

Japan's rise to economic power is the result of American and European economic stagnation. They correctly point out that both the U.S. and Europe are economically viable and highly competitive. In particular they take issue with the theory of American deindustrialization, pointing out that U.S. manufacturing output, as a share of GNP, increased in the 1980s. Japan has not surpassed the United States and Europe economically—it has merely

matured to their level, thanks in no small part to the willingness of America and Europe to cooperate by providing technology, markets, financing and management techniques.

The problem is that the Japanese economy has matured at such a rapid pace that no one—Europe, the United States or Japan itself—has really adjusted to the new reality. That will only happen when Japan, the U.S. and Europe finally

accept the idea that they are not engaged in economic warfare but rather in a cooperative effort to unleash the energies of their peoples to provide goods and services that will benefit people everywhere.

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 of the American Chamber of
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Outing

Izumo: Land of Myth And Tradition

The date was November 13, 1989. The place Shimane Medical University Hospital in Izumo City. Only one year old, little Yuya Sugimoto was undergoing a transplant to give him a new liver, and the donor was his 26-year-old father. This was the first time this procedure (taking part of a liver for transplant from a healthy, live donor) had been performed in Japan, and only the fourth time in the world.

A dramatic tale involving a small child, this was a major human-interest story that was watched nationwide. Organ transplants are still relatively rare in Japan, since the concept of brain death has yet to gain general acceptance, and healthy donors are allowed only in extraordinary situations. Was this an emergency? Was the procedure justified? How would he and his father fare? It was surgery for the family and shock therapy for the Japanese medical establishment. At the same time, it was a revelation to society. What was this cutting-edge technology doing in Izumo? Izumo is supposed to be a quiet backwater known for its famous shrine and mythological associations.

It is these traditional attractions that have drawn the *Journal* to Izumo for this first article in the "Outing" series. Izumo has long been known as a prime portal

for technology and culture flowing off the Korean peninsula to ancient Japan—one of the leading founts in Japan's earliest internationalization.

With a population of about 83,000, the city of Izumo nestles in the fertile Izumo Plain and has thrived as a commercial center for nearly a thousand years. It is 75 jet minutes from Tokyo, with three flights daily. Going more leisurely by train or the very popular red-eye express buses takes 12–13 hours.

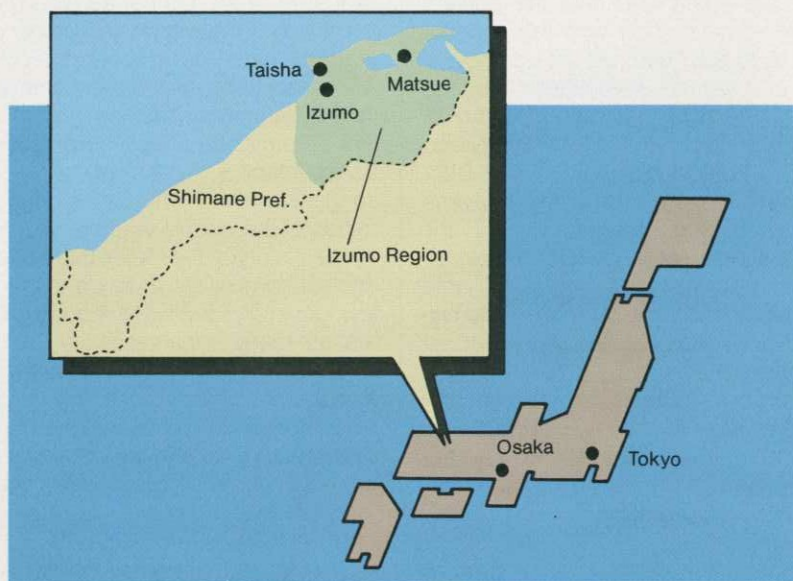
The town's name—Izumo—is also the name for the eastern half of Shimane Prefecture on the Japan Sea. And Izumo City is the western focus of this broad area (the eastern focus perhaps being Matsue, where the prefectural capital is located). Although the city tourism office bewails the lack of any glittering tourist attractions, and most of the people who visit the Izumo region just pass through the city,

it would be a mistake for you to just pass through.

Every region has a history of some sort, but few are as resplendent as Izumo's. Every region also has a pithy little slogan that it uses to attract visitors—"Where the Cranes Roost," "The Lights Never Go Out," "Land of a Thousand Dances," and that sort of thing—but few are as true as Izumo's: "Land of Myth and Tradition" and "Your Spiritual Home."

Mythical traditions

All Japanese have been exposed to the ancient mythology at some point, and the bulk of this mythology is set in Izumo. Thus visitors fleeing from the stressful tensions of urban life can wander around Izumo's peaceful environs at ease, constantly coming upon the sites where famous stories are supposed to have taken place. "So this is where...And that





The main building of Izumo Taisha. It is built in the oldest style of shrine architecture, representing 1,500 years of tradition.

Photo: Shinya Sakamoto



Trees in the grounds of Izumo Taisha on which people have tied "unfavorable" fortunes received in *omikuji* fortune-telling, in the hope that they will not come true.

Photo: Shinya Sakamoto

means... Yes, I can see it now. Yes, it feels right." Just as someone steeped in Greek mythology might feel a certain awe at the many fabled sites in the Aegean, so do knowledgeable Japanese identify Izumo with its legends.

Why are so many of the Japanese myths sited in Izumo? Answering this would take us back to the myths themselves. Suffice it to say that, according to the *Izumo Fudoki* (Izumo almanac) compiled in 733, there were 399 major and minor shrines in Izumo even then. As is well known, traditional Shinto is an animistic religion venerating respected heroes living and dead, natural phenomena such as the mountains and the seas, and even seemingly minor miracles such as grain and silkworms. Thus it is only natural that there should be numerous myths in and about the Izumo area. Indeed, similar stories may once have existed about other areas as well. Yet Izumo's were carefully noted and passed down to posterity. This is no accident.

Japan's oldest known historical works were compiled in the early 8th century, about the same time that the ancient central administration with the imperial court at its core had just set up shop in Nara and gained sovereignty over the land. There was the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters) in 712 and the *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicle of Japan) in 720. Both dealt with the creation of the heavens and earth, the development of the land, the birth of the gods and their lineages, and heroic tales. Both were mixtures of mythological fantasy and historical storytelling focused on the earliest imperial exploits.

Seeking to buttress the legitimacy of the newly established imperial court lineage and to enhance its administrative authority, these were very political works

compiled by very establishment authors. And as might be expected, their version of the mythology very much reflects the balance of interests among the different political powers at the time. As history they are bunk—but as entertainment they are great fun.

About a third of the mythological tales of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* take place in Izumo. The Izumo that shows up in these works is the vulgar world, as opposed to the exalted realms where the imperial ancestors lived, and the gods who inhabit Izumo are not pristine deities but the rough-hewn, rebellious gods—most of whom are depicted in an unfavorable light as delinquents needing discipline. In fact, the Izumo kingdom surrendered to the central Yamato administration in the late 6th or early 7th century and the lord of this region became a local governor reporting to the Yamato Court.

Grand Shrine

In many ways, the constant disparagement of the Izumo gods in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki* can be considered indicative of the central administration's latent fear of the wealth and power commanded by the faraway Izumo powers, who had maintained close contact with the Korean peninsula. The very fact that this propaganda keeps harping on the unacceptability of the Izumo legends suggests that the battle for the hearts and minds of the people was not yet over.

The history of the forces that governed ancient Izumo is still murky, and there are few generally accepted theories. There are as many hypotheses as there are scholars. Yet it seems clear from recent archaeological advances that a group with knowledge of iron-making came to Japan from Silla, that the dominant powers continued to maintain close ties with

the Korean peninsula after that, and that the area was a center of commerce between Japan and the peninsula.

The one thing that comes to mind immediately when one thinks of Izumo is the Izumo Taisha (Grand Shrine), dedicated to the Okuninushi-no-mikoto. According to the mythology, emissaries were thrice dispatched from the heavenly deities to the Okuninushi-no-mikoto, who had introduced Korean culture, fostered industry, and basically made Izumo what it was. Finally, he yielded to the entreaties of the third emissary, asking only that, in return for the transfer of authority, a resplendent palace be built for him to live in after he retired. The Izumo Taisha was the result.

The main building, with its distinctive crosspieces reaching up to the skies, is the oldest example extant of the *taisha-zukuri* style of shrine architecture, and it is designated a national treasure. Although 10th century records indicate that it once was 48 meters high, the present structure (built in 1744) is only half that at 24 meters.

Okuninushi-no-mikoto has long been beloved as the god of good luck and happy marriages, and numerous celebrities have had their weddings consecrated at the Izumo Taisha. This association harks back to the legend that Okuninushi-no-mikoto gathers the gods from all over the land to Izumo every October (by the lunar calendar), consulting on the ways of the world and cementing marriages. (This same legend accounts for the fact that October is even now referred to as *kamiarizuki*—the month when the gods are present—in Izumo and as *kannazuki*—the month when the gods are absent—everywhere else.) Hearing the other gods' reports and wishes, Okuninushi-no-mikoto renders judgments and joins couples in marriage.

There are small one-story row-house-

like buildings on both sides of the main building where the gods are supposed to stay when they are in Izumo, and the doors are left open and food offered before each of the compartments for the duration of their "meeting."

Izumo is also famous as the home of Okuni, the founder of Kabuki. Her grave is on a little rise by the roadside about 10 minutes' walk from the Taisha, and it is visited even today by leading Kabuki actors. The daughter of the local blacksmith, Okuni served as an attendant at the Taisha, but she was such a skilled dancer that she joined a troupe, raising money for

the shrine's renovation. Dressed as a man and with a sword stuck boldly in her sash, she danced in Kyoto, then the nation's capital and cultural center. So popular was she that her troupe's performances quickly developed into what was called "Okuni Kabuki." After a long and successful run in Kyoto, the story goes, she retired to Izumo, became an abbess, and lived quietly until her death in 1620 at the age of 87.

Even if—or maybe especially if—you are one of those people who knows nothing about the ancient myths or Kabuki, you should go to Izumo. If possible, go in the

spring or fall when the weather is best. Take the little train from Matsue. It is only a 40km ride along the northern shore of Lake Shinji and across the Izumo Plain. This will be quite a change from Tokyo. And if the sight of the vineyards on the gentle slopes by the tracks so moves you, get off and sample the wares at the Shimane Winery. There are worse ways to spend a weekend.

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Editorial Manager

Journal of Japanese Trade & Industry

Table Talk

Kihachi

Most Japanese in my generation were taught in childhood that it is a virtue to be silent while eating. Such an axiom is based partly on the tradition of Japanese eating manners which require formality and partly on the introduction of British table manners in modern Japan. So it is a pleasant surprise for us to see people gesticulating and obviously enjoying their food in bistro-style restaurants in Italy and France.

Kihachi is one of the restaurants with such a French or Italian atmosphere which have recently been emerging in increasing numbers in Tokyo amid the city's internationalization. A "lively place" is the most suitable expression to describe Kihachi. It is quite different from traditional Western restaurants in Japan, associated in the minds of most Japanese with a rigid, formal atmosphere. The service is not exquisite, but this doesn't seem to worry the customers, who are too busy eating, talking and enjoying themselves to notice it anyway.

Its informal atmosphere is reflected in the choice of foods. The menu is not lim-

ited to French or Italian cuisine; other Western and even Japanese and Chinese dishes are also served. But Kihachi has an uncompromising rule: only fresh fish arriving every morning from Miura peninsula and organically grown vegetables are used.

Owner and chef Kihachi Kumagai spent six years learning his skills in leading restaurants in Paris and Japan, and before opening his own shop in Minami-Aoyama in September 1987, served as the chef at La Marée, a famous French restaurant specializing in seafood in the seaside resort of Hayama on Miura peninsula.

I particularly recommend: *Tartelette d'oursin frais* (sea urchin baked in pie, ¥700); *Salade de fruits de mer* (seafood salad, ¥1,900); *Ainamé frits à la chinoise* (fried ainame fish Chinese style, ¥2,200); *Kama rôti à la purée de prune* (fish neck broiled with prune-fish paste, ¥1,800); and *Suprême de volaille grillé au raifort japonais* (breast of chicken broiled with horseradish, ¥2,300).

The lunch menu offers courses ranging in price from ¥1,800 to ¥3,000. For dinner, the chef's specialties are available on request for ¥8,000.

Kihachi has a market in the basement, where fresh fish and other foods are sold. It also provides a catering service.

Last spring, in Kita-Aoyama, Tokyo, Kihachi opened a sister restaurant, the Selan, which serves breakfast under chef

Kumagai's guidance. It is a nice place to relax over a weekend brunch.

(Yoshimichi Hori, editor-in-chief)

<Kihachi>

Address: 18-10, Minami-Aoyama 4-chome, Minato-ku
Tel: (03) 403-7477

Open every day except Jan. 1-10 and Aug. 10-20: 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. for lunch; 5:30 p.m.-10 p.m. for dinner; 11:30 a.m.-9 p.m. Sundays

<Selan>

Address: 1-19, Kita-Aoyama 2-chome, Minato-ku
Tel: (03) 478-2200

Open every day except Jan. 1-10 and Aug. 10-20; 8 a.m.-10 p.m.

