

Imperial Ritual in the Heisei Era: A Report on Research¹

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It was perhaps inevitable that the death of the emperor Hirohito on January 7, 1989, would be the occasion for a new and vigorous round of debates over the Japanese emperor system—its history, its practices, and its symbolic significance in contemporary Japan. What has been striking about discussions on every side, however, has been the lack of sustained critical attention to the ritual dynamics of the emperor system, despite the fact that it has long been recognized that it is in the ritual arena that the modern emperor system exposes itself most completely. Just as conventional wisdom mistakenly maintains that all vestiges of Buddhism were removed from the imperial system during the Meiji era, so also the impression remains that the postwar “symbolic emperor” system has effectively removed religious sentiment from at least the public sphere of imperial activity.² The strength of these impressions was one reason that both the funeral of the old emperor and the Grand Festival of First Fruits (*Daijōsai*) of the new one raised such conflicted public reactions in 1989 and again in 1990³

In order to understand these reactions we must attend more carefully to the ritual articulation of the emperor system. The accession ceremonies comprise the most spectacular and awesome examples of imperial ritual, providing a well-documented and persistent illustration of the ways in which ritual inscribes social, political, and religious meanings and, as importantly, of how these meanings change over time. I have found that a detailed examination of the ensemble of performances associated with the imperial accession process reveals a dynamic, contentious system of practice whose effects on contemporary Japanese life Norma Field characterized so poignantly in her book *In the Realm of a Dying Emperor*.⁴ There, Field opined that too much attention has been focused on passionate demonstrations of support for

(or opposition to) the emperor system, while the vast majority of ordinary Japanese are disturbingly disinterested or indifferent altogether. Public opinion polls confirm the prevalence of the attitudes Field found so troubling, but they also reveal that the very people who consider the emperor "irrelevant" also find it utterly unimaginable to live in a Japan *without* an emperor. What are the roots of this paradox, and what does it imply? The arguably benign "givenness" of the emperor system, I contend, is more the result of a very sophisticated process of ritual inscription than a matter of historical inertia or social amnesia. In this essay, I would like to introduce some examples of the ritual dynamics of the emperor system and indicate some ways that ritual analysis might illuminate certain strategies of its inscription.

Western scholars have directed little sustained critical attention to the role of imperial ritual in Japan. Even in the limited context of imperial accession ceremonies, there have been few studies by Western scholars. The two monographs in English are still valuable, of course, but they are limited in both historical range and topical focus, and obviously do not take into account important Japanese scholarship during the past twenty years.⁵ Indeed, events since the death of the emperor Hirohito in January, 1989, have produced a host of new primary and secondary materials and once again raised issues that are as important for the study of religion and culture in general as they are for understanding the emperor system today. Still, scholarly research on the imperial ritual system appearing in English since Hirohito's death has generally followed a predictable pattern of analysis. This general pattern can be broken down into two related trajectories. The first is characterized by a continuing interest in the "timeless" mysteries connected with so-called secret rites (*higi*) during the Grand Festival of First Fruits (*Daijōsai*). Typically, the historical analysis in these studies is limited; the intention is to recover some "original" meaning of the Grand Festival and its various components.⁶ This perspective is noteworthy for its attention to ritual evidence, however narrowly or speculatively conceived, but it lacks a critical sense of wider socio-historical as well as ritual contexts. The second trajectory is more directly concerned with the modern accession process, and is especially attentive to recent historical changes in particular rites and procedures. Unfortunately, studies of this kind tend to be either very narrowly conceived or journalistic.⁷ We are alerted to the importance of specific historical contexts, but left with no clear sense of either how particular rites fit into the larger ritual process or what significance any changes in their production might have for our understanding of the imperial system as a whole.

These two trajectories of scholarship form the background for my own investigation of the modern Japanese imperial system.⁸ In the larger

historical frame of my study of imperial ritual, I attend to comparative issues of continuity and change, but here I would like to illustrate something far simpler. While historians rightly argue that we must acknowledge an external (social, economic, political) context for our ritual studies, I intend in this essay to be much less ambitious. I want to demonstrate that "context" can be structural as well as historical, and to that end will identify a series of "matched performances" that constitute internal ritual contexts that might serve as frames for more rigorous historical studies. It should go without saying that the ritual ensembles that I will introduce are meant to be illustrative, so the description and analysis of each will be correspondingly limited. After a brief outline of three types of matched performances that occur early in the process, I will suggest ways such ensembles could fruitfully be elaborated as part of a larger and more complicated analysis of imperial accession.

TYPE 1. SYNCHRONOUS PERFORMANCES

Minimally, the ritualized emperor system can be said to have two aspects, one representing the constitutional monarchy of postwar Japan—the civil dimension of the imperial presence—and the other representing the domestic institution of the imperial household—the cultural dimension of the imperial presence. The ground distinguishing these two dimensions is unstable, however, and it is one of the functions of the ritual process to negotiate the contending claims of those who would define the system in favor of one or the other.⁹ This ritualized negotiation began simultaneously at three separate sites on the morning of January 7, 1989. The first site, the Hall of State (*Seiden matsu no ma*) inside the official palace building (*kyūden*), is indisputably public and associated with the civil function of the emperor system, while the second, the imperial sanctuary compound (*Kyūchū sanden*), is indisputably religious and officially identified with the domestic cultural heritage of the imperial household. Ritual performances at these two sites were foregrounded during the opening movements of the process, while funereal activities at the third, the residential palace (*Fukuage gosho*) of the deceased emperor, were conducted as extremely private affairs with virtually no media attention or official representation at the proceedings.¹⁰

The ritual process began with the death of emperor Hirohito (and the automatic constitutional succession of Crown Prince Akihito) at 6:33 on the morning of January 7, 1989. The death was publicly announced at 7:55 am, and at 8:22 a brief emergency meeting of the Prime Minister's cabinet was convened to discuss official arrangements for the immediate transition. It was decided that the Transfer of Regalia and the post-

accession Imperial Audience (see below, "Type 3") would be performed as state ceremonies as opposed to private imperial family rites. This decision was certified by the new emperor, who signed and sealed the measures at 9:35 in his first official act in the capacity of emperor.¹¹

At 10:01 that same morning, the imperial regalia were formally transferred to the new emperor Akihito in a brief state rite called the *kenjitō shōkei no gi*.¹² This first formal ceremony of the accession took place in the Pine Room of the Great Hall of State inside the imperial palace, and was attended by the male members of the imperial family (those in the line of succession) as well as by high officials of the national government. The treasures, emblems of the office of emperor, include 1) a sacred sword; 2) sacred jewels; and 3) the Seals of the Emperor and of the State.¹³

Prior to the ceremony proper, the officials who were to witness the transfer took their places in three rows directly in front of the central ritual space where the emperor would shortly stand for the presentation. The central ritual space in front of them was marked by a plain white rectangular carpet. Behind the carpet stood a huge purple screen, the lower third delicately illuminated with Georgia Pine branches in muted gold. Toward the back of the carpet stood an elegant high-backed cherrywood throne chair (*gyokuza*) with brass fittings and upholstered arms, seat, and back. Along the front of the carpet stood three small rectangular tables of white wood, the one in the center noticeably shorter than the other two (for reasons that will become apparent shortly).

At the appropriate moment, the new emperor and six imperial princes, led by the Grand Master of Ceremonies (*Shikibu kanchō*) and the Grand Steward of the Imperial Household Agency (*Kunaichō chōkan*), entered in a rather loose single-file procession from stage right to take their places. The emperor assumed a formal stance in front of the throne chair, facing the tables and the 26 official witnesses, while the other imperial heirs lined up parallel to the emperor on either side of the carpet. The heir apparent, the new Crown Prince Naruhito, stood closest to the emperor on the right side, while the emperor's second son took up his position to the emperor's left.

Everyone, including the emperor, was dressed in black morning coat and striped grey trousers, and each wore a black mourning band on his left arm. They stood at attention as a second procession entered from stage left, this one escorting the imperial treasures. Three court chamberlains (*jijū*), carrying ceremonial packages wrapped in imperial silk, proceeded to the center of the hall. Holding the treasures high in their outstretched hands, they bowed toward the emperor, then stepped forward to arrange the containers on the tables in front of him. The sword was set on the table to the emperor's left, the jewels to his right.

Only when the sacred regalia had been properly positioned (facing away from the emperor) were the Seals laid on the shorter table in the center.¹⁴ The emperor did not take actual physical possession of the objects—he did not approach the tables, nor did the attendants step onto the carpet. Rather, the rite involved only *the presentation* of the treasures by members of the imperial household staff and their subsequent momentary *display*. The emperor stood motionless and silent during their presentation, then offered a slight formal bow when everything was finally in its proper place. Thereupon, the sword and jewels were solemnly retrieved by the chamberlains and the ceremony seemed to draw to a close, with the emperor taking his position between the sacred sword and the sacred jewels in the exiting procession. The princes followed in single file in order of rank, departing the Pine Room to stage right. Finally, only after the imperial participants had disappeared from view, the third chamberlain approached the ritual tables, picked up the tray holding the Imperial Seal and the State Seal, and was escorted out of the room to stage left. The entire ceremony lasted but four minutes.

A number of things about the ceremony are noteworthy here. First, the entire performance was unabashedly “symbolic.” That is, it was both unproductive in the literal sense—legally, the transfer of the imperial status had been accomplished by Hirohito’s final earthly act, his death—and yet inferential in every detail. From the timing to the ritual space itself to the passivity of the principal participants, the impression was created that this was a momentous and *inevitable* event of state. Indeed, it was the studied inevitability of the brief performance, during which the treasures themselves seemed to dictate the action, that lent such moment to the event. This was neither a family affair (else why the absence of women?) nor a diplomatic display (else why the absence of foreigners?), but rather a domestic political affirmation of the legitimacy of the imperial claim to “symbolic” authority. Second, the emblems (*shirushi*) of authority included both religious and civil items, the former deeply imbued with mythical powers, the latter (the seals) having practical as well as symbolic value. The ritualized interaction between these objects—their entrance together, their placement during the ceremony, and the separation of the religious from the civil icons at the conclusion of the rite—was an official acknowledgment of the intimate relationship between the civil and cultural (religious) dimensions of the emperor system. Though in the end the tension between the two was resolved ritually through physical separation, this detail went unnoticed in both live television commentary and subsequent reports in the print media. We can see how productions such as this allow one to see what one wants to see, permitting the official sponsors to claim only to be preserving tradition.¹⁵

Meanwhile, at the very moment the presentation of imperial treasures was taking place in the Hall of State, another set of rites was beginning at the Palace Sanctuaries (*kyūchū sanden*) a few hundred meters to the west of the official palace building. The sanctuaries, established during the early Meiji period, are comprised of three main shrine buildings lined up on an east-west axis.¹⁶ At the center (and slightly higher) stands the *Kashikodokoro*, dedicated to the imperial ancestral goddess Amaterasu and enshrining the third article of the sacred regalia, a sacred mirror, which duplicates the primary icon of Amaterasu in the principal sanctuary of the Inner Shrine at Ise. To the west of the *Kashikodokoro* stands the Shrine of the Imperial Ancestors (*Kōreiden*), and to the east is the Shrine of the national Gods of Heaven and Earth (*Shinden*). At each shrine, special rites were carried out on the morning of January 7, 1989, to announce to the gods and ancestors on behalf of the new emperor the fact of accession, and to pray for a successful transition from one reign to the next.¹⁷

The most obvious feature of these rites was their physical separation from the official palace. This separation instantiated the ritualized distinction between imperial family rites on the one hand and state ceremonies on the other, and reasserted the strategy introduced (albeit in muted form) simultaneously at the conclusion of the Transfer of Regalia ceremony. We should not ignore a second physical feature, however, and that is that the Palace Sanctuaries are, after all, *palace* sanctuaries. They stand inside the imperial palace grounds, and until the end of World War II served as the ritual center of State Shinto. Their maintenance is paid for with public funds from a special budget devoted to official court functions.¹⁸

In any case, two things are noteworthy about the synchrony of these two events. First, both sets of ceremonies were sponsored by the state, and neither was privileged in terms of temporal priority. Yet it is clear from the media attention afforded it that the transfer of imperial treasures was being ritually privileged during the Heisei accession process. Indeed, the sanctuary rites can be seen to have reinforced the religio-cultural dimension of imperial tradition that was openly (if ambiguously) embodied in the transfer ceremony. In short, both sets of performances underlined the state's continuing regard for modern imperial tradition, but while the transfer ceremony incorporated the same mythic elements that the sanctuary rites invoked, it framed them in terms of civil as opposed to religious principles. In conscious contrast, the sanctuary rites were explicitly religious and resolutely "private"—even the "symbolic" emperor was not in attendance.¹⁹

TYPE 2. CONNECTING PERFORMANCES

Ceremonies at the palace sanctuary during the opening days of the new era also illustrate a way that connections between two or more elements of the ritual process can be asserted. While funerary rites continued to be carried out in private at the residential palace of the deceased emperor, daily offerings were likewise being presented at the Kashikodokoro shrine by ritualists of the Imperial Household Agency staff. On the first day, these offerings were accompanied by the oral presentation of an imperial report (*otsugebumi*) announcing the accession, but on the second and third day no special reports were made. What is significant for our discussion is that the official post-accession audience (*Sokui-go chōken no gi*) scheduled for the morning of January 9, 1989, could not take place before the Kashikodokoro rites had been completed. In other words, according to ritual protocol the ceremonial public announcement by the emperor of his accession had to be delayed until the sequence of religious ceremonies begun at the palace sanctuary on the morning of January 7 had been accomplished. Although the connections between the sanctuary rites and the civil ceremonies were never made explicit in official accounts of the accession schedule, and despite the fact that the Kashikodokoro rites were themselves associated in the media only with the private ancestral cult of the imperial family, there can be no doubt that the link between the civil and religious-cultural dimensions of the emperor system itself was being ritually reinforced at the same time that the more controversial link between the ancestral cult and the deceased emperor Hirohito was (at least publicly) being ignored.²⁰

TYPE 3. CORRESPONDING PERFORMANCES

At 11:00 on Monday morning, January 9, 1989, following the completion of the three-day liturgy at the Kashikodokoro shrine, the new emperor appeared again in the Hall of State, this time in the company of both male and female members of the imperial family. In front of some 300 Japanese dignitaries—"representatives of the people"—he formally proclaimed his accession in a ceremony known as the *Sokui-go chōken no gi*. This of course replicated for a civil audience the earlier announcement at the palace sanctuaries, but here the Emperor himself made the proclamation in a live television broadcast. And here, instead of the sacred bells (*osuzu*) of the Kashikodokoro that signalled the presence of the imperial progenitor Amaterasu, the formal response came from the Prime Minister (see below). It was this ceremony that would be repeated—with great fanfare and majesty—almost two years later in front of the whole world.

The ceremony took place in the same hall of state as did the earlier transfer ceremony, and again attire was diplomatic and formal rather than archaic.²¹ Once the public representatives had taken their places, the imperial entrance began from stage left. The procession was again led by the Grand Master of Court Ceremonies and the head of the Imperial Household Agency, who took their places on either side of the Grand Chamberlain to stage right, facing east toward the open space separating the imperial stage from the assembled guests. The empress stood to the left of the emperor on the ritual stage; to her left, off the carpet, stood six female members of the imperial family, and to the right of the emperor stood the crown prince and five other male imperial heirs. Facing them, the Prime Minister stood at the center of the first row of officials, again flanked by the heads of the upper and lower houses of the Diet and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Behind them stood other officials and representatives of the nation, including provincial governors and local political leaders.

When all had taken their places, the ceremony proper began with a corporate bow. The Grand Chamberlain approached center stage, faced the emperor, and bowed again. He then formally presented a document to the emperor, bowed once again, and returned to his place at stage right. The emperor unfolded and proceeded to read the proclamation (*okotoba*):

The late emperor's demise has truly brought us to the extreme of grief but, in accordance with stipulations of the Constitution of Japan and of the Imperial Household Law, I have now ascended the throne.

Even in the depth of my sorrow I think of the great responsibilities he bore, and remember the natural gentleness of his heart. In retrospect, the late emperor during his sixty-some-odd years on the throne fervently prayed for peace in the world and for the welfare of our people. In a tumultuous world, he continually strove in concert with the whole nation to overcome innumerable tribulations, so that today we have come to realize a stable and prosperous national life and have assumed a distinguished place in international society as a peaceful nation-state.

Having ascended the throne under these circumstances, I cannot but reflect on the profound debt owed to the late emperor and, mindful of his heart's desire to be always in concert with the people of this nation, I vow to uphold the Constitution of Japan and to discharge the duties thus incumbent on me in concert with all of you. To promote the continuing development of our nation's good fortune, of world peace, and of the welfare of humanity is my most earnest desire.²²

When he had finished, the emperor refolded the document and bowed, then stood to wait as the Grand Chamberlain returned to center stage, bowed, and received the manuscript back again. After another bow, the Grand Chamberlain returned to his original station.

The Prime Minister then took one step forward, bowed, and proceeded to read the formal reply (*hōtō*):

Allow me to express my deep condolences.

Despite the fervent hopes of the nation, the late emperor has passed away—how ever can our grief be allayed?

In the midst of this grief, we have been graced with the words of our illustrious new emperor, who has just ascended to the throne. He has expressed his eagerness to abide by the Constitution of Japan and to carry on the virtuous work of the late emperor, (as well as) to promote the continuing development of our nation's good fortune, of world peace, and of the welfare of all humanity.

The nation as a whole, looking up to the emperor as a symbol of the unity of the nation under the Constitution of Japan, will once again apply itself to the utmost to opening up to the world while energetically building a culturally-rich Japan in order to promote world peace and the welfare of all humanity. I offer this as my solemn pledge.²³

After refolding his text and bowing, the Prime Minister returned to his place. Following a final corporate bow, the emperor and his family exited in procession to stage right and the ceremony was complete.²⁴

I have already noted the parallels between this post-accession ceremony and the civil and religious ceremonies that preceded it, as well as suggesting its correspondence with the spectacular "Enthronement Ceremony" (*Sokui no rei*) that would mark the climax of the civil celebrations of the accession process almost two years later. In addition to a detailed analysis of the shared performative elements characterizing the two state ceremonies (the first primarily for a domestic audience, the second for an international one), we could learn a great deal from a comparison of the public announcements themselves. Clearly, one intended effect of both was to reassure the respective audiences, *in the contexts* of peculiarly Japanese cultural displays, of the conscientious aspirations of the new emperor and of the Japanese government as well.²⁵ A second and more contentious intent was to reassert the humanity and *humaneness* of Hirohito, for the new emperor's claim of continuity with a *tradition* of pacific commitment and resolve denied the very object of postwar criticism of the imperial system embodied by his father.

Examples of other types of matched performances could easily be offered, but for the point I want to make it would be superfluous. From

the illustrations above it should be obvious that when we pay attention to the ritual contexts of particular rites and ceremonies, to their place in the larger ritual process, our view of those events changes. For example, we can no longer be satisfied with the kind of straightforward explanation of the "Transfer of Regalia" ceremony that conventional scholarship has provided; we see that the timing and performative details of any particular transfer ceremony cannot fully be appreciated without reference to the sanctuary rites and the attendant publication that each receives. The same holds true for the subsequent post-accession imperial audience. Without both retrospective and prospective reference to the particular ritual contexts of a specific accession, the historical nuances of the ceremony are likely to lose their significance, and the production's multivocality liable to be reduced to an unremarkable hum.

I am convinced that such an outcome is the result of a concerted strategy designed to neutralize the imperial presence in contemporary Japan, to constitute it as an uncontroversial and "given" part of Japanese cultural tradition. Perhaps that is an appropriate result, but it is hardly a natural one. If we truly want to get to the root of the paradox of the modern emperor system, we must get beyond the hum of its ritual inscription. It is that hum that sustains the emperor system today. And it is that hum that most Japanese cannot imagine living without.

NOTES

¹ I would like to thank the Japan Foundation, the Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics at Kokugakuin University (Tokyo), the Harvard-Yenching Library, and the Bowdoin College Asian Studies Program for their encouragement and support at various stages of this project. I would also like to thank the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Berkeley and the Museum of Natural History in New York City for allowing me to present early reports of my findings. Needless to say, individuals too numerous to mention here have also provided generous criticism, insight, and friendship since the inception of the project.

² Buddhist monks are regular and active participants in imperial ritual. For example, annual rites (*viz.*, *Nochi no nanoka no mishiho*), initiated by Kūkai in 834, continued (with a temporary hiatus of about 170 years during the medieval period) to take place in the Shingon-in at the Kyōto imperial palace until 1883, when their performance was moved to the Kanjōin at Tōji, where they are still carried out each year on behalf of the emperor and of the state. They were performed for the new emperor January 8-14, 1989. Similar services were car-

- ried out by Tendai monks at Enryakuji April 4-11, 1989. In each case, items of imperial clothing were provided by the Imperial Household Agency, and Agency representatives participated in the ceremonies. *Jinja shimpō* 2023 (February 6, 1989): 2.
- ³ During my field research I found remarkable evidence of tension on the local level at ritual sites in Akita and Ōita Prefectures as well as in rural Tokyo; in educational settings as diverse as a junior high school in rural Hiroshima and the campus of Kokugakuin University in Tokyo; and in such unusual television programs as the all-night roundtable debate on the emperor system broadcast live by TV Asahi the night of the *Daijōsai*.
 - ⁴ Norma Field, *In the Realm of a Dying Emperor* (New York: Pantheon, 1991).
 - ⁵ D. C. Holtom, *The Japanese Enthronement Ceremonies* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1972 [1928]); and Robert S. Ellwood, *The Feast of Kingship* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1973).
 - ⁶ A few critical studies have argued that the object of these studies—a timeless “essence”—does not in fact exist, and that the apparent existence of such an “essence” is a product of rather than an inspiration for the rites. OKADA Shōji has located the scholarly *ur-text* for this orientation in the work of ORIGUCHI Shinobu, and offers a valuable (if controversial) revisionist historical analysis of the *Daijōsai* in his *Ōnie no matsuri* (Tokyo: Gakuseisha, 1990).
 - ⁷ Adrian Mayer’s brief review of modern imperial funeral practices (“The funeral of the Emperor of Japan,” *Anthropology Today* 5.3 (June, 1989): 3-6) is representative. For ethnographic details, he draws heavily on Takashi Fujitani’s admirable 1986 doctoral dissertation (“Japan’s Modern National Ceremonies: A Historical Ethnography, 1868-1912” [University of California, Berkeley]). Fujitani himself takes an entirely different approach from Mayer’s in his “Electronic Pageantry and Japan’s ‘Symbolic Emperor’” (*Journal of Asian Studies* 51.4 (Nov., 1992): 824-850), claiming to demonstrate through an analysis of media coverage of the funeral that the “emperor phenomenon” in contemporary Japan is “a product of our present historical moment.” (828) An example of the journalistic (non-specialist) type is Thomas Crump’s *The Death of an Emperor: Japan at the Crossroads* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1989).
 - ⁸ Tentatively entitled “Processing Tradition: Imperial Accession in Modern Japan,” the manuscript is in the final stages of composition.
 - ⁹ Needless to say, other interests are also involved (including those opposed to the system itself), but the fact remains that it is in terms of these primary dimensions that ritualized contestation is played out.
 - ¹⁰ This generalization about participation in the rites at the Fukuage

residential palace is complicated in an essay, tentatively entitled "Publication and Transformation," which I have just completed. Because the funereal rites constitutes the "retrospective" aspect of accession (focused on the imperial remains of the old era), I will not burden this discussion with further elaboration of their place in the overall process.

- ¹¹ *Asahi shimbun*, 1/8/89. Akihito had acted on behalf of the Emperor Showa (Hirohito) frequently in the past, especially during his final illness. He had performed administrative functions such as these in the *Bara no ma* office of his father. Henceforth he would use the *Hōō no ma*, which also is located in the private imperial chambers of the official palace.
- ¹² This ceremony is conventionally identified in English as the Transfer of Regalia. To say that the ceremony was a public one would be literally correct only in the sense that public money was used and that elected representatives of the public participated in their official capacities. Signalling while at the same time belying the public nature of the event was live television coverage, which for the first time functioned as an integral part of the ritual production.
- ¹³ The most sacred of the imperial regalia is the mirror, which is noticeably absent from the transfer ceremony but is the central icon in the Palace Sanctuaries, to which we will turn our attention momentarily. For a fuller treatment in English of the history and possible meanings of the regalia, see Holtom. It should be noted that the seals are not strictly speaking included among the imperial regalia [*sanshu no jingū*], even though they hold a significant ritual place in this rite of transfer. When referring to the regalia and seals collectively, I use the term "treasures."
- ¹⁴ It should be noted incidentally that the treasures themselves were not visible during the ceremony; they remained in their wrapped containers, which to all appearances might well have been empty. The observation that the treasures were placed facing outward is based on the direction they faced during the entrance and exit processions.
- ¹⁵ Such a strategy (albeit in a different context) was explicitly acknowledged by sources close to the Prime Minister in early February. In discussing final arrangements for Hirohito's funeral, one told reporters, "It was decided [to stage the funeral] in such a way that those who want to think of the ceremonies as integrating (civil and religious rites) can see them that way, while those who want to think of them as separate and distinct can see them as separate and distinct." (*Asahi shimbun* [2/10/89]: 2).
- ¹⁶ See Murakami Shigeo, *Tennō no saishi* (Tokyo: Iwanami shinsho, 1977), 55-67, for an account of the establishment of these shrines. While his descriptions of the details of imperial rites sometimes in-

vites skepticism, his historical overview is detailed and reliable. Though there are other important structures within the sanctuary compound, only the three shrines discussed here are “residential” shrines, that is, they have permanent numinous residents.

¹⁷ As we will see below, the Kashikodokoro rites alone were repeated on the mornings of January 8 and 9. The ritual presentation of the emperor’s announcement (*otsugebumi*) was omitted on the second and third days.

¹⁸ The ongoing interest of the state is apparent in the budgetary support for the shrines and for the rites performed there. The imperial household is funded by three separate accounts: the “Domestic Allowance” (*naiteihi*) for the emperor and his immediate family’s private expenses (food, clothing, etc.); the “Court Allowance” (*kyūteihi*) for imperial expenses associated with official responsibilities; and the “Extended Family Allowance” (*kōshitsuhi*) for the support of members of the imperial household outside the emperor’s immediate family. Maintenance of the palace shrines is paid for from the Court Allowance, due to their “historic association” (*yūen*) with the imperial tradition. Needless to say, this arrangement conflates the religious, cultural, and political legitimacy of the imperial presence in contemporary Japan, much as the rites themselves do.

¹⁹ Admittedly, this too had a legitimate ritual explanation. Being in mourning, the emperor could not personally participate in the sanctuary rites, but the fact remains that his presence was required for the state ceremony. The point is that the sanctuary rites were carried out in virtual secrecy; only the fact of their performance was reported, with no details available through the mass media concerning the actual procedures employed or the exact content of the imperial announcement (*otsugebumi*).

²⁰ A second and more obvious form of “connecting performance” involves physical rather than liturgical linkages. It was particularly evident in the funereal phase of the process, where it marked various moments of transition from one ritual site to another both within the palace grounds and between the official palace and locations outside. The funeral processions from the palace to Shinjuku Park (the site of the state funeral ceremonies for Hirohito) and again from Shinjuku to the imperial tomb in the western suburb of Hachiōji are the most obvious examples.

²¹ At the same ceremony for the Shōwa emperor (Hirohito) the new sovereign had worn *daigensui*, a ritual costume from the Heian period. The media attributed the change to the postwar “symbolic emperor” system and the effort to demystify the emperor’s role in contemporary Japan. Given that such attributions generally emerge from Imperial

Household Agency briefings, it is reasonable to assume that this represented the official government explanation.

- ²² The official text of the proclamation (and of the response by the Prime Minister, quoted below) was published in all the major newspapers. Both translations are my own.
- ²³ It is curious, perhaps, that the domestic ceremony was performed in contemporary diplomatic garb while that directed toward an international audience was carried out in archaic costumes. Let me note also that the form of response (*yogoto*) of the Prime Minister at the Enthronement Ceremonies in 1990 was a particularly contentious matter. In the end, he simply led a collective *banzai* cheer for the new emperor, but the overall style of his performance differed in significant details from that for the emperor Hirohito's accession.
- ²⁴ The direction of movement—from stage left to stage right—duplicates that of the regalia during the transfer ceremony.