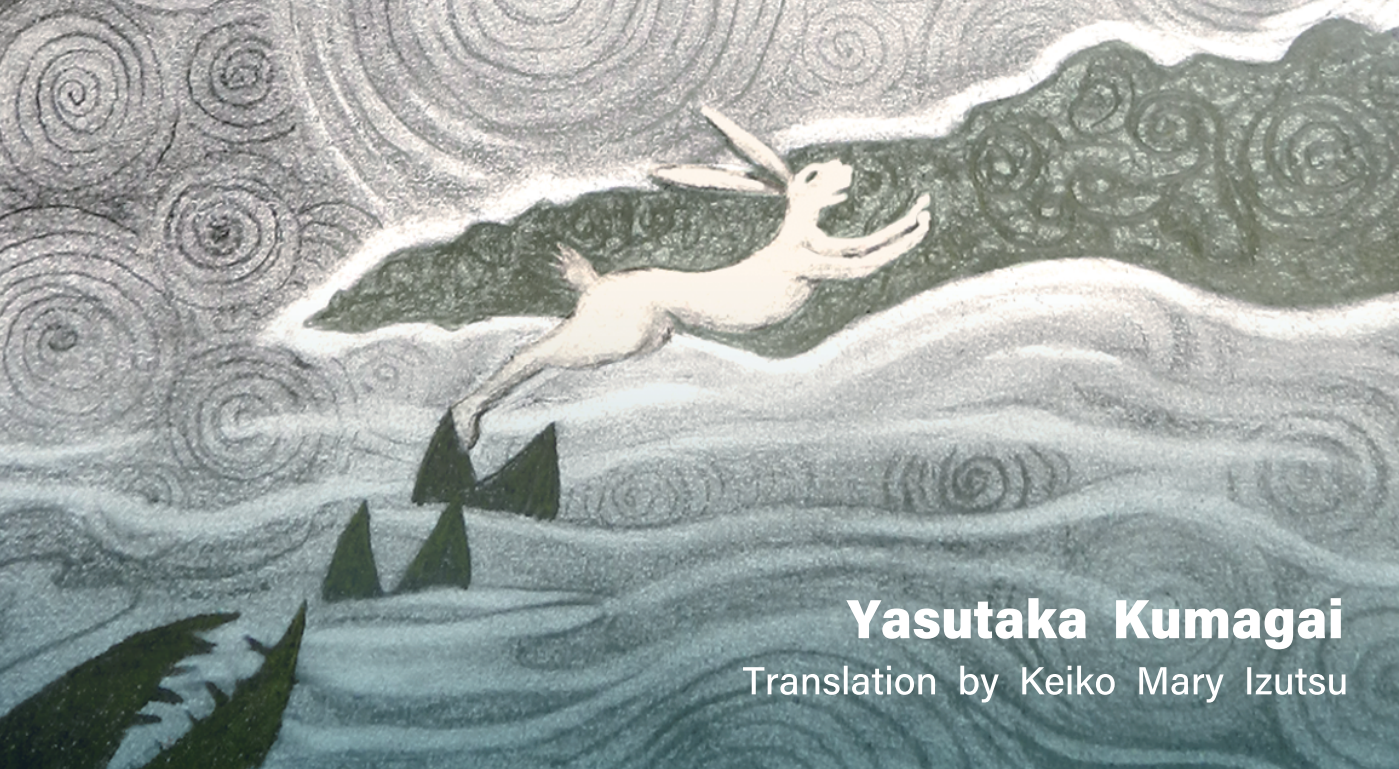


ETERNAL LAND
Kojiki
LAND OF LIFE



Yasutaka Kumagai
Translation by Keiko Mary Izutsu







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Prologue

What is the *Kojiki* ?

It is the extant oldest chronicle of Japan compiled nearly one thousand three hundred years ago. I was not familiar with it until I was given a thin booklet of *Kojiki* by Dr. Kumagai about seventeen years ago. I was a staff of a culture school, and while standing at the reception desk, he came to me and said: “Please read this booklet I wrote.”

There was a well-known anecdote of a white hare and Ōkuninushi, one of the central deities in *Kojiki*. I had heard the story, but I didn’t know the details. After reading his booklet, I knew Ōkuninushi experienced terrible bullying from his brothers and overcame a complex divinity trial before transforming into the integrated country’s ruler. This story encouraged me, and I figured: “I do not know my country’s myths at all; I should learn it.”

So, a couple of months later, I asked him: “Please teach us *Kojiki* in our culture school.” Immediately, he agreed, saying: “I’ll be pleased to talk about it and especially hope the younger generation will learn *Kojiki*. They can practically use the tools of *Kojiki* in their lives.”

At this moment, my instinct worked: “There is no doubt something in *Kojiki* resonated with me.” Although I had no idea, I was thrilled to know the sparkling jewel and began learning it.

Although the generosity of the Divinities in the *Kojiki* world inspired me at first, as his lesson was once a month, it took a long time, about five years, to read through the text. The second time, I spent the exact span of five years, but it enthralled me more than the first, and I’m now in the third circle and started translating this book. The more I read, the more it taught me the deeper layer of *Kojiki* and an unknown layer of myself. Also, various questions arose. For instance, what do the three precious

treasures of the imperial family represent? Or, among the magic spells written, what happened to the missing powerful spells in the original version? The quest for those answers is a fascinating challenge.

Now, looking back on my long journey of *Kojiki*, I feel grounded on this earth and more energetic than before. I've gotten to know our ancestors a bit and understand myself on a deeper level. Adults and children can benefit from reading mythology because they can learn how to be emotionally stable. Probably, we subconsciously take in our tribe's experience and wisdom and feel their power and courage.

Another reason for emotional stability is in the text's formation. Although Greek and other European myths are foreign to me, the significant difference is that we are descendants of the Divinities. Therefore, returning to the days of the Deities such as Amaterasu, Susanoo, and Ōkuninushi help us connect with our ancestors. Living with suffering is inevitable, but mythology pushes us to transcend our hardships.

For me, the most intriguing place in the text is *Yomotsu-Hirasaka*, a boundary between the land of life and the land of the dead. Izanaki and Izanami exchanged their leaving words, Susanoo admitted Ōkuninushi and gave him magical weapons, and Ninigi met a vanguard Sarutahiko there. Mythology seems to play a similar role as this boundary. It is the bridge between this mortal and immortal world, conscious and unconscious, cognitive knowing and unknown, and an exciting spot full of possibility to change us.

As our origin is a multinational race, we have grown by respecting each person's values. So, why not dive into the world of Japanese mythology now?

Keiko Mary Izutsu

Introduction

As a graduate student majoring in Japanese history, the fascinating theme was the implications of politics and religion, especially the era from the late 7th to the 10th century. Although the economy is a crucial dynamic for politics, I was convinced religion influenced politics. So, my thesis was “The governance of Ritsuryo period¹ and religious ritual of the deities.”

In my forties, I became curious about Japanese thinking. For instance, “What is behind the Japanese way of thinking?” Or “What is the peculiarity of the Japanese Thinking?” So, to find answers, I focused on mythology and submitted the doctoral dissertation entitled “The view of the cycle of birth-and-death of the ancients” and released an excerpt from this book. I relied a great deal on *Kojiki*.

Since then, I have frequently had the opportunity to give lectures on the Japanese mythology of *Kojiki*. In 2007 and 2008, I talked in Oita, Kyushu, and published a thin text, “*Nihon Shinwa Nyumon*,” from my presentations. Although the circulation number was 1000, these were sold quickly due to the relatively low price and receiving orders in 100 volumes.

I wasn’t satisfied with this thin booklet because it was too simple to review Japanese mythology, so I decided to expand the information based on that text. But trying to fit everything made it more intractable for the general public due to its expertise. So, I wrote this book to break down as much information as possible.

I hope to introduce Japanese mythology to multiple readers, not only to

¹ The era from the late 7th to the 10th century.

the young generation in Japan but also in the world. It makes it possible to explain our roots and the unique way of thinking, the ancient worthy wisdom to live by, and valuable hints to handle the mixed problems we face.

Today, the modern ages have evolved scientific technology, capitalism, and enrichment to our lives. However, our earth suffers from various environmental issues and egoism based on extreme individualism. I believe you receive a dynamic key to resolving these issues.

Preface

There was once a legendary country called 'Yamato' in the Yamato Basin valley in Nara prefecture, and it was probably the beginning of Japan. While taking various political systems throughout its timeline, Yamato has grown to the present nation. The name 'Yamato' has changed to 'Japan' during a relatively early phase of history, though we cannot say precisely when.

Before the Second World War, unlike the Western calendar, our calendar starts from the first Emperor Jinmu's enthronement. So, if we correlate his enthronement to the Western calendar, it was 660 B.C.; but now, no scholar believes this. Then, when was his enthronement? This issue has been an ongoing dispute from the Edo era (1603–1867) to the present day. Especially the historian Michio Naka (1868–1912) focused on this matter academically. Now, even though the starting point is obscure, whether we can deny his existence or not is another matter.

I believe he lived and left his mark. Thinking of our oral traditions, they are not fictitious, but they are a bit factual. Some were dramatized in various ways or changed into another story by passing through its transmission. Accordingly, our oral tradition is not history, but we can glimpse fragments of history hidden in its background.

So, Yamato presumably conquered most parts of Japan around the 4th century. Incidentally, we cannot pretend that Yamato appeared all of a sudden, and the country's origin could have started long before and gradually developed into the land of Yamato.

I assume Jinmu was the head of such a small-scale country in the Kashihara region of the Yamato basin. So, if we calculate from the establishment of his country, it is not necessarily wrong to say that we

have such a long history of almost two thousand years. But, as Michiyo Naka emphasizes, it is ridiculous to define his enthronement as 660 B.C.

Gradually, the head of the country came to be called 'Ou' 王 in the process of unification of Japan and changed to 'Ōkimi' 大王 and 'Tenno' 天皇. The power of politics moved to the Fujiwara clan, a powerful family of regents in Japan in the 8th century, and it moved to Kamakura Bakufu, Muromachi Bakufu, and Edo Bakufu. Although its political style has changed in various ways, the Imperial family has been the symbol of the state for more than two thousand years from the start of Jinmu's country. It is rare in world history.

Kojiki and *Nihon Shoki* are the mythology and chronicles compiled to tell the origin of the country of Yamato, so we often find explanations such as "This is the origin of 〇〇" in the text. This explanation testifies that the purpose of the ancients was to bring the origin of their country, especially the origin of the ruler 'Tenno.'

The 40th Emperor Tenmu had launched the historiography project of *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* in the era of the 7th century. Some mythology originated in the Jomon oral tradition, and others came from abroad. Some disappeared from the Japanese traditions, while others evolved into different stories. What is left is the essence of what our ancestors wanted to pass on to us. So, to learn mythology is to hear the message of our ancestors and pay attention to their practical wisdom.

Mythology and *Kojiki*

What exactly is mythology? Generally, humans play the leading roles in the story, but in mythology, the main characters are non-human and other supernatural figures. So, mythology deals with deities; however, it was not “the story of the deities” initially. Storytellers talked about their heroes or worthy wisdom with the signs of the time. As time passed, these stories changed little by little and sublimated to the mythology of the deities.

Myth is full of the wisdom of the tribe

Some say, “If people forget about their myth, their nation will finish.” Why?

The reason is that mythology is the crystallization of the worthy wisdom of the tribe, and the essence left after a long process of transmission. Although it is still shrouded in mystery and riddles, reading mythology is so exciting that we can unveil the mystery of hidden treasures and find the basis of our spirit and identity. Mythology is something we should remember rather than learn.

When we hear the term ‘mythology,’ it reminds us of *Kojiki* or *Nihon Shoki*, the earliest surviving accounts. We also have *Fudoki* (surviving local reports) and folklore, and among these, some materials take us back to the timeless days, like the ancient Jomon period (thousands of years ago).

For instance, in *Kojiki*, they have written a story of the goddess, Izanami.



When she gave birth to the deity of fire Kagutsuchi, her private parts burned, and she died. Japanese classical scholar Atsuhiko Yoshida² says this story originates in the religious rites using the Jomon pottery shaped like a woman's face if looked at from afar. By setting fire inside the pottery, it appears that the goddess suffers extreme pains of labor.

As fire is the most imperative, they performed the ritual to appreciate the goddess Izanami who produced fire at the expense of her life. Subsequently, mythology tells the background of our religious beliefs and experiences.

So, we should never forget mythology. As previously mentioned, some have originated in the story of the Jomon period, and some have derived from various folks from the Pacific Ocean Coast areas, such as the story "Umisachi and Yamasachi," which I will describe later.

The Intention of storyteller and compiler

Although the source of the stories is global, in a long process of its transmission in the Japanese Archipelago, people added their local ideas and spirits to the original stories, making each story unique. Accordingly, even though the material was the same, the theme of each regional myth had varied.

Moreover, in the editorial process of *Kojiki* or *Nihon Shoki*, the compilers also added their intentions to the original stories. In other words, the compilers reconstructed the stories of each clan in various regions under the new theme.

² Ref. Japanese Goddess faith

The historiography project of *Kojiki* might have been initiated in the era of **Emperor Tenmu** (631-686) to tell the origin of the nation and the emperors, so when we read *Kojiki*, we have to separate the compilers' intention and the ancestors' wisdom.

Kojiki and Nihon Shoki

'*Kiki*' (記紀) is a collective designation of *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*. The term '*Kiki*' consist of '*ki*' of *Kojiki* (古事記) and '*ki*' of the *Nihon Shoki* (日本書紀.) In these two materials, of course, there are some similarities and differences.

The preface of *Kojiki* describes: "**Empress Genmei** ordered **Ōno Yasumaro** to compile *Kojiki* in 711 and he completed in 712. Eight years later, **Toneri Shinno** compiled *Nihon Shoki* and presented it to **Empress Gensho** in 720."

Kojiki consists of only three volumes. Conversely, *Nihon Shoki* consists of thirty volumes with a genealogical tree of the emperors, although this is missing now. *Nihon Shoki*, a Japanese official history book, is written in chronological order in the Kanbun style (Chinese classic) modeled on Chinese historical documents, compiled by an official organization of history books under the auspices of the imperial court. The evaluation point of *Nihon Shoki* is that they provided references to other legends besides the central text. They might have had numerous unverifiable stories, so they left these references with us for review.

As for other myths, we have *Fudoki* (regional history books). The government ordered each region to compile its history books in 713. Accordingly, *Hitachinokuni-Fudoki* (常陸国風土記), *Harimanokuni-Fudoki* (播磨国風土記), *Izumonokuni-Fudoki* (出雲国風土記), *Bingonokuni-Fudoki*

(豊後国風土記), and *Hizennokuni-Fudoki* (肥前国風土記) remain to this day in almost perfect condition. Some fragments of *Settsunokuni-Fudoki* (摂津国風土記) also remain. Unlike 'Kiki,' these *Fudoki* reflect their regions with their original colors. In this sense, *Fudoki* is a precious material.

Literary style and the time of the completion of *Kojiki*

As described, both *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* were compiled in the Nara period (710-794) and presented to the emperors. In my opinion, the official historiography projects had already been launched in the previous Asuka period by Emperor Tenmu's order and proceeded to the Nara era.

As for *Kojiki*, they might have completed most parts in the era of Tenmu. The ground on this is in the literary style. They had not yet established the Japanese writing system; they struggled to express our Japanese language. So, even though they borrowed Chinese characters (漢字), its literal style was not the Chinese classic (漢文) but the mixture of the Chinese classic and *Man'yōgana* style using the Chinese reading (音) and Japanese reading (訓).

From the reign of Empress Jito (645-703) to the early Nara period, we started a new writing style, *Senmyotai*. In this style, independent words were written in large letters with the sounds, and auxiliary words were written in small letters. It is the origin of a composition written in *kanji* and *hiragana*. In *Kojiki*, they did not use this rational *Senmyotai* in place of the original writing style. They could have used *Senmyotai* in 712, but they didn't use it. So, I presume they might have accomplished the majority of the text in the reign of Emperor Tenmu.

As described earlier, Empress Genmei ordered Ōno Yasumaro to

compile *Kojiki* on September 18th of the year 711, and Yasumaro offered it on January 28th of 712. So, he had less than four months before the completion.

According to the preface, they gathered various legends from numerous regions and let a person named **Hieda-no-Are** memorize all these legends. Hieda-no-Are was a person of a remarkable memory, and Yasumaro examined all these materials, weeded them out, and selected only mythologies that seemed correct.

Given the enormous amount of transcription, it seems impossible to complete it in four months. Then, what did Yasumaro do during the last four months? Supposedly, he just completed the manuscripts by providing explanatory notes under the main text or putting *furigana*, vocal reading for particular characters. Accordingly, before Yasumaro compiled the *Kojiki*, the text was ready to be offered.

Among three volumes of *Kojiki*, the first dealing with the deities, it was not the mythology for the ancients, still a history to answer the questions about cosmology, cosmogony, and the beginning of the country. This book goes into detail the first volume of *Kojiki* in line with my interpretation.

Episode 1

— Formation of the base of the world

The beginning of nature — Koto-Amatsukami

Preface (excerpt)

In the world, there was no existence, but chaos. There was no phenomenon, no name, no shape, and nothingness.

Central text

When the world was divided into Heaven and Earth, **Amenominakanushi-no-Kami** transpired in Takamagahara, Heaven. Next, **Takamimusuhi-no-Kami** and **Kamumusuhi-no-Kami** came into being. These three deities were all the Deities born alone and hid their persons.

As previously explained, the history books or mythologies were primarily to help understand “the beginning of the country” and to pass on this information to the next generation. The first volume of *Kojiki* starts with cosmogony and cosmology.

Amenominakanushi-no-Kami transpired first. It is the most significant deity, and its work is not specified but the whole Universe itself. As *Kojiki* describes: “Amenominakanushi-no-Kami hid its person,” it is immanent in the Universe, but we cannot visualize its spirit. Ultimately, we will never meet Amenominakanushi-no-Kami again in the whole text of *Kojiki*.

Examining the words of Takamimusuhi-no-Kami and Kamumusuhi-no-Kami, as the first syllable of ‘Takami’ and ‘Kamu’ of Takamimusuhi and Kamumusuhi are eulogistic words for the deities, the essence of these deities is in the term ‘*musuhi*,’ which divide into *musu* and *hi*. ‘*Musu*’ is a verb that means ‘bear’ or ‘grow’ (as used for the terms Musume for a daughter and Musuko for a son), and ‘*hi*’ is a spiritual power. Therefore, *musuhi* is a producing power of the Universe. The linguist Kazutami Nishimiya³ explains that there was only an intransitive verb for *musu* in ancient. So, ‘*musuhi*’ is a power to produce divinities spontaneously.

Looking at Japan’s environment, numberless sprouts pop up in spring and grow thickly in summer due to the mild and humid climate. My hometown is in the mountain area of Hyogo prefecture, and I return a couple of times a month to tend the garden, but innumerable weed grows around the house, and if rain falls, weed grows back quickly. The ancient people intuitively perceived such an awe-inspiring power of nature and expressed it as ‘*musuhi*.’

Now, we understand that ‘*musuhi*’ signifies the power that brings whatever comes into being in the Universe. We call Amenominakanushi-no-Kami and Takamimusuhi-no-Kami and Kamumusuhi-no-Kami as ‘Zouka Sanshin’ (The three creation deities). They are the formless dimension of life existence.

³ Ref. The ancient rituals and language

Japanese thinking is based on Dualism

If ‘*musuhi*’ is a deified spirit of producing power, why did they need two deities of *musuhi*? There must be a strong reason for that.

I will return later with the story of Izanaki and Izanami. For now, I would like to underline here that they have produced all the lands and deities in this world, and their producing power comes from the male-female dualism. Then you can understand why they divided the producing power of *musuhi* to Takamimusuhi and Kamumusuhi.

They are two beings but come together as one to bear lives. Accordingly, the reason for the births of ‘The three creation deities’ is clarified. At its origin, the Universe was the integrated existence of two; Amenominakanushi-no-Kami was an integrated existence of two ‘*musuhi*’ — Takamimusuhi and Kamumusuhi.

As for dualism, you could recall a Western dualism — opposing each other, such as subjectivity and objectivity, or the material world and the spiritual world. Conversely, Japanese dualism does not oppose but complements. This difference could come from the Jomon people’s idea that the two ropes become stronger by twisting one another. They drew various straw-rope patterns on the earthenware. This idea is the root of the unique Japanese dualism.

Chinese culture changed into the Japanese way

The beginning of *Kojiki* says: “The meteorological phenomenon had not yet started.” Some scholars say, Ōno Yasumaro just borrowed it from Chinese classic (天端編 of 列子 Liezi) and expresses it ideologically, since this idea was by no means Japanese original. I am against this view. Even if Yasumaro used the phrase from the Chinese classic, he must not have adopted it uncritically but changed it to the Japanese style with a thorough examination.

While the beginning of the Chinese classic of *Liezi* starts: “Energy, shape, and matters were mixed and have not separated yet, and we call this chaos,” the preface of *Kojiki* begins the world with only two words - energy and shape (phenomena.) So, this is why he processed the Chinese idea on a national scale. In China, they respected the number ‘three’ as a valuable number, yet in *Kojiki*, Yasumaro applied dualism.

Musuhi and its Chinese character

‘*Musuhi*’ is the mysterious inherent quality that brings whatever comes into being, so the birth of life owes to the power of ‘*musuhi*.’ Now, let’s examine the Chinese character for ‘*musuhi*’ in Japanese materials. In *Nihon Shoki*, they adopted (高皇産靈尊) to Takamimusuhi and (神皇産靈尊) to Kamumusuhi. Therefore, they adopted (産靈) to ‘*musuhi*.’

Looking at the congratulatory address of *Engishiki* (延喜式) and the ritual greeting of the high priest of the Izumo Taisha Shrine to the Emperor (出雲国造神賀詞), they adopted the different Chinese character (高御魂) to Takamimusuhi and (神魂) to Kamumusuhi. So, (魂) is used for ‘*musuhi*.’

Also, in the article of *Chinkonsai* ritual, they enumerated (神魂) (高御魂) (生魂) (足魂) (魂留魂) to the eight deities. They might have searched all the Chinese character suites ‘*musuhi*’ and selected (魂). While we pronounce (魂) as ‘*tamashii*’ (soul) in general, we pronounce ‘*musuhi*’ as well. Accordingly, it implies a deep interconnection between ‘soul’ and ‘*musuhi*.’

‘*Tamashii*’ is the basic principle of existence. Now let me refer to the theory of Japanese classical scholar Shinobu Origuchi⁴ (1887-1953), who asserts that a body is a temporary vehicle for ‘*tama*’ (*Tamashii*) that circulates between this manifest world

⁴ Ref. Original belief

and the land of the dead.

Japanese classical scholar Katsumi Masuda⁵ (1923-2010) extends Origuchi's theory and elucidates the etymology '*shinikaeru*': If we are out of consciousness, the soul '*tama*' leaves the body and return to another world. If we become conscious, we say '*ikikaeru*.' Thus, we express the circulation of '*tama*,' '*kaeru*' (return). So, the original meaning of the word 'return' is going into another world.

'*Tama*' is the core of our vital force and the basic principle of existence. If '*tama*' comes into our body, we are alive, and if it departs from our body (カラ), we die, and we call an empty body '*nakigara*.'

Accordingly, it is clear why they applied the character '*tama* (魂)' to '*musuhi*.' To live in this secular world, we need a body so that *tama* (*musuhi*) can enter our body to work.

⁵ Ref. The heart of the ancient Japanese and thought

The deities of Ashikabi and Ameno-Tokotachi

While oil was floating on the surface of the earth, nothing had shaped yet, **Umashi-Ashikabihikoji-no-Kami** came into being spontaneously like reed shoots.

Next, **Ameno-Tokotachi-no-Kami** came into being spontaneous, and these two deities transpired alone and hid their persons eternally.

These five deities (The three creation deities and Umashi-Ashikabihikoji-no-Kami and Ameno-Tokotachino-Kami) are **Koto-Amatsukami**.

The term ‘ameno’ carries the concept of the deity of Heaven, and Tokotachi means ‘standing eternally.’ So, Ameno-Tokotachi signifies the deity standing permanently to protect Heaven, and a contrasting deity Kunino-Tokotachino-Kami will follow soon.

Now, we should separate Koto-Amatsukami from Amatsukami, Heavenly deities. Among these five deities, Umashi-Ashikabi-hikoji emerged from the oily surface of the earth. This means Koto-Amatsukami includes the deities born on Heaven and the earth.

Nareru Kami

It seems *Kojiki* only lists the names of the deities at the beginning, but this enumeration does condense the ancient people’s view of the beginning of the Universe.

As previously described, *Kojiki* starts: Amenominakanushi-no-Kami first transpired in Takamagahara. In Japanese, we pronounce this:

“Takamagaharani **Nareru Kami** (成れる神) no naha Amenominakanushi-no-Kami.”

Now, we should focus on the term ‘*Nareru Kami*.’ It means the deity born spontaneously, and this expression is unique in the world. While *Kojiki*’s description of ‘*Nareru Kami*’, *Nihon Shoki* expresses it as ‘*Hitori Naru*’ (独化). Both mean that the deities came into being spontaneously due to the inherent producing power of the Universe, not God produced the deities.

So, why did the Japanese observe so? As mentioned, the reason is that grass and trees grow spontaneously in our environment. So, the idea of ‘spontaneous’ comes quite naturally. On the contrary, it is seldom to see plants grow without our hands in a desert area, especially in a rocky desert in Palestine. They believe, “All was created by God,” rather than growing spontaneously.