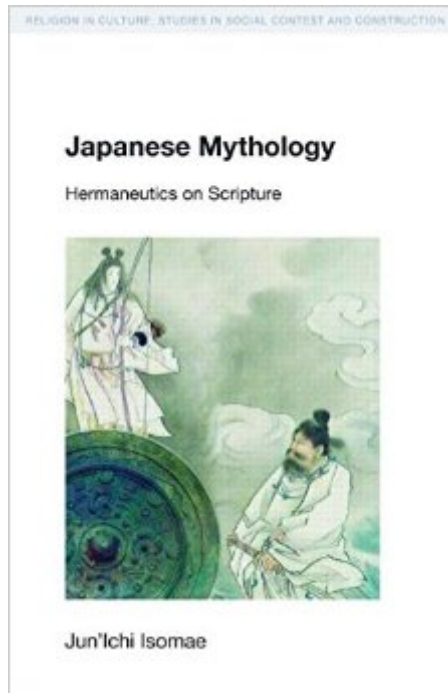


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# Japanese Mythology: Hermeneutics On Scripture (Religion In Culture)



## Synopsis

Before the westernisation of Japan, mythological events were treated as national history. Two key documents have contributed to this history, both written over 1300 years ago: 'Kojiki', the Tale of Old Age, and 'Nihonshoki', the Chronicle of Japanese History. Both the Imperial Court and the general public searched for the origin of their identity in these documents, which took on the central and sacred role of scripture. Through the act of commentary and interpretation, the sacred books connected interpreters to their historical origins, authenticating where they came from, the emergence of the Japanese archipelago, and the uniqueness of the Japanese people. 'Japanese Mythology' explores the nation's attraction to this act of historical grounding and the varying identities that emerged during different historical periods. The study reveals that, rather than having any clear and unified substance, Japanese mythology has always been the result of a nostalgic desire to retrieve historical origins.

## Book Information

Series: Religion in Culture

Hardcover: 224 pages

Publisher: Routledge (August 8, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1845531825

ISBN-13: 978-1845531829

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.6 x 9.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (2 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #2,193,572 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #119 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Other Eastern Religions & Sacred Texts > Shintoism](#) #433 in [Books > History > World > Religious > New Age, Mythology & Occult](#) #1289 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Mythology & Folk Tales > Mythology](#)

## Customer Reviews

I own several Japanese books by Junichi Isomae, but I find this English translation difficult to recommend. The reason is kind of uncomfortable to describe. It's not that the information is outright wrong, or that it's incomprehensible. Instead, and rather unfortunately for a book by a thinker whose methodological seriousness is apparent from his non-Kiki writings, the methodology here is insufficiently rigorous. The very title, 'Japanese Mythology', marks the beginning of the

problem. Isomae is very assertive that he considers the early emperors of Japan legendary. Are they, then, part of the mythology? In what way are they mythological? The term "myth" did not exist in English until 1800 and Japanese until 1900. Although he devotes an entire chapter to unravelling the ideological interpretations of postwar thinkers, Isomae still fails to question many of the historical conclusions reached by modern interpreters. The story he is telling is one that can be read in many (Japanese-language) academic publications and it is remarkably boring in its lack of critical thought. Some examples: Kume Kunitake was suppressed by conservatives? But Shirayama Yoshitarō has recently put forward that he was not suppressed by conservatives, but by other rationalists. Isomae does not touch on this. Tsuda Sankichi's obsession with the idea of imperial myth remains relevant today? But many historians have been moving past Tsuda. Isomae is completely silent about recent discussions of Tsuda, and simply puts him on a pedestal as if he discovered the final truth. There is a lot of good information here, but I cannot recommend this as a textbook on the subject, nor as an introduction to new readers on the Kojiki and Nihon Shoki.

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