

Nationalistic interpretations of Japanese mythology used to reassure clients during a session with a Japanese type of professional psychic in present-day Tokyo

Ioannis Gaitanidis (UK)

In the mid-nineteenth century, with the opening of the country to the Western world, Japan's traditional esoteric and magico-religious practices came into contact with Anglo-Saxon spiritualist and French spiritist thought and activities. From this mixture of other-worldly cosmologies and pseudo-scientific theories, sprang a Japanese type of professional psychic practice which kept evolving over the decades into a complex and pluralistic matrix of concepts regarding the world of the dead, the spirits and the ways to communicate with them, and the explanatory models offered to 'suffering' clients. Most recently, the New Age movement, the increasingly significant role played by the media, the financial crisis since the 1990s, and the constant social changes experienced by the Japanese, have fueled these psychic practices with new material and power to influence a consumerist, therapism-driven, post-modern, 'globalized' Japanese society.

During my interviews with these Japanese psychics, popularly called in Japanese *reinōsha* (霊能者), I often come across a certain nationalistic dimension in their rhetoric, a feature that was claimed to be having no parallel among kindred practitioners of Western societies [Prohl, Inken. "The Spiritual World: Aspects of New Age in Japan." Handbook of New Age. Eds. Daren Kemp and James R. Lewis. Leiden: Brill, 2007. p.373]. However, similarly to the ideologies of many European extreme right-wing groups, this nationalistic dimension almost always includes a reinterpretation of well-known, mythological accounts about the birth of the nation, accounts that are meant to produce pride and strength in the hearts of the *reinōsha*'s clients. This reinterpretation usually involves firstly the *reinōsha*'s own explanation of the symbolism of these myths, by which he/she attempts to prove the historical validity of his/her cosmology, and secondly, the emphasis on Japan's uniqueness as a country and people in possession of the secret of life and future success.

In this presentation, I shall illustrate the above argument by using the example of a certain *reinōsha* turned philanthropist, Buddhist priest and business consultant, to just cite a few of his alleged positions, who, in his seminars, revisits two well-known Japanese myths: the myth of the gods Izanagi and Izanami and their three children, Amaterasu, Tsukuyomi and Susanoo, the founding gods of the Japanese pantheon, and the myth of the three sacred treasures (the jewel, the mirror and the sword) said to have been handed by the goddess Amaterasu to her grandson, Ninigi, as the symbols of the Japanese imperial throne which he was the first to occupy.