

The Influence of the Ancient Japanese Court Myths

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On the fourth of January 2007 Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited Ise shrine mainly because it has enshrined Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami. It is believed by majority of the Japanese people that the deity is: (1) the main god of the Japanese deities; (2) a central figure of the Japanese myth; (3) the ancestor of the Japanese imperial family.

However, it is difficult to admit those characteristics as that deity's in general. Only in the *Kojiki*, which was completed probably in 712, those three characteristics were recorded. On the other hand, in the *Nihongi*, which was completed in 720, Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami was not the central figure of the myths. Furthermore, in an anthology named the *Manyoshu*, which was edited by 780s, some of the poems described the myths of the ancestor of the imperial family in another way. Those differences between the descriptions of those documents look like telling us that Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami was one of the deities of the Japanese court myths in the eighth century. This essay will pick up five topics about Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami in order to investigate the characteristics of that deity in the ancient myths.

2

First topic is its birth.

“The great deity the Male-Who-Invites” or Izanagi-no Mikoto went to a land where his wife “the Deity the Female-Who-Invites” or Izanami-no Mikoto moved to because of her passing. When “the great deity, the Male-Who-Invites” came back to the land where he used to be, he cleansed himself. The *Kojiki* translated by Chamberlain reads:

Therefore the Great Deity the Male-Who-Invites said: “Nay! hideous! I have come to a hideous and polluted land, – I have! So I will perform the purification of my august person.” So he went out to a plain [covered with] *akagi* at a small river-mouth near Tachibana in Himuka in [the island of] Tsukushi, and purified and cleansed himself. ... The name of the Deity that was born as he thereupon washed his left august eye was the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity (“Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami” in the Japanese text - Touyama’s note). The name of the Deity that was next born as he washed his right august eye was His Augustness Moon-Night Possessor. The name of the Deity that was next born as he washed his august nose was His Brave-Swift-Impetuous-Male-Augustness.... At this time His Augustness the Male-Who-Invites greatly rejoiced, saying: “I, begetting child after child, have at my final begetting gotten three illustrious children. [with which words,] at once jingly taking off and shaking the jewel-string forming his august necklace, he bestowed it on the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity, saying: “Do Thine Augustness rule the Plain-of-High-Heaven.” With his charge he bestowed it on her.

On the other hand, the main text of the *Nihongi* did not record the passing of “the deity the Female-Who-Invites” or Iza-Nami no Mikoto. She and her spouse (“the great deity the Male-Who-Invites” or Izanagi-no Mikoto) gave birth to three deities. The *Nihongi* translated by Aston reads:

After this Izanagi no Mikoto and Izanami no Mikoto consulted together, saying: ... Why should we not produce someone who shall be lord of the universe? They then together produced the Sun-Goddess, who was called Oho-hiru-me no muchi.

Called in one writing Ama-terasu no Oho kami.

In one writing she is called Ama-terasu-oho-hiru-me no Mikoto.

The resplendent lustre of this child shone throughout all the six quarters. Therefore the two Deities rejoiced, saying: – “We have had many children, but none of them have been equal to this wondrous infant. She ought not to be kept long in this land, but we ought of our own accord to send her at once to Heaven, and entrust to her the affairs of Heaven.” At this time Heaven and Earth were still not far separated, and therefore they sent her up to Heaven by the ladder of Heaven.

The *Nihongi* put the main text first and after that other texts such as “one writing” in the quotation above. Although very similar stories with the *Kojiki*’s ones can be found in “one writing” of the *Nihongi*, probably the editors of the *Nihongi*

recorded the main text as the most reliable one. Therefore, this essay admits that the editor's intention was expressed by the main text.

The *Nihongi's* "Oho-hiru-me no-muchi" seems the same deity with the *Kojiki's* "Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami" because both were borne in a similar situation. In the two documents the deity was produced by the similar deity or deities and sent to heaven. However, first of all, the names of the deity were different. The *Kojiki* recorded "Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami". On the other hand the *Nihongi's* main text called the deity "Oho-hirume no muchi". And the *Nihongi's* "one writing" gave the name "Ama-terasu no Oho kami" while another "one writing" "Ama-terasu Oho-hiru-me no Mikoto". Those different names might present different deities. Secondly, in the *Kojiki* only "the great deity the Male-Who-Invites" produced Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami while in the *Nihongi's* main text the male and female deities gave birth to the deity. Even about the birth of this deity the two documents recorded different names and parent(s).

In spite of those differences researchers tried to construct an original myth through the two documents because the differences between the two looked small for them and because they believed that the differences occurred while the original myth had been recited for long years. However, the differences between the two documents were not small as this essay referred to. It looks rational to admit that the two documents recorded different myths in order to describe different stories.

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The second topic is Ama-Tearsu-Omi-Kami's reappearance from "the Heavenly Rock dwelling". After telling her brother's wrong behaviours the *Kojiki* says:

So thereupon the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity, terrified at the sight, closed [behind her] the door of the Heavenly Rock-Dwelling, made it fast, and retired. Then the whole Plain of High Heaven was obscured and all the Central Land of Reed-Plains darkened. Owing to this, eternal night prevailed. Hereupon the voices of the myriad Deities were like unto the flies in the fifth moon as they swarmed, and a myriad portents of woe all arose. Therefore did the eight hundred myriad Deities assemble in a divine assembly in the bed of the Tranquil River of Heaven.

Then eight hundred myriad deities did a trick to pull the deity out of “the Heavenly Rock-Dwelling”.

Then the Plain of High Heaven shook, and the eight hundred myriad Deities laughed together. Hereupon the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity was amazed, and, slightly opening the door of the Heavenly Rock-Dwelling, spoke thus from the inside: “Methought that owing to my retirement the Plain of Heaven would be dark, and likewise the Central Land of Reed-Plains would all be dark: how then is it that the Heavenly-Alarming-Female makes merry, and that likewise the eight hundred myriad Deities all laugh?” Then the Heavenly-Alarming-Female spoke saying: “We rejoice and are glad because there is a Deity more illustrious than Thine Augustness.” While she was thus speaking, His Augustness Heavenly-Beckoning-Ancessor-Lord and His Augustness Grand-Jewel pushed forward the mirror and respectfully showed it to the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity, whereupon the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity, more and more astonished, gradually came forth from the door and gazed upon it, whereupon the Heavenly-Hand-Strength-Male-Deity, who was standing hidden, took her august hand and drew her out, and then His Augustness Grand-Jewel drew the bottom-tied rope along at her august back, and spoke saying: “Thou must not go back further in than this!” So when the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity had come forth, both the Plain of High Heaven and the Central-Land-of-Reed-Plains of course again became light.

Those descriptions give a strong impression to the audience that the deity was the sunlight. On the other hand, *Nihongi's* main text did not describe the deity in that impressive way as the *Kojiki* did. It reads:

Then Ama-terasu no Oho-kami started with alarm, and wounded herself with the shuttle. Indignant at this, she straightway entered the Rock-cave of Heaven, and having fastened the Rock-door, dwelt there in seclusion. Therefore constant darkness prevailed on all sides, and the alternation of night and day was unknown.

Now Ama-terasu no Oho-kami heard this, and said: — “Since I have shut myself up in the Rock-cave, there ought surely to be continual night in the Central Land of fertile reed-plains. How then can Ama no Uzume no Mikoto (“the Heavenly-Alarming-Female” in the Chamberlain’s *Kojiki* - Touyama’s note) be so jolly?” So with her august hand, she opened for a narrow space the Rock-door and peeped out. Then Ta-jikara-wo no Kami (“the Heavenly-Hand-Strength-Male-Deity” in the Chamberlain’s *Kojiki* - Touyama’s note) forthwith took Ama-terasu no Oho-kami by

the hand, and led her out. Upon this the Gods Nakatomi no Kami and Imibe no Kami at once drew a limit by means of a bottom-tied rope (*also called a left hand rope*) and begged her not to return again (into the cave).

The third topic is an order to a deity to control earth.

The *Kojiki* described:

The Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity commanded saying: “The Luxuriant-Reed-Plains-the-Land-of-Fresh Rice-ears-of-a-Thous-and-Autumns, - of long-Five-Hundred-Autumns is the land which my august child His Augustness Truly-Conqueror-I-Conquer-Conquering-Swift Heavenly-Great-Great-Ears shall govern.” Having [thus] deigned to charge him, she sent him down from Heaven.

But there were hostile deities on earth named “the Luxuriant-Reed-Plains-the-Land-of-Fresh Rice-ears-of-a-Thous-and-Autumns, - of long-Five-Hundred-Autumns”. When those hostile deities surrendered,

(t)hen the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity and the High-Integrity-Deity commanded and charged the Her Apparent His Augustness Truly-Conqueror-I-Conquer Swift Heavenly-Great-Great-Ears [saying: “The Brave, Awful-Possessing-Male-Deity] says that he has now finished-pacifying the Central Land of Reed-Plains. So do thou, in accordance with our gracious charge, descend to and dwell in and rule over it.”

Before having that order “the Her Apparent His Augustness Truly-Conqueror-I-Conquer Swift Heavenly-Great-Great-Ears” got married with a daughter of “the High-Integrity-Deity” and gave birth to a child named “His Augustness Prince Rice-ear-Ruddy-Plenty”. Then

(t)hey (“the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity” and “the High-Integrity-Deity”-Touyama’s note) laid their command on His Augustness Prince Rice-ear-Ruddy-Plenty, deigning to charge him with these words: “This Luxuriant Reed-Plain-Land of Fresh-Rice-ears is the land over which thou shalt rule.” So [he replied]: “I will descend from Heaven according to your commands.”

In the *Kojiki* “the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity” had a supreme command to control earth. On the other hand, the *Nihongi* reads :

MASA-YA-A-KATSU-KATSU-HAYA-HI AMA NO OSHI-HO-MI-MI NO MIKOTO (“His Augustness Truly-Conqueror-I-Conquer-Conquering-Swift Heavenly-Great-Great-Ears” in the Chamberlain’s *Kojiki* - Touyama’s note)), the son of Amaterasu no Oho-kami, took to wife Taku-hata-chi-chi-hime, daughter of Taka-mi-musubi no Mikoto (“the High-Integrity-Deity” in the Chamberlain’s *Kojiki* - Touyama’s note). A child was born to them named Ama-tsu-hiko-hiko-ho-no-ninigi no Mikoto (“His Augustness Prince Rice-ear-Ruddy-Plenty” in the Chamberlain’s *Kojiki* - Touyama’s note). Therefore his august grandparent, Taka-mi-musubi no Mikoto, treated him with special affection, and nurtured him with great regard. Eventually he desired to establish his august grandchild Ama-tsu-hiko-hiko-ho-no-ninigi no Mikoto as the Lord of the Central Land of Reed-Plains.

Then Taka-mi-musubi no Mikoto took the coverlet which was on his tree couch, and casting it over his August Grandchild, Amatsu-hiko-hiko-ho-no-ninigi no Mikoto, made him to descend.

The order to descend from heaven and to rule earth is the most important part of the Japanese court myths because it was the base of the present kings’ legitimisation to rule their kingdom. In spite of that importance in the *Nihongi’s* main text the central figure of this part was not Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami or “the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity” but Taka-Mi-Musubi or “the High-Integrity-Deity”.

4

The fourth topic is the support for the first king. The *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi* recorded similar stories. In both documents Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami helped the future first king conquer the enemies.

The *Kojiki* reads:

So when His Augustness Kamu-yamato-ihare-biko (the First king in the future - Touyama’s note) made a progress round from thence, and reached the village of Kumanu, a large bear came out of the mountain, and forthwith disappeared into it. Then His Augustness Kamu-yamato-ihare-biko suddenly fainted away, and his august army likewise all fainted and fell prostrate. At this time Takakurazhi (this is the name

of a person) of Kumanu came bearing one cross-sword to the place where the august-child of the Deity was lying prostrate and presented it to him, upon which the august child of the Heavenly Deity forthwith rose up, and said: "How long I have slept!" So when he accepted the cross-sword, the savage Deities of the mountains of Kumanu all spontaneously fell cut down. Then the whole august army, that had been bewildered and had fallen prostrate awoke and rose up. So the august child of the Heavenly Deity asked him how he had got the cross-sword. Takakurazhi replied, saying: "I was told in a dream that the two Deities the Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity and the High Integrating Deity commanded and summoned the Brave-Awful-Possessing-Male-Deity and charged him [thus]: 'The Central Land of Reed-Plains is painfully uproarious, — it is. Our august children must be ill at ease. As [therefore] the Central Land of Reed-Plains is a land which thou specially subduedst thou the Brave-Awful-Possessing-Male-Deity shalt descend [thither].'

In the *Nihongi* the record reads:

Leading his army forward, he arrived at Port Arazaka in Kumano [*also called Nishiki bay*], where he put to death the Tohe of Nishiki. At this time the Gods belched up a poisonous vapor, from which everyone suffered. For this reason the Imperial army was again unable to exert itself. Then there was there a man by name Kumano no Takakuraji, who unexpectedly had a dream, in which Ama-terasu no Oho-kami spoke to Take-mika-tsuchi no Kami ("the Brave-Awful-Possessing-Male-Deity" in the Chamberlain's *Kojiki* - Touyama's note), saying: - "I still hear a sound of disturbance from the Central Land of Reed-Plains. Do thou again go and chastise it." Take-mika-tsuchi no Kami answered and said: - "Even if I go not, I can send down my sword, with which I subdued the land, upon which the country will of its own accord become peaceful." To this Ama-terasu no Kami assented. Thereupon Take-mika-tsuchi no Kami addressed Takakuraji, saying: - "My sword, which is called Futsu no Mitama, I will now place in thy storehouse. Do thou take it and present it to the Heavenly Grandchild." Takakuraji said "Yes," and thereupon awoke. The next morning, as instructed in his dream, he opened the storehouse, and on looking in, there was indeed there a sword which had fallen down (from Heaven), and was standing upside down on the plank floor of the storehouse. So he took it and offered it to the Emperor. At this time the Emperor happened to be asleep. He awoke suddenly, and said: - "What a long time I have slept!" On inquiry he found that the troops who had been affected by the poison had all recovered their senses and were afoot.

Although the two documents recorded similar stories about the first king's conquering enemies, the two documented different stories when the fourteenth king's wife sent the military to Korean peninsula. The *Kojiki* reads:

This Empress, Her Augustness Princess Okinaga-tarashi, was at that time, divinely possessed. So when the Heavenly Sovereign, dwelling at the palace of Kashihi in Tsukushi, was about to smite the Land of Kumaso. The Heavenly Sovereign played on his august lute, and the Prime Minister the Noble Take-uchi, being in the pure court, requested the divine orders. Hereupon the Empress, divinely possessed, charged him with this instruction and counsel: "There is a land to the Westward, and in that land is abundance of various treasures dazzling to the eye, from gold and silver downwards. I will now bestow this land upon thee.".....

Then [the Noble Take-uchi] requested more particularly [saying]: "I wish to know the august names of the Great Deities whose words have now thus instructed us." Forthwith [the Deities] replied, saying: "It is the august doing of the Great-August-Heaven-Shining-Deity, likewise it is the three great Deities Bottom-Possessing-Male, Middle-Possessing Male and Surface-Possessing-Male. (At this time the august names of these three great Deities were revealed.)

By following this prophecy, the "Empress" was successful to conquer Korean kingdoms.

On the other hand, the *Nihongi* recorded:

The Empress, having selected a lucky day entered the Palace of worship, and discharged in person the office of priest. She commanded Takechi no Sukune to play on the lute, and the Nakatomi, Igatsu no Omi, was designated as Saniha. Then placing one thousand pieces of cloth, high pieces of cloth, on the top and bottom of the lute, she prayed saying: - "Who is the God who on a former day instructed the Emperor? I pray that I may know his name." After seven days and seven nights there came an answer, saying: - "I am the Deity who dwells in the Shrine of split-bell Isuzu in the district of hundred-transmit Watarahi in the province of divine wind Ise, and my name is Tsuki-sakaki idzu no mi-tama amaakaru Muka-tsu hime no Mikoto. Again she inquired: - "Other than this Deity, are there any Deities present?" The answer was: - "I am the Deity who comes forth on the ears of the flag-like Eulalia, and my dwelling is in the district of Aha in Ada-fushi in Oda." She inquired: - "Are there others?" There was an answer, saying: - "There is the Deity who rules in Heaven, who rules in the Void, the gem-casket-entering-prince, the awful Kotoshiro-

nushi.”.....

She inquired: – “Are there others?” There was an answer saying: – “It is not known whether there are others or not.” Hereupon the Saniha said: – “There is no answer now, but they will speak again afterwards.” So there was an answer, saying: – “There are the Gods who have settled to the bottom of the water of the Little Strait of Tachibana in the Land of Hiuga, and who are produced and dwell there like fresh water plants. Their names are Uha-tsutsu no wo, Nake-tsutsu no wo, and Soko-tsutsu no wo. She inquired: – “Are there others?” There was an answer, saying: – “Whether there are or not is unknown.” And nothing more was ever said as to the existence of other.

The *Nihongi* also recorded that the queen was divinely possessed, however, Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami didn't help the queen conquer Korean kingdoms. Comparing the descriptions of this queen's activities in the *Kojiki* with the *Nihongi*, it is clear that the *Kojiki* focused on Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami as the helper of the queen while the *Nihongi* did not.

5

In the *Manyoshu* poets did not describe Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami except Kakinomoto Hitomaro and Otomo Yakamochi. However, that deity in their poems did not have even one of the three characteristics which are regarded as the deity's. In the poem number 167 by Kakinomoto Hitomaro the eight hundred myriad deities decided the rulers of heaven and earth separately, and king Temmu who was the thirty-ninth king in the imperial genealogy descended from heaven to become the founder of the monarchy. The ruler of heaven named “Ama-Terasu-Hirume no Mikoto” in that poem was ordered to control heaven by the eight hundred myriad deities and had no influence on Temmu's descent to earth.

In the poem number 199 composed by the same poet, Hitomaro, the same king went to earth from heaven without any deity's order. Besides in Otomo Yakamochi's poems such as poem number 4094 no descriptions were given to Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami and heaven's deities. The ancestor of the present kings descended from heaven without having any order by any deity in heaven. Otomo Yakamochi described “Ama-Derasu Kami” in only one poem number 4125. That poem,

edited by early eighth century.

That hypothesis can explain the reason why: (1) princess Nukata and king Tenchi did not mention Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami which was supposed to be their ancestor in the *Kojiki* and at least one of their ancestors in the *Nihongi*; (2) princess Nukata and king Tenchi paid respect to Miwa's deity because the deity was the main one in the old dynasty's religion; (3) in the Hitomaro's poems 167 and 199 Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami was not the ancestor of the present king Temmu; (4) in the Yakamochi's poem 4125 Ama-Derasu Kami was connected with a Chinese legend without any relationship with Japanese imperial family's myths.

Probably Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami and its shrine at Ise were new for the imperial family members and the courtiers in the seventh and eighth centuries. Therefore that deity did not penetrate into their hearts which were the base of their religious and poetic emotions. Although their religion and poems were not connected with Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami, probably they needed a deity or deities to support their monarchy. That deity or one of the deities was Ama-Terasu-Omi-Kami and its shrine at Ise. This deity became the main pillar to build up the imperial houses which were reorganized into one genealogy.

A question may take place; why didn't they accept three dynasties? The reason why they built a line of the kings without preserving three dynasties' records was probably they needed a different myth from Chinese empire. According to the historiography of Wei dynasty a queen of a kingdom in the Japanese archipelago was appointed as a ruler of the kingdom by a Wei's emperor. That was an event in the third century. And in the historiography of Song dynasty Yuryaku was appointed by a Song's emperor as a king of a kingdom in Japan and a Song's general at the same time. The appointment was in the fifth century. According to the Japanese imperial genealogy in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi* Yuryaku was the twenty-first king.

Those Chinese historiographies recorded Wei and Song like suzerain states and Japanese kingdoms like vassal states or tributary. In this seeming feudalistic system the Japanese queen and kings depended on Chinese emperor's authority to rule their kingdoms.

The way of thinking which legitimised Chinese kings being able to appoint the Japanese queen and kings to be the rulers was Confucianism. In this Chinese thought heaven chose a man of virtue as a ruler of the world, and that man of virtue became the founder of a Chinese dynasty. Chinese historiographies recorded plural founders of plural Chinese dynasties. Reflecting the Chinese historical events, Confucianism claimed that heaven's will was changeable.

In those days the Chinese empire had a strong influence on the Japanese court. The Japanese courtiers needed a special thought against the authority of Chinese empire and Chinese emperor when they started to be independent. The thought which the Japanese courtiers created was one dynasty from the beginning of their dynasty to the present. In order to support this idea Japanese courtiers created another thought against Chinese thought. They claimed that Japanese heaven's will was unchangeable, and that the unchangeable heaven's will supported one dynasty in Japan. That was the struggle between the thoughts between Japan and China in the seventh and eighth centuries.

The *Kojiki*, the *Nihongi* and the *Manyoshu*'s poems described different myths to each other. It suggests us that the courtiers in the seventh and eighth centuries tried various ways of legitimising by telling different myths in order to establish authority on which they relied.

Although there were varieties of myths in the *Kojiki*, the *Nihongi* and the *Manyoshu*, the courtiers shared a common myth. That was the myth in which the ancestor of the Japanese monarchs was from heaven. Japanese courtiers tried to invent that mythology in order to support the independence of Japanese monarchy from Chinese empire.

6

About 1300 years later Japanese political leaders in the middle of the nineteenth century again needed the thought of independence. In that time it was not from China but from Western powers. By that time Western powers almost ended to divide the world into their colonies. Japanese political leaders noticed the danger of

being colonized and they claimed the superiority of Japan to western powers. The ideology of their claim was based on the continuity of the Japanese kings from the beginning of history.

The Constitution of the Empire of Japan, which was promulgated in 1889, declared:

Article 1 The Empire of Japan shall be reigned over by a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal.

Article 3 The Emperor is sacred and inviolable.

“(A) line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal” and “sacred” are vague. However, eighth century’s documents, the *Kojiki*, the *Nihongi* and the *Manyoshu*, give us clues to understand what they meant. This essay already discussed “a line of Emperors unbroken for ages eternal”. The meaning of “sacred” is ambiguous although this essay also referred to this concept. One of the two meanings of that concept was that Japanese monarchs are descendants of heaven’s deity. This meaning was given by the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*. And the second meaning was that Japanese monarchs are deities. This meaning was given by *Manyoshu*’s poems, particularly by Hitomaro and Yakamochi.

Besides, the promulgation’s date of *The Constitution of the Empire of Japan* was interesting. That was the 11th of February. That was the day when the first king ascended to the throne according to the *Nihongi*.

By reviving the ancient myths, the Japanese political leaders in modern time tried to establish a national entity to support the independence of Japan from the Western powers. The prime ministerial visit to Ise Shrine in the beginning of the year of 2007 was one of the versions of the ancient myths in the modern time.