

Studies on the *Kojiki*

Translated by Quiros Ignacio,
in cooperation with Kate Wildman Nakai.

Chapter 1: Heaven and Earth First Become Active

When Heaven and Earth first became active (1), in Takamanohara 高天原 (2) there came into existence (3) a deity named Amenominakanushi no kami 天之御中主神 (4). Next appeared Takamimusuhi no kami 高御産巢日神, and then, Kamumusuhi no kami 神産巢日神 (5). All three came into existence as solitary deities (6), and they hid their own bodies (7).

Then, at the time when the land was still in an embryonic state, like floating fat, and drifting about like a jellyfish, from something sprouting out like a reed shoot there came into existence a deity named Umashiashikabihikoji no kami 宇摩志阿斯訶備比古遲神 (8). Next appeared Amenotokotachi no kami 天之常立神 (9). These two deities also came into existence as solitary deities and hid their own bodies.

The five deities mentioned above constitute the Special Celestial Deities (10).

1. “When Heaven and Earth first became active” (*Ametsuchi hajimete okorishi toki ni* 天地初発之時)

No agreement exists as to a definitive reading of this opening phrase of the *Kojiki* text proper.

Further comment: Various interpretations have been advanced over the centuries as to the reading and meaning of the digraph *shohatsu* 初発. The medieval texts of the Ise lineage read it as *hirakeshi* (opened up), whereas those of the Urabe lineage read it as *hirakuru* (also, open up). Many early modern and modern editions and commentaries likewise adopt some form of *hiraku* as the reading. Such readings and interpretations draw from the wording found in the *Kojiki* preface and the *Nihon shoki*. The *Kojiki* preface describes the beginning of the world as a process of separation or division, using the sinified expressions *kenkon shobun* 乾坤初分 (the initial separation of yang [heaven] and yin [earth]) and *tenchi kaibyaku* 天地開闢 (the opening up of heaven and earth). The first passage of the *Nihon shoki* similarly uses the expressions *kaibyaku* 開闢 (primordial opening) and *shohan* 初判 (initial division) found in Chinese creation stories such as those in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 or the *Sanwu liji* 三五歷記.

The Kokugaku 国学 scholar Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730–1801), however, held that one should try to recover the worldview expressed in the ancient Japanese language that lay behind the Chinese graphs used to record the *Kojiki*. He thus criticized reading the digraph *shohatsu* as *hiraku*, seeing this as influenced by Chinese concepts. Instead he proposed that, in line with the outlook expressed in the cosmogony myth particular to ancient Japan, this digraph should be read simply as *hajime* (beginning). In developing this interpretation he drew from the first verse of poem 167 of the *Man'yōshū* 万葉集, which reads *ametsuchi no hajime no toki no* 天地之初時之 (“At the time of Heaven and Earth’s beginning . . .”).⁽¹⁾

No scholar today would deny Chinese influence on the *Kojiki*’s phrasing and content. The influence of Daoist ideas in the opening passage, especially, is often noted. It is important, however, to separate this issue from the problem of how to

interpret the wording 天地初発. Inasmuch as the digraph 初発 does not occur in Chinese cosmogony myths, there is room to see its use as evidence, as Norinaga held, of a view of the world's origin particular to the *Kojiki*. But, we should not overlook the implications of the compilers' choice of the graph *hatsu* 発 (start up, become active), for the distinctive features of the expression *shohatsu* lie precisely in its inclusion. Norinaga's reading of the digraph 初発 simply as *hajime* (beginning) thus cannot be accepted. Since the graph 発 is read *okoru* (become active) or *tatsu* (start up, set out) elsewhere in the *Kojiki*, scholars such as Nishimiya Kazutami 西宮一民 have proposed reading the opening phrase as *hajimete okorishi toki* ("when [Heaven and Earth] first became active").⁽²⁾

2. Takamanohara 高天原

It may be hypothesized that this term for the world where the deities appeared and exist should be read Takaamanohara, but, for ease in reading, here the widely used romanized transcription Takamanohara will be adopted. Several instances of this toponym, which means "high celestial plain," can be found in the alternative versions (*aru fumi* 一書) of the "Age of the Gods" chapter of the *Nihon shoki*, but it does not appear in the main text (*honsho* 本書). There the term used is simply "heaven" (*ame* 天) or "heaven above" (also read *ame* in the original, but rendered by the digraph *tenjō* 天上). It thus has been argued that the specific term Takamanohara emerged together with the formation of the version of the myths found in the *Kojiki*.⁽³⁾ As the Japanese-style posthumous name of Emperor Jitō 持統天皇 is Takaamanohara no hironohime no sumeramikoto 高天原広野姫天皇, the term Takamanohara likely was coined in the period of her reign. The *Kojiki* includes a gloss indicating that the "celestial plain" element should be read

amanohara, not *amenohara*. In other words, the graph for “celestial” (天) should not be read as a single, independent unit (*ame*), but with the pronunciation used when it is part of a compound term (*ama*). This suggests that “celestial” and “plain” were understood to be tightly linked and that the structure of the trigraph 高天原 is not 高天 (high celestial) + 原 (plain), but 高 (high) + 天原 (celestial plain). This interpretation is in line with the reference in the *Kojiki* preface to the purpose of such glosses, which indicates that the specification of a term’s composition is intended to clarify its meaning.⁽⁴⁾

In the *Man’yōshū* we find the word *amanohara* 天原 used as a term for “sky” in combination with the verb “to look up to” (*furisake miru* 振り放け見る; e.g., MYS 289). By adding the prefix *taka* 高, the *Kojiki* compilers seem to have intended to convey the meaning of a place where gods lived, a “Heaven–above” realm that was the basis for ruling over that “below Heaven.”

3. “Came into existence” (*naru* 成)

The aforementioned scholar Motoori Norinaga pointed out three different meanings of the verb *naru*, rendered here by the Chinese character 成:

- a. The birth of something that did not exist previously.
- b. The transformation of one thing into another.
- c. The completion of an act of creation.

Here the meaning is the first of these senses. It appears that the compilers used the term *naru* to express the advent of deities in the stage prior to the myth of Izanaki and Izanami (where deities appear through the act of giving birth, *umu* 生 産). The verb *umu* would have implied a parent–child relationship, while the verb “to create” (*tsukuru* 作る) would have implied one of creator and created. Use of

the verb *naru*, by contrast, made it possible to express the advent of entities to which such “ruler–ruled” relationships were not applicable.⁽⁵⁾

4. Amenominakanushi no kami 天之御中主神

This deity’s name means literally “the divinity that dwells in and rules the center of Heaven.” In the *Nihon shoki*, this deity is mentioned in conjunction with the next two deities, Takamimusuhi and Kamumusuhi, in an alternative within the fourth variant of the first sequence of the “Age of the Gods” section. (However, the suffix *mikoto* 尊 is used in place of *kami* 神. This reflects the principle expressed in the note to the *Nihon shoki* main text: “The character *son* 尊 [Jp. *mikoto*] is used to refer to the most exalted entities; the character *mei* 命 [Jp. *mikoto*] is used for the remainder.”)

This deity’s name can also be found in other texts such as the *Kogo shūi* 古語拾遺 or the *Ise no kuni fudoki itsubun* 伊勢国風土記逸文. In all instances, however, only the deity’s name appears, and nothing further is said about it. It thus has been asserted that the idea of this deity did not emerge out of longstanding rituals and beliefs, but reflects the influence of ancient Chinese Daoist thought. Chinese works identify the center of Heaven with the Pole Star; it also was deified as the supreme divinity under the name Tianhuang Taidi 天皇太帝 (Jp. Tennō Taitei, “Celestial Ruler Great Monarch”). Some scholars see this eponym Tennō Taitei as the source of the title *tennō* that was assumed by Japan’s ruling lineage. This has led to the supposition that the development of the notion of Amenominakanushi was related to the establishment of the title *tennō*.⁽⁶⁾

5. Takamimusuhi no kami 高御産巢日神 and Kamumusuhi no kami 神産巢日神

Although, generally speaking, the deities mentioned in the opening section of the *Kojiki* prior to the advent of the couple Izanaki-Izanami do not reappear in later sections, this pair of *musuhi* deities is an exception. This point relates to the question of how to interpret the issue, discussed below, of deities who hide their bodies (*mi o kakushimasu* 身隠). In the *Nihon shoki*, Takamimusuhi appears in the ninth sequence as the commanding deity of the celestial realm in the narration of both the “cession of the land” (*kuniyuzuri* 国譲り) and the “descent of the Heavenly Grandson” (tenson kōrin 天孫降臨). In the main text, this deity occupies a more central place than Amaterasu herself. For this reason, there is a debate as to which of these two deities, Amaterasu or Takamimusuhi, should be regarded as the original commanding deity.

Kamumusuhi, by contrast, in the *Nihon shoki* is mentioned solely in the aforementioned fourth variant of the first sequence and does not reappear in subsequent sequences. This deity does appear, however, under the name Kamumusuhi no mikoto 神魂命, as a major Izumo deity in the *Izumo no kuni fudoki* 出雲国風土記. It remains uncertain whether by origin this deity is a central deity related to the imperial house or a deity with roots in beliefs indigenous to Izumo. In the *Kojiki*, Takamimusuhi acts together with Amaterasu as the commanding deity of Takamanohara. At the same time, Kamumusuhi, who is also called Kamumusuhi mioya no mikoto カムムスヒ御祖命, or, the “August Parent Kamumusuhi,” appears in conjunction with Izumo deities such as Susanoo and Ōkuninushi, toward whom it acts as a protector. Although the process by which the myths took shape is not well understood, we can at least say

that the compilers structured the opening section of the *Kojiki* so as to pair the representative or ancestral deities of the worlds of Takamanohara and Izumo that would eventually interact in the “cession of the land” sequence.⁽⁷⁾

As for the meaning of the word *musuhi*, the general understanding follows Motoori Norinaga’s interpretation of it as combining *musu* (creative force) with *hi* (spiritual force). Opinion divides, however, whether to consider the verb *musu* as transitive or intransitive (Norinaga, too, wavers on this point). Apart from this approach, Kurano Kenji 倉野憲司 holds this word must be a single lexeme deriving from the verb *musubu* 結ぶ (to bond, to tie).⁽⁸⁾ This interpretation, however, depends on the usage of later periods and is thus not convincing. Nakamura Hirotohi 中村啓信, regarding the hearth deity (*kamadogami* 竈神) as the commanding deity, sees the original form as *umusuhi*. Postulating the existence of an intransitive verb *umususu* that expressed the notion of spontaneous generation in contrast to the transitive verb *umu* (to give birth), he argues for a combination of *umususu* and *hi*.⁽⁹⁾ In our view, such interpretations are not sufficiently convincing to refute that deriving from Norinaga.

6. “Solitary deity” (*hitorigami* 独神)

This is the counterpart of the term “paired deities” (雙神), which appears later. As the term 雙神 refers to a male and female deity that form a pair, *hitorigami* indicates a solitary entity without a partner. The corresponding passage in the *Nihon shoki* main text uses the expression “pure male” (*hitao* 純男). It thus would be possible to interpret the *Kojiki*’s “solitary deities” as also being male. However, from the following “Seven Generations of the Age of the Gods” (*kamuyo nanayo* 神世七代) sequence, expressions specifying gender appear,

as with the deity Uhijini and his female partner (*imo* 妹) Suhijini. It therefore seems preferable to interpret “solitary deity” as being without a defining gender. Objections may be raised, such as the existence of interpretations of Kamumusuhi as a female deity or the typically male suffix *hiko* found in the name of the fourth deity to appear, Umashiashikabihikoji. On the other hand, Kamumusuhi’s gender cannot be specified unequivocally, and even if Umashiashikabihikoji’s name might be postulated to contain a male-like element, there does not seem to be much point to trying to assign either male or female gender to these deities who do not form a pair. The perception of these deities as being without specific gender bears on the following issue of “hid their bodies.”

7. “Hid their bodies” (*mi o kakushiki* 隱身)

Manuscripts of the Urabe-text lineage include the gloss *mi o kakushimasu* (hide the body) for these two characters. The reading *kakurimi ni masu* (remain hidden) may also be found,⁽¹⁰⁾ but ever since Fujitani Mitsue 富士谷御杖 (1768–1823) argued that the character sequence 而隱身也 does not allow syntactically for the reading *kakurimi*, the reading *mi o kakusu* has been widely accepted.⁽¹¹⁾

Further comment: What meaning should be ascribed to the statement that deities who had just appeared thereupon “hid their bodies”? One interpretation might be that it sought to depict them as bodiless entities without a definite form, but this would require adopting the syntactically problematic reading *kakurimi* (remain hidden). Was not this phrasing most likely intended to convey the sense that these deities migrated to an invisible world or transformed themselves into something invisible? It will be useful here to consider the implications of the lexeme *mi* 身 (body). Subsequently the narrative depicts Izanaki and Izanami

engaging in a dialogue about their respective bodies, and the land (*kuni* 国) to which they give birth is also described in terms of “bodies.” In other words, the physical bodies of the land are produced from the physical bodies of paired male–female deities. Izanaki and Izanami represent the culmination of ten sets of “paired deities” (雙神). The entities preceding these paired male and female deities with bodies constitute “solitary deities” (*hitorigami*), who hid their bodies. In other words, Izanaki and Izanami were entities who acted by making use of their bodies. The “solitary deities,” by contrast, had neither a definite gender nor a partner to couple with. They thus are situated as entities who cannot put their bodies to use (namely, give birth by procreation). The expression “hid their bodies” might well be interpreted as intended to account for this circumstance.

8. Umashiashikabihikoji no kami 宇摩志阿斯訶備比古遲神

The initial term *umashi* is an expression of praise. *Ashikabi* (reed shoot) epitomizes youthful vitality springing forth. The name of this deity thus conveys the context in which the deities came into existence. The *hiko* of *hikoji* is the same as that in the paired terms *hime* and *hiko*, used to denominate respectively female and male deities and exalted personages. The term *hikoji* thus seems to indicate male gender, and it is possible that Umashiashikabihikoji was originally thought of as a male deity. As discussed above, however, within the narrative structure of the *Kojiki*, this deity should best be understood as not having a specific gender.

In some variants of this sequence in the *Nihon shoki*, Umashiashikabihikoji is the first deity to appear (variants 2 and 3), but in the main text (and also in variants 1, 4, and 5), the first to appear is Kuninotokotachi no mikoto 国常立尊.

These disparities likely reflect different transmissions that arose from divergent conceptualizations of the beginning of the world: one type that emphasized the origin of the land (the *Nihon shoki* main text and several variants), another that emphasized the origin of life (*Nihon shoki* variants 2 and 3), and a third that put first the centrality of the heavens and the emergence of deities endowed with the power to generate all creatures and things (the *Kojiki*).

Yet, even the versions that put Kuninotokotachi first tend to postulate “a certain thing” as the premise for the advent of deities and to liken it to a reed shoot. The *Nihon shoki* main text, for instance, states: “Between Heaven and Earth a certain thing was produced. In form it was like a reed shoot, and thereupon it became a deity.” The first *Nihon shoki* variant states, “There was a certain thing in the midst of emptiness; its form is difficult to describe. From within it a deity was generated spontaneously.” In almost all instances the advent of the first deity is associated with a “reed shoot.” In other words, deities were conceptualized as being generated from “a thing”; this “thing” did not have a definite shape, but in that it possessed the capacity for growth, it was likened to a reed–shoot.⁽¹²⁾

Considered in this light, it is possible that the notion of *naru* (coming into existence) did not necessarily presume “existence” as arising out of absolute nothingness and that the original notions of the first deities saw them as emerging out of a “thing.” If such is the case, the first three deities of the *Kojiki* perhaps represent a distinctive perspective wherein “existence” is produced out of “nothingness.”

9. Amenotokotachi no kami 天之常立神

This deity’s name makes a pair with that of the next deity to be mentioned,

Kuninotokotachi no kami 国之常立神. In the main text of the *Nihon shoki*, Kuninotokotachi occupies a preeminent position as the first deity to appear. By contrast, Amenotokotachi is mentioned only in the sixth variant of the first sequence. It thus may be hypothesized that Amenotokotachi is a late invention, created as a counterpart to Kuninotokotachi. The morpheme *toko* 常 has been thought to mean *toko* 床, that is to say, “foundation” or “base,” but as the character 常 usually carries the meaning “eternal,” even if the *toko* of this deity’s name derives from *toko* meaning “foundation,” the Chinese character 常 was presumably intended to convey also the sense “eternally unchanging.” The next element, *tachi* 立, means “to appear.”

In that the land at this stage existed only in an as yet unstable form, a deity whose name signifies the emergence of an eternal foundation for it would plausibly be important. Yet as the world of Takamanohara already existed, it is difficult to see a comparable need for a deity to guarantee its “eternal foundation.” It thus seems likely that, as suggested above, Amenotokotachi was created as a counterpart to the more crucial Kuninotokotachi.

10. Special Celestial Deities (*koto amatsu kami* 別天神)

The first published edition of *Kojiki*, that edited in 1687 by Watarai Nobuyoshi 度会延佳 (1615–1691), glossed the first two characters as *wake ame no*, while the modern *Nihon koten zensho* 日本古典全書 edition (1962) reads the phrase as *wake amatsu kami*. All other published editions follow the reading *koto amatsu kami* adopted by Motoori Norinaga in his *Teisei kokun Kojiki* 訂正古訓古事記 (1799).

Notes

- (1) *Man'yōshū* 万葉集, ed. Kojima Noriyuki 小島憲之, Kinoshita Masatoshi 木下正俊, Tōno Haruyuki 東野治之, *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 新編日本古典文学全集 (Shōgakukan, 1995), vol. 6, p. 118.
- (2) Nishimiya Kazutami 西宮一民, ed., *Kojiki shūteiban* 古事記修訂版 (Ōfū, 2000; first edition 1973).
- (3) Nakamura Hirotochi 中村啓信, *Kojiki no honsei* 古事記の本性 (Ōfū, 2000).
- (4) Komatsu Hideo 小松英雄, *Kokugo shigaku kisoron* 国語史学基礎論 (Kasama Shoin, 1973).
- (5) See Maruyama Masao 丸山真男, “Rekishi ishiki no kosō” 歴史意識の古層, in Maruyama Masao, ed., *Rekishi shisō shū* 歴史思想集 (Chikuma Shoin, 1972).
- (6) Terada Keiko 寺田恵子, “Amenominakanushi no shinmei o megutte” 天之御中主の神名をめぐって, *Kojiki nenpō* 古事記年報 25 (1983); Fukunaga Mitsuji 福永光司, *Dōkyō to kodai Nihon* 道教と古代日本 (Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin, 1987).
- (7) Mizoguchi Mutsuko 溝口睦子 has discussed extensively the temporal and spatial changes related to Takamimusuhi and Amaterasu; see, for instance, her *Ōken shinwa no nigen kōzō* 王権神話の二元構造 (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2000).
- (8) *Kojiki zenchūshaku* 古事記全註釈, 7 vols. (Sanseidō, 1973–1980).
- (9) Nakamura, *Kojiki no honsei*.
- (10) Tanaka Yoritsune 田中頼庸, *Kōtei Kojiki* 校訂古事記 (1887).
- (11) Mitsuya Shigematsu 三矢重松, *Kojiki ni okeru tokushu naru kunpō no kenkyū* 古事記における特殊なる訓法の研究 (Bungakusha, 1925).
- (12) Some scholars such as Saijō Tsutomu 西條勉, Mibu Sachiko 壬生幸子, and Masuda Katsumi 益田勝実 have pointed out that a view of deities as emerging from “things” may be found in this *Kojiki* account of the advent of deities and in the subsequent contest in which Amaterasu and Susanoo produce deities out of objects particular to each of them in a test (*ukehi*) of the latter’s intentions. See Taniguchi Masahiro 谷口雅博, “‘Kojiki’ shinwa no naka no saigai: Wazawai o motarasu mono” 『古事記』神話の中の災害: 災いをもたらすモノ, *Yūkyū* 悠久 129 (2013:1).