

The Ambivalence of Izanami with Reference to Gaia: some observations

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Abstract

This paper investigates the ambivalent nature of the Japanese earth goddess Izanami, as portrayed in the Kojiki. It mainly focuses on how the positive productive aspect and negative destructive aspect of her nature are developed in the narrative of the Kojiki. Specifically, it investigates how this is accomplished through her actions toward her mate and offspring, through the dual natures of several of her offspring, and through her connection with the Underworld. It also explores how her dual nature is further elaborated through her relationship with technology. For comparative purposes, frequent reference is made to a previous study of the dual nature of the Greek earth goddess Gaia as portrayed in Hesiod's Theogony (Kirk, 2012).

アブストラクト

本論文では日本神話の大地の女神イザナミの二面性について研究する。古事記においてイザナミの生産的な面と破壊的な面がどのように描かれていくのかに焦点を当てる。また、この二面性が、彼女の夫や子孫に対する行動、様々な性格を持つ彼女の子孫、彼女と黄泉の国の密接な関係を通して明らかにされていく過程を見ていく。さらに、ヘシオドスの神統記で描かれているギリシャ神話の大地の女神ガイアの二面性について述べた先行研究にも触れ、二つの神話の女神の二面性を比較する。

Key Words: Gaia, Izanami, earth goddess, ambivalent nature

キーワード：ガイア、イザナミ、大地の女神、二面性

Introduction

In a previous Kiyō article (Kirk, 2012), I discussed how the ancient Greek poet Hesiod develops the ambivalent nature of the earth goddess Gaia in his *Theogony*,

and how he relates that nature (that is, its positive productive aspects and its negative destructive aspects) to the “goods and evils” that are part of the human condition. Specifically, I argued that, in the *Theogony*, Gaia’s ambivalent nature is portrayed through her actions towards her own husband and offspring (Kirk, 2012, 59-67), the ambivalent natures of her various offspring (Ibid, 67-70), and her close relation with the Underworld (Tartarus) (Ibid, 70-72). I also argued that it appears also to be further elaborated through her close relation to technology and through the personas of subsequent female figures in the *Theogony* such as Aphrodite, Hekate, and Pandora (Ibid, 72-80).

In a similar manner, this study looks at the dual nature of the Japanese Earth goddess, Izanami, as portrayed in the *Kojiki* (Book 1, chapters 1-20), and investigates whether her nature and its relation to the human condition are developed in a similar manner to that of Gaia in the *Theogony*, and if so, how and to what degree. It will be shown that, while there are obvious differences between these two earth goddesses and how their ambivalent natures are portrayed, there are some striking similarities. Specifically, similarly to Gaia, the positive and negative aspects of Izanami are expressed through her ambivalent actions toward her husband and offspring, her giving birth to ambivalent offspring, her close relation to the underworld, and her role in the development of technology. (Note: For the sake of consistency and easy reference, this study is based on the well-known English translation of the *Kojiki* by Donald Philippi and its accompanying glossary and notes.)

I. Izanami’s actions toward her husband and offspring

Like Gaia, the most obvious manifestations of Izanami’s ambivalent character are seen in her positive and negative actions towards her husband and her offspring. The following are some examples.

Her breaking of the marriage ritual

In contrast to Gaia, who is the earth, and who comes into being spontaneously and then subsequently gives birth to her husband Ouranos, Izanami and her husband Izanagi seem nearly symmetrical as they are born almost simultaneously (she is born immediately after him) from a pre-existing primordial mud as a sibling male-female couple (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Chs. 1-2). Their names, usually interpreted as suggesting a positive sexual attractiveness (although the etymology

is obscure) are almost identical except for the gender, and they are together commissioned by all the other deities to harden and develop the yet unformed land. They together receive the Jeweled Halberd of Heaven and, standing on the Heavenly Bridge, together lower the halberd into the sea, stir and lift it, and form the first island Onogoro. Next they descend together to the island where they build a temple and the Heavenly Pillar. They almost simultaneously become mutually aware of their sexuality, and agree to sexually reproduce children and to first conduct a marriage rite. Although it is the male Izanagi who takes the initiative in stating their sexuality, proposing their union, and in stating the procedure of the marriage rite, they seem to be of one mind.

However, during this rite, an unsettling change occurs. She suddenly takes the initiative and addresses him first, resulting in his rebuke (the first sign of conflict) for her breaking the proper order of speaking. Consequently, she then bears two bad offspring (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Chs. 3-4). That this negative incident is her fault for violating the correct order of the marriage ritual is confirmed by divination. In other words, the earth-mother Izanami becomes the first ‘wrong-doer’, thereby causing the first gender conflict and worse, the first instance in the *Kojiki* of failed reproduction and agricultural disaster in the world. There is no suggestion that the male Izanagi shares any responsibility for Izanami’s wrongdoing here.

Her drastic character inversion in the Underworld

In contrast to Gaia, whose productive actions toward her husband and offspring alternate with destructive actions towards them, Izanami’s ambivalent nature is expressed most clearly through an extreme and permanent inversion of her character which occurs in the Underworld. Until that point, apart from her violation of the marriage ritual, the ensuing rebuke from her husband Izanagi, and the consequent birth of two failed offspring, their relationship had been completely harmonious and very productive. This changes suddenly and drastically after she dies and goes to the Underworld.

In the narrative, when Izanagi tries to retrieve Izanami from the Underworld, she prohibits him from looking at her corpse. But he breaks her prohibition, making a fire from the end tooth of his comb, and looks at her. To his shock, what the fire illuminates is a corpse full of squirming and roaring maggots, and eight thunder deities in the various parts of her corpse. Terrified at her horrifying decay, Izanagi flees. Izanami, shamed and enraged by his exposure of her decay, dispatches the Ugly Hags of the Underworld to pursue him. When he barely

manages to escape them with the help of some magical objects, she dispatches the eight thunder deities and the myriad Underworld warriors to continue the pursuit. Finally reaching the Slope of the Underworld (that connects the Underworld to the human world), he escapes his pursuers by throwing three peaches, which he then invokes to likewise come to the aid of any “mortal human green grass” in painful anguish and distress. Finally, Izanami herself comes in pursuit, so he blocks the Slope of the Underworld with a huge boulder. The conflict culminates when, standing on each side of the boulder, they say words of divorce. She vows to slay 1000 of his ‘human grass’ each day, to which he responds that he will build 1500 birthing huts each day. She is then renamed ‘great deity of the Underworld’ and ‘road pursuing great deity’ (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Chs. 9-10).

This shocking inversion of Izanami’s character is sudden and extreme. Previously she had been the embodiment of the female as a life-giver, nourisher and protector, who had together with her husband produced all the life on earth. But suddenly she is transformed into her very opposite, and embodies the horror of death and decay, and the dangers of pollution as her corpse nourishes the roaring maggots and produces horrifyingly destructive thunder deities. She is now a fearsome, malevolent and relentless pursuer who tries to take away her husband’s life and then vows to slay his human offspring every day. Furthermore, the expression ‘human grass’ used here seems to emphasize human temporality, fragility, and hence mortality

This new role of Izanami which she performs while confined to the Underworld is reminiscent of a passage in the *Theogony*. There, it is not Gaia herself, but the monster Typhoeus, the offspring of Gaia, who is confined to the Underworld but sends forth winds, some of which benefit humans and agriculture, but some of which wreak utter destruction and death on humans and their livelihood (*Theogony* 868-880).

Paradoxically, however, as in the case of the conflict and grotesque violence from Hesiod’s Gaia, this episode in the *Kojiki* also shows some positive results of violent conflict as it continues to express the advancing differentiation and ordering of the world, making it more fit for fertility, agriculture, and other aspects of human life. Specifically, the Underworld and the world of humans are clearly differentiated, and a border is established between them by the setting up of the boulder. This prevents the direct incursion of Izanagi and any other harmful agent from the Underworld into this world, thus offering a measure of protection to the human world.

II. Izanami's production of good, bad and ambivalent offspring

In the *Theogony*, Gaia, from her own coming into being at the very beginning of the creation story, is seen to be the extremely fertile genealogical source of the being of almost all the subsequent deities that subsequently appear in the narrative. In my previous study of Gaia (Kirk 2012), I argued that her own ambivalent nature is further elaborated by the ambivalent natures of her offspring and in turn their offspring.

In contrast to Gaia, Izanami comes into being somewhat later in the narrative of the *Kojiki*, after the birth of a previous series of deities. Furthermore, she does not personify the earth itself, but is born from pre-existing primordial mud which constituted the primal unformed earth. On the other hand, she plays a much more prominent and detailed role in the early narrative of *Kojiki* than Gaia does in the *Theogony*. Whereas Gaia is the basic genealogical source of other deities by giving birth to deities which then give birth to subsequent generations of deities, Izanami herself directly gives birth to almost all the deities until she changes to the goddess of death and the Underworld. (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Chs. 6-7) In this sense she appears to be even more directly productive than Gaia.

From her beginning Izanami is extremely fertile, giving birth to numerous deities, many of which are mostly positive as they represent the birth of the various islands of Japan and the geographical ordering and development of the land, as well as agricultural fertility and technological productivity. However, she also gives birth to deities that represent or imply the existence of agricultural failure, the destructive forces of nature that threaten human life and livelihood, and ritual pollution which itself has both very destructive and productive aspects. The following are examples:

Izanami's birth of the two bad offspring Apa and Hiru-go, representing the first natural calamities and ritual pollution (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Ch. 4).

As mentioned above, Izanagi's incorrect performance of the marriage ritual results in her sexual procreation of what are called two "bad children", Hiru-go and the island of Apa. There is no description of the island Apa (commonly taken to mean 'foam'), except that it was not reckoned among the children of Izanami and Izanagi; in other words, it was rejected. The etymology of Hiru-go is most commonly interpreted literally according to the Chinese ideographs as *leech-child*. There are various views as to what is signified by this creature, but most scholars

generally accept the literal ideographic *leech-child* reading, and see this offspring as a kind of limbless, amorphous and deformed being. (Philippi, note #4, p. 399). That it was “floated away” seems to suggest ablution rites, which implies the existence of ritual impurity or pollution, implying in turn the destructive danger of pollution for agriculture.

Law argues that this episode should be seen as a ‘failed creation’ myth, whereby it symbolizes various failures including failed crops, bad fishing, and disorder (Law, 63-4, 123). Taking into account that this episode occurs in a clear context of creation and agricultural fertility, this view is convincing.

After being floated away, the leech-child Hiru-go is not mentioned again in the *Kojiki*. However, he does reappear in later Shinto tradition (at least as early as the 15th century) in the persona of a very important Shinto deity named Ebisu, who is said to have drifted ashore from the sea, and is also deformed, ugly, and in some representations almost amorphous. This identification of Hiro-go with Ebisu is made very explicitly in the records of the various Ebisu shrines (Law: 112ff.).

Ebisu, an extremely ambivalent deity, is even now worshipped on the one hand as a benevolent luck and prosperity bringing deity, but is also dreaded as a malevolent bringer of all sorts of human catastrophes including storms, droughts, and epidemics, etc, and so must be ritually handled very carefully. In the records of the Nishinomiya Ebisu Shrine, this necessity to appease Hiruko/Ebisu is connected to the founding of the ancient ritual puppet tradition, “the original purpose of which was to entertain and appease this dangerous powerful deity, and thus prevent the human disasters that his negative aspect can bring about” (Law, 130-33). This ambivalent nature of Ebisu also associates his mother Izanami with the origin of not only bad, but also good aspects of the human condition, and implies that her impurity and the pollution she produces have a very productive and very destructive aspects aspect.

Izanami’s Birth of and Ambivalent Series of Construction Deities

Following the correction of the first calamity consisting of the birth of Apa and Hiru-go, Izanagi and Izanami successfully give birth to the numerous islands and the deities who will inhabit them (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Chs. 6-7), thus positively signifying further ordering of the world and development of agriculture and technology, making the world more habitable for humans. At first, there appear to be no further difficulties, but in the following group of 10 deities (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Ch. 7), although the etymology of their names is somewhat obscure, there seem to

gradually appear more suggestions of the presence of the destructive forces of nature and resulting calamities, together with physical and ritual means of protection from those calamities:

1. O-koto-oshi-o: great male of the great undertaking deity
2. Iwa-tsuchi-biko: stone/earth spirit lad
3. Iwa-su-hime: stone and sand maiden
4. O-to-hi-wake: great door young deity (sometimes identified with a deity connected to architecture")
5. Ame-no-fuki-o: heavenly roof-thatching male deity
6. O-ya-biko: great house-roof lad/great roof lad
7. Kaza-motsu-wake-no-oshi-o: protection from the wind male
8. O-wata-tsu-mi: great sea spirit
9. Haya-aki-tsu-hiko rapid autumn lad. Some scholars have connected this name with purification by ablution in rapid waters.
10. Haya-aki-tsu-hime rapid autumn princess (also associated with ablutions by rapid water). (For more detailed etymologies of these names, see Philippi, Glossary.)

On the one hand, this series of deities seems to represent the positive development of some basic aspects of human culture, particularly the development of building construction and of ablution rituals. But the presence of ablution rituals implies the need to remove the impurity that causes disorder and calamity. Ablution rituals were previously suggested by the floating away of the 'leech-child, and here they reappear, more explicitly represented by deities of flowing water (deities 9 and 10). Hence the birth of these ablution deities by Izanami implies the continuing presence of natural calamities and their destructive effect on human existence. In this context of the danger of calamity, the deities of the various parts of the house (2-6) cannot be seen as representing only the positive development of building, but also the presence of the unruly forces of nature that make shelter necessary and can destroy shelter. Hence this series of deities not only symbolizes both the advance of ordering and human technology (building construction), but also the existence of unruly natural elements and the need to protect both human life and livelihood from the calamities that these forces bring about.

Izanami's Birth of the Fire Deity

Izanami continues to give birth to various deities, some of which represent the

continued geographical development and ordering of the earth (mountains and plains, etc). Next she bears several deities which are associated with various aspects of technology, agriculture and other aspects of human culture, such as Tori-no-iwa-kusu-fune (bird-shaped rock-hard camphor-wood boat deity) which has been associated with boat building and sailing, as well as funerary rites. After this deity is born the important food goddess, O-ge-tsu-hime (great food princess deity). She is followed by the birth of the fire deity, variously named Hi-no-yagi-haya (fire burning fast male), Hi-no-kaga-biko (shining lad of the fire), and Hi-no-kagi-tsuchi (fire-shining spirit). By giving birth to this deity, Izanami is mortally burned and lies down sick (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Ch. 7).

Izanami's birth of the male fire deity immediately and directly introduces more calamities and human miseries into the world, and also indirectly sets in motion a whole series of dramatic events that are causally related to calamities and human woes. First, the fire deity burns his mother Izanami's genitals as she gives him birth, directly causing the first injury and painful childbirth. This then causes her severe sickness and its various symptoms (vomiting, diarrhea, etc.), and eventually her death, which in turn results in her separation from her husband and in his severe grief (*Kojiki*, Bk.1, Ch. 8). Thus, during and immediately following his birth by the earth goddess, the male fire god directly causes the first injury, pain, illness, death, embodied in the earth goddess herself, and its consequent loneliness and grief embodied in her husband Izanagi. The very anthropomorphic nature of the suffering and dying Izanami and of her grieving husband Izanagi emphasize that these are truly human woes being introduced here.

Positively, however, this mortal wounding of the mother goddess by the birth of the fire deity and the sickness it introduces also result in the birth from her excrement (i. e. pollution) of several deities of various kinds of human production, such as agriculture, metal, pottery, and growth. Hence this episode also vividly expresses both the destructive and the productive aspects of grotesque violence and pollution.

Law sees this episode as primarily a mythical expression of the fundamental importance of the ancient Japanese preoccupation with the ritual purity and impurity distinction. In the ancient Shinto system, impurity is divided into three categories: red pollution (menstruation, childbirth, bleeding and open wounds), black pollution (death, corpses, mourners, acts of killing), and between these another category that involves contact with bodily excreta. These pollutions were understood to be highly contagious, and so any contact with them required ritual

purification, the most common of which was immersion in a flowing stream (Law, 60-61). Pollution itself was considered to have both negative and positive aspects. On the one hand it was regarded as highly dangerous, anti-creative, and leading to death and destruction. But paradoxically, it was also viewed as possessing highly creative potential if correctly handled (Law, 61, 65). Law stresses the “intense focus of this myth” on a number of physiological processes related to pollution, namely parturition, vomiting, defecation, urination, and death. However, she notes that deities are born from these various highly polluting states and substances, which indicates that the world of pollution is also “highly generative” (Law, 64-65).

Consequently, it is seen that the birth of the fire deity from the earth goddess Izanami has both negative and positive consequences for the human condition, and that these positive and negative consequences are inseparable. Yet it remains that this birth of the fire deity from the earth goddess, simultaneously with all the production, technology and cultural progress it dramatically promotes, even more dramatically and vividly causes the first injury, painful childbirth, sickness (and its awful symptoms), and most importantly, the first death and its resulting loss and grief. Furthermore, it sets in motion a whole series of subsequent negative events in the narrative that will later be seen to culminate in the inevitability of human mortality.

It should also be noted that the earth goddess Izanami does not merely introduce these woes into the world by giving birth to the fire deity. Rather, by passively embodying the woes in very anthropomorphic terms as the suffering and dying mother and wife, she becomes the prototype of human suffering and death. This passive suffering role sets her apart from the more cosmic and abstract Gaia, who is herself further removed from the world of humans, is much less anthropomorphic than Izanami and hence does not embody human suffering in the vivid way that Izanami does.

Izanami’s genealogical relation to the deities born from the blood and corpse of the fire deity.

In revenge for the death of his wife Izanami, Izanagi takes his sword and slays the fire deity, whose blood gushes from various specific parts of the sword onto the rocks, giving birth to the following three groups of deities:

From the blood from the tip of the sword:

1. Iwa-saku: rock-splitting deity

2. Ne-saku: root-splitting deity
3. Iwa-tsutsu: rock pipe/hammer male deity

From the blood from the sword-guard:

1. Mika-haya-hi: awesome vigorous force deity, (probably connected to lightning)
2. Hi-haya-hi: fire vigorous force deity (also perhaps connected with lightning)
3. Take-mika-zuchi: valiant lightning male deity (a sword and lightning deity), also called Take-futsu (valiant deadly swish deity), and Toyo-futsu (abundant deadly swish deity)

From the blood from the hilt of the sword:

1. Kura-okami: valley dragon rain deity
2. Kura-mitsu-ha: valley water greens deity (For more detailed etymologies of these names, see Philippi, Glossary).

Then eight more mountain deities are born from the various parts of the fire deity's corpse, the etymologies of which seem to represent the various parts of mountains, thus representing the continuing geographical ordering of the earth (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Ch. 8).

This episode has also been predominantly interpreted as a natural phenomena myth, with these deities combining to represent the destructive forces of nature. Specifically, Izanagi's explosive rage against the fire deity involving "sword flashes, blood spurting forth, and the slashing into pieces of the body of the fire god, points to volcanic eruption, which includes not only the destruction of the mountain and the bursting forth of molten rocks but also, frequently, thunder and lightning, rainstorms, and floods" (Philippi, note 2, p. 60). Thus, on one level this passage, interpreted as a nature myth, vividly expresses the destructive effects of the forces of nature on the human condition.

On the other hand, the deities born from the blood dripping from the various parts of the sword have also been widely interpreted as technology deities, representing the various stages of the process of making a sword.

Thus the necessary steps in making a sword--firing it, shaping it on a rock, and soaking it in water—are behind this myth. The blood flowing over the surrounding rocks is reminiscent of the sparks which fly out when a sword is being tempered. Also, at the appearance of the dragon god one imagines the smith seeking out sacred waters in the mountain and soaking the blade in them. (Tsugita, quoted by Philippi, p. 59, note).

This 'technology myth' interpretation is plausible, and it is also important to keep in mind that it occurs in a context of ritual pollution following the death of

Izanami, and that therefore it also seems to reinforce the fundamental role of ritual pollution in the production of both goods including the benefits of technology and evils. The paradoxically productive role of the pollution of bodily excreta (in this case blood) and corpses again appears in this episode, this time in the birth of eight deities from the blood and eight more from the corpse of the fire deity child of Izanami.

As the various interpretations of this myth (natural phenomena, technology, mythical statement of the ritual pollution system) make clear, no matter how these deities are viewed, their impact on the human condition is both positive and negative. In each interpretation, death and the production of life are seen to be inextricably linked. Like his mother Izanami, the fire deity, both in his life and death, and specifically through his blood and corpse (i.e. pollution), is related to the production of both goods (human agriculture and technology) and evils in the world.

The offspring born from the various parts of Izanami's corpse in the Underworld.

This relation between death and production is then further developed by the birth of the thunder gods from the various parts of Izanami's rotting corpse in the Underworld (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Ch. 9), which also recalls the birth of deities from the corpse of the fire god. These thunder deities seem to be another obvious reference to the destructive danger of the natural elements. However, it is noteworthy that even after her own death, Izanami, as a corpse, continues to produce offspring, destructive though they are.

The children born from the ablution rites of her husband Izanagi

Horrified at the pollution he picked up from Izanami in the Underworld, Izanagi performs exorcism and ablution rites, during which the following deities are produced from his various items: Tsuki-tatsu-to (deity of the fork in the road), Michi-no-naga-chi-ha (deity of the long road), Toki-hakashi (time measuring deity), Wazurai-no-ushi (lord of misfortune deity), Chi-mata (road fork deity/deity of the thoroughfares), Aki-gui-no-ushi (deity of swallowing evils), Oki-zakaru (off-shore distant deity), Oki-tsu-nagisa-biko (offshore surf lad deity), Oki-tsu-kai-bera (offshore space deity), He-zakaru (shore-distant deity), He-tsu-nagisa-biko (shore surf-lad deity), and He-tsu-kai-bera (shore space deity).

When he washes in the middle stream, there are born Yaso-maga-tsuhi

(abundant calamity-working-force deity) and O-maga-tsuhi (great calamity-force-working deity). To counter them, there are born Kamu-naobi (divine corrective deity), O-naobi (great corrective deity) and Izu-no-me (consecrated woman deity). When he washes at the bottom depth, there are born Soko-tsu-wata-tsu-mi (bottom sea spirit deity) and Soko-zutsu-no-o (bottom male spirit lord). When he washes in the middle depth there comes into being Naka-tsu-wata-tsu-mi (middle sea spirit deity) and Naka-zutsu-no-o (middle spirit male lord). When he washes on the surface, there come into being Uwa-tsu-wata-tsu-mi (upper sea spirit deity) and Uwa-zutsu-no-o (upper spirit male lord).

When he washes his face, from his left eye is born Amaterasu (‘heaven illuminating great deity’), from his right eye Tsuku-yomi (‘moon counting deity’), and from his nose Take-haya-susano-o (‘valiant swift raging male lord’). He rejoices that he has given birth to numerous children, and especially to these last three “noble children”. He gives Amaterasu the Mi-kura-tana necklace (deity of the august store-house shelf) and commissions her to rule Heaven. He then commissions Tsuku-yomi to rule the realm of night and Susano to rule the ocean (*Kojiki*, Bk.1, Ch. 11).

The parentage of these deities appears somewhat obscure, as it is unclear whether they are best regarded as primarily the children of Izanagi or Izanami. On the one hand, they seem most obviously to be the children of Izanagi himself, as they are born during his ablution rites from the pollution that he has picked up, and he himself proclaims that he has given them birth (*Kojiki* Bk. 1, Ch. 12). However, it is also clear from the text that they were not born from his body nor even from his excreta, but rather from the secondary pollution that he picked up in the Underworld. Furthermore, the story of his visit to the Underworld is also very much the story about the horrors of his contact with the primary pollution of Izanami’s corpse. Thus the pollution that Izanagi is trying to get rid of by his ablutions is really his secondary pollution picked up from his contact with Izanami’s primary pollution which she produced in the Underworld. Viewed thus, these deities are just as much, if not more, to be considered Izanami’s offspring than Izanagi’s, in spite of his boast to the contrary.

This view is supported by the subsequent episode about one of these offspring, Susano. Asked by Izanagi why he is crying and refuses to rule his appointed realm, he replies that he wishes to visit the land of his mother, Ne-no-kata-su-kami (*Kojiki*, Bk.1, Ch. 13), which is usually regarded as a synonym for the land of Yomi, that is, the Underworld. Here he clearly regards Izanami, the queen of the

Underworld, as his mother. Hence we can safely regard Susano, and by extension the other deities born during Izanagi's ablution rites, as primarily children of Izanami, and more specifically of the pollution of Izanami which occurred in the Underworld.

The majority of these deities positively represent the continuing differentiation and ordering of the world, specifically the differentiation and ordering of space and time. For instance, the birth of road deities (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Ch. 11, lines 3ff.) seem to indicate a kind of geographical ordering to facilitate land travel and an accompanying awareness of distances and their measurement, which is also quite naturally accompanied by the awareness of time. It also seems natural that these deities are grouped together with deities of calamity and protection from calamity, as traveling is a particularly dangerous activity. In this context, the road deities themselves also might be expected to also perform some sort of protective function.

The birth of deities of the sea suggests seafaring (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Ch. 11, lines 9ff.) and obviously indicate awareness of distances associated with sea travel. The dangers of seafaring can also be easily imagined, and so these deities also likely played a protective role (even now sea gods are mainly invoked for such a protective purpose). The deities born at the various depths of the stream obviously symbolize the ordering and awareness of various depths. This further advance of spatial awareness and measurement is also accompanied by an increasing awareness of the forces of calamity, and the need to counter and correct them.

The birth of the three children from the washing of Izanagi's face (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Ch. 11, lines 22-24) marks another very big advance in the ordering of the world and agriculture, for now there is an explicit division between the day sky and night sky, and the ocean is more clearly distinguished as a separate realm from the earth. The sun goddess, Amaterasu is most clearly associated with agricultural production through her illuminating role and more specifically through her necklace, which symbolizes the storage of harvested crops. The moon god's name seems to imply not only the separation and measurement of day and night, but also of seasons, the awareness of which is indeed essential to successful agriculture. The meaning of the name of the ocean god, Susano, is ambiguous, but he later turns out to be a destructive menace representing the forces of nature as well as a constructive culture hero.

In short, this series of deities born from pollution, on the one hand positively represents a continuing differentiation and ordering of the human environment,

and hence a human environment that continues to become increasingly receptive to life, fertility, production, and navigation, thus facilitating human travel and other endeavors. However, the birth from the Underworld pollution of powerful calamity-causing deities (and deities to prevent and rectify calamities) among the positive deities simultaneously indicates an increasing awareness and fear of the forces of calamity that destroy life and production.

It can be seen that, through the birthing by Izanami of these numerous deities, some of which represent ordering of the world, agricultural production and technological advance, and some of which represent or imply the existence of the destructive forces of nature that threaten human life and livelihood, both the productive and destructive aspects of Izanami herself as the mother earth goddess are being elaborated in the narrative of the *Kojiki*. Although the details differ, this recalls how Gaia's birth of numerous ambivalent offspring in the narrative of the *Theogony* elaborate her own ambivalent nature as the mother earth goddess.

III. Izanami's close relation to the Underworld

My previous study on Gaia discussed how the narrative of the *Theogony* portrays Gaia as very intimately related to the Underworld (personified as Tartaros), and I argued that she is even conflated with it through various epithets and other narrative devices. This relationship between Gaia and the Underworld was also seen to have both very destructive and positive aspects, and hence I further argued that it is one way that the *Theogony* elaborates the ambivalent nature of Gaia herself (Kirk, 2012, 70-72). I believe that the Izanami's connection with the Underworld in the *Kojiki* narrative likewise plays a similar role in elaborating her ambivalent nature, even though the particulars of the relationship are developed quite differently from that of Gaia and Tartaros.

Yomi-no-kuni (land of Yomi) is generally considered to be the Japanese version of the Underworld. It is first mentioned in the *Kojiki* after the death of Izanami, when Izanagi goes there to retrieve her (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Ch. 9). Thus, unlike the personified Greek Tartaros, which appears almost at the beginning of Hesiod's cosmogony as part of the triad that also includes Gaia and Eros, the Japanese Underworld appears rather late as an *unpersonified* place, rather poorly described, and certainly does not initially as play the important cosmological role that Tartaros does. It is apparently subterranean, as indicated by its being connected to the human world by a slope (Yomo-tsu-hira-saka), and it is obviously the place of

the dead, as indicated by Izanami's presence there after her death. It apparently has the structure of a building (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Ch. 9, line 2), and also has food, which if eaten, ends the possibility of return to the upper world (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Ch. 9, Line 3).

At first, judging from the initial conversation there between Izanagi and Izanami, it does not appear to be particularly horrible or unpleasant compared to the Greek Underworld. Neither of them express revulsion at it in their first conversation there, and there is initially no ghastly description of its horrors nor of suffering by its inhabitants. Izanagi's grounds for trying to get Izanami out of the Underworld are his loneliness at being separated from her, and his need of her help in developing the unfinished earth. However, in another indication of her importance in the narrative, Izanami's presence is about to drastically change the nature of the Underworld.

Izanami's relation to and role in the Underworld progressively become more important. At first, when her husband Izanagi goes there to retrieve her and bring her back to Earth, she is merely a new inhabitant, and quite willing to cooperate with his attempt to get her out. However, by eating the food of the Underworld, she has become inextricably tied to it, as it makes it impossible for her to leave (it is unclear whether her appeal to the Underworld deities to allow her to return in spite of this would have failed or succeeded, since Izanagi's breaking of her 'don't look' prohibition interrupted it).

Next, it is in the Underworld that her nature undergoes a drastic inversion (*Kojiki*, Bk. 1, Chs. 9-10), first as she manifestly becomes the passive embodiment of the horrifying decay and pollution of death. She suddenly changes from the benevolent, productive and nourishing mother-earth goddess into her very opposite — a malevolent, violently vindictive deity of destruction and death who decrees human mortality, and whose incursion from the Underworld into the realm of Earth must be prevented by the huge boulder. Her connection with the Underworld culminates in her being named the goddess of the Underworld, in which role she continues to threaten the human world. As mentioned earlier this reminds one of the role of the confined Typhoeus sending the destructive winds from Tartaros into the world of men, in the *Theogony* (868-880).

An obvious difference between the *Kojiki* and the *Theogony*, particularly in their descriptions of the Underworld, is that the *Theogony* does not directly emphasize the pollution of the Underworld, while the *Kojiki* does. However, as I have discussed elsewhere (Kirk, 2012), the imagery of the Underworld in the

Theogony does seem to imply the idea of pollution in both its positive and negative aspects. This is even more apparent if Pandora's jar is interpreted as representing the Underworld (Kirk, 2013). In any case, in both the *Theogony* and the *Kojiki*, the earth goddess is portrayed as having a very close relationship with the Underworld, and this relationship further elaborates both the extremely destructive and extremely productive aspects of her own nature.

Summary and Conclusions

It is clear from the above that, while the earth goddess Izanami in the *Kojiki* is portrayed quite differently than the Greek earth goddess Gaia in the narrative of Hesiod's *Theogony*, there are some striking similarities, particularly in how their ambivalent natures are developed in the narratives. Like Gaia, Izanami plays a very active and central role in the narrative describing the creation, differentiation and development of the earth, making it increasingly suitable for agriculture and human habitation. Also, like Gaia, together with her very positive fertile aspect, she also has a very destructive aspect that threatens productivity and hence human life and livelihood. The co-existence of these opposite positive and negative aspects are not surprising as they are characteristic of earth goddesses generally. More interesting, however, is that, in spite of differences in the particulars, the narrative of the *Kojiki* expresses this dual nature of Izanami in basic ways that are quite similar to how Gaia's dual nature is expressed in the narrative *Theogony* as shown in this study.

In both narratives, the ambivalent natures of these earth goddesses can be seen most obviously in their productive and destructive actions towards their husbands and offspring. In the case of Gaia, both her fertile nourishing aspect and her destructive aspect are shown alternately in her positive and negative actions, first towards her husband Ouranos, subsequently towards her son Chronos, and finally towards her grandson Zeus. In the case of Izanagi, her ambivalent nature, particularly how it is expressed towards her husband and offspring, is portrayed more dramatically and abruptly by a single drastic character inversion from the almost completely positive, extremely productive earth mother goddess to her very opposite: the enraged, vindictive and destructive goddess of the Underworld who tries to kill her husband and vows to kill his human offspring.

The dual nature of both goddesses is similarly portrayed and elaborated by their ambivalent offspring that represent both the productive fertility and technology that make human life possible, and the negative forces that threaten to destroy

production. One difference is that Izanagi directly gives birth to almost all her offspring, whereas Gaia's offspring consists both of her direct offspring and the subsequent generations of their offspring, giving her a somewhat indirect genealogical relationship to many of them. Also, ritual pollution plays an important role in the births of many of Izanami's children and she continues to produce children from her very pollution during and after dying and going to the Underworld, whereas ritual pollution is not directly mentioned in the story of Gaia. Yet, in spite of these narrative differences, the offspring of both goddesses can be seen to repeat and elaborate the ambivalent natures of the mother goddesses.

In addition, like Gaia, Izanami is shown to have a very close connection with the Underworld. In the *Theogony*, Gaia has a very close cosmic relation with the Underworld (personified in Tataros) and through various epithets and other literary devices seems to be even conflated with it. Hence the Underworld, which also has negative and destructive aspects together with positive productive aspects, can be seen to elaborate the ambivalent nature of Gaia. While Izanami is not so closely identified with and conflated with the Underworld as is Gaia, she nevertheless has a very important connection with it as it is the place where she undergoes her drastic and shocking inversion from being the almost all-positive mother earth goddess to almost her very opposite—the raging goddess of the Underworld who tries to murder her husband and vows to murder humans. Likewise it is in the Underworld that both positive and negative deities are additionally produced from her corpse and pollution. Hence, although she is not conflated with the Underworld as Gaia is, she does become the source of much of its pollution (itself both destructive and productive) and its queen, and she is confined to it by the boulder placed by Izanagi. Hence, it can be viewed just as important and as potent in terms of elaborating the Izanami's extremely ambivalent nature as is Tartaros in the case of Gaia.

Also, very significantly, both goddesses are seen to play a fundamental role in the birth and development of technology, which itself is seen to have both productive and destructive aspects for human beings. Like the characters of Gaia and Izanami, the portrayals of technology in both narratives emphasize its positive and negative aspects, thus again helping to elaborate the ambivalent natures of Gaia and Izanami and how they relate to the goods and evils in the human condition.

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