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The Cradle

Origins of mythology and steel

Issue area

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The ancient Japanese notion that gods dwell in all things has evolved into a unique mythology that has found its way into Japanese culture.

Here in Unnan, it has evolved in its own way, and remains alive even today.

The Cradle

Origins of mythology and steel

From ancient times, humans that lived together with nature have feared and trembled from phenomena that exceed human comprehension, and have called them "gods." Those experiences, called *kami-gatari* or "god stories," have been handed down from generation to generation, and today are known as "mythology."

Some 1300 years ago in the Nara Period, when this country made the shift from "Yamato" to "Japan," "*Kojiki*" and "*Nihon Shoki*" were created to tell the origins of the country and establish the legitimacy of the Emperor. Both volumes tell the story of the slaying of the Yamata-no-Orochi, and the Unnan Area became widely known as the location of many Izumo legends.

Additionally, "*Izumo-no-Kuni-Fudoki*," with the gods of Izumo as the main characters of the origin story the region is named for has been handed down to this day, and features many myths of the ancient gods as told from the perspective of those who lived in the Izumo Region some 1300 years ago.

At its heart, the Unnan area is a special place, where even the mountain names have origin stories. The inhabitants that live amid both the dangers and blessings of the rivers that flow from Unnan's mountains believe that the gods dwell in those mountains, and have seen the gods' visages there.

Having felt the presence of the gods in nature, people eventually created spaces within their communities to celebrate the gods, called "jinja" (shrine). At shrines, myths were told as historical accounts of the area and passed down to younger generations. At festivals, locals offered prayers for grace and protection, and as an effort to please the gods, offered local delicacies and performances. Shrines were at the center of people's lives.

While it is true that the wisdom and power of humanity has created a variety of civilizations, we know here that it is also the result of nature's blessings. As an example, in the well-known "Tatara Iron Production," which uses iron sand gathered from local mountains and rivers, and charcoal made from local wood, Kanayago-Shin is worshipped as the god of ironmaking, and many shrines have been built to enshrine this god. Furthermore, Tatara Iron Production gave rise to nature and culture in the region and was responsible for the birth of a new "culture" which featured terraced rice fields and a number of specialty products. In this way, the people of Unnan allow their culture and rich natural surroundings to intertwine into the future, while cherishing the legends and history protected and passed down to them by their predecessors.

Written by Hiroshi Yoshimatsu

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Mythology: the grand theater of the gods. In a land where ancient gods met, united and grew, people continue to live on.

These legends are still alive in Unnan today.

Your journey through the stories of the gods begins by perusing the ancient books.

Birthplace of Japanese Mythology

Unravel the stories of the gods Unnan Area



Kojiki
(Shimane Museum of Ancient Izumo)



Izumo-no-Kuni-Fudoki
(Hinomisaki Shrine collection, sponsored by Shimane Prefectural Ancient Culture Center)



Nihon Shoki
(Shimane Museum of Ancient Izumo)

"*Kojiki*", "*Nihon Shoki*" and "*Izumo-no-Kuni-Fudoki*" were all created approximately 1300 years ago, but the contents of each are significantly different, and thorough study of each can offer a deeper understanding of life in ancient times.

"*Kojiki*", summarizing the myths and legends from the age of the gods to the 33rd Empress Suiko, and is the oldest history book that exists in Japan. Legends and myths featuring Izumo as their setting account for one-third of all Japanese folklore, which indicates the importance of Izumo mythology in Japanese origin stories.

Much like "*Kojiki*", "*Nihon Shoki*" is a history book that tells Japan's legends and history from the era of the gods all the way to the 41st Emperor Jito, with the main difference being that Izumo mythology is rarely mentioned. Nevertheless, even in this

"*Nihon Shoki*" we find the legend of "Yamata-no-Orochi" recorded. Unlike historical books such as "*Kojiki*" and "*Nihon Shoki*", "*Izumo-no-Kuni-Fudoki*" is a "geography" book that records in detail the origin of place names, the appearance of mountains and rivers, and the state of traffic in various parts of Izumo. *Fudoki* records were created all over the country, but many have disappeared entirely, or parts of them have gone missing, meaning that the only one remaining in its original form is the "*Izumo-no-Kuni-Fudoki*". This makes it very valuable.

Further, the "*Izumo-no-Kuni-Fudoki*" contains mythological traditions based in the region, which are also found in "*Kojiki*" and "*Nihon Shoki*". By exploring the Unnan Area, frequently mentioned in the "*Izumo-no-Kuni-Fudoki*", one can feel closely the breath of the gods that connect the present to ancient times.





Unnan City: Cherry blossom trees on the banks of the Hii River.



Okuizumo Town: "Oni-no-Shitaburui" (The Demon's Trembling Tongue) Gorge

Interviewee



Shimane Prefecture Ancient Culture Center
Senior Researcher

Mr. Hiroshi Yoshimatsu

The Unnan Area is home to many mythological locales in the "Kojiki" and "Nihon Shoki", a perfect stage brimming with history and adventure. The "Izumo-no-Kuni-Fudoki" also contains a number of other interesting myths, and the ruins and scenery that remain today add to its appeal.

Remembering the gods whose names are etched in places that still exist today -
Reminding us of legends that can't be found in "Kojiki" or "Nihon Shoki"

A brilliant light that splits the sky, a crashing sound like the mighty beating of a drum— Lightning, caused by electrical discharges that occur between clouds, is a mechanism that is easily explained today with scientific evidence. However, for ancient peoples it was impossible to properly understand the sudden genesis of lightning and thunderstorms. In particular, Japanese people lived closely connected with nature since ancient times, from planting rice to harvesting the land and sea, and have always lived with the threats of rain, typhoons and the blazing sun. Thus, events that transcended the understanding of humans were thought to be acts of the gods, and as a result, thunder became known as *kami-nari* or "sound made by the gods."

People also felt the presence of the gods in all kinds of natural phenomena, such as pristine mountains, peaceful boulders, lush trees and majestic waterfalls, and worshipped them. Because of their sheer numbers and variety, people came to call these natural objects the "Eight Million Gods," and now treat nature with a sense of awe. Eventually, these gods were considered to have the same form and thoughts as humans, evolving into the grand myths found in the "Kojiki" and "Nihon Shoki".

One of the most famous of these myths is the legend of Yamata-no-Orochi. Although there are some differences in the versions, both the "Kojiki" and "Nihon Shoki" relate that Susano'o-no-Mikoto defeated Yamata-no-Orochi and was wed to Princess Kushiinata. In myths found in the history books, we move from there to the

next scene, but in "Izumo-no-Kuni-Fudoki", the etymology of place names tell what happened to the gods after they were united, what kind of gods did what, among other things.

For example, in the area known as Sase in Unnan City, there remains a legend that Susano'o-no-Mikoto danced with a "leaf of the Sase tree" on his head. Kumatani, located in Unnan City was named "kuma" tani (valley) because Princess Kushiinata, who visited the area to give birth to her child and said, "This place is very 'kumakumashii' (a word used to describe the intricate valleys)." Legend holds that Mt. Shitaiyama, located in Okuizumo Town where the fall colors are beautiful, got its name from the story of a shark that fell in love with a female god that lived on the mountain. The shark attempted to swim upstream to propose to her, but she placed large boulders in the stream, thwarting his progress, and he was ultimately unable to reach her. Thus, the name of the mountain is written "Love Mountain" and read as "Shitaiyama" as a result. Further, the word *shitau* in Japanese also meant anciently that the leaves are dyed red, giving the mountain's name a double meaning, joining both the legend and the natural surroundings together.

Incidentally, many records written in other regions also contain the etymology of place names, but most of them are very simple, such as "the island is named 'Sparrow Island' because many sparrows live there." "Izumo-no-Kuni-Fudoki" is unique in that 90% of the place names therein are related to the mythology of the area.

A special place where you can feel close to the gods
handed down without fail for over 1300 years

One of the more notable myths in the "Izumo-no-Kuni-Fudoki" is the legend relating to Mt. Kotobiki. It is said to have been called "Mt. Kotobiki" because the harp (koto) of Oanamochi-no-mikoto (a.k.a. Okuninushi-no-mikoto), the god who created the Izumo province, was located there. The god's harp (koto) is said to be a large rock. The koto isn't simply a musical instrument, but rather has been treated as a special instrument since ancient times—a ritual tool to invoke the gods and is believed to have the power

to attract the opposite gender. On Mt. Kotobiki, there are still, today, rock outcroppings that resemble large koto.

In this way, the names of places in the Unnan area still reflect the uninterrupted love for the gods that has been passed down through the ages, indicating that the area is a special place where the gods have always been nearby, for the past 1300 years.

Related Points of Interest



Amagafuchi

It is believed that the legendary Yamata-no-Orochi lived here. The story is recorded in "Amanofuchi-yatsumata-no-Orochinoki," a book written in 1527 during the Warring States Period. It is located at the headwaters of the Hii River, which flows quietly these days.



Sajiro - Yato

Many sites in the legend of "Yamata-no-Orochi" appear here, including the Choja Mansion Ruins and Kagamigaike, Motoyukakenomatsu, Igatake Shrine, and the former shrine Yaegaki Daimyojin. It is also mentioned in a local publication called "Unyo-Shi", which was produced in the middle of the Edo period.

Yaegaki Daimyojin



Mt. Kotobiki

According to the "Izumo-no-Kuni-Fudoki", this mountain was named for the harp (koto) of Oanamochi-no-Mikoto, the "god that created this world." From here, one can view Ohkami Iwa and other sights.



Transcending generations,
protected locally

case.2 A tale of shrines and parishioners

Many ancient shrines still remain in Unnan. Shrines are protected mainly by priests, but they are also supported by local residents called *ujiko*, or parishioners, who clean, make repairs, and offer charms at the visitor center on a daily basis. As a part of their lives, parishioners inherit faith in the gods and a daily sense of prayer and gratitude. One such shrine is the Suga Shrine in Unnan City. It is said that after Susano'o-no-Mikoto conquered the Yamata-no-Orochi serpent, he and Princess Kushiinata built their first shrine here, and many gather here to worship. As the generations of *ujiko* parishioners change, the older and younger generation work together to protect the shrine.

Living with the gods.

In the Unnan Area, where the myths live on, there are still customs and techniques that show a deep connection with the gods in the daily lives of the people.

We introduce the customs of residents of Unnan, demonstrating the ancient legends in their daily lives.

The art of making *shimenawa* has been passed down for generations

case.1 Making Shimenawa



Producing the giant *shimenawa* for Kagura Hall, 1955

The giant *shimenawa* (shrine rope) on display at Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine has been made in Iinan Town since approximately 1955. With a length of 13.6 meters and a weight of 5.2 tons, the *shimenawa* is said to be one of the largest of its kind in Japan. It takes more than a year and a total of 1,000 townspeople to make it, and it is dedicated to the Kagura Hall at Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine. Rice farming is thriving in Iinan Town, and the making of *shimenawa* began as a way to supplement income during winter months when farming is impossible due to snowfall. In this region, the making of *shimenawa* is a skill that is seen as important to master at some point in life, and is passed down from skilled artisans to the young generation.





Unnan
City

A beautiful eight-layered cloud envelops the shrine
Japan's first palace as described in the "Kojiki"

The "Suganomiya" mentioned in the "Kojiki" and "Nihon Shoki" is said to refer to Suga Shrine. When Susano'o-no-Mikoto built his palace, beautiful eight-layered clouds rose up around the palace, and the poem written to describe the scene is said to be the oldest waka poem in Japan. Three large and small rocks in the inner shrine look like a parent and child, drawing visitors into a world of wonder. There is also a legend that the sword Amenomurakumo no Tsurugi, one of the three sacred treasures, was presented to the Amaterasu Omikami from this spot. Many people come here to pray for good fortune, good luck, and good marriages.

Suga Shrine

Worship

260 Suga, Daito town, Unnan City, Shimane



linan
Town

A famous peak with great spiritual power
Climbing sacred giant rocks

Mt. Kotobiki, which rises 1,014 meters above sea level, was named after the harp (koto) of Okuninushi-no-Mikoto in the "Izumo-no-Kuni-Fudoki". Located near the summit is Kotobikiyama Shrine, which is dedicated to Okuninushi-no-Mikoto, and is said to be beneficial in preventing infantile spasms and healing children's illnesses. You can visit the giant stones that rise up in front of the shrine known as "the stone gods," and as you go up the mountain you will see sacred giant rocks such as Ohkami Iwa and Anagami Kotobikiwa, which is said to contain a harp. There is a well-maintained hiking trail up to the summit, so even beginners can go up the slope with confidence.

Kotobikiyama Shrine

Mountaineering

Sami, linan town, Iishi County, Shimane

Points of Interest to Experience

The Unnan Area conveys the breath of the gods in everyday life.

There are many places where you can experience the world of mythology connecting the ancient to the modern.



linan
Town

The workshop where Japan's largest *shimenawa* is created
Experience shimenawa-making with skilled craftsmen

linan Town, where the skills and traditions of *shimenawa* making are still passed down from generation to generation. The Ohshimenawa Sousakukan (Giant *Shimenawa* Creation Center) produces the giant *shimenawa* for the Kagura Hall of Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine, which is considered to be one of the largest in Japan, as well as other *shimenawa* for locations all over the country. In the museum, you can see an exhibition of Shimane Prefecture's distinctive *shimenawa*, and there is also a corner where you can experience making *shimenawa* using rice straw grown specifically for that purpose. At the workshop, you can observe the skills of the craftsmen up close. In addition to *shimenawa* for home altars, the gift shop also carries souvenir versions as well as *shimenawa* made for traditional year end ceremonies.

Ohshimenawa Sousakukan

Shimenawa making experience

54-2 Hanaguri, linan town, Iishi County, Shimane



Unnan
City

Kagura dancing in a thatched-roof house
Dancing for the gods that have supported us in life

Kagura is a dance dedicated to the gods. In Daito Town, Unnan City, there is a custom of inviting Toshitokujin, the god of good fortune for the year, to the tatami room of the house where the New Year's amulet-burning ceremony is held, and performing the Kagura dance to pray for the safety of the family and a good harvest. Located very near Suga Shrine, the Kagura-no-Yado inn was built to preserve and perform the Kagura dance, traditionally performed in tatami rooms, as a long and deeply-held cultural asset, supported by locals in their daily lives. In this thatched-roof building, dance performances are held nightly every July. In addition, other performances may be scheduled. (Paid admission/Reservations required).

Kagura no Yado

Kagura Appreciation

375-1 Suga, Daito town, Unnan City, Shimane

Yamata-no-Orochi

The Eight Headed Dragon



In the legend of Yamata-no-Orochi, which appears in the "*Kojiki*" and "*Nihon Shoki*", Susano'o-no-Mikoto descended to Torikami (present-day Mt.Sentsu) at the headwaters of the Hii River, and discovered there an old father and mother crying over their daughter, Princess Kushiinata. When Susano'o-no-Mikoto asked them why they were crying, they told him they were crying, because Yamata-no-Orochi would soon eat their daughter and they were terribly sad. Yamata-no-Orochi is a giant beast with eight heads and eight tails, with eyes as red as Chinese lantern plants. Susano'o-no-Mikoto told them: "If you will give me your daughter in marriage, I will dispose of the Yamata-no-Orochi." Susano'o-no-Mikoto prepared strong rice wine (sake) and waited for the Yamata-no-Orochi to appear. When the great beast appeared, it drank the sake and passed out drunk. At that moment, Susano'o-no-Mikoto swung his sword and sliced the eight-headed serpent, and a sword came out of its tail. This sword

is known as "Amenomurakumo-no-Tsurugi." According to one theory, the legend of Yamata-no-Orochi is referencing the Hii River and iron making. The legend of Yamata-no-Orochi is not mentioned in "*Izumo-no-Kuni-Fudoki*". However, because it contains writings about the Okuizumo town area that state: "the iron made here is hard and suitable for making various tools," proving that iron has been made in this area for a long time. In the Unnan Area, Tataru (a traditional Japanese iron-smelting furnace) ironmaking later flourished. There are still a number of places where the legend of Yamata-no-Orochi is reenacted. At the headwaters of the Hii River, where the tradition of ironmaking has been passed down across the generations, reenactments take place of Susano'o-no-Mikoto's defeat of the eight-headed dragon and discovery of the Amenomurakumo-no-Tsurugi sword.

Kotobiki

The Kotobiki Myth



"There is a cave in the ridge of this mountain. On the back side is the harp (koto) of Ame-no-Shita-Tsukurashishi-Ohkami (the god that created this world). (Omitted) Therefore, this mountain is called "Kotobiki-yama." "*Izumo-no-Kuni-Fudoki*" tells us that this mountain is given the name "Kotobiki-yama" because the koto of the great god Okuninushi-no-Mikoto was housed here. The "*Kojiki*" relates the following in regards to the relationship between Okuninushi-no-Mikoto and the harp: "Okuninushi-no-Mikoto, after falling in love with Suseribime-no-Mikoto, daughter of Susano'o-no-Mikoto, overcame the ordeals that Susano'o-no-Mikoto had imposed upon him, and while Susano'o-no-Mikoto was asleep, took his sword, bow and arrow, and harp, and fled. When Okuninushi-no-Mikoto drove his brothers away, he became king of the earthly world." In ancient times, the koto was a sacred instrument used to importune the will of the gods, and the episode in the "*Kojiki*" is said to symbolize the transfer of power from Susano'o-no-Mikoto to Okuninushi-no-Mikoto. Thus, we can see how important the harp was to Okuninushi-no-Mikoto. The story that followed that incident is told by locals as follows: "The king of the this world, Okuninushi-no-Mikoto, climbed Mt.Kotobiki

with Suseribime-no-Mikoto, and played the koto while pondering the creation of a kingdom. From the top of the mountain, they looked out over the land of Izumo and decided that the place where they would settle down was the area of the present Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine." The Kotobiki legend tells of the deep connection between Okuninushi-no-Mikoto and Mt. Kotobiki, but Mt. Kotobiki is also known as the mountain where gods from all over the country gather to descend to Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine for their annual conference. Each year, the 10th month of the lunar calendar, is locally called Kamiaridzuki the Eight Million Gods of Japan seek to gather at Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine, and look for Mt. Kotobiki as a landmark. After they gather there, the gods travel to Inasa-no-hama, where the Shinto ritual of welcoming the gods takes place, by relying on the Kando River, which originates from this mountain and flows into the Sea of Japan near Izumo Taisha Grand Shrine. In keeping with this tradition, each year on the Autumnal Equinox, a Shinto ritual is held at the top of Mt. Kotobiki to welcome the gods and purify the mountain, which attracts many worshippers.



Tatara Iron Production

Looking deep into the Unnan area through the lens of Tatara Iron Production

The Nittoho tataru, the only one in Japan to inherit the tataru iron production process. (Picture provided by the Japanese Society for Preservation of Japanese Art Swords, a public interest incorporated foundation.)

Tatara iron production is a uniquely Japanese process that uses iron sand as a raw material.

Including Izumo, the Chugoku Region once produced the greater part of the country's iron when production was booming.

Unnan became representative of iron manufacture, even within that, and the influence of tataru iron production can still be felt today in its beautiful scenery and profound culture.



Tamahagane
Steel produced through the tataru system is of high purity and good quality. It's also used as a material in the making of Japanese swords.

Iron production in the Japanese archipelago began in the second half of the 6th century. At the time, they followed the iron production process of the Korean peninsula, which uses iron ore as a raw material. However, as Japan isn't rich in iron ore, production methods which use iron sand, which was plentiful in far more areas, were developed instead.

In the Unnan area, production using iron sand began around the end of the 6th century. The "Izumo Fudoki," compiled in the Nara period (8th century), also contains writings surrounding the making of iron. Then, iron production ramped up towards the end of the Heian period (11th century). In the Muromachi period (14th period), the country had built up prominent production areas. And given that, although the Unnan area was blessed with good iron sand and forests necessary for the making of charcoal, it is also thought they advanced technology to the point of mass production and perfected methods of distributing the iron they produced.

Then, in the Edo period, iron production systems saw great advances. By having balancing bellows ventilate large furnaces efficiently, they became able to go through more than 10t of iron

sand and charcoal in one operation to produce over 3t of iron. Meanwhile, processes such as "kanna nagashi," where sediment cut from a mountain is passed through water to separate the heavier iron sand, as well as "Ohkaji" that treats the various kinds of iron made in tataru to make them pliable and tough, were also established. And so, in completing a system that covered every step of the iron-making process, Izumo's tataru iron production entered its prime.

However, following the Meiji Restoration, it became possible to import inexpensive iron from overseas, and tataru production fell into decline. In 1923, operations temporarily stopped. And although they were reopened during wartime, they were again shut down at the end of the war. Yet, because tamahagane is indispensable in the creation of Japanese swords, tataru iron production was once again revived in 1977. Now, the Nittoho tataru in Okuizumo, operated by the Japanese Society for Preservation of Japanese Art Swords (a public interest incorporated foundation), is the sole successor of the tataru system.

The Emerging Culture and Beautiful Scenery from the History of Iron

Tatara iron production scaled up after the Edo period (1603-1868) and sites operated out of one location for a long time. In addition to the main *takadono* building of a tatara ironmaking site, office cabins and workers' quarters were also built, forming villages that came to be known as *sannai*. In Yoshida Town, Unnan City, Sugaya Tatara has preserved the landscape of *sannai* villages and shows us a glimpse of the past.

Those who owned a tatara site, vast forests, and employed a large number of workers to run the business were known as *tesshi*, or iron dealer. Among the *tesshi* in Izumo, the most influential were the Tanabe family of Yoshida Town, Unnan City, the Sakurai family of Kamiai, Okuizumo Town, and the Itohara family of Otani, Okuizumo Town, known as the Big Three Tesshi.

The Tanabes ran several businesses, including the Sugaya Tatara, and also established a large forge and main residence in Yoshida Town as their operational base. The Tanabes' storehouses stand side by side in the center of Yoshida, which developed into an industrial castle town, and tells of the prosperity of the time.

The Sakurai family had a large forge and main residence in Uchidani, Kamiai, where they operated their business. The buildings and storehouses of the Sakurai residence still stand

there today. They had an O-narimon (a gate for important persons) and garden, built when the lord of the Matsue domain visited, showing the connection between the lord and the iron dealer.

The Itohara family set up their residence and base of operations in a Sannai conducting *kanna tatara* (excavating iron sand). Although no mansion remains today, the residential buildings, storehouses, and Kanayago Shrine tell of the prosperity of the iron dealer and the *sannai*.

In Iinan Town, excavations conducted in conjunction with the construction of the Shitsumi Dam have revealed many other iron production sites dating from the Middle Ages to the Edo period. These excavations have revealed the state of ironmaking shops and the process of technological development over time. At the Yundani Tatara ruins, the underground structure of a large-scale ironworking furnace from the Edo period was discovered, showing the enormous effort that went into the construction of tatara sites.

As mentioned above, the settlements, buildings, and ruins that were created along with tatara ironmaking, show that iron manufacturing was closely related to people's lives and created a rich culture in the Unnan Area.

Cultural Assets of the Big Three Tesshi

Tanabe Family

Tanabe Storehouses



In the heart of Yoshida Town, 14 beautiful white-walled storehouses line the path leading to the Tanabe Residence. These storehouses contained, rice, documents and other items, demonstrating the family's days of prosperity. Visitors can travel back in time and enjoy a relaxing stroll.

Sakurai Family

Sakurai Residence



Many of the buildings, including the main house (built in 1738), are designated as Important Cultural Properties of Japan. In addition, the garden, named "Ganro" by Matsudaira Harusato, is designated as a Place of Scenic Beauty of Japan, which features a waterfall drawn from the river upstream. Many artefacts and artwork passed down in the Sakurai family are exhibited in the adjacent Kabeya Museum.

Itohara Family

Itohara Residence



In 1924, the iron dealer residence, including the main building, storehouses, and Kanayago Shrine, were registered as Tangible Cultural Properties of Japan. At the Itohara Memorial Museum, you can also see tatara-related documents and furnishings from when the lord of Matsue visited.

Terraced Rice Paddies Built Atop Iron Sand Collection Site in the Oidani District (Okuizumo Town)



Interviewee



Curator, Shimane Museum of Ancient Izumo

Mr. Shinji Higashiyama

Iron production not only supported people's daily lives in Okuizumo as a major industry, but also shaped the local culture and landscape. I hope more people will come and enjoy the culture and beautiful scenery that emerged from the history of iron manufacturing.

TOPICS

Unique use of the land, such as transforming former iron mines into terraced rice fields or reusing waterways and reservoirs created for mining, ushered in integral agriculture centered around the rice and livestock industries.

Japanese Nationally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems

Okuizumo's Resource-Recycling Agriculture Originating from Tatara Iron Production

The Okuizumo area's resource-recycling agriculture produces rice made in terraced rice fields, which are deeply intertwined with tatara iron production. The nationally recognized Japanese Nationally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems acknowledged this type of agriculture in February 2019.

Tatara Iron Production and Okuizumo's Agriculture, Forestry, and Livestock Industries

Tatara iron production did not simply produce superb iron, it was also deeply interconnected with land use and the area's scenery. In order to collect iron sand, they cut through mountains and carried out *kanna nagashi* (iron mining), but those sites were then transformed into terraced rice fields. Behind the scenes of tatara iron production, there was a boom in breeding cattle to deliver iron sand, charcoal, and iron as well as for agricultural use. This set the foundation for today's Okuizumo wagyu beef production. The local brand of rice, "Nita Rice," is produced through a resource-recycling agricultural system in which organic compost such as cow manure and mountain grasses are used in the rice paddies in conjunction with the improvement of Japanese cattle with superior lineage. In the Okuizumo region, high quality agricultural products are grown in harmony with nature. Charcoal forests that once produced charcoal for fuel now supply logs for shiitake mushrooms and other crops. Native buckwheat, which was cultivated in the burnt fields of deforested sites and former iron mines, is being preserved and passed on. In addition to the terraced rice paddies built from the tatara iron production industry, rice farming and livestock breeding have boomed in this area through the unique use of land, such as the reuse of waterways and reservoirs that were once used for iron sand extraction. These paddies also form a landscape that changes with the seasons, and the mountain village environment nurtures a wide variety of flora and fauna.

The Japan Agricultural Heritage is a system under which the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries certifies systems that are important and traditional in Japan.



giant salamanders



Recycling Resources while Passing on Nature's Beauty to the Next Generation

A cool breeze blows in the summer, and golden stalks of rice sway in autumn. This is the picturesque scenery of the terraced rice fields in Okuizumo. However, a different picture may have been painted if the iron sand sites had been left alone. We would not see the nature-rich landscape we see today. The people of this area have been gradually restoring the greenery while retaining the memory of the time when the mountains were deforested.

The soil was low in nutrients after mining iron sand, making it unsuitable for rice cultivation; so they improved the soil by growing buckwheat and other crops, and enriched it by composting mountain grass and the manure of Japanese cattle, which were often raised to transport iron products. In combination with this historical culture, the region is now highly regarded as a producer of high-quality rice.

Human civilization and nature can coexist if the agricultural, forestry, and livestock industries, which originated from tataro iron production, are operated while respecting nature, and if people's lives and diverse biological resources are protected through resource-recycling agriculture. The beautiful terraced rice paddies of Okuizumo give us such hope.

Living with nature.

In Okuizumo, the areas for iron sand collection have been reclaimed and turned into beautiful terraced rice paddies, where resource-recycling agriculture continues.

Appreciating nature's blessings and adopting the wisdom of our ancestors

case.3 Farmer

Resource-recycling agriculture is wisdom from our ancestors, preserved, passed on, and used today by the local people. Mr. Shigenori Hibiki is a full-time farmer who produces rice, breeds Japanese cattle, and as a forestry instructor, teaches the next generation about the connection between forests, fields, and rice paddies; the importance of coexisting with nature; and says that "We are here thanks to the achievements of the past. Connecting with people and sharing knowledge and techniques is important."

Mr. Yasuo Matsubara, an organic rice and "shiso (Japanese mint)" farmer, works to protect the giant salamanders that live in clearwater rivers. By working with the local community to improve the water environment and holding observation sessions for children, he hopes to promote activities to protect the giant salamander as a "local treasure" and "leave a beautiful environment and ecosystem for future generations."



"Hashima" is a midafternoon snack in the country



Okuizumo Town

The Beauty of Japanese Tradition Portrayed Up Close in the Modern-day Master Swordsmiths

Okuizumo is the only region in the world that continues to use tataro iron making to manufacture *tamahagane* steel, the raw material for Japanese swords. The "Okuizumo Tataro and Sword Museum" comprehensively exhibits and introduces the tataro iron production in Okuizumo Town, and has a powerful full-scale model of a tataro furnace. There are also three actual models of the bellows used in tataro blowing, allowing visitors to fully experience one aspect of iron making of the time. A swordsmith also demonstrates sword forging, recommended for those interested in Japanese swords and smithing.

Okuizumo Tataro and Sword Museum
Japanese Swordsmith Demo & Museum Tour

1380-1 Yokota, Okuizumo town, Nita County, Shimane



Unnan City/ Okuizumo Town

Experience the Grand Scenery & Local Gourmet by Trolley

The "Okuizumo Orochi" is a two-car open-air trolley that runs between Kisuki Station and Bingo-Ochiai Station on the JR Kisuki Line, one of the most famous mountain railroads in the Chugoku region. The trolley allows you to freely breathe the mountain air, and you can take in the magnificent scenery of Okuizumo along the Hii River from the windows of the train between the fresh leaves in spring and the autumn foliage in fall. At each station, boxed lunches and desserts made from delicious local ingredients, such as Okuizumo wagyu beef, sasazushi, soba, as well as ice cream and custard flan are sold and can be savored while enjoying the journey.

JR Kisuki Line Trolley "Okuizumo Orochi"
Trolley Journey

Points of Interest to Experience



Okuizumo Town

Traditional Japanese Sake by Izumo's Master Brewers
Made with Pure Water and Choice Brewer's Rice

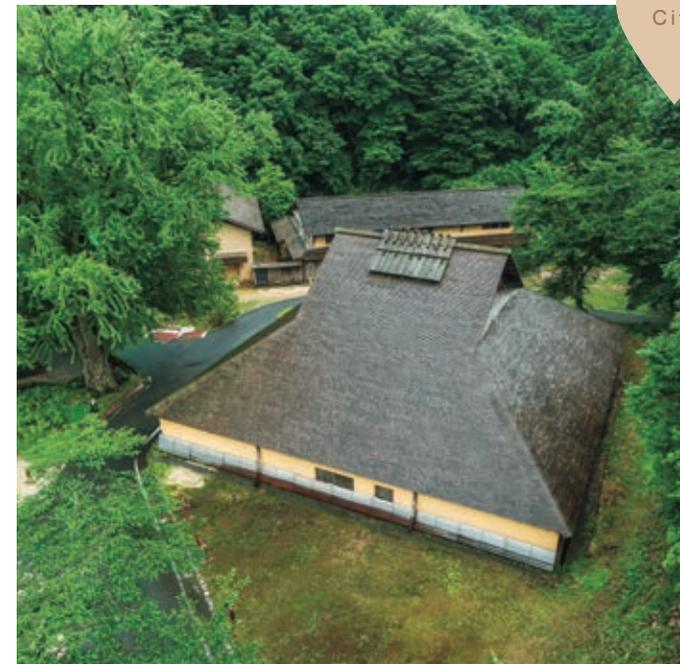
This is a long-established sake brewing company with over 300 years of history in Okuizumo Town. Generations of *toji* (master brewers) in Okuizumo have produced sake with a focus on flavor. Izumo's brewers were mainly farmers that worked at the breweries during the off season (i.e. winter), so brewing techniques have been kept intact. At the Hikamiseisyu brewery, sake is produced using Okuizumo's pure water and carefully selected rice, including the Daiginjo Tamahagane, named after the steel used for sword forging.

Hikamiseisyu Co., Ltd.
Japanese Sake

1222 Yokota, Okuizumo town, Nita County, Shimane

The Unnan Area conveys the breath of the gods in everyday life.

There are many places where you can experience the world of mythology connecting the ancient to the modern.



Unnan City

Remembering the peak of tataro iron production
The world's only remaining *takadono*-style tataro site

Sugaya Tataro Sannai is a village where ironmaking facilities and houses of tataro (smelting iron) masters have been preserved and restored. It is designated as an Important Tangible Folk Cultural Property of Japan. Visitors can see how these facilities were managed and operated by the iron masters of the time. Sugaya Takadono, one of the smelting places, is the only facility in the world that exists in its complete form. It was in operation for 170 years since 1751. It is said that the iron town scene in the movie "Princess Mononoke" was modeled on this facility. Inside Takadono, the restored ironwork furnace, charcoal storage place and resting area, help visitors visualize the craftsmen at work, sweating their brow.

Sugaya Tataro Sannai Takadono
Facility Tour

4210-2 Yoshida, Yoshida town, Unnan City, Shimane

Listed Facilities & Access

- P1 Mt. Oyorogi
Tonbara, Iinan town, Iishi County
- P3 Yae Falls
Iruma, Kakeya town, Unnan City
- P5 Hiikawa Riverbank Cherry Blossoms
Kisuki, Kisuki town, Unnan City
- P6 Oni-no-Shitaburui Gorge
Une, Minari, Okuizumo town, Nita County
- P6 Amagafuchi
Yumura, Kisuki town, Unnan City
- P6 Sajiro - Yato
Sajiro, Okusizumo town, Nita County
- P6 Mt. Kotobiki
Tonbara, Iinan town, Iishi County
- P9 Suga Shrine
260 Suga, Daito town, Unnan City
- P9 Ohshimenawa Sousakukan
54-2 Hanaguri, Iinan town, Iishi County
- P10 Kotobikiyama Shrine
Sami, Iinan town, Iishi County
- P10 Kagura no Yado
375-1 Suga, Daito town, Unnan City
- P14 Nittoho Tataru
529 Oro, Okuizumo town, Nita County
- P15 Tanabe Family Dozo Storehouses
Yoshida, Yoshida town, Unnan City
- P15 Sakurai Family/Kabeya Shuseikan
1655 Kamiiai, Okuizumo town, Nita County
- P15 Itohara Family/Itohara Memorial Museum
856 Otani, Okuizumo town, Nita County
- P15 Terraced Rice Paddies of Oidani
Oidani, Okuizumo town, Nita County
- P19 Okuizumo Tataru and Sword Museum
1380-1 Yokota, Okuizumo town, Nita County
- P19 Hikamiseisyu Co., Ltd.
1222 Yokota, Okuizumo town, Nita County
- P20 JR Kisuki Line Trolley "Okuizumo Orochi"
4210-2 Yoshida, Yoshida town, Unnan City

