

## **The Myths of Japan: The Consummation of the Deities**

While on the island of Onogoro, Izanagi and Izanami realize that their bodies are different, meaning that they have the ability to produce offspring. The deities decide to circle the island's heavenly pillar in opposite directions until they meet again, and when they do, Izanami invites Izanagi to bed. They have two children, but both are deformed and lifeless. Confused, Izanagi and Izanami seek the advice of their fellow deities in heaven. They reveal Izanami's invitation to have been the cause of the malformed children: the man, not the woman, should speak first.

Several explanations have been suggested for this story, but most point to the influence of Chinese philosophy, especially Confucianism, on the court scholars who wrote down the myths in the eighth century. Confucianism was well established among elites in Japan at the time. It emphasized male primacy and accorded women an inferior position in society. The warning against female agency incorporated into the tale of Izanami and Izanagi has to be understood in the context of the society when the myths were written down. The story of Izanami's stillborn children may also reflect the high rate of premature pregnancies and infant mortality in ancient societies.