof of the assembling of the gods?"<sup>35</sup> In the same text, Sakusa listed the rituals performed at the Izumo Shrine by both the Kitajima and Senge houses, which by this time were moving toward each other in making joint efforts to overcome financial difficulties. The major ritual in the tenth month, the *kamiagejinji*, or Gods-Sending-Off Ritual, was configured as the *karasadejinji*, or the Gods-Departure Ritual, thereby stripping off the ritual's association with cyclical agricultural rhythm and erasing the Shrine's previous role as the Central Shrine of the Izumo Province.<sup>36</sup> Instead, Sakusa was claiming Okuninushi as a god of Japan and substantiated that claim with the Gods-Departure Ritual that confirmed the meeting of all the gods across the archipelago at the Izumo Shrine.

While the connections of the Izumo Shrine with the Month with(out) the Gods were first made for infighting between the two kokuso houses, overtime the idea became a way of presenting the Shrine, relating the Shrine, and after the 1660s, the god Okuninushi, to the whole country rather than simply the Izumo province. Such a mode of linking proved a valuable strategy for the development of the major effort of the Shrine in overcoming economic difficulties, popular preaching.<sup>37</sup> Actually it is precisely based on the Month without the Gods that a complex theological discourse about the Izumo god Okuninushi was constructed in the

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<sup>35</sup> Sakusa Yorikiyo. "Izumo mitsuharu zuihitsu" in *Shinto taikai, Jinja hen*. Vol.37: *Izumo Taisha*. 224.

<sup>36</sup> Sakusa Yorikiyo. "Izumo mitsuharu zuihitsu" in *Shinto taikai, Jinja hen*. Vol.37: *Izumo Taisha*.

<sup>37</sup> Another fund-raising effort of the Izumo Shrine was issuing lotteries. *Izumo Taisha no oshi to shintoku kōfu*.

eighteenth century, which contributed to the successful preaching across the nation in promoting the god Okuninushi to the popular Shinto god of creation, blessing and fortune.

### “Respected Teachers”

Popular preaching is the most significant fund-raising development of the Izumo Shrine in the early modern period. Its development reflected the shift at the Shrine away from primarily reliance on land-based resources to raise money directly from the increasingly commercialized society. At the center of popular preaching was the traveling preacher called *oshi* 御師 in Japanese, literally meaning “respected teacher,” who in many cases was a merchant but received authorization from the Izumo Shrine as its franchised preacher. So *oshi* refers to both a hereditary and transferable right to preach and the holder of the right. The *oshi* was involved in two activities: first, traveling to provinces to perform rituals, distribute amulets and images for enshrinement, image scrolls and tracts, and establish parishioner communities (*danjo*), and second, provide accommodations to pilgrims when they visited the Shrine. An *oshi* purchases the franchise with an annual fee from the Izumo Shrine which also receives offerings in forms of rice or money from pilgrims brought to the Shrine by the *oshi*.

The origin of the *oshi* at the Izumo Shrine can be traced to the fifteenth century when at the Kizuki town, essentially the community surrounding the Izumo Shrine, there already existed a group of inn owners who monopolized the provision of accommodation for pilgrims from within the province.<sup>38</sup> More specifically, each owner developed an exclusive patronage relationship with Izumo followers from a particular area. This exclusive right to accommodation provision is known as “room-right” or *muroshiki*. The formation of room-right holders’ relationship with their patrons was not based on preaching or conversion but by way of

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<sup>38</sup> *Taisha chōshi*. Vol.1. 787.

authorization from warlords of the areas.<sup>39</sup> That is, it is local warlords who gave these muroshiki holders the right to maintain the patronage relationship with people in their area of control. Preaching or belief did not figure prominently in this relationship but parish-like communities could easily develop from this relationship. Indeed many room-right holders grew into major oshi in the early modern period.<sup>40</sup> During the rule of the Amago house in the first half of the sixteenth century, sixteen room-rights were authorized jointly by the Amago and the head priests of the Izumo Shrine to comprise a local system of franchised room-right holders and pilgrims.<sup>41</sup>

Financial stress resulted from landholding conscription in 1591 pushed the Shrine to increase its franchising of more room-right holders who in turn started more actively engaging in preaching, not just in Izumo but going to different provinces, a move also stimulated by favorable social conditions of peace, stability and development of commercialization, after the establishment of the Tokugawa bakufu in 1603. This expansion led to transformations of the room-right holders into what came to be widely known as *oshi*, or popular preachers. By the early seventeenth century, the relationship between inn owners and pilgrims had come to rest on satisfying the requests and needs of the pilgrims rather than solely on political authorization. In 1626, Horio Yoshiharu, the then domain lord of Matsue, issued the Kitsuki Code to the Izumo Shrine in which he ordered the inn owners (*shukushu*) not to fail to arrange praying sessions for parishioners (*danna*) who made such requests.<sup>42</sup>

Into the eighteenth century, organizing Izumo followers into parishioner communities (*danjo*) came to be the dominant mode of preaching. The usual schedule of an oshi preacher was to travel from the ninth month to the third of the following year in their exclusively designated

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<sup>39</sup> *Taisha chōshi*. Vol.1. 788-789.

<sup>40</sup> *Taisha chōshi*. Vol.1. 794.

<sup>41</sup> *Taisha chōshi*. Vol.1. 786.

<sup>42</sup> Senge Katsuhiko. "Izumo shinko to oshi no kaikoku." In Ishizuka Takatoshi, ed. 1986. *Izumo shinkō*. Tokyo: Yuzankaku. 97.

province(s) to distribute amulets and tracts, perform rituals and collect offerings. In many cases they also brought local products of Izumo for distributing among local officials and local people of some status or merchants, called *sewanin*, who facilitated preaching by helping the oshi with organizing communities, distributing amulets and collecting offerings. By the early nineteenth century the Izumo Shrine's traveling proselytizers had expanded to regions as north as Ezo (which is present-day Hokkaido, a yet frontier region of which only the southern tip was inhabited by the Japanese), and as south as the Kyushu Island, reaching into various kinds of local communities including rural villages, urban areas, trading centers, but also communities on move like merchant cum ship-owners that operated the thriving *kita-mae-bune* transportation business along the northwestern coast of the Japanese archipelago.

Parallel to the development of room-right holders and their transformation to traveling preachers was periodic preaching for the specific purpose of raising funds for shrine rebuilding and renovation. This practice can be traced to the fifteenth century when itinerant Buddhist practitioners were hired to raise funds for rebuilding when the province-wide tax could no longer be easily collected. They travelled in the provinces of Izumo and neighboring Ishimi, propagating the virtuous power of the Buddha, rather than Shinto gods, and collected donations.<sup>43</sup> By 1550, under the sponsorship of the warlord Amago Tsunehisa, the ad hoc practice was institutionalized at the Izumo Shrine as the *hongan* post. Tsunehisa provided the *hongan* with the authority that essentially displaced that of the head priests of the Shrine: managing funds raised through proselytizing, managing the project of rebuilding, negotiating with warlords with regard to shrine rebuilding, and even daily administration of the Shrine. After the transformation of the Izumo Shrine into a self-consciously defined Shinto shrine in the 1660s, however, the *hongan* post was abolished and it was the Izumo Shrine's priests themselves who

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<sup>43</sup> *Taisha chōshi*. Vol.1. 678.

started to go out to conduct proselytizing to raise rebuilding funds. During 1726-1741, sixteen of them conducted officially sanctioned shrine rebuilding preaching after the financially stressed Shogunal government turned down their request for funding.<sup>44</sup> In 1806 Izumo priests again conducted the same kind of fund-raising campaign for its final shrine renovation of the early modern period.<sup>45</sup>

Both traveling preaching and the temporary fund-raising activities helped bring in monetary funds from across the country; more significantly these efforts reaped enormous cultural capital for the Shrine, transforming it from essentially a ritual institution that defined itself in relation to the earlier land-based regional political structure into a nationally renowned and popular Shinto shrine. They achieved this transformation via actively reconfiguring the popular idea of the Month without the Gods into a theological discourse that linked the nation to the creation god Okuninushi and based on it developing a series of discursive and institutional strategies which enabled the Izumo Shrine to articulate a new form of cultural authority and project that authority throughout the archipelago.

### **Ōkuninushi: The God of Creation and Protection**

The active incorporation of the idea of the Month with(out) the Gods into the Izumo Shrine's self-representation in the seventeenth century provided popular preachers a valuable discursive tool to link the Shrine with people across the land. This link was made by relating the

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<sup>44</sup> Nishioka. *Kinsei Izumo*.

<sup>45</sup> As part of the consolidation of its political rule, the Tokugawa bakufu sponsored many temple and shrine rebuilding in the early seventeenth century, including the Izumo Shrine. Into the second half of the century, however, the bakufu had basically terminated its sponsorship but shifted to a policy of giving temples and shrines temporary prerogative to raise funds through traveling preaching, or kange. This policy change marks a transformation in the economic and social life of temples and shrines, a transformation also described by Barbara Ambros in her book on the Ōyama pilgrimage. See Barbara Ambros. *Emplacing a Pilgrimage: The Oyama Cult and Regional Religion in Early Modern Japan*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008. Chapter 1.

god Okuninushi with all the gods in the land and thereby projecting his power and authority throughout the archipelago. While we have seen that the Month with(out) the Gods had been assimilated into the Shrine, the idea's connection with the newly resurrected Okuninushi was yet minimal, as articulated by Sakusa in 1694. As popular preaching developed from the second half of the seventeenth century, however, consistent attempts were made to center preaching activities on propagating the divine power of Okuninushi. By the second part of the eighteenth century a complex theological discourse on Okuninushi had been constructed and laid the foundation for successful popular preaching of the Izumo Shrine. The major components of this discourse last to today.

One of the earliest cases of theological construction through connecting Okuninushi to the Month without the Gods can be found in a tract distributed for the Izumo priests' preaching for raising rebuilding funds in the 1720s-1730s. The period no longer saw the generous support from the bakufu it provided the Izumo Shrine in the 1660s. From the early eighteenth century, the bakufu started to experience chronic financial constraint as it was confronted with the problem of "how to allocate the resources of a realm whose material production...no longer reliably met the basic needs of a population that had more than doubled in a century's time."<sup>46</sup> In the 1710s, the bakufu stopped financing renovation and rebuilding of prominent temples and shrines.<sup>47</sup> In return, it issued permits for them to raise funds through popular preaching (*kange*). In 1725 the Izumo Shrine received preaching permission, followed by fifteen years of traveling fund-raising. The priests were able to raise about 12,500 taels of silver, one-fourth of the total cost of the rebuilding which was completed in 1744, with the rest borrowed from the bakufu as a

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<sup>46</sup> Totman, Conrad. 1993. *Early Modern Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 33.

<sup>47</sup> Nishioka. *Kinsei Izumo*. 145.

ten-year loan.<sup>48</sup> The economic benefit of this officially sanctioned popular preaching did not meet the fund-raising expectation of the Izumo Shrine priests but their preaching was an early, if not the first, step in popularizing the Izumo god Okuninushi as a god important to all the people across the land, and corroborating this claim with an authoritative discourse of the divine power of the god.

The tract the Izumo priests distributed focused on introducing four closely related themes: Okuninushi as a creation god, Okuninushi as a god of protection, the manifestation of his power through the divine assembly in the tenth month at the Izumo Shrine, and the importance of rebuilding the Shrine, the residence of Okuninushi. The tract started by recounting the divine accomplishment of Okuninushi in creating the land of Japan. “The wise and valorous Onamuchi suppressed the evil gods of all regions and yielded its rule to the grandson of the Sun Goddess so that the land was pacified and unified.”<sup>49</sup> As the lord of the land full of exuberant life (*ashihara*), Onamuchi was also known as Okuninushi. Just as the god taught medical knowledge for curing diseases of humans and animals in generating life in the land, Okuninushi had the power in sustaining the state and society. Indeed, “Whether military campaigns, agriculture or treating diseases, everything is secured as long as the god is pleaded to. He is the protector of the state, the god of military forces and none other than the god of fortune, Daikoku, enshrined in every household.”<sup>50</sup> It is because of his power that the Sun Goddess built a grand shrine of Izumo for him and arranged her second son Amenohiho to serve as the chief priest. The Shrine was not

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<sup>48</sup> The exact amount raised from popular preaching is unknown. Because the 1744 rebuilding was exact replicating of the buildings of the 1660s, we can assume, without taking into account inflation, the cost was similar to or not much higher than the previous one at 500,000 taels of silver. The loan from the bakufu was 365,000 taels, which put the amount raised through preaching at over 125,000 taels. It is not clear yet whether the loan was eventually paid off.

<sup>49</sup> “Izumo Taisha goenki kange no jō.” Quoted in full in Nishioka Kazuhiko. 2002. *Kinsei Izumo Taisha no kisoteki kenkyū*. (Tokyo: Daimeidō). 153-155.

<sup>50</sup> “Izumo Taisha goenki kange no jō.” 154.



only the residence of Okuninushi but also his office because his protective power was realized through a divine assembly at the Shrine. That is, all the gods in Japan would gather at the Izumo Shrine in the tenth month to join Okuninushi in “nurturing all the people in the Land of Exuberant Reeds (*toyoashihara*).”<sup>51</sup> Because of this assembly, every single household of all generations and in all the provinces received the blessing of Okuninushi. During the assembly the whole Shrine area abstained from cleaning, conducting business transactions, singing, dancing in observation of the purification practice started from times immemorial. A day before the arrival of the gods, an exquisitely patterned dragon-snake god serving as their messenger, would appear on the seashore near the Shrine to initiate the start of the seven-day assembly. Thus emphasizing the importance to each and every person of the shrine, which was now old and in need of repair, the tract ended with the confirmation that the priests thereby conducted officially sanctioned fund raising.

Another preaching tract from fifty years later shows how the connection between Okuninushi and the idea of the Month without the Gods came to be enriched with new themes and built into a complex theological discourse. Sasa Seishō, a traveling preacher based in Kyushu, composed in 1772 a tract entitled *Taisha yūmei shi* which he distributed among patrons including domain officials. The tract has three volumes running for about thirty pages in modern print form.<sup>52</sup> It reads like a consolidated version of previously mobilized, highly heterogeneous discursive themes and symbolics, including the yin-yang binary, creation and pacification, tortoise-shell shaped crest, and also with new additions of popular themes. Laying at the foundation was nevertheless the narrative from the now canonized “Shinto” classical texts particularly *The Chronicle of Japan*, or *Nihon shoki*. Building upon the episode of Okuninushi’s

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<sup>51</sup> “Izumo Taisha goenki kange no jō.” 155.

<sup>52</sup> “Taisha yumei shi.” In *Izumo Taisha no oshi to shintoku kōfu*. 2005. (Matsue, Shimane Pref.: Shimane ken kodai bunka sentaa). 138-167.

surrender of the land to the Sun Goddess in *The Chronicle*, Sasa brought the creation god Okuninushi to the apex of the Shinto pantheon as the god of creation and protection, upon which the authority of the descendants of the Sun Goddess, the imperial genealogy, was dependent. The episode in *The Chronicle* about Okuninushi's surrender, usually called *kuni-yuzuri* or "land-surrender" includes three themes: first, when Okuninushi was forced to agree to relinquish to the Sun Goddess the rule of the land he created and pacified, the senior musubi god decreed that Okuninushi was to in turn take leadership of the Shinto pantheon in commanding the invisible, divine affairs. Second, the musubi god further arranged to have his daughter married to Okuninushi as to guarantee that he would honor the conditions under which Okuninushi agreed to surrender and to demonstrate that their former rivalry relationship had changed to a familial one. Third, Okuninushi thereupon retreated to the invisible world, holding in front a curved bead.<sup>53</sup> The three themes of leadership, marriage and curved bead were brought together by Sasa in elevating Okuninushi, by way of the tenth month, to the status of an unparalleled divine authority.

Sasa attached great importance to the idea of the bead for which *The Chronicle* narrative did not indicate any explicit symbolic value. From here he developed some highly significant ideas. Reading the bead in pair with a spear which Okuninushi gave the Sun goddess, however, Sasa held that the exchange of bead and spear stood for an exchange of authority: that is, in return for his renouncing of the rule of the visible human world to the Sun Goddess, Okuninushi now ruled the invisible world of the gods. The bead was symbol of the authority of Okuninushi to command the "eight million gods," or *yaoyorozu no kami* as is called in Japanese, or the Shinto pantheon. By thus reading the bead, Sasa transformed Okuninushi from the god with past feat of creation to a ruling god. The exchange between Okuninushi and the Sun Goddess, Sasa

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<sup>53</sup> Nihon shoki.

argued, spelled the essence of Shinto, that is, the unity of the gods and the emperor.<sup>54</sup> More specifically, while the emperor ruled the visible world of humans, Okuninushi ruled over the invisible world of the gods. The imperial rule was necessary but the divine rule of Okuninushi was even more indispensable because beyond the political governance of the emperor were things concealed from the emperor which could only be administered by Okuninushi and the gods following him. From here, Sasa further developed a theory similar to karmic retribution, “people of kind heart and virtuous deeds will definitely receive Okuninushi’s protection. Their disasters will transform to fortune. People of vicious thoughts and perverse actions will be judged crime by Okuninushi and incur changes from fortune to disaster.”<sup>55</sup> These are significantly unprecedented statements. Despite of Sasa’s claim for unity of the gods and the emperor, his elevation of Okuninushi to the ruler of the invisible world of the gods and also the judge on human affairs implied Okuninushi not only upheld the Shinto pantheon but propped up the rule of the imperial court. Okuninushi was promoted to the unparalleled status as was indicated by his very name – “The Great Pillar of the Land.”

Sasa then used the yin-yang theory to connect Okuninushi’s rulership to the tenth month, the Month without the Gods. The gods under the leadership of Okuninushi were unruly demons who before Okuninushi’s pacification roamed and commanded the land in darkness. These demons were therefore yin in contrast to the gods in the bright heaven, who were yang. The rule of Okuninushi of these gods of yin in nature in the invisible, i.e., yin, world, in alignment with the temporal rhythm of yin-yang fluctuation, culminates in the tenth month, the month of extreme yin in a year.<sup>56</sup> In other words, the tenth month was of utmost importance on

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<sup>54</sup> “Taisha yumei shi.” In *Izumo Taisha no oshi to shintoku kōfu*. 2005. (Matsue, Shimane Pref.: Shimane ken kodai bunka sentaa). 145.

<sup>55</sup> “Taisha yūmei shi.” 145.

<sup>56</sup> “Taisha yūmei shi.” 158.

Okuninushi's administrative calendar. Marking the importance of the month was precisely the divine assembly when all the gods go to Izumo to decide on issues of principal significance, an event that always began with the appearance of the dragon-snake god on the coast of the Izumo Shrine.<sup>57</sup> To corroborate his theory of the Month without the Gods, Sasa cited the practice of rituals in various regions of Gods-Sending (to the Izumo Shrine) (*kamiokuri*) at the end of the ninth month and of Welcoming the Gods Back (*kamimukai*) at the end of the tenth month.<sup>58</sup>

Sasa next brought the three themes of the bead, marriage and divine rule together to explain that the most important thing determined at the divine assembly in the Izumo Shrine in the tenth month was deciding on people's marriage, or *enmusubi* in Japanese. Because the senior musubi god arranged the marriage for Okuninushi in conjunction with his decree for the latter to rule the invisible affairs, Sasa argued, marriage arrangement was the principal issue at the divine assembly as the divine arrangement embodied the fateful karmic connection (*aien no kanno* 相縁の感応) which would secure everlasting succession of generations for each household.<sup>59</sup> By relating the widely popular idea of *enmusubi* with Okuninushi via the tenth month, Sasa made Okuninushi to address an issue of utmost concern for most people of the time: to ensure successful succession of a family line.

Sasa's preaching tract then elevated Okuninushi to the apex of the Shinto pantheon with divine power that related directly to both the daily life and the most vital concern of all people. By so doing, the tract articulated a popular and theological form of authority that relativized the authority of the imperial house and the Sun Goddess. In other words, Sasa's tract transformed the idea of the Month without the Gods into a matrix in structuring the time, which culminates in the

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<sup>57</sup> "Taisha yūmei shi." 159.

<sup>58</sup> "Taisha yūmei shi." 158. What Sasa referred to as *Kamiokuri* and *kamimukai* were indeed performed widely in early nineteenth century Japan, if not earlier. There was a multi-domain survey "Shokoku fuzoku mondo jo" conducted in 1810s which recorded the rituals.

<sup>59</sup> "Taisha yūmei shi." 141.

tenth month, and the space, which centers on Izumo, of the archipelago wherein its past, present and future all hinged upon the divine power of Okuninushi, the Great Pillar of the Land. Such a matrix, despite of Sasa's claim for Okuninushi as yin which needs yang to be complete, implicitly displaces the discursive and ritual structure in which the authority of the Sun Goddess was articulated and imperial court was organized. It does so by presenting an alternative mode in which to relate the gods to the humans, not by justifying a political state but by speaking to people's ordinary concern.

As I will continue to show, by the end of the early modern period, the theological discourse represented by Sasa's tract had become the standard textual basis for the Izumo Shrine's popular preaching. The themes of creation, the month without the gods, marriage arrangement, and the dragon-snake god all became the warp and weft with which the protective and blessing power of Okuninushi was articulated discursively and institutionally. But the accessibility of the power of Okuninushi was not delimited as that of creation and protection; it was more specifically articulated and further reinforced by another proselytizing strategy of the traveling proselytizers: to promote Okuninushi as the god of good fortune (*fuku no kami*).

### **Ōkuninushi: The God of Good Fortune**

The idea and image of Okuninushi as the protective god of the nation, constructed through refiguring the idea of the Month without the Gods, were further reinforced by Izumo preachers' deliberate conflation of representations of Okuninushi with those of the fortune god named Daikoku, or Mahākāla, thereby transforming Okuninushi simultaneously to a Shinto god of creation and protection and the popular deity of good fortune. Taking advantage of the phenomenal development of commercialization in early modern Japan, Izumo Shrine's strategic

representational conflation met the needs of a commercializing society for protection from the precariousness of business investment and operations and in turn succeeded in popularizing Okuninushi as a god capable of taking care of each and every dimension of people's lives.

The origin of the god Mahākāla can be traced to early India where he was described as an incarnation of Shiva known for destruction. In that capacity, he was depicted as a figure with three scowling faces and six arms in protection of the Buddhist Dharma. On the other hand, according to the *Nanhai ji-gui-ne-fa-chuan* (J. *Nankai kikinaihōden*), a travelogue compiled by the Tang-dynasty Yi-Jing (Jp. Gijō, 635-713) during his visit to India, Buddhist temples there enshrined Mahākāla on kitchen pillars as a god of fortune, depicting him as a black-colored, two-armed figure holding a sack. This cult of Mahākāla was brought into China along with esoteric Buddhism and in turn was introduced to Japan by the ninth-century Tendai monk Saichō, resulting in the practice of enshrining Mahākāla as a kitchen tutelary god in Tendai temples. Mahākāla, whose name meant literally “great-black,” took on a Sino-Japanese name of Da-hei-tian (pronounced Daikokuten in Japanese) and came to be depicted with a pleasant facial expression in place of the fearsome scowl of earlier figures. By the sixteenth century, the belief in and enshrinement of Daikokuten as the god able to bringing forth good fortune had moved beyond temples walls and become a dominant theme in popular folk culture. The most common representation of Daikokuten in the popularization process changed to a chubby, smiling man carrying a “wealth-pounding” wooden mallet in his right hand, holding a treasure sack over his left shoulder, and standing upon two bales of rice, symbolizing bountiful harvest (Figure 1).<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> This brief introduction to Mahakala is based on “Daikoku” in *Nihon no shinbutsu no jiten*, eds. Ōshima Tatehiko (2001) and “Daikokuten” in *Encyclopedia of Shinto*. Last accessed February 18, 2011. <http://eos.kokugakuin.ac.jp/modules/xwords/entry.php?entryID=203>.



Figure 1: Daikokuten (Mahākāla)

On the other hand, the god (or gods, as the Japanese term *kami* can be singular or plural) enshrined at the Izumo Shrine was also identified as the god of fortune from at least the sixteenth century despite the fact that the specific identity of the god was left unarticulated. Like the association of the Month with(out) the Gods with the Shrine, the identity of the god enshrined there as one of fortune was depicted in popular theatrical performances of the time including that of *kyōgen*, a short, comical play performed between two sections of a Noh play.<sup>61</sup> One of *kyōgen* plays was titled simply “The God of Fortune” (*fuku no kami*). The play tells about two pilgrims journeying to the Izumo Shrine to make their spring offerings to the god of fortune and when the god manifested himself, pleaded him for wealth and honor. As it turned out, the fortune god needed a great amount of wine before bestowing secret of good fortune, which the pilgrims had brought with them apparently in anticipation of that demand. Upon consuming plentiful “sacred wine,” the fortune god revealed the secret, “Rise up swiftly in the morning, compassion in your

<sup>61</sup> The *Kyogen* plays were collected in four collections during the mid-Tokugawa period. See *Daijirin*, Matsumura Akira, ed. (Tokyo: Sanseido, 1988).

heart. Man and woman joined in wedlock, ne'er let anger come between you. ...All the joyful gods, always give them the very best of all your possessions. And when you serve wine to guests, give of your best wine. If you pour their cups brimful, until they cry stop,... you will find that you are blessed with joy unbounded.”<sup>62</sup> While the play carries a didactic and slightly sarcastic tone, the very appeal of the twists was based on the idea of the Izumo god as the god of fortune, an idea arguably popular enough to give rise to the creation and circulation of the play. Nevertheless, no evidences show the Izumo god was associated or identified with the fortune god Daikoku. This may reflect the fact that the fortune god was a generic category that could be identified with different gods at the same time. Indeed, altogether seven gods of variegated origins came to be worshiped together as the Seven Fortune Gods (*shichifukujin*) from the sixteenth century and remain ever widely popular till today.<sup>63</sup>

From the early eighteenth century, however, if not earlier, the Izumo Shrine and its preachers made consistent efforts to present and propagate the god Okuninushi as the fortune god Mahākāla, i.e., Daikoku. The strategy of conflation of the two gods so as to create Okuninushi as the god of fortune was enabled by similarity in the pronunciations of the two gods' names. The first two Chinese characters of the name Okuninushi, meaning respectively “great” and “land,” can be read as *daikoku* in Sino-Japanese pronunciation which is the same as the Japanese reading of Mahākāla, *daikoku*, meaning “great” and “black.” Their names written in katakana or pronounced in shortened versions are therefore exactly the same: daikoku. Similarity in names facilitated imitation in visual representations of Okuninushi as Daikoku or Mahākāla. This

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<sup>62</sup> “Fuku no kami” (The God of Happiness), translated by Don Kenny. *The Book of Kyōgen in English*. (Tokyo: Dramabooks Gekishobo, 1986). 58.

<sup>63</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century, the popularity of the Seven Fortune Gods had triggered competing efforts in domesticating these gods into the Shinto or Buddhist pantheon. In 1698, the priest Makaanaya's *Nihon shichi fukujin den* which provided a Buddhist explanation to the gods was challenged by the Shinto popularizer Masuho Zanko whose *Shichi fukujin godenki* (1737) argued instead that all the gods originated in the Divine Age of Japan. In turn, these competing efforts to determine the origin of the gods contributed to the plurality of their origin and to the multiple ways in which to make appeals to their power.



conflation strategy first appeared in the afore-mentioned preaching tract distributed by the Izumo priests on their fund-raising tours of the 1720s-1730s. The tract explicitly identified Okuninushi with Mahākāla in order to cash in on the popularity of the latter god to foreground the divine power of Okuninushi of satisfying any and all needs of society, “Whether military campaigns, agriculture or curing diseases, everything is secured as long as the god is pleaded to. He is the protector of the state, a military god and none other than the god of fortune, Daikoku, enshrined in every household.”

At the same time or earlier, priests and preachers distributed images of Okuninushi modeled after that of Mahākāla. An episode that Kisasi Tekisō, a resident of Ohama town to the north of Kyoto, recorded in his 1757 essay collection *Shui zatsuwa* helps us catch a glimpse of these efforts. “In the third year of the Kanpō Era (1743) Izumo priest Kitakawa Sangita came to Ohama for the first time and presented *tamagushi* (camellia branches attached with folded paper strings) to our domain lord. I also received the *tamagushi* and had the pleasure of viewing the painting of Onamuchi painted by the Kitajima kokuso of three generations earlier (*sandai izen* 三代以前). It looks the same as the popular Daikoku (“Great Black,” i.e. Mahākāla).”<sup>64</sup> If we count twenty years as one generation, then the painting Kisasi viewed was made by the Kokuso before the end of the seventeenth century, prior to the preaching tract of the 1720s. Even if the exact starting date of the practice of painting Okuninushi in the form of Mahakala can’t be pinned down, it is evident the Izumo kokuso led the continued strategy of partial or complete visual conflation of Okuninushi with Mahākāla. That this preaching strategy was endorsed and supported by the head priest of the Izumo shrine was evident from another painting which was signed (that is, endorsed if not painted) by Senge Toshikatsu, the Senge kokuso at the turn of the

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<sup>64</sup> Kisasi Tekisō. “Shui zatsuwa.” Quoted in *Izumo Taisha no oshi to shintoku kōfu* (Matsue, Shimane Pref.: Shimane ken kodai bunka sentaa, 2005). 193.

nineteenth century.<sup>65</sup> Here, Okuninushi was made to squat on two bales of rice, making reference to the idea of good fortune and the god of Mahākāla (Figure 2). At the same time, Okuninushi held a bead in front of him, the bead, if we recall the meaning as advocated by the popular preacher Sasa, signified the authority of Okuninushi in commanding the whole Shinto pantheon. Here we see a deliberate strategy of conflating so as to borrow the power of Mahākāla yet simultaneously maintaining the symbol of authority that define Okuninushi as the paramount Shinto deity.

The conflation of Okuninushi with Daikoku must have been widely known. An interesting recent discovery at the Izumo Shrine's main sanctuary which is currently under renovation (scheduled to finish in 2014) lends an evidence for the popularity of the god Okuninushi in the form of Daikoku in the eighteenth century. Images of Okuninushi qua Daikoku were found by carpenters on pieces of wood that were part of the wall between two of the nine pillars of the main sanctuary (Figure 3). Carpenters determined that these pieces of wood were original ones used in the 1744 rebuilding (while many other pieces are later replacement for earlier rotten ones). The priest guide told me when I visited the Shrine in December 2011 that the image, painted in black ink, was left by a carpenter of the time who tried to remind later generations of his and his colleagues' committed work. In one of the images Okuninushi was made squatting on two bales of rice. The Okuninushi-Daikoku conflation was instantiated by a print block from the late Tokugawa years which Izumo popular preachers brought with them to produce on-site prints of the image of Okuninushi (Figure 4).

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<sup>65</sup> The dates of Senge Toshikatsu need confirmation. Since it's known his son, Senge Toshizane, was born in 1793, the active years of Toshikatsu were likely around the turn of the nineteenth century.



Figure 2: Okuninushi qua Daikoku, with calligraphy of head priest Senge Toshikatsu



Figure 3: Okuninushi qua Daikoku on the wooden wall of the main sanctuary built in 1744



Figure 4: Print Block of Okuninushi qua Daikoku from late Tokugawa period



Figure 5: Amulet of Okuninushi qua Daikokuten (1864)

Sasa Seishō in his 1772 tract also identified Okuninushi as the god of fortune. This was evident for Sasa because the protective power of Okuninushi secured not only efforts of warriors, farmers and artisans but also the merchants. As such, Okuninushi “made sure of the realization of the success and fortune of all people.”<sup>66</sup> An amulet with the image of Okuninushi from 1864 then completely conflated Okuninushi with Mahākāla, with caption saying “Rising in the World and Living a Long Life: Daikokuten (Mahākāla)” rather than Okuninushi himself (Figure 5).

<sup>66</sup> Sasa Seishō. “Taisha yūmei shi.” 146.

Izumo Shrine's iconographical strategy in promoting Okuninushi as the popular god of fortune, however, did not render invisible the implicit political statement. While the images of Okuninushi were sometimes completely conflated with those of Mahākāla, many of them, as the one endorsed by the Izumo head priest, were explicitly recognizable as the unique Okuninushi: standing on two bales of rice yet holding a round bead in hands rather than the fortune-bringing mallet and the sack. The bead, which Sasa made it abundantly clear in his tract, symbolized an unparalleled form of divine authority. The images then were a visual confirmation of the claim for that authority while at the same time presenting the god as capable of meeting the various practical needs of the society, including the need for sense of security in the unpredictable world of business. In other words, the Izumo Shrine's claim for a supreme form of authority, in displacement of that of the Sun Goddess to whom Okuninushi surrendered the rule of the land, was based on the power of Okuninushi to satisfy all the needs of the society rather than to justify the rule of the imperial court.

### **Father and Son: Two Gods of Fortune**

In its promotion of Okuninushi, the Izumo Shrine did not stop at deliberately conflating the representations of the god with those of Daikoku the fortune god. Another strategy was to couple Okuninushi with his son Kotoshironushi and conflate the father-son gods with the images of Mahākāla and Ebisu, the latter of which being another popular god of fortune, particularly as the god of fishing and bountiful catch for fishermen. By so doing, Izumo preachers borrowed the popularity of Mahākāla and Ebisu as the two fortune gods that came to be enshrined and worshipped together from the sixteenth century. The origin of the god Ebisu was difficult to trace although his connection with sea became from early on the major dimension of the god's identity.

As a *kyōgen* play called *Ebisu Daikoku* from the sixteenth century shows (more below), the god had been identified with Hiruko, the leech child of the couple gods Izanami and Izanagi in their joint project of engendering the Japanese islands, according to the Divine Age narratives of *The Chronicle of Japan (Nihon shoki)* and *Record of Ancient Matters (Kojiki)*. The leech child greatly disappointed the two gods and was abandoned by being flown away into the sea. But deciding the ancestry of Ebisu by his connection with the creation myth could be a later attempt to explain Ebisu's already popular connection with sea rather than being the reason leading to his popularity as the god of fishing. Ambiguous origin notwithstanding, popular representations of Ebisu in the early modern period were the god holding a fishing pole or a sea bream. Ebisu from early on had also been associated with commerce. Shrines to Ebisu as a tutelary of the marketplace were dedicated (*kanjō*) within the temple Tōdaiji in Nara in 1163 and at Kamakura's Tsurugaoka Hachimangū in 1253, and they gradually drew the devotion of merchants, in conjunction with the expansion of commerce. The shrine of Ebisu, the Nishinomiya Shrine not far from the commercial center Osaka, was the major promoter of the god as the tutelary of commerce.<sup>67</sup> One strategy of promotion by Nishinomiya Shrine was juxtaposing Ebisu with Daikoku (Figures 6 & 7), partly because Daikoku, that is, Okuninushi, was also enshrined at the shrine compound with the main sanctuary devoted to Ebisu, and partly because it had been a customary practice to place the two gods together for worshipping. The afore-mentioned *Kyōgen* play, *Ebisu and Daikoku*, shows that the coupling was already in place by the sixteenth century. The story is simple: a devout follower of the two gods was visited by the two and was offered plenty of goods and money as result of his devotion. In the play, the two gods explained their

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<sup>67</sup> Yoshii Yoshitake, ed. *Ebisu shinko jiten*. (Tokyo: Ebisu kosho shuppan, 1999). See also "Ebisu," in *Encyclopedia of Shinto*. Last accessed February 2011. <http://eos.kokugakuin.ac.jp/modules/xwords/entry.php?entryID=206>.

own origin. The Ebisu god traced his ancestry to the couple gods Izanami and Izanagi whereas Daikoku to the Tendai Temple on Mount Hiei as the protective god of its numerous believers.<sup>68</sup>

The god Kotoshironushi similarly could be associated with sea. In the narratives of *The Chronicle of Japan* and *Record of Ancient Matters*, Kotoshironushi was enjoying fishing when the heavenly gods sent down by the Sun Goddess to subjugate Okuninushi found him and demanded his submission. After the god agreed to submit to the Sun Goddess, he retreated into the far sea. The Izumo priests and preachers magnified this association with sea and conflated the representations of Kotoshironushi with those of Ebisu (Figure 8). The deliberate conflating and coupling of the father-son gods as fortune gods by the Izumo Shrine generated mutually reinforcing effects with Nishinomiya Shrine; the promotion of Daikoku and Ebisu was simultaneously that of Okuninushi and Tokoshironushi. These proselytizing strategies were deployed by the Izumo Shrine to popularize its gods with the eventual goal of raising more funds. These strategies, however, also functioned as articulations of a form of authority of Okuninushi not simply as the lord of the Shinto pantheon but also as the source of human life itself. A different vision of Shinto divinity from the imperial one was articulated: Okuninushi as the god of agriculture, symbolized by the bales of rice, and Kotoshironushi as the god of sea, symbolized by the fish held in his hand, represented provision of the necessary conditions for human life, or the source of life, the emphasis of which worked to relativize the rice-centered vision of life transmitted by and conditioned upon the rule of the Sun Goddess and her imperial descendants.

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<sup>68</sup> “Ebisu Daikoku” (Two Happy Gods). *The Kyogen Book, an Anthology of Japanese Classical Comedies*. Compiled by Don Kenny (Tokyo: Japan Times, 1989). 162-166.



Figure 6: Okuninushi & Kotoshironushi/Daikoku & Ebisu at Nishinomiya Shrine



Figure 7: Okuninushi & Kotoshironushi qua Ebisu at Nishinomiya Shrine



Figure 8: Okuninushi & Kotoshironushi/Daikoku & Ebisu of the Izumo Shrine (Meiji period)

### **Dragon-Snake, Mouse, and a Thousand People**

The complex theological discourse and multiple modes of representation mobilized by the Izumo Shrine priests and preachers constituted a kind of tool kit which enabled their preaching to expand into various kinds of communal spaces and organize followers of the Izumo gods into different types of communities. As previously explained, the primary mode in which Izumo oshi preachers conducted preaching was through establishing parishioner communities, or *danjo*. This form of community was effective in rural settings with the help of local officials and farmers of wealth in organizing and distributing amulets and collecting donations. On the other hand, when the parishioners decided to visit the Izumo Shrine as pilgrims, they were organized into associations (*kō*) for the duration of the trip. In time, associations became the major communal form and may have been conflated with the institution of *danjo* in urban areas and for followers who were on move, like merchants and ship owners. While *danjo* communities were developed by Izumo proselytizers from the early seventeenth century, by the first half of the nineteenth century, associations organized under various themes had become the major institution for the Izumo proselytizers to reach people that *danjo* organizing format could not. While using different themes, these associations shared the same theological discourse of Okuninushi as the god of creation, fortune and protection.

One theme used to organize Izumo followers into associations is the Dragon-Snake God (*ryūjajin* 龍蛇神). The god made first notable appearance in the Izumo Shrine's efforts in resurrecting Okuninushi in the 1660s together with the foregrounding of the tenth month for defining the Izumo Shrine, and then appeared in all the later preaching tracts. As a result the



snake became the trade mark of the tenth month as the month of divine assembly.<sup>69</sup> The oshi preacher Kitagawa Sangita on his trip to Ohama in 1743 brought the image of the Drago-Snake God with him together with that of Okuninushi as objects of worship.<sup>70</sup> Overtime, the messenger dragon-snake god which played a supportive role in the theme of the Month without the Gods became part of the Izumo divinity after it was elevated to a god capable of protecting humans from the dangers of flood, wind and fire and thereby becoming an object of worship itself. Nariai Ukyō, the traveling preacher who based his preaching in the central commercial area of Osaka, organized Izumo followers into the Dragon-Snake God Association. The association's introductory tract started with a brief account of Okuninushi in creating and protecting the land, referring readers to *The Chronicle of Japan* for details. The following explanation of the Month with(out) the Gods led to the exposition of the divine power of the Dragon-Snake God. As a sea god, the Dragon-Snake was able to protect people from sea disasters, and by extension, disasters caused by flood, wind and fire, particularly securing the safety of ships in the sea.<sup>71</sup> The association was organized on the basis of the monthly membership fee of six monme. Nariai would reveal for one day in every month the image of the dragon-snake god (Figure 9) and host sessions of praying for health, longevity, safety from fire, flood and wind, and safety of every household. In the first month of each year, Nariai would distribute the Dragon-snake amulet and other Izumo Shrine amulet (Figure 10) and in the fifth and ninth months collect membership fees.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Sakusa Yorikiyo. "Izumo Mizuharu zuihitsu."

<sup>70</sup> Ishizuka Takatoshi. "Izumo shinko no enkaku." In *Izumo Shinko*. 82.

<sup>71</sup> "Taisha Ryūjajin benryaku." *Izumo Taisha no oshi to shintoku kōfu*. 132-133.

<sup>72</sup> The scroll of the Dragon-Snake God and the amulet are from a collection of Shinto objects collected by Buckley in Japan in the 1880s-1890s, i.e., the mid-Meiji period. The period of Nariai's life needs further research. My use of Buckley's Meiji-period objects for explaining Nariai's proselytizing is based on the assumption that similar or identical amulets and scrolls were used before the Meiji period and in Nariai's time.



Figure 9: The Dragon-Snake God Scroll (Meiji Period) Figure 10: The Izumo Shrine Amulets

A second kind of association Nariai organized is the Mouse Association (*Kinoene kō* 甲子講). How and when the image of the mouse became connected to Okuninushi and the Izumo Shrine is an open historical question. In the entry “Daikokuten shinko,” *The Comprehensive Dictionary of Japanese History* (*Nihonshi daijiten*) posits that the connection originated from the mythological narratives in *The Chronicle of Japan* and *Record of Ancient Matters* where a mouse served as the messenger for Okuninushi.<sup>73</sup> In the entry “Kōshimachi” or the Kōshi Festival which is a festival devoted to Mahākāla, the dictionary holds that Daikoku/ Mahākāla is from the

<sup>73</sup> “Daikokuten shinko,” *Nihonshi daijiten*. 736.

north direction and north corresponds to mouse, first of the twelve zodiac animals.<sup>74</sup> It is interesting to note that Nariai simply cited tradition as the reason for his naming of the association as the Mouse Association. The founding statement gives a standard introduction to the power of Okuninshi, first in creating the land then blessing people with good fortune, money and business prosperity. The building of the Izumo Shrine, the statement continues, and the appointment of Amenohohi as its priest by the Sun Goddess is based on the fact that Okuinushi is now the ruler of the divine affairs, which is carried out in the Month with the Gods when blessing of all humans and marriage decisions are metered out.<sup>75</sup> “It is an age-old custom that praying to the images of Okuninsuhi on the days of *kōshi* can lead to avoidance of disasters, good fortune and the realization of all wishes. The Kitajima kokuso in particular hopes the blessing power of Okuninushi reach Osaka; therefore I am setting up the Mouse Association.”<sup>76</sup>

In 1846 the Izumo preacher Hiraigaki Suzuhira developed what he called the “Thriving Thousand People Association” (*futebute sennin kō* 太太千人講). The epithet of “Thousand People” was common for organizing associations at the time, indicating probably organizer’s wish for prosperity, but what makes this Izumo association stand out is that its members were mostly people on the move: port traders, merchants from Osaka and Hakodate in Ezo, and owners of flourishing transport ships that plied along the Sea of Japan coast between Ezo and Osaka by way of the Inland Sea.<sup>77</sup> That is, rather than proselytizing and organizing followers of Okuninushi based on geographical units, Hiraigaki succeeded in organizing people constantly traveling on the sea into the Izumo association with none other than the Izumo Shrine, located right on the transportation route, as its base. The Thousand People Association thus provided

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<sup>74</sup> “Koshimachi” *Nihonshi daijiten*. 375.

<sup>75</sup> “Izumo Taisha Kinoene ko karicho.” *Izumo Taisha no oshi to shintoku kofu*. 132

<sup>76</sup> “Izumo Taisha kinoene ko karicho.” *Izumo Taisha no oshi to shintoku kofu*. 132.

<sup>77</sup> “Futofuto sennin kō Izumo Taisha hōhei kifu seimei roku” in *Izumo Taisha no oshi to shintoku kōfu*. 133-137.

these people a node for re-centering their busy, precarious, constantly moving life style. Each member was charged an offering to the Shrine at the value of the amount of rice consumed by an adult in three months. In return, members received amulets, scrolls with images of the god, among other gifts, and enjoyed the prestige of receiving divine wine in the main sanctuary and visiting the treasure collection when they visited the Izumo Shrine in the third and seventh months every year.

The theme in the theological discourse emphasized to tie Okuninushi to this special group of followers was the father-son team of Okuninushi and Kotoshironushi. The association's membership list was headed by a brief explanation for why and how the association was organized. The short explanation like in all other cases starts from Okuninushi's creation of the land but then introduce his son Kotoshironushi who "likes fish, travels on the sea, and initiated fishing and trade for humans. The fortune gods of Daikoku and Ebisu popular among people are precisely these father-son gods." With Kotoshironushi's connection to sea foregrounded, the text goes on to emphasize the protective power of Okuninushi as the ruler of the invisible divine affairs: "To rule the invisible world of the gods means all the good and bad things in the human world, including marriage, illness, child birth, agriculture, rain and wind, are all determined in the invisible world. ... The kokuso of the Izumo Shrine, tracing the origin to the god Amenohohi, performs more than seventy rituals a year, among them the third month and the tenth month, called the month with the gods, being the most important."<sup>78</sup> The text then states that making an offering and praying in front of Okuninushi at the Izumo Shrine would secure "the long fortune of the warrior houses, prosperity of offspring, success of households, and fulfillment of all wishes."

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<sup>78</sup> "Futofuto sennin kō Izumo Taisha hōhei kifu seimei roku." *Izumo Taisha no oshi to shintoku haifu*. 133-134.

Through the Izumo priests and preachers' mobilization of the popular idea of the Month without the Gods and a variety of representational strategies, together with increasing circulation of classical texts of *Nihon shoki* and *Kojiki* on which the discourse of Okuninushi as the Shinto god of creation, blessing and fortune based its textual authority, Okuninushi by the mid-nineteenth century had grown into a god of fortune and protection known to people of various walks of life across the Japanese archipelago. Both traveling preaching and the temporary fundraising activities helped bring in monetary resources from across the country; more significantly these efforts reaped enormous cultural capital for the Shrine, transforming it from essentially a ritual institution that defined itself in relation to the earlier land-based political structure into a nationally renowned and popular Shinto shrine. They achieved this transformation via actively reconfiguring the popular idea of the Month without the Gods into a theological discourse that linked the nation to the creation god Okuninushi and based on it developing a series of discursive and institutional strategies which enabled the Izumo Shrine to articulate a new form of cultural authority in competition with the imperial court and project that authority throughout the archipelago.

The divine authority of Okuninushi articulated by way of the idea of the Month without the Gods was evident in many of popular culture depictions, especially the ukiyo-e paintings. There were many ukiyo-e prints portraying the stories and tales about the Month without the Gods, of which we will look at four. The first one (Figure 11) was probably from the late Tokugawa period. It depicts the moment of divine assembly at the Izumo Shrine where the gods decide on marriages for young people. The Dragon-Snake God was ushering in more gods on the left side of the painting while on the ground floor of the main sanctuary of the Izumo Shrine Okuninushi sit at the center flanked by the Sun Goddess, indicating the secondary status of the

imperial ancestor. Other gods were busying themselves with writing down the names of soon-to-be-couples.



Figure 11: The Divine Assembly at the Izumo Shrine in the Tenth Month

Another *ukiyo* print (Figure 12) was painted by the famous artist Utagawa Yoshitoshi (1839-1892) in 1868 depicting a quarrel of the gods. Why did they quarrel? Because there were so many couples to be married that the god serving as the scribe mixed up the names! Now the gods on the right side were pointing at the god in the middle for his failure to perform the job. The god, being accused, was trying to explain or make up a good excuse.



Figure 12: A Quarrel of the Gods

The third print shows a catfish (*namazu*) being beaten up by people of Edo after the great Ansei earthquake of 1855. Catfish was believed in the early modern period as causing earthquakes. Usually the catfishes were put under control by the gods residing in the provinces but in 1855 the catfishes were able to take the advantage of the absence of the gods in the tenth month who all went to the Izumo Shrine for the great assembly and caused the earthquake. On the left side of the picture is a board showing the name of the shop being “House of the Month without the Gods (Kannazukiya)” (Figure 13). For the same reason, the catfishes were brought in front of the Great Kashima God, who was responsible for dealing with earthquakes, for an investigation, as depicted in the fourth print. The ebisu god, who was supposed to watch on the catfish during the great assembly in the tenth month, was apologizing to the Kashima God (Figure 14).



Figure 13: Catfish being beaten up by Edo people



Figure 14: Ebisu apologies to the Kashima god for letting catfishes make trouble

Okuninushi's popular form of authority in the Tokugawa society provided the futile ground for the Nativists, especially Hirata Atsutane and his disciples, to mobilize its agency for constructing a Shinto discourse that they believed was able to assimilate the threatening knowledge of Christianity and Western astronomy but also able to energize the spirit of the nation in crisis. By the 1850s and 1860s when Hirata's Shinto discourse became widely



circulated and the Izumo Shrine in turn actively introduced Hirata's discourse back to empower its god, the sense of national crisis had translated into an expectation that this newly constituted Shinto would be able to prop up a nation in danger of disintegration and colonization, an expectation embodied nowhere better than in the very name of the god: Okuninushi or "the Great Pillar of the Land."

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