

## Basic Mentality seen in Japanese Mythology: with Izumo's Particularities

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Japanese mythology reflects the mind of ancient Japanese people. In this paper, I want to clarify the basic mental state of people when Japanese mythology was codified.

In traditional ways of enumeration, basic numbers are arranged by doubling. Eight is the most famous sacred number, perhaps because it is the doubled number closest to ten, the last number in decimal system. I think whereas ten symbolized the end, the complete, and the absolute, eight symbolized the incomplete, the relative, and the infinite. The basic mentality of ancient Japanese seems to have idealized the incomplete and the relative that lead to the infinite.

In myth, Heavenly gods and Earthly gods do not fight. Instead they merge into one group. There are many stories about the marriage of Heavenly god and Earthly goddess. Marriage of Heavenly goddess and Earthly god is also known, though less in number. These two groups of gods must be thought as interdependent and helping each other. Both the relationship of Izumo and Yamato and the relationship of Izumo-Kokuzo and the emperor could be understood in the same manner.

Japanese mythology was systematized and codified at the time of Emperor Tenmu and Emperess Jito (the seventh to the eighth century). It was the time when Japan was trying to be a unified state learning the law system from more advanced Tang China. Thus under the influence of Chinese law ideal, the pantheon of Japanese gods in mythology was arranged as Amaterasu on top and the other gods ranked in hierarchy. I find this scheme far from reality. Judging from the above-mentioned basic mentality, the traditional pantheon must have had two centers: one of Heavenly gods and the other of Earthly gods. Besides, the arrangement of gods must have been in horizontal, concentric circles, not in vertical hierarchy. Heavenly gods centered at Ise Shrine where Amaterasu was enshrined and Earthly gods centered at Izumo Shrine where Okuninushi was enshrined. These two centers were connected by Susanowo who moved about from the Heavenly Takamaga-hara through the terrestrial zone of Izumo, and further down to the Land of Roots (*ne*).

In Hyuga section of Japanese mythology, the heavenly descendant Ninigi married Konohana-sakuya-bime (Tree Flower Blooming Princess), but not her elder sister Iwanaga-bime (Stone Longevity Princess). This myth is usually classified as the Banana type myth of the origin of death in comparative mythology. In my opinion what is important here is the contrast between tree/flower and stone, between the ephemeral and the eternal. Think about a wooden Shinto shrine building which is rebuilt periodically using exactly the same materials. By using perishable materials but recreating exactly the same thing, the ancient Japanese may have tried to realize the eternal on earth. In old Izumo, when a new Kokuzo, the ruler of the area, inaugurated, a new fire was set. Through the symbolic ritual of setting new fire, the spirit of the former ruler was passed to the new one. The same ritual is still repeated for the inauguration of a new head priest of Izumo shrine.

In my view, Japanese mythology testifies the basic mentality that appreciates the incomplete that leads to the relative and the eternal.