

BECOMING GOD

DEIFICATION FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE PRESENT

LECTURE 7: THE JAPANESE EMPEROR

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KAMI 神



Starting from the End

The *Humanity Declaration*

(人間宣言 *Ningen-sengen*)

“...The ties between Us and Our people have always stood upon mutual trust and affection. They do not depend upon mere legends and myths. They are not predicated on the false conception that the Emperor is divine, and that the Japanese people are superior to other races and fated to rule the world.”

Emperor Hirohito (1 Jan 1946)



What Did Hirohito Denounce?

Akitsukami (現つ神)

Tennō (天皇)



The Past as a Charter: (But) Which Past?

- *Kojiki* (“Record of Ancient Matters” [711-712 CE])
- *Nihongi* (“Chronicles of Japan” [c. 720 CE])
- *Kogoshūi* (806-807)
- Combination of myth, legend, & history
- (All) trace the origins of the Japanese empire to the primordial action of the *kami* (great ancestral deities)
- They sent to earth from heaven the grandson of the sun-goddess, Amaterasu-ō-mikami, charging him with the conquest of the realm and promising him that the imperial succession would continue unbroken and prosperous, co-eternal with heaven and earth.

The Origins of the Divine Emperor: Jinmu



- *Kojiki & Nihongi*: the first emperor
- Reigned: 660-585 BCE
- Great-grandson of Ninigi no Mikoto
- Blood line of Amaterasu

Establishing Lineage

When the celestial grandson, Ninigi no Mikoto, descended upon earth, his celestial grandparent, Amaterasu, spake saying “I give the country of Toyoashiwara [Reed-plain-fair-rice-ear] to my child to rule over,” and she gave him some of the [rice] ears which grew in her sacred garden. The celestial grandson descended from heaven to the palace of Takachiho in Hiuga, first planted the seed of paddy, and ate the new rice. This was the origin of Daijo [sic]. [...] The celebration of the Daijo in the commencement of each reign is a ceremony which symbolises the fact that a new sovereign rules over this country, and that he received *investiture* from the celestial grandparent. It is therefore the *gravest affair*, which concerns the State. On the day of the Hare of the present month [eleventh month, fourth year of Meiji (1871)], His Majesty sacrifices to the gods of heaven and earth and on the day of the Dragon, seated on his throne, he partakes of a banquet of the new rice and bestows [rice and rice wine] on his officers and ministers.

[Meiji government’s official notice of the 1871 *daijōsai*]

What's the Meiji Restoration?

- 1868 Political Revolution (Meiji period, 1868-1912)
- Coup in Kyoto
- Final demise of the Tokugawa shogunate (military government)
- Returned control of Japan to direct imperial rule under Meiji
- Major political, economic, and social change
- Modernization and Westernization of Japan



Daijōsai Rite under the Meiji

- The most dramatic claim for the emperor's divine descent made by the new regime
- It cast the emperor as a filial sovereign since he offers rice to his divine ancestor as a way of recompensing her blessings
- Sealed the Emperor's relationship, and that of his successors, with the sun-goddess and was a vital moment in the modern articulation of the myth of the emperor's descent from that goddess

An Example of the Rite's Function

“This is a great rite performed once in each imperial reign ... *Ever since their birth* several thousand years ago, our people have been ruled by a sovereign. To this day the line of sovereigns *remains without change*. Such examples are surely *rare in foreign countries* ... The radical reforms which began four years ago are now complete, thus enabling this daijōsai to take place.”

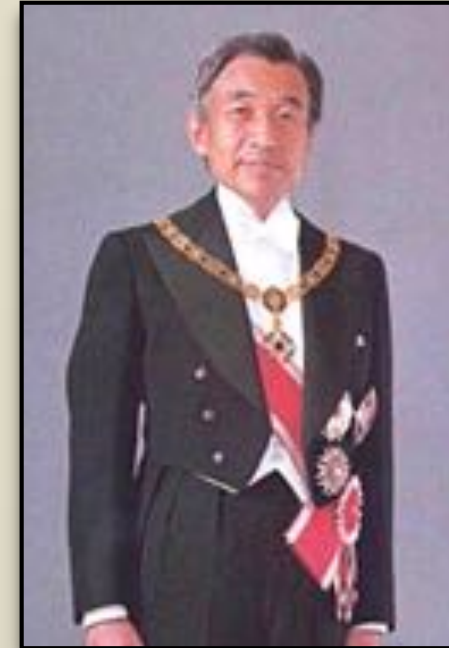
Foreign Minister Soejima Taneomi (under Meiji)

Ascension to the throne: The case of Akihito (1989)



Jan 7, 1989

Senso rite: Receiving the Imperial Regalia



Nov 12, 1990

Sokui rite: Public proclamation of a new Emperor on the throne

158 nation-representatives; 100,000 people participating in Tokio

“...observe the Constitution of Japan and discharge my duties as symbol of the state and the unity of the people.”

The Controversial Rite: *Daijōsai*

Locale:

- *Daijōkyū*, or Shrine of Great Tasting, temporarily erected in the grounds of the Imperial Palace in Tokyo.
- The shrine comprised three main structures: the Kairyū Hall; the Yuki Pavilion; the Suki Pavilion.

Structure:

- A. Night of November 22: the emperor dressed in the garment known as ame-no-hagoromo (“the heavenly robe of feathers”)
- B. Ppurified himself in the hot waters of the Kairyū Hall before proceeding to the Yuki Pavilion.
- C. He took chopsticks and offered rice and other fruits of the land and sea to the sun-goddess before partaking of them himself.
- D. Repeated the procedure at the Suki Pavilion.
- E. He emerged at dawn the next day, his transformation from crown prince into emperor now complete

Structure



Reactions in a 'secular' milieu

Questions of constitutionality and contested meaning of the daijōsai

- Kagoshima prefectural governor's use of public moneys to attend the daijōsai in November 1990
- A group of Kagoshima citizens claimed that the participation breached both Article 20 and Article 99, which obligates public officials to uphold the Constitution.
- Sought compensation from the government.
- Kagoshima district court judge acknowledged the Shinto religious dimension to the daijōsai but absolved the governor of guilt in October 1992.
- Rationale: Applied what is known as the "object and effect standard", according to which
- The governor's "object" in attending the daijōsai was not religiously significant; what motivated him was a desire to celebrate the emperor's enthronement.

Imperial Projection

1868 onwards

- National holiday celebrating the emperor's birthday
- National holiday celebrating the legendary accession of the Emperor Jimmu in 660 BCE,
- The Empire Festival celebrating the inception of rule over the nation by the sun-goddess's imperial descendants
- Triumphal military reviews
- The imperial funerals and weddings
- The great imperial progressions throughout the nation's provinces

Why React?

Traditionally understood:

- The Emperor acted as the great representative of the people before the kami by the act of presenting food and by the partaking thereof himself, entering into an *intimacy* of communion with *spiritual powers*.
- He was viewed as *becoming* the very repository of the sacred Rice Spirit.
- Thus: the *sacred living kami*, responsible for the entire welfare of his people.

The Living Kami (?)

- Why claim divinity?
- Who benefits?
- Who claims it? Why?
- What kind of reception? By whom?
- How myth works as paradigm?

What can we learn?

- Are humans gods?
- If so, how?
- What is a god in this cultural milieu?
- How is a rite transformative?
- Rites of Passage

rites of passage

ARNOLD VAN GENNEP
(1873-1957)



Rites of Passage

Rites of Passage – The Threefold Scheme

- a) **Separation:** between the participant and the world; the person is detached from the roles and obligations associated until then with their lives.
- b) **Liminality:** Latin limen = threshold. The participants are expected to cross a threshold, which marks the boundary between the world leaving behind and the social world for which they are getting prepared for by the ritual itself. Can be a physical threshold = people walk over a step or line on the ground; make a jump over a barrier; walk through a door.
- c) **Incorporation:** indicates the new role that the participants are to take on. They are welcomed back from liminality as new persons; they may be welcomed by their new peers, or be expected to stand amongst them; they may receive a new title or name.

Next: Captain Cook

