

国引神話 “The Land-pulling Myth”

Here is the story of how this district came to be called “*Ou*”:

Yatsuka-mizuomizuno-no-mikoto, who drew and moved the lands near with strong pulls, once said, “What a young land Izumo, the land of issuing clouds, is, whose shape is like a strip of cloth! It was made too small in the first creation. Well then, I will seam some lands together and make the land bigger,” and further, “I wonder if there might be any spare land in the direction of the Cape of *Shiragi* far away, and do I see there is spare land there,” said the deity.

So he took a hoe as broad and flat as a young maiden’s chest, and cut the spare land apart as if cutting through the gills of a huge sea bass and severing its head, or like a typhoon cleaving its violent way through the autumn pampas grass. Then he hitched a strong three-ply rope to it; and saying, “Come, land! Come land!” did he struggle to draw it near; as you would struggle to pull down frost-damaged vines from the trees, or as you would struggle to row a boat upstream. And the land he drew near and seamed together extended as far east as *Kozu*, and as far west as the Cape of *Kizuki*. The post used for holding the land in place is Mt. *Sahime*, which marks the border between the land of *Iwami* and the land of *Izumo*. The remains of the strong rope he used formed *Naga-hama* beach in *Sono*.

And then he said, “I wonder if there might be any spare land in the direction of the land of *Saki*, the north gate of *Izumo*, far away, and do I see there is spare land there.”

So he took a hoe as broad and flat as a young maiden’s chest, and cut the spare land apart as if cutting through the gills of a huge sea bass and severing its head, or like a typhoon cleaving its violent way through the autumn pampas grass. Then he hitched a strong three-ply rope to it; and saying, “Come, land! Come land!” did he struggle to draw it near; as you would struggle to pull down frost-damaged vines from the trees, or as you would struggle to row a boat upstream. And the land he drew near and seamed together extended as far east as *Taku*, and as far west as *Sada*.

And then he said, “I wonder if there might be any spare land in the direction of the land of *Hara*, also the north gate of *Izumo*, far away, and do I see there is spare land there.”

So he took a hoe as broad and flat as a young maiden’s chest, and cut the spare land apart as if cutting through the gills of a huge sea bass and severing its head, or like a typhoon cleaving its violent way through the autumn pampas grass. Then he hitched a strong three-ply rope to it; and saying, “Come, land! Come land!” did he struggle to draw it near; as you would struggle to pull down frost-damaged vines from the trees, or as you would struggle to row a boat upstream. And the land he drew near and seamed together extended as far east as *Unami*, and as far west as *Kurami*.

And then he said, “I wonder if there might be any spare land in the direction of the cape of *Tsū* in *Koshi* far away, and do I see there is spare land there.”

So he took a hoe as broad and flat as a young maiden’s chest, and cut the spare land apart as if cutting through the gills of a huge sea bass and severing its head, or like a typhoon cleaving its violent way through the autumn pampas grass. Then he hitched a strong three-ply rope to it; and saying,

“Come, land! Come land!” did he struggle to draw it near; as you would struggle to pull down frost-damaged vines from the trees, or as you would struggle to row a boat upstream. And the land he drew near and seamed together was the cape of *Miho*. The remains of the strong rope he used formed *Yomi-no-shima*. The post used for holding the land in place is Mt. *Hi-no-kami-dake* in the land of *Hōki*.

“Now I have finished the land-pulling,” he said and crying, “*O-we!*”, showed that the land was his own, with the action of thrusting his stick into what we call at present the hill of *Ou*. The name *Ou* came from the deity’s exclamation at the end of the tradition above. The hill called *Ou* is an earth mound in rice fields that is situated around the northeast to *Kōri-no-miyake*, the county office. It is about sixteen yard around, with a tree on it.

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Izumo-misaki-yama, or the Mountain of August Cape of *Izumo*: it is 27 *ri* and 260 *bu* (about 15.1km) north-west of the *kori-no-miyake*, the district office; its height 360 *jo* (about 1069.2m), its circumference 96 *ri* and 165 *bu* (about 51.6km). At the western foot of the mountain there is what is called the August Shrine for the God who created the world under the Heaven (= *Izumo-tai-sha*).

#### Notes | 注釈

(Fujioka says) In my opinion, such a dynamic epic, seen in the section on the historical explanation of the origin of the district name *Ou*, could not have been created by the ancient people of *Izumo* after they had surrendered to the *Yamato* Regime. In other words, this story should have been made before the people of *Izumo* were defeated, in the second century as I deduce it.

We may suppose that the prototype of this myth was created as early as the second century. *The Izumo-no-kuni-no-fudoki*, however, was completed at the beginning of eighth century, 733 A.D. In those days the people in *Izumo*, we might assume, could not have handed the story on because they did not have so much paper or pencils or other things conveniently available for recording, as we do. But that is just the common sense of modern people. Ancient people had excellent *Katari-be* (reciters), who were professionals with great and amazing memories. *Katari-be* could pass on their collective memories from generation to generation. Though not many may agree with this idea, I think it was possible for *Katari-be* to continue inheriting their predecessors’ memories for several hundred years, and that such oral traditions as had been produced in the second centuries could have survived over to the eighth century and be recorded at last.

The reason why I propose that the prototype myth seemed to have been produced around the second century, is that there are some enigmatic things about this myth. In the first land-pulling

by Yatsuka-mizuomizuno-no-mikoto, the god used a rope, which formed *Naga-hama* beach in *Sono* afterwards and also used Mt. *Sahime* as a post, and in his fourth pulling, he used *Yomi-no-shima* as the rope and Mt. *Hi-no-kami-dake* as the post. Then, why is there no explanation about the second and third pullings?

Or why is it that upon finishing the fourth pulling and crying, “*O-we!*”, he didn’t thrust his staff down somewhere nearby such as Mt. *Hi-no-kami-dake* or Mt. *Daisen* in *Hōki*, but thrust it into *Kōri-no-miyake*, which is far away from where he finished the fourth pulling?

In order to give some satisfactory explanation to these enigmas, I would like to try to develop a hypothesis: that the first part of the four land-pullings, the prototype of the story, was produced in the second century, and it changed through many revisions over a long period of time, growing to become the final versions as written in the *The Izumo-no-kuni-no-fudoki*, with the fourth part becoming somewhat inconsistent with the first part.

Connecting the myth and the historical facts, let us think about why and how the first part was originally created. We know the strongest *Gōzoku* or local ruling clan in the district was the *Izumo-no-omi*, who was thought to have advanced from east to west, conquering and ruling over the district from the beginning of the fifth century toward the middle of the sixth century. If the prototype myth was produced in this period, the history seems to contradict the contents of the story, since the land-pulling began from the west and stretched toward the east. So we can find much more validity in postulating that the first version of the story happened earlier than the time when *Izumo-no-omi* began to take.

Another possible reason why the story began at the west of the district would be that the west part, that is, the place around *Kitzuki-no-misaki*, was a very holy, consecrated place. This place includes the whole western part of Shimane peninsula and it is worth noting it has the word ‘*mi*’ in its name which means ‘August,’ in contrast to the east part of the peninsula, *Miho-no-saki*, the Cape of *Miho*, which has no such modifier. So the story began from the sacred place.

In this connection, we can see another example of such a modification in the following description of *Izumo-misaki-yama*.

*Old Fudokis* (including *The Izumo-no-kuni-no-fudoki*), in each volume, have the sections for geographical descriptions on mountains, rivers, ponds, or lakes, in each district. In *Izumo-no-kuni-no-fudoki*, there are some descriptions, as you see in the translation above, of *Izumo-misaki-yama* (*yama*=mountain). The *Fudoki* says that the mountain’s circumference is 96 *ri* and 165 *bu* (=about 51.6km). And it continues, “at the western foot of the mountain there is what is called the August Shrine for the God who created the world under the Heaven(= *Izumo-tai-sha*).” The circumference seems to be rather big, or in fact, including not just a single mountain but the whole area of the district, and at its western foot is the holy *Kitzuki* Shrine (*Izumo-tai-sha*). Considering the geographical descriptions with what is mentioned above about *Kitzuki-no-misaki*, we can identify the place which refers to *Kitzuki-no-misaki* (The August Cape of *Kitzuki*) along with the place which refers to *Izumo-misaki-yama* (the Mountain of August Cape of *Izumo*).