

# A brief analysis of the existence significance and self-value of female gods in Japanese mythology from the background of The Times -- taking Amaterasu and Izanami as examples

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**Abstract:** Different from other countries, the Japanese royal family has the idea of “divine authority” and “blood of God”, and in Japan as a patriarchal society, Amaterasu, the highest god in mythology, is a female god. In Greek mythology, the appearance of women was often accompanied by jealousy, guilt, or eroticism. On the contrary, in Japanese mythology, the female gods such as Moon reading God, Izanami, and Tiandian goddess all play an important role. This paper will take Amaterasu and Izanami as examples, and analyze from the background of The Times why Japanese scholars give such a status to female gods, and what kind of existence meaning and self-value of women as gods in mythology.

**Key words:** Amaterasu, Confucianism, Japanese mythology, Ancient Century, patriarchal society, Izanami

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## 1. Introduction

No matter from the social phenomenon, or historical records, Japan is a more obvious patriarchal country. The supreme god in Greek mythology is the male god Zeus, in Chinese mythology is the Jade Emperor, and in Japan, as a male-dominated society, the most revered god in mythology (regarded as the “emperor God” by the emperor family) is the goddess Amaterasu, which can not help but think about the reasons. If it is due to the influence of matrilineal society, there is a lot of controversy about whether human beings have a matrilineal society in general, so experts cannot confirm whether Japan has a matrilineal society period. As can be seen from the earliest “Ancient Chronicles”, the number of female gods in the high heavens is not large, but each has an indispensable significance.

## 2. Female Gods in the context of The Times

### 2.1 Female gods in ancient Japanese mythology

Different from the description and rendering of the “cold” and “inhuman” image of the supreme god in other myths, Amaterasu is considered to be loving and gentle, with great human emotions, and very similar to people. The presence of humanity in the divinity of Amaturu is reflected in such incidents as hiding in a crack in a rock out of fear, and peeking out of curiosity at the laughter caused by the funny dance that Tenwoo is forced to perform (the name is Tenjin-nyoshi in Nihongoki is アメノウズメ).

In the Book of Ancient Events, Ienaki’s spouse Izanami was burned to death while giving birth to his youngest son. Ienaki missed his wife too much and sadly pursued to the land of Yellow Springs, only to find Izanami who had become extremely ugly. After leaving the kingdom of the Yellow Spring, Ienaki washed himself in the river because of excessive fear, and Amaterasu and Moon reading God (moon God, female god), and the male life of Jianasa were born from Ienaki’s body. Thus it can be seen that Amaterasu is not a god born of women, and even has nothing to do with women during the birth process.

Back to the titular mother god of Amaterasu, Izanami. Heaven and earth began to separate, Izanami and Izanagi in the gesture of the god of heaven. However, just because Izanami was the first to praise Susanoo, she attracted the wrath of the gods, which materialized when Izanami gave birth to leeches (underdeveloped children) as punishment for her transgression. Obviously, it was the joint act of Izanami and Izanagi, but only Izanami, who was a female god, was punished, and the leech seed, which was regarded as a symbol of punishment, was also thrown into the river by Izanami and ran away with the water. Before she died because she was burned while giving birth to the fire God, the image of Izanami was almost always obedient and gentle, very much in line with the image of a mother in the minds of Japanese scholars at

that time, even if she abandoned her child, she had no choice. However, when Izanagi's dead wife has become unrecognizable and ugly, she is not as heartbroken as ordinary people imagine, and she did not bear this pain alone, but launched a chase after her husband, and after the gods were sent to kill her, she even personally ended up wanting revenge on the husband who began to abandon the chaos, which is the opposite of the meek mother image.

After becoming the master of the land of the yellow spring, Izanami seems to have lost the maternal characteristics of ordinary goddesses in the eyes of Japanese scholars, and only existed as her own individual, which is especially evident in Amaterasu. Love, charity, gentleness, but also anger and tenacity.

## **2.2 Influence of Confucianism and Buddhism**

Confucianism was formed in the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, founded by Confucius, and experienced the continuous improvement and development of his disciples and descendants, and spread widely, has no small influence on East Asian countries. Confucianism was introduced into Japan at the beginning of the 5th century, and at the same time of spreading and developing, it had no small influence on many aspects of Japan. In the Middle age (Kamakura, Muromachi era), Japanese Confucianism was mainly carried by Zen monks who practiced both Confucianism and Buddhism. Influenced by Chinese Zen Buddhism, which emphasized the unity of Confucianism and Buddhism or the unity of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism since the Song Dynasty, "The Japanese Goyama Zen monks naturally formed a tendency to advocate the harmony of three religions centered on Zen, and some Japanese scholars also put forward the idea of the unity of three religions in Japan." Buddhism came to Japan from Korea around the 6th century. At the beginning of Japan, female chastity was not seen as a measure of female morality, and after Japan was exposed to a large number of foreign cultures, scholars added to Amaterasu's story by referring to the restraint and gaze of women in Confucianism and Buddhism.

As mentioned above, the relationship between Izanami and Izanagi is not "Platonic", but rather the birth of other gods through sexual intercourse under the guidance of the higher gods, and the legend of the birth of Amaterasu, Tsukusama, and Sukusaku from the female is clearly influenced by Confucianism and Buddhism. Take Amaterasu as an example, she was shaped as a very maternal goddess, not only became the ancestor of the Japanese royal family, but also the most revered god, but in the process of her birth, women were optional, and the most important is the father God, which also reflects the need for the establishment of a patriarchal society in Japan at that time. It is worth mentioning that Amaterasu and Sojian Suazuki are sworn children, that is to say, in addition to Izanagi, who is a male god and does not have female fertility itself, as a female god with fertility, Amaterasu still maintains a virgin god after several children - that is, a pure body in the eyes of scholars at that time.

Amaterasu seems to have become the benchmark of male gaze in the era, and male scholars are eager to reflect the importance of men in the myth, so as to better establish a patriarchal society, but they are difficult to give up the soft maternal nature and love. So Amaterasu is not only benevolent, she also glares at him with her bow when she suspects that Susako is trying to take her territory. Scholars have added the pairable male characteristics to Amaterasu, but they cannot erase the characteristics that women have to exist. It is necessary to recognize the necessity of women, integrate the "pure" and loving female image that men love to see, with the superiority of male culture, and find a delicate balance among them, Amaterasu will be worshiped and loved by the Japanese people.

## **2.3 Influence of the imperial system**

Since ancient times, the Japanese imperial family has believed that the emperor is a descendant of Amaterasu, and this view is not uncommon in history and in the world. Kings strengthened their control over the people and slaves in the way of "divine right of Kings", so that they could better govern the country. As mentioned above, since ancient times, Japan has been difficult to give up its dependence on and need for motherhood, so scholars created the image of Amaterasu Daiokami when they entered the patriarchal society. The people were so attracted to the loving mother God that they would naturally bow down to the emperor, the "descendant" of the mother God.

During the shogunate era, the power of the emperor had gradually fallen away. When it came to the Meiji Restoration, in order to rise rapidly, Japan was no longer subject to others, and chose to develop the road of capitalism, and also for the political unification of Japan, the

Emperor of Japan was once again mentioned and emphasized, and the rapid development of Shinto once again told the Japanese people that the emperor is the descendants of Amaterasu. From a literal point of view, the fundamental reason for shaping Amaterasu is to better consolidate the internal unrest of society, and to stabilize the hearts of the people under reform by means of the divine grant of monarch power.

### 3. Conclusion

In retrospect, the Japanese imperial family seems more appropriate to call itself a descendant of the god Izanami, but scholars and the imperial family agree that the emperor is a descendant of Amaterasu. The existence of Amaterasu is not only for the political means of the royal family's "divine grant of power" to serve, she is more like the attachment of the Japanese nation to motherhood, and then added political colors. Amaterasu, as the chief deity governing Takahara, is described as the highest status among the Izanagi Mitsuko, and in addition to the masculine qualities that Japanese male scholars attach to her, there are more or less ideal maternal factors that scholars want to mold. Compared with Amateru's "being a mother is just", the description of Izanami after her death is more divided, which more reflects the changes of Japanese mythology with the changes of The Times. The two goddesses show their specificity and necessary mythological value and social value in different angles and different aspects.

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