

Ohno Susumu, *Kami of the Japanese* (『日本人の神』), Tokyo, Kawade shobo shinsha, 2013. 229 pp. ISBN: 9784309412658. (Japanese)

The author, Ohno Susumu, is a Japanese language scholar. In this book, he deals with historical documents with mythological elements such as the *Kojiki* (712 A.D.) and the *Nihon Shoki* (720 A.D.) and other classical literary works using the methodology of linguistics, philology, and archeology in order to reveal the origin of the Japanese term *kami* (神), which is usually translated as “god” in English.

At the beginning of the first chapter (“Kami of Japan”), Ohno attracts the reader's interest, stating that the word *kami* was imported. To give the idea validity, Ohno explores the etymology of the word *kami*. In general, it is said to be derived from *kagami* (鏡: mirror) or *kami* (上: upper, above), but Ohno disputes this. Through detailed research on Man'yōgana (万葉仮名), an ancient writing system employing Chinese characters, Ohno demonstrates that *mi* (ミ) in Hiragana, the present Japanese writing system, had two different sounds in the Nara period (710 - 794), and *mi* (ミ) in *kagami* (鏡) and *kami* (上) were different from *mi* (ミ) in *kami* (神). Ohno insists that it is impossible to find the origin of *kami* in Japanese words of that period, and turns to the meaning of *kami* (神), and how people of that time understood Japanese gods. The earliest Japanese literature has many examples which show that *kami* (神) has an animistic nature. In referring to the examples, Ohno puts emphasis on such words as *matsuru* (祀る), *oharai* (御祓い), and *inori* (祈り). They have a close connection with *kami* (神), and will be the ground on which Ohno argues in the sixth chapter of the book that the origin of Japanese is *Tamil*.

Those who are interested in Japan know that there are two major religions in Japan: Shinto (神道) and Buddhism (仏教). The third chapter (“Shūgō of *kami* and *hotoke*”), the fourth chapter (“Separation of *kami* and *hotoke*”) and the fifth chapter (The destruction of *hotoke* and import of God) discuss how the two religions have fused and separated from each other throughout Japanese history. The second chapter (“Import of *hotoke*”) serves as an introduction to the following chapters. According to Ohno, when Buddhism was brought from Baekje to Japan in the 6th century, Buddha statues (*hotoke* [仏]) refers to both a Buddha and its image. Ohno says that the images of Buddha as an idol for people to worship later had a great influence on Shinto. There are many shrines presently in Japan, but Shinto, which believes in *kami* (gods) with an animistic nature, originally had no custom of worshipping idols and does not need any specific buildings. However, after Buddhism was imported along with an artistic Buddha statue, Shinto shrines were set up to display the idols representing *kami* (神).

In the third chapter, the historical process of *Shinbutsu-shūgō* (神仏習合: syncretism of *kami* and *hotoke* [Buddhas]) is explained in more detail. The word 仏神 (meaning Buddha as god) was used around the 8th century, so *Hotoke* was recognized as a type of *kami*. In addition, as an example of the fusion of *kami* and

hotokake, Ohno discusses the buildings called *Jingū-ji* (神宮司) which began to be built in those days. *Jingū-ji* refers to a Buddhist temple built in shrine precincts. In addition, the fact that some emperors who were believed to be the descendants of indigenous gods became Buddhists was also seen as a prominent example of fusion. Ohno compares the literary works of the Nara period and the Heian period: the *Kojiki* (712 A.D.) and *Genji Monogatari* (1008 A.D.), and examines in detail which verbs *Kami* and *Hotoke* were used with, in order to illustrate how they mixed with each other. Lastly, the important idea of *honji suijaku* (本地垂迹) is presented as an crucial example of *Shinbutsu-shūgō*. This is a theory that the gods of various religions are, in fact, Buddhas of India appearing temporally with different names or figures. It was the custom of Buddhism to incorporate elements of other religions. In fact, in some Buddhist sermons and historical documents about shrines and temples, Japanese native gods written in the *Kojiki* or the *Nihon Shoki* correspond to various Buddhas (*hotoke*). After Buddhism was introduced to Japan, it kept increasing its influence, and people devoted to Shinto resorted to *honji suijaku* in order to protect the gods indigenous to Japan.

In chapter 4, Ohno discusses the reaction to the fusion of *kami* and *hotoke* and *Kokugaku* (国学), which is a school of Japanese philology and philosophy during Edo period (1603 A.D. - 1868 A.D.). *Kokugaku* developed to reveal the Japanese culture before Confucianism and Buddhism spread in Japan. Keichū, a monk in the 17th century, studied the literature of Man'yōgana (万葉仮名) in the literature from the Nara era to the Heian era and established a research method to empirically clarify the meaning of a word in Japanese. In addition, in the 18th century, Kamono Mabuchi (賀茂真淵) advocated the importance of studying the Japanese ancient history book the *Kojiki*, which includes Japanese myths, or the Japanese version of *Genesis*. In the latter part of the 18th century, Motoori Norinaga (本居宣長) appeared. Inspired by Keichū and Kamo no Mabuchi, he made a close and ambitious study of Japanese in the *Kojiki*, and established *Kokugaku* by discovering what Japan had been like before Buddhism and Confucianism were introduced to Japan. His ideas and ideology had a strong influence on Hirata Atsutane (平田篤胤), later to foster the political philosophy and social movement of *Sonnō jōi* (尊王攘夷), eventually leading to the historically important changes of the Meiji Restoration (明治維新).

The fifth chapter explains the process of the separation of *kami* and *hotoke* during the reconstruction of an Emperor-centered political system triggered by the Meiji Restoration. Ohno finds evidence of the separation in famous political oaths and the great demand for the restoration of imperial rule (王政復古の号令) issued by the members who played an important role in destroying the Edo shogunate, as well as in the *Oath in Five Articles* (五箇条の御誓文) issued by the Emperor Meiji, and in the state of the people at that time. In addition, he describes how the translation of *kami* was settled as God and Deus in English after English entered Japan in the Meiji era. According to Ohno, the spread of Christianity from the end of the Muromachi (室町) period to the beginning of the Edo period is

strongly connected to the fact that the temple came to have great power in the Edo period. A cautious warning that Christianity was trying to invade Japan spread to powerful Daimyo (大名: Japanese feudal lords) and the Edo shogunate, and eventually Christianity was prohibited and repressed. For the purpose of seizing hidden Christians, the Edo shogunate forced Buddhist funerals on their people and left the temples in charge of family registers. In the Edo era, the Buddhist temples played an important role when people were born and died, which meant that the influence of *hotoke* penetrated nationwide at that time.

Ohno finishes analyzing the history of *kami* and *hotoke* in the fifth chapter, and in the next chapter (“Import of *kami*”) he explores again the etymology of the word *kami* which he began in the first chapter. To tell the truth, the origin of Japanese is still uncertain. Ohno attributes the origin of Japanese to *Tamil* using the comparative linguistic method that started with the research of the Danish linguist Rasmus Christian Rask, leading to the discovery of the Indo-European languages. Ohno examines the 22 words related to God, which exemplify how Japanese and Tamil are similar languages, and finally shows the *Tamil* has a word corresponding to *kami* in Japanese. He insists that the sound and meaning of *kōm-ān* in Tamil closely correspond to *kami*, and hopes that the research on the origin of Japanese will develop in this direction in the future.

Ohno’s consideration of *kami* in the seventh chapter (“Japanese civilization and culture”) reflects his view of Japan based on his personal experience rather than that of strict academics. Ohno points out that the root of culture is “cult-“, which means “cultivate,” and therefore, culture is inseparable from the land and its climate. Japan has been blessed with abundant nature and has a great variety of climates, which has had a great influence on the Japanese view of the world, says Ohno. He presents the typical Japanese outlook on the world by comparing the creation myth in the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki* with the book of *Genesis* of the Old Testament.

What makes this book interesting and appealing is the author’s broad perspective, objective analysis, daring ideas, and fluent narrative. It is also a guide book for Japanese history, religions, and classic literature including myths. Moreover, Ohno’s knowledge of Japanese classic literature and mythology is so overwhelming that to those who seriously intend to study Japanese culture and spirituality, this book unquestionably provides a good starting point.

SENOUE KAZUNORI, Lecturer at Tokyo Institute of Technology Foreign Language Research and Teaching Center, Japan. Email: senoue82@gmail.com.