

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Editor: DR. PAUL CARUS.

Associates: { E. C. HEGELER.
MARY CARUS.

VOL. XX. (NO. 8.)

AUGUST, 1906.

NO. 603

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OR

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BY

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FIRST STEPS.

BY GEORGES LAVERGNE.

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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THE GOD-IDEA OF THE JAPANESE.

BY HARRIS LEARNER LATHAM, A.M., S.T.M.

THE WORD KAMI.

THE native Japanese name for deity is *kami*. This paper is concerned with the derivation of this term. It must be borne in mind that it is a Japanese word as distinguished from imported Chinese equivalents *shin* and *jin*. The analogy of English may assist in remembering the distinction. Etymologically, *kami* equals god; *shin* or *jin* equals deity; present usage however is not analogous.

In Shintoism there is an innumerable host of deities. These may be roughly classed as *Tenjin* or *Amatsu Kami*, that is heavenly deities, and *Chigi* or *Kunitsu Kami*, that is earthly deities. With rare exceptions these deities have at one time been human beings. All men after death become *kami*. Below mankind any animal or natural object including insects, grass, stones, trees, and such may be called deity. Hence it is evident that any definition of the term *kami* must be broad enough to include all these varieties of existences. As an aid to this definition, let us see what light Japanese philologists can throw on the subject.

There are eleven distinct explanations of the origin of the word *kami* that are worthy of enumeration. We will take them up in the order they were given to me by my friend and instructor Professor Okada of the Yamada High School.

1. *Kangami* means "pattern." They say that this term was the original name applied to the deity, because man measures himself by his god and thus determines his own moral standing. Since a sight of the pattern inspires to correction of defects, the deity is conceived as a producer of action; this idea of the deity is desig-

nated by the technical term *yō*, "function," "activity," or "operation." By elision *Kangami* becomes *kaami* and later *kami*.

2. *Kagami* means "mirror." It is derived from *kage*, "reflection" and *mi*, "see"; it is the instrument by which one sees his shadow. By constant usage as a name for deity, the second syllable become worn out and disappeared. The distinction between this and the preceding conception is the difference between *yō* and *Tai*, "body," "substance," "individual." In the first case he is conceived of as an inspirer of action; here the deity is looked upon simply as pure substance. Action is not wholly absent; however it takes place only when the individual appears before the deity and consists in enabling the worshiper himself to draw the distinctions between good and bad. The deity reflects a man's character. all consequent effects are due to the man's initiative.

It may be asked whether or not the mirror as an article of household furniture dates from a time anterior to the birth of the term *kami*. In reply it should be stated that *kami* is not the oldest term in Japanese literature applied to the deity, *mikoto* must be given that place; however, on the basis of the probability that the mirror developed very early in the period when men began to construct implements, there is no difficulty in believing that the derivation is not based on an anachronism.

This idea of the reflection of the soul of man in the divine mirror is very old in Japanese thought and very widely spread. As for example,

Kaku to dani
Kagami ni miyuru
Mono naraba,
Wasureru hodo mo
Aramashi mono to.

"My thoughts in a mirror could he see
Forgotten never, never would I be."

This is supposedly the reflection of a maiden who is not loved by him whom she adores. Another interpretation makes the speaker long for a revelation of the thoughts of the beloved.

Furthermore, it is a common saying that the mirror is the soul of a woman, just as the sword is the soul of the knight. It typifies on the one hand her yielding disposition, since it is round and will roll in any direction. On the other, it reminds her of her duty to be pure, since the mirror is spotless.

But the source, or, shall we say, the most notable product, of national thought relating to the mirror, is the following:

"Regard this mirror exactly as if it were our august spirit, and reverence it as if reverencing us."

This is the charge given to the grandchild of the sun-goddess when he was starting to assume the rule of Japan. The sun-goddess and the high integrating deity are presenting him with the three famous presents: the jewel, the mirror, and the sword. The charge is understood to relate to the goddess alone and is tantamount to a command to maintain ancestor worship. The suggestion that this story is all an invention on the part of invaders to prove their right to reign in these islands, does not affect the value of the mirror legend in the present connection.

3. The third view to be mentioned derives *kami* from *kagayaku*, "to be brilliant" and *mi*, "body." This supposition gains credibility from the fact that divine beings may possess an extraordinary brilliancy. By the substitution of *mi* "to see," a slightly different result is obtained: the deity then is the being whose radiancy is visible; this is the opinion of Tanigawa Shisei. Either one of these derivations may also be supported by the fact that a view of the sun has aroused many religious thoughts in the minds of the Japanese and would certainly suggest the very notions here indicated.

It may be of some worth to note the names of deities recorded in the Kojiki that lend credence to these two views:

<i>Ama-terasu-oho-mi-kami,</i>	Heaven-Shining-Great-August-Deity;
<i>Shita-teru-hime,</i>	Under-Shining-Princess;
<i>Ho-deri-no-mikoto,</i>	Fire-Shine-August-Prince;
<i>Hi-kaga-biko-no-kami,</i>	Fire-Shining-Prince-Deity;
<i>Oho-kaga-yama-to-omi-no-kami,</i>	Great-Refulgent-Mountain-Deity;
<i>Kagayo-hime,</i>	Refulgent-Princess.

One deity is said to be so radiant with supernatural light that her garments offered no resistance to illuminating power. His Augustness Fire-Subside was sitting in a tree at the time when the daughters of the sea deity came to draw water at the well just beneath the tree; they beheld a light shining in the well which the learned commentator thinks is meant to be understood as "a celestial light" shining from the deity sitting in the tree.

4. Tanigawa Shisei also ventured the suggestion that *kami* is derived from the expression *akiraka ni miru*, "to see clearly." The

intermediate stage of the word was *akami*. This derivation is far fetched.

5. *Kami* (God) *wa kami* (above) *nari*, "god is the superior one." Before Chinese characters provided a means for showing the difference between the several meanings of words, the word *kami*, meaning superior, high, upper rank, was given a secondary meaning, namely, "god"; when the characters were introduced, "superior" was represented by the Chinese character *shang*, and "god" by *shên* (*shin* or *jin* in Japanese). There is certainly abundant ground for this hypothesis. The distinction of inferior and superior is more prominent than any other idea in all Japanese life. To say that exactly the same emphasis was laid on this matter at the time when *kami* came into use as a name for deity, would be hazardous. The force of the argument after making this allowance is almost convincing. The supposition is credited to Arai Hakuseki and Kamo Mabuchi.

6. *Kami wa kashikomi no mono nari*, "god is a being of reverence," that is, a being to be revered. *Kashikomi* (reverence) by the elision of two syllables becomes *kami*. This derivation is credited to Arakida Hisaoi. It is open to the same objection as is the fourth proposal.

7. Hirata Atsutane suggests that *kami* may be derived from *kahi*, "that wonderful thing"; *kare* denotes "that thing" and *hi* means "wonder"; the two compounded are read *kahi*. The last syllable has suffered displacement by its co-ordinate *mi*; instances of this are frequent. This hypothesis seems not to hit on a popular view, an everyday opinion as the source of the name. Power, brilliancy, anger, are more suggestive of names for deity than wonder.

8. *Kakuremi* means "hidden body," "one living in concealment." If *kami* is derived from this word, the invisibility of the deity is affirmed to be the striking phenomenon. Saito Hikomaru's name is attached to this suggestion.

9. Hatto Tomonori, thinking apparently that his only hope for material to construct a new derivation rests in combining other views, takes the *ka* of *kakure*, "hidden," and *hi*, "wonder," as the original syllables; accordingly, *kami* means "hidden wonder."

10. A more ingenious procedure is proposed by Okuni Takamasa. He takes *kamu*, which means "to chew," or *kamosu*, "to brew" as the starting-point. The explanation accounting for this is that anciently rice was prepared for fermentation by first being thoroughly chewed; it was then placed in vats for fermentation.

Thus the verb acquired a secondary meaning; that is, "to create." Now deities being creators may properly be called *kami*.

II. *Kabi* means "mould," "mildew." Motowori Norinaga affirms that all things when first made were as small as the units in mildew. Hence the first existences may be called *kabi* softened into *kami*. The deities were the primordial beings; hence the name came to be applied to them. "Many scholars accept this as the best explanation." I asked my instructor to indicate his preference among these hypotheses; he replied by designating numbers 1, 5 and 11. Among these three he could make no certain choice.

It does not seem unreasonable to suppose that there were several origins for this word. It is a well-known fact that in ancient days populations one after another swept from foreign lands into these islands and settled. Moreover, tribes thus originating segregated themselves for long intervals, having little or no intercourse with their neighbors. No country could furnish better opportunity for a plurality of origins for a given word. If mythological ideas have in most cases had an indigenous origin among the peoples where they are current, it certainly seems that among people using kindred dialects coinage of words might follow partly distinct and partly parallel lines.

To think of the time when *kami* and god first sprung into use as appellations for the deity, projects the imagination back too far for rational guessing. The data for the solution of the question are either wanting or confusing; yet a consideration of the topic furnishes at least an interesting history of the opinion of learned men as to the origin of the god-idea.

THE WRITTEN CHARACTER.

There may be students of religion who suppose the real Japanese religion to be of little worth as a field for study. But, granting that it is an important subject, it may be thought too difficult to pierce to its heart, to grasp its real meaning to warrant any serious hope of success. It must be admitted that Shintoism is somewhat shadowy. Yet persistent pursuit will run down a real substance that is both interesting and of great worth.

Shintoism is not a universal religion. Its adherents have been, from of old, islanders for the most part cast off from the great currents of racial and national activity. These people represent the fragments of peoples from several streams of primitive races thrown to one side and left apart to develop according to their own bent. Shintoism in its essence is of a piece with the ancestor worship

of the continent. However, its particular ideas are purely Japanese, understanding by this term ideas that developed in Japan previous to the great flow of Chinese influence into the country.

In spite of the remark just made, we attempt an introduction to the Japanese ideas of God by investigating the Chinese character used to express in writing the Japanese term *kami*. The explanations given below are not to be discredited, because they pertain to a matter of Chinese philology. Even granting that all the stages of development of the character are events in the history of Chinese thought, it yet remains true that in the original Japanese stock was a large element directly related by blood with the Chinese; the history of this and nearly all of the written signs called Chinese characters is not a national history but belongs to all Eastern Asia. Continental ideas and words during many forgotten ages were being unceasingly imbedded in Japanese soil. And in any case Chinese national thoughts have become rooted so thoroughly in the Japanese mind that Chinese thoughts are now Japanese thoughts and Chinese characters are Japanese characters.

The formal adoption of Chinese written symbols dates from an age now forgotten; Aston holds that A. D. 284 is too late a date for the commencement of the study of Chinese literature even though supported by Japanese opinions of a former generation. Among the very earliest possibly was the character *kami*, the Chinese *shên*. The accompanying plate exhibits the various forms this character has taken in Chinese books.

Here are twenty characters meaning *kami* (in Japanese Chinese *shin* or *jin*). The relations of one to the other are at this late date inexplicable because of the loss of necessary philological data. No. 1 is the form now in use; its immediate predecessor was No. 2. Farther back than this, we cannot go in tracing the genealogy of this character; yet something may be said about groups.

At this point it is necessary to introduce two Japanese technical terms, *hen* and *tsukuri*. The *hen* is the part of the character to the left, that is the radical; *tsukuri* is the part at the right called in English phraseology the phonetic.

The first point to be observed is that with rare exceptions the characters are composed of *hen* and *tsukuri*; they are compound characters. Furthermore, with only a few exceptions the *hen* is alike in every case; the same is true respecting the *tsukuri*. Hence these characters may be grouped according to the similarities of *hen* and *tsukuri* combined. There result then the following groups:

1 神

2 禰

3 神

4 神

5 禰

6 禰

7 禰

8 禰

9 禰

10 禰

11 禰

12 禰

13 禰

14 禰

15 禰

16 禰

17 禰

18 禰

19 禰

20 禰

I. Nos. 4, 9, 12, 14, 16. II. Nos. 10, 19. III. Nos. 3, 6, 13, 15, 20. IV. 2, 5, 8, 17, 18. V. Nos. 7 and 11, which are unclassifiable.

It is safe to assume that the most difficult characters are the oldest. This would give us No. 10 as the oldest form of the character. It is also probable that the characters as above grouped represent styles of writing prevailing at given times and in given localities.

Having noted individual peculiarities, let us look a moment at the meaning of the *hen* and *tsukuri*. The *hen* is said to represent a man standing with arms pendant. No. 3 contains a clear example; you see his head above the shoulders, the two arms and the perpendicular trunk. This is the position of a respectful listener. The head should be bent forward and all unusual wrappings removed (this last point is unmistakably in evidence) and the hands hanging straight. This is the attitude of respect; it is the attitude of one who stands before a deity. It represents the worshiper in the position of a servant waiting to hear his lord's commands.

The *tsukuri* is a very faithful picture of a *tamagusushi* or *gohei*; No. 1 contains the clearest example. This is an emblem in daily use by the priest as he appears before the shrine with offerings. Just as the smoke of incense in ancient Israel, ascending before the altar, symbolized the ascent of prayer to God, so this *gohei* is a token signifying that the bearer wishes to present offerings and prayer to the deity. Because of the high importance of the prayer the *gohei* came to typify the prayer mainly. The written symbol is said to have first meant *môsu*, i. e., speech directed to a deity; later, *môsu* came to mean speech to any superior and such is its meaning to-day.

We have the *hen* denoting respectful attention, representing the verb *shimesu*, "to inform"; we have the *tsukuri* denoting speech to the deity. Here is a novel derivation; perhaps it is a true one: the deity is he who gives commands and he to whom men speak. The idea rests upon the assumption that men and deity hold inter-communication. Inherent probabilities lend much force to this supposition. Religious duties being matters of everyday occurrence, they form a most probable source for new words. Doubtless these two component parts were long used separately before being combined to mean deity. They are used as single characters at the present time.

Like many other derivations for significant terms this one is open to criticism no doubt; like many doubtful explanations this one may be correct. It may be readily conceded that the common

people do not know anything of the real significance of this character; they use it as a sign regardless of its inherent significance. It is pronounced *kami*, or if the sentence demands it may be read *jin*, the *Kan-on* sound, or *shin*, the *Go-on* sound. This is the same *shin* in Shintō, the "way of the gods."

This character is employed in the Bible and has the usual three pronunciations also in Christian usage. Oftentimes it seems quite unfortunate to be compelled to labor under the burden of ancient ideas in attempting to explain the Biblical idea of God, but there seems to be no alternative. The difficulty encountered in China is a parallel incident.