

Taoist Thought, Political Speculation, and the Three Creational Deities of the *Kojiki*

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»The names of the deities that came into existence in the Plain of High Heaven when Heaven and Earth began to unfold were Ame.no mi-naka-nushi.no kami, next Taka-mi-musubi.no kami, next Kami-musubi.no kami. These three deities all came into existence as single deities, and they hid their bodies« – thus the first sentences of the *Kojiki* (NKBT 1: 50/51; cf. CHAMBERLAIN 1982 [1882]: 15; PHILIPPI 1969: 47). They mark the beginning of the mythical narrative; but instead of the plastic, figurative style of myth they give the strong impression of speculative thinking. This has not escaped scholarly attention.

In his first »additional note« Philippi (1969: 397) more or less repeats the opinion of Matsumura Takeo (1955: 39) when he writes: »Among the first triad of deities, Amë-nö-mi-naka-nusi-nö-kamï appears to be the embodiment of an abstract concept rather than an object of religious worship. Kamï-musubi-nö-kamï seems to be merely the counterpart, perhaps the female counterpart, of Taka-mi-musubi-nö-kamï, the only one of the three to play an active rôle in the mythology outside of Chapter 1«. He further deems the first two chapters to be »the intellectual products of the literati familiar with Chinese culture who were charged with editing a national mythology«, adding a reference to Tsuda Sô-kichi's *Nihon koten no kenkyû* (I: 325-41).

Meanwhile, studies by Kojima Noriyuki (1962) and Hirohata Sukeo (1977) devoted especially to the elucidation of Chinese influence on the *Kojiki* and other early Japanese texts touch again upon these problems. We are grateful for the many hints we have gained from their work; nevertheless, our opinion differs in several respects.

The first sentence of the *Kojiki* begins with >Heaven<, as it should be; then follows the Earth. But Matsumura (1955: 38) had already remarked, in accordance with former scholars, that this first sentence also shows a discrepancy: Heaven and Earth were just beginning to take form, so how then was it possible that deities came into existence in the >Plain of High Heaven<? He sees a given and indissoluble connection of Taka-mi-musubi with Takamagahara, the >Plain of High Heaven<, both of »northern origin«; thus necessarily Takamagahara became the location for the whole triad. But he does not dwell further on the subject.

Evidently, the >Plain of High Heaven< of Japanese mythology is not the same as the Heaven of >Heaven and Earth<, the latter to all appearances being only an adaptation of the Chinese compound *t'ien-ti* >Heaven [and] Earth<.

Thus there is no real equation of the Chinese concept of Heaven and the Japanese concept of Takamagahara, the >Plain of High Heaven<, as a place of mythical geography. >Heaven and Earth< have a beginning, but Takamagahara exists on another level. Hirohata (1977: 64, 70ff.), however, takes Takamagahara as an equivalent of >Heaven< and hence the unfolding of Heaven as the unfolding of Takamagahara. He sees only conformity where in reality we are confronted with two entirely different concepts, one philosophical, the other mythical.

If we want to avoid the easy way of assuming that the literati *subconsciously* followed the Chinese model of creation with which they were familiar from such encyclopedic works as the *Wen-hsüan* or the *I-wen lei-chü* (cf. KOJIMA 1962: 201f.), we have to find the reason why the *Kojiki* begins its mythical narrative by mentioning just these three deities. This seems the more important since in the *Nihongi* (var. *Nihon shoki*) these same three deities appear only in an appendix to variant IV of the creation myth and are thus put aside to an entirely insignificant place. Ô.no Yasumaro in his *Preface* to the *Kojiki*, more or less commenting on its content, shows these deities in the full context of a Chinese model: »I, Yasumaro, say: The chaotic primeval matter was already congealing, but breath and form had not yet appeared. There was nought named, nought made, who could know its shape? But Heaven and Earth first parted and the Three Deities performed the commencement of creation« (NKBT 1: 42/43; cf. CHAMBERLAIN 1982: 1; PHILIPPI 1969: 37; FLORENZ 1919: 3).¹ There is all the Chinese speculation, yet no answer to our question of *why* these deities head the narrative of the *Kojiki*.

The conspicuous position to which this triad of deities is assigned in the *Kojiki* can only be due to religious or political speculation essential for the concept of the *Kojiki* as a whole. Yasumaro's *Preface* recounts the guide-lines for preparing the compilation of the *Kojiki* given by Emperor Tenmu. As this *Preface* was in fact »a document presenting the *Kojiki* to Empress Gemmei« (PHILIPPI 1969: 37 n. 1) there is no reason not to take it at face-value. This *Preface* gives clear evidence that, whoever was responsible for collecting the materials, it was Emperor Tenmu who decided what was »true« and had to be included and what was »false« and therefore had to be corrected. With Emperor Tenmu standing behind the redaction of the whole work we can be sure that these three deities must have been of special importance for him and his

1 It is unfortunate that Paul (1993: 51) mistakes the *Preface* of the *Kojiki* for the *Kojiki* itself, which makes quite a difference. However, it is the question of »when did philosophical Taoism and Yin-Yang cosmology reach Japan?« that interests him most and in this connection I should like to correct a misleading citation (PAUL 1993: 55) of my paper (1989: 321ff.): There is no proof whatsoever for »deutlichen Einfluß« of *Wu-tou-mi*-Taoism in the Yamatai state of Queen Pi-mi-hu. All we can speak of is the possibility of an influence of Taoist thinking on the lowest level, while the picture of this state and its queen given in the *Wei-chih* is an idealization; it consists of the standard formula for the utopian state the realization of which was striven for by *Wu-tou-mi*- and *T'ai-p'ing*-Taoism. It is only much later that concrete knowledge of philosophical Taoism can be expected in Japan.

intentions. Thus, first of all, we must ask what kind of deities they are, what was the role they played within the myths and for the Imperial House, and what kind of speculation was responsible for their prominent position.

Of Ame.no mi-naka-nushi, the first of the three deities who effect creation, we know only the name: Lord of the August Center of Heaven. Nowhere else in the mythical narrative is this god mentioned again. Not a single old text contains his name; no shrine is known where he was worshipped; and it was only during the 13th century that for the first time he became the object of theological speculation within some of the medieval syncretistic doctrines. The *Kokushi daijiten* (1: 311d s.v.) assumes that he was brought to life merely in order to form, together with the other two creational deities, the triad which would be necessary for arranging all the deities coming into existence at the beginning of the world into categories of 3–5–7. This seems too poor a reason to be taken seriously. As a guide for our exploration there remain then only the name of the god and his outstanding position as a creational deity at the beginning of Heaven and Earth, and as such also his position at the beginning of the narrative of the *Kojiki*.

The center of heaven is at the same time its highest point; the god residing there as sovereign rules over the world. In the center of heaven, however, resides also the pole star; around this center rotates the firmament with all its stars – this is a concept widely-held in the northern parts of Asia (cf. Harva 1938: 37f.; Paulson 1962: 28ff.). There might have been such a concept in Japan too; but the speculative ideas concerning the pole star which are concealed behind the laconic text of the *Kojiki* clearly originate in Chinese philosophical thinking.

During the time of Tenmu the writings of Taoist thinkers of the Han period were *en vogue* among the intellectual élite of Japan. There we meet with the idea of the *t'ai-i*, the >Great One< or the >Great Oneness< in two forms: one as the designation of the pole star or of a deity representing this star, the other as the name of the primeval, undefinable entity in which everything originates. In *Huai-nan-tzu* (fasc. 14: 235), written in the 2nd century B.C., we read: »Pervading Heaven and Earth, in confused Unwrought Simplicity, with nothing created: this is called the Great Oneness« (Feng 1983: 399). One hundred years earlier, Lü Pu-wei had written: »Tao is the finest essence; it cannot form a shape, it cannot be named; if need be it can be designated as the Great Oneness« (*Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* fasc. 5: 47; cf. Wilhelm 1928: 57f.). Here the Great Oneness or the Great One stands for *tao* which embraces all; it designates the chaotical *Urfluidum* existing before Heaven and Earth were created, yet in which the forces creating Heaven and Earth and the >ten-thousand things< originate.

For the first time during the Han period *t'ai-i* appears to be deified; it stands for *T'ien-ti* or *T'ien-huang ta-ti*, the Celestial Emperor, the Supreme God, and at the same time for the pole star, his symbol or embodiment. Wechsler (1985: 109) observes that during Han times »stars came to be thought of as the

embodiment of ancestors, and star worship became popular. [...] The royal ancestors, it was thought, resided in the center of Heaven, in the region of our Polaris«. Heaven itself is divided into five palaces; the central palace comprises the pole star and the permanently visible circumpolar constellations, the Great and the Little Bear (or Great and Little Dipper, *Ursa major* and *Ursa minor*) and the Dragon (*Draco*). This central palace is the projection of the imperial capital with the residence of the sovereign, or as *Huai-nan-tzu* (fasc. 3: 39) writes: »[The constellation] *t'ai-wei* is the court of the Great One, [the constellation] Purple Palace is the dwelling of the Great One.« Polaris itself as the permanent residence of the Great One corresponds with the position of the emperor. The stars or constellations rotating around Polaris represent his consorts, princes, and dignitaries. *Ursa major* is his conveyance, it determines the Four Seasons, parts Yin and Yang, and keeps the Five Elements in balance (cf. NGO 1976: 177ff.).

Hirohata (1977: 76f.) points to many scholars, beginning with Tsuda Sôkichi, who have expressed the opinion that Ame.no mi-naka-nushi, the highest deity residing in the center of Heaven, is to be taken as the equivalent of the pole star, the Great One, and that he, therefore, represents the emperor as well as his ancestors. Hirohata (1977: 78f.) argues further that the myth equating Ame.no mi-naka-nushi with *T'ien-huang ta-ti* and putting him at the head of creation was meant to show that the Japanese emperor had this deity as his ancestor; during the ceremony of the *Daijôsai* he received the divine spirit of this deity and thus became himself *T'ien-huang ta-ti*.

This argumentation we can follow only partly. There can be no doubt that Ame.no mi-naka-nushi is the equivalent of Polaris, the Great One, the embodiment of *T'ien-huang ta-ti*; as such he is necessarily the celestial counterpart of the emperor and his ancestors while the emperor on his side represents this deity on earth. This is an immediate, direct relation which illumines at once the absolutely unique and true position of the emperor; there is no need for any genealogical relation.

It was during the time of Emperor Tenmu that these ideas were brought into prominence. There is some controversy (cf. HIROHATA 1977: 83f.), but it seems again to be during his time that the Chinese compound *T'ien-huang* >Celestial Emperor<, now pronounced as Sinico-Japanese *Tennô*, became one of the official appellations of the Emperor, and also during this time that the different buildings of the imperial court were given the names of the corresponding celestial palaces. Last but not least, it was only from Emperor Tenmu on that the emperor was deemed to be *kami*, a living god (cf. NAUMANN 1988: 174; 1970: 12f.).

The presence of these concepts was impressively demonstrated when in 1972 the Takamatsu-tumulus, a tomb constructed around the end of the 7th century, was opened. For a long time it had been thought to be an imperial tomb but later it was eliminated from the list of presumable imperial tombs. The interior of the tomb as a whole offers the full picture of Chinese cosmological speculation. The

painted ceiling shows the starred Heaven with all the constellations related to the emperor. Thus it is now supposed to be the tomb either of Crown-Prince Kusakabe, the son of Emperor Tenmu and Empress Jitô, or Kusakabe's son Emperor Monmu, both of whom died young. As an imperial tomb it was soon closed again (cf. YOSHINO 1975: 77-92; NAUMANN 1994: 41f.)

It is evident that during Tenmu's time astronomy as well as astrological speculation of Chinese provenience had reached a first culminating point. In the year 675 for the first time a »star-divination-tower« was built. This coincides with the first mention of the »Department of the Yin and Yang« which had »charge of astronomy and calendar-making« (NKBT 68: 416/417; ASTON 1956: II, 326). The revitalization of the Ise-cult by Tenmu was another measure where astrological speculation concerning Polaris seems to play an important rôle. The yearly ceremonies in both shrines, the Inner dedicated to the sun-goddess Amaterasu, and the Outer dedicated to Toyo'uke, the goddess of food, show that Amaterasu was equated with the Great One, Toyo'uke with the Great Dipper, the »minister« of the Great One (cf. YOSHINO 1974: 209f.; 1978: 109ff., 112ff., 144ff., 185f.; NAUMANN 1994: 42ff.).

As an embodiment of the Great One or the Great Oneness, Ame.no mi-naka-nushi represents also *t'ai-i* in the original sense, *t'ai-i* as the first beginning, shapeless, boundless, unlimited, the first principle (*Urprinzip*) in and from which everything originates. The *Tao-te-ching* (42, fasc. 2: 26) makes clear how this is to be understood, cited again in *Huai-nan-tzu* (fasc. 7: 99): »The one produced duality. Duality evolved into trinity, and trinity evolved into the ten thousand things« (FENG 1983: 398). Commenting on this Duyvendak (1954: 99) remarks that it is the duality of Yin and Yang which emerges from the One, while the »trinity« alluded to might mean the trinity of Heaven, Earth, and Man. When we return to the first sentences of the *Kojiki* with Ame.no mi-naka-nushi as the equivalent of the Great One, it is only natural to assume that Taka-mi-musubi and Kami-musubi form a duality corresponding to the one of Yin and Yang. They are >single deities< but their names are related to each other, and in the *Kogo-shûi* Kami-musubi is already held to be female. Again, together with Ame.no mi-naka-nushi they form a trinity.

It is the word *-musubi* (Old Japanese *musuF*), the common part of the names of Taka-mi-musubi and Kami-musubi, which suggests a duality, and it is the supposed meaning of this word *-musubi* which suggests the actual conformity with Yin and Yang. In the *Nihongi*, *musuF* is written in phonogram orthography as well as in semantograms. The semantograms consist of two graphs meaning >divine (or spiritual) effecting force of creation<. Thus Taka-mi-musubi.no kami would mean >God of the High August Effecting Force of Creation<, while Kami-musubi.no kami would mean >God of the Divine Effecting Force of Creation<. It is quite another question whether this semantic explanation may at the same time also serve as an etymological explanation for OJ *musuF*.

In the *Nihongi* the god (or goddess?) Kami-musubi is met with only once in a secondary variant where he (or she) evidently takes the part of Taka-mi-

musubi. The *Kojiki* mentions Kami-musubi four times, always in connection with deities of the old Izumo region. Here the deity is also named Kami-musubi mi-oya, >August Ancestor Kami-musubi<; here too the sex of the deity remains unclear. The *Izumo-fudoki*, presented to the throne in 733, claims the parenthood of Kami-musubi for five deities worshipped in shrines of this province. In its variant of the myth telling of the building of a palace for the god ōkuni-nushi, Kami-musubi plays an important part. The *Izumo-fudoki* is later than the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, thus it is doubtful whether or not these genealogical connections are the product of later political calculations. Kuratsuka (1978: 240) is of the opinion that the god has only slight connections with Izumo.

The situation is quite different in regard to Taka-mi-musubi. He is, to cite Matsumura (1955: 39), the only »live« or »active« god among the three creational deities. He is actively involved at every single turning point within the mythical narrative important for the imperial family. In contrast to Ame.no mi-naka-nushi, there is an obvious genealogical connection with the imperial family: as grandfather of Ninigi, the Heavenly Grandchild, on his mother's side he is indeed its first matrilineal ancestor.

In the *Kojiki* Taka-mi-musubi is also named *Takagi.no kami* >God High Tree<. This was perhaps even his original name. It would be in conformity with the mythical geography of Takamagahara, the >Plain of High Heaven<, and it would explain why Takamagahara is selected as the place of coming into existence of this god, and hence of the other creational deities, while nothing is said about the place from where the other gods emerged.

The special significance that these two deities held for Tenmu and his house becomes evident in their cultic functions. They head the list of the eight deities worshipped in the *hasshinden* >Hall of the Eight Deities< in the >Department for the Gods< (*jingi-kan*) on the special behalf of the emperor. These same deities are worshipped on the occasion of the *mi-tama-furi* >shaking of the soul<, a ceremony for revitalizing the vital force of the emperor, later known as *chinkon-sai* >ceremony for pacifying the vital force<. In Tenmu 14 (685), on the 6th day of the Eleventh Month this ceremony was performed for the first time (NKBT 68: 473; cf. ASTON 1956: II, 373). This day corresponded to December 25, which means that it was near the winter solstice, and it fell on the Middle Day of the Tiger. Here again, Chinese and indigenous conceptions were brought together. First of all, the ceremony imitates part of a mythical scene: the preparations for luring out the sun-goddess from the rock-cave where she had hidden, a scene that was designated to show the restitution of light and life on earth. The sun-goddess was only hidden, not dead – like the sun reaching the lowest point in the winter-solstice. The emperor is likened to the sun, and the ceremony was held to strengthen his vital forces, in the same way that the sun gains new vital force as soon as its deepest point is overcome. On the other hand, the day of the tiger is chosen because in Chinese thought the tiger stands symbolically for the west, representing illness and death (and – within the oldest Chinese concepts – rebirth; cf. ANTONI 1982: 238ff.). The winter-solstice

combined with the day of the tiger thus signifies the lowest point of the vital forces in a double way (cf. NAUMANN 1988: 85).

Details of the performance of this ceremony are for the first time known from the *Kujiki*, still later from the *Engishiki*. Thus we can only state that for the time of Tenmu when the ceremony is first mentioned it must have contained strong magical elements while the greater part of the eight gods invoked by the >Department for the Gods< had very probably been speculatively contrived by it for the purpose. This holds especially true for the three gods with *-musubi* as part of their names. The way these gods are presented in the *Kogo-shûi* (cf. Florenz 1919: 423, 433) enhances this impression (cf. NAUMANN 1988: 154-156). Moreover, the names of two of them, Iku-musubi and Taru-musubi, coincide with the names of two >pearls<, *iku-tama* and *taru-tama*, used in the ceremony according to the *Kujiki* (fasc. 7: 202).

Interestingly enough, on the same day on which this ceremony was performed, Popchang and Kumchong (Aston transcribes the names as Pöpchang and Gonju), two priests from Paekche, »presented to the Emperor an infusion of Wokera«, *atractylis ovata*, a plant the root of which was used for medical purposes. When partaken over some time it »soll den Körper leicht machen, das Leben verlängern, den Hunger abwehren«, as Florenz (1919: 391, n. 76) remarks. As an entry in the *Nihongi* under Jitô (6th year/692, 2/11, NKBT 68: 513f.; ASTON 1956: II, 405) shows, Popchang was *onmyô-shi* >professor of the Yin and Yang<. The Taoist goal of prolonging life fits very well into the whole scheme.

When we now return to the *Kojiki* and the deities Taka-mi-musubi and Kami-musubi, and keep in mind how deeply the idea of Yin and Yang had permeated the thinking of the time, it then seems quite obvious that the two deities were conceived of as representations of the forces of Yin and Yang.

We see now that not only the *Nihongi* but also the *Kojiki* shows the strong influence of Chinese thinking. This we have to consider in several ways. Emperor Tenmu, initiator and >redactor< of the *Kojiki*, was well aware – as were those who compiled the *Nihongi* – that the beginning of this world necessarily could be but *one*. If not only the ideas of the Chinese thinkers were correct, but if what had been told in Japan from of old was valid as well, then it should be possible to bring the two concepts into harmony with each other. The three creational deities are the manifestation of the speculative grasping of the primeval beginning: Ame.no mi-naka-nushi stands for the Great One, Taka-mi-musubi and Kami-musubi represent Yin and Yang, the primeval forces which *effect* creation without generating themselves. That Taka-mi-musubi as well as Kami-musubi later on appear as ancestors of gods is the consequence of genuinely Japanese *genealogical* as well as *mythical* thought, while here the concept still remains within the bounds of genuinely Chinese *philosophical* thought. It is the latter which is also responsible for the numerical categories involved.

At the same time, and beginning with its first sentence, the ultimate purpose of the compilation of the *Kojiki* is disclosed. Ame.no mi-naka-nushi comprises the beginning of everything, and at the same time, as the first and highest of all gods, he is the heavenly counterpart and the symbol of the emperor. Through the identification of the emperor with Ame.no mi-naka-nushi, Lord of the August Center of Heaven, the person of the emperor is defined, and his divinity and his unambiguous and absolute position at the head of the state are set down. Again, Taka-mi-musubi and Kami-musubi are not only representations of the effecting forces of Yin and Yang; Taka-mi-musubi as the original divine ancestor of the imperial line is given a complementary *vis-à-vis*, Kami-musubi, who for his (or her) part is connected with the gods of Izumo. Behind this forced integration we may assume questions of legitimation which are again brought to the fore in the myth of the abdication of ôkuni-nushi in favor of the Heavenly Grandson.

Thus, the first sentences of the *Kojiki* connect without any hesitation cosmological and political speculations of Chinese provenience with the political speculations and the highest deity of the Japanese Imperial Family.

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