

# Japan's Imperial Household Rites: Meaning, Significance, and Current Situation

MOTEGI SADASUMI

**Keywords:** emperor (*tennō* 天皇), imperial household rites (*kōshitsu saishi* 皇室祭祀), inner court (*naitei* 内廷), Imperial Household Law (*Kōshitsu Tenpan* 皇室典範), Imperial Household Finance Law (*Kōshitsu Keizai Hō* 皇室經濟法)

## *Author's Statement*

Throughout Japanese history, emperors performed imperial household rites for the peace of the country, bountiful harvests, and the welfare of the people. These were emperors' most important public duties. After World War II, Allied powers' occupation policies introduced regimes of the freedom of religion and the separation of politics and religion, only allowed the imperial household to engage in Shinto rites in a private capacity, and abolished the legal infrastructure surrounding these rites. However, emperors continued to perform them solemnly. They still do so today, and the present emperor's wholehearted prayers for the peace of the nation often garners its attention. In this context, this paper re-examines the meaning and significance of imperial household rites.

## *Introduction*

Leading up to the Heisei Daijōsai 大嘗祭, there were hardline opposing views in Japan. Proponents of such positions held it would run afoul of the constitutional principle of the separation of politics and religion. This led to a variety of discussions. The Japanese government released its official understanding of the Daijōsai's meaning and significance on 21 December 1989. In short, it asserted that the Daijōsai is a traditional and important harvest ceremony of Japan that has been carried out upon imperial succession. The emperor prays to Amaterasu Ōmikami 天照大御神 and the

---

\* This article is a translation of Motegi Sadasumi 茂木貞純, "Kōshitsu saishi no igi to genjō" 皇室祭祀の意義と現状. *Kokugakuin zasshi* 國學院雜誌 120(11) (2019), pp. 274–293. Translated by Dylan Luers Toda.

gods of heaven and earth (*tenjinchigi* 天神地祇) for the peace of the state and nation, as well as a rich harvest. Because it is clearly a religious ceremony, by its nature the national government cannot intrude on its content. Therefore, the statement concluded, while the Daijōsai cannot be carried out as an “act in matters of state” (*kokujī kōi* 国事行為), in light of the Constitution of Japan, which dictates that imperial succession shall be dynastic, it is only natural that the national government make it possible for these rites to be held. Its expenses shall be covered by state funds (the “court budget” or *kyūteihi* 宮廷費).<sup>1</sup>

However, people argued that holding the Daijōsai as an imperial succession ceremony was unconstitutional. They pointed to the 1 January 1946 “Beginning of the Year Imperial Rescript on National Revitalization,”<sup>2</sup> as well as the work of Orikuchi Shinobu 折口信夫, who held that the Daijōsai is a ceremony in which the emperor becomes divine.<sup>3</sup> Centered on the Diet and with mass media serving as a vehicle, a discourse holding that the Daijōsai violated the separation of politics and religion would grow quite heated.<sup>4</sup>

In the end, on 19 September 1990, the government released its understanding of the Daijōkyū No Gi 大嘗宮の儀, the Daijōsai’s central ceremony. The statement, touching on the emperor’s actions in the Daijōkyū 大嘗宮 (halls constructed for the Daijōsai) and the content of his *otsugebumi* 御告文 address, rejected Orikuchi Shinobu’s view that the Daijōsai is a ceremony in which the emperor became divine.<sup>5</sup>

Even following the statement’s release, the anti-Daijōsai activities of the National Christian Council in Japan, priests and followers of the Jōdo Shin 浄土真 (True Pure Land) sect of Buddhism, academics, labor unions, civic organizations, and others accelerated. After entering January, such groups held demonstrations throughout the country. The Japan Socialist Party and Japanese Communist Party voiced their opposition right up until the Daijōsai.

Here let us review the argument of the Japan Socialist Party Secretary-General Yamaguchi Tsuruo 山口鶴男, released on 21 November, immediately before the Daijōsai.

The Daijōsai is said to be a religious ceremony in which the emperor becomes a “god” based on Shinto rituals. Even the government’s Enthronement Ceremony Preparatory Committee (21 Dec. 1989) concluded upon examination that “considering its intent, form, and so on, one cannot deny that it has the nature

<sup>1</sup> Saitō, “Seifu Kenkai ‘‘Sokui no rei’’ no kyokō ni tsuite,” pp. 128–129.

<sup>2</sup> Nentō, Kokuun Shinkō No Shōsho 年頭、国運振興の詔書. Commonly referred to as the emperor’s “Declaration of Humanity” (Ningen Sengen 人間宣言).

<sup>3</sup> Orikuchi laid out this theory in “The True Meaning of the Daijōsai” (Daijōsai No Hongi 大嘗祭の本義), which was released upon Emperor Showa’s 1928 Sokui No Rei 即位の礼 ascension ceremony.

<sup>4</sup> Motegi, “Daijōsai o meguru kokkai ronsō.”

<sup>5</sup> Saitō, “‘Daijōsai no gi’ no kenkai.”

of a religious ceremony, and in this sense as well, by its nature the national government cannot intrude on its content.” The national government involving itself in this kind of religious ceremony goes against the present constitution's principles of sovereignty residing in the people and the separation of politics and religion.<sup>6</sup>

In this way, he made clear that he was entirely against it. The Japanese Communist Party's understanding was basically the same. Amidst this, even indiscriminate terrorist attacks were carried out by extremists seeking to use force to prevent the Daijōsai from happening. A delayed action bomb went off in an Imperial Household Agency employee dormitory parking lot on 29 April 1989. On a single day in January 1990, ammunition was fired towards the residence of Prince Hitachi and near the Kyoto Imperial Palace's Nashinoki Jinja 梨木神社. In March, three shrines in Tokyo completely burned down due to arson: Shirahige Jinja 白髭神社, Hikawa Jinja 氷川神社, and Shinmei Jinja 神明神社. In June, a room of the Gakushuin Girls' Junior & Senior High School was destroyed due to arson, as was Gokoku Jinja 護国神社 in Akita Prefecture in July. With Akita Prefecture being selected as the Yuki 悠紀 district that would supply rice for the Daijōsai, the Association of Shinto Shrines' prefectural sub-office (*jinjachō* 神社庁) had been taking the lead to establish “celebratory rice fields” (*hōshukuden* 奉祝田) and harvest pure new rice crops from throughout the prefecture.

The leaders of the Japan Revolutionary Communist League's National Committee (Kakumeiteki Kyōsanshugisha Dōmei Zenkoku Inkaikai 革命的共産主義者同盟全国委員会; often referred to as the Chūkakuha 中核派), who had issued a statement in late July claiming responsibility for many of these attacks, announced at a gathering that in November the group would storm the Imperial Palace. On 31 July, shrines in Nara Prefecture completely burned down due to arson: Iwasononiimasu Takumushitama Jinja 石園坐多久虫玉神社, Musanimasu Jinja 牟佐坐神社, and Muro Yahata Jinja 室八幡神社. Upon entering August, Fukuoka's Montoguchi Tenmangū 門戸口天満宮 burned down completely, and fire was set to the home of the head of Oita Prefecture's Agricultural Policy Planning Department. Oita Prefecture had been chosen as the Suki 主基 district and was managing a field that would supply rice for the Daijōsai (*saiden* 齋田). In October, the storage shed of Kobe's Gokoku Jinja 護国神社 (Hyogo Prefecture) burned down completely, as did the main building of the Nogi second residence at Nogi Shrine 乃木神社 (Tochigi Prefecture).

In November, the terrorist attacks intensified. On the 12th, when the Sokui No Rei was to take place, fire was set to three shrines in Tokyo: Tabata Hachimangū 田端八幡宮,

---

<sup>6</sup> Yamaguchi, “Danwa (Daijōsai),” pp. 202–203.

Hiroo Inari Jinja 廣尾稻荷神社, and Tōnomine Naitō Jinja 多武峰内藤神社. They either completely or partially burned down. On the 13th, Ibaraki Prefecture's Takada Jinja 高田神社 completely burned down due to arson. On the 19th, a mortar was shot four times into the grounds of Atsuta Jingū 熱田神宮 in Aichi Prefecture. Fortunately, there was no damage to the main shrine building. On the 21st, Takekoma Jinja 竹駒神社 in Miyagi Prefecture completely burned down, as did Saitama Prefecture's Shinmei Jinja 神明神社 on the 22nd and Ibaraki Prefecture's Yasaka Jinja 八坂神社 on the 23rd. Also on the 23rd, in Yamanashi Prefecture, fire was set to Mishima Jinja 三島神社, but quickly discovered, preventing any damage. On the 30th, Shiga Prefecture's Ōtaki Jinja 大瀧神社 completely burned down. On 5 December, a mortar was fired three times into the Outer Shrine of Ise Jingū 伊勢神宮. Fortunately, there was no immediate damage.

Writing down all of these shrines and other sites of terrorist attacks, one again realizes just how abnormal and crazy these acts were. However, the Sokui No Rei took place on 12 November 1990, as did the Daijōsai from the evening of 22 November to the early morning of the next day. The Daijōsai, which originates in the divine edicts (*shinchoku* 神勅) of the Age of the Gods (*kamiyo* 神代), was carried out solemnly and the Heisei era began. Until stepping down thirty years later, the emperor sought to perform his duties as a symbol of the state and the people's unity, and did so with his entire body and spirit. Then, on 1 May of this year (2019), the now-reigning emperor carried out the ascension ceremony called Kenjitō Shōkei No Gi 劍璽等承継の儀, thereby becoming the new emperor. Preparations are underway for the Sokui No Rei and Daijōsai to be carried out in the fall. This time, there are basically no debates regarding the separation of politics and religion. What changed in the past thirty years? There were many natural disasters, and perhaps understanding of palace rites deepened as people saw the now-retired emperor engaging in prayers for those affected, something which he saw as important. While looking back on the Heisei Daijōsai, in this paper I will review the meaning and significance of the emperor's rites.

### ***1. The Nature of Post-War Imperial Household Rites***

Until the end of World War II, state affairs were carried out based on the Constitution of the Empire of Japan (below, Meiji Constitution), and Imperial Household-related court matters based on the Imperial Household Law (*Kōshitsu Tenpan* 皇室典範). Revision of the Meiji Constitution required two-thirds of the Imperial Diet's vote. Diet deliberations were not required to revise the Imperial Household Law: the emperor himself could revise it after consulting with the Imperial Household Council (*Kōshitsu Kaigi* 皇室會議) and privy councilors (*sūmitsu komon* 枢密顧問). Therefore, there was a clear distinction between ministers of state, who dealt with state affairs, and ministers of the Imperial Household, who saw to court affairs. The latter were not members of the Cabinet.

There was also a clear distinction between state bureaucrats and Imperial Household bureaucrats. However, the emperor, of course, possessed ruling power, and therefore such distinctions were ultimately ambiguous in some ways. Under the Meiji Constitution, various laws and ordinances were enacted and state affairs carried out. Under the Imperial Household Law, various Imperial Household ordinances were established and Imperial Household court affairs carried out. The Imperial Household Law was also positioned as the “family rules of the Imperial Household.” State and Imperial Household business was dealt with under the two major law systems of the Meiji Constitution and Imperial Household Law.

Some rites (at Ise Jingū and other shrines) were part of government administration. They were incorporated into the Home Ministry's legal structure. The basic parts of Imperial Household rites were carried out based on the Imperial Household Rites Ordinance (Kōshitsu Saishirei 皇室祭祀令; 18 September 1908), which was an associate ordinance of the Imperial Household Law. In the same way, enthronement-related ceremonies (Senso No Gi 踐祚の儀, Sokui No Rei, Daijōsai) were carried out based on the prescriptions in the Ascension Ordinance (Tōkyoku Rei 登極令; 11 February 1909). Also, the Investiture Ceremony Ordinance (Ritcho Rei 立儲令), Imperial Coming of Age Ceremony Ordinance (Kōshitsu Seinenshiki Rei 皇室成年式令), and Imperial Regent Ordinance (Sesshō Rei 摂政令) contained prescriptions for extraordinary (non-regular) rites, and the Imperial Household Tombs Ordinance (Kōshitsu Ryōbo Rei 皇室陵墓令) contained prescriptions for imperial ancestral rites.

After the end of World War II, on 15 February 1945, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (generally referred to as the “GHQ” [“General Headquarters”] in Japanese) issued to the Japanese government the so-called “Shinto Directive,”<sup>7</sup> ordering the complete separation of the state and shrine Shinto. It ordered the separation of “all ceremonies, customs, myths, legends, and everything else related to Shinto” from the state. It was a measure that branded Shinto as a hotbed of ultra-nationalism and militarism. At the same time, under the principle of the freedom of religion, Shinto was allowed to continue to exist if Japanese people so desired. This thereby detached shrines across Japan, which had been under the Home Ministry, and Yasukuni Jinja 靖国神社, which had been under the Ministry of the Army, from state management, turning them into independent religious juridical persons (*shūkyō hōjin* 宗教法人), and also abolished the Institute of Divinities (Jingiin 神祇院), which was the Home Ministry-attached organ in charge of shrine administration.

<sup>7</sup> Full title: “Regarding the Abolition of Government Protection, Support, Supervision, and Proliferation of State Shinto or Shrine Shinto” (Kokka Shintō, Jinja Shintō Ni Taisuru Seifu No Hoshō, Shien, Hozen, Kantoku Narabi Ni Kōfu No Haishi Ni Kansuru Ken” 国家神道、神社神道ニ対スル政府ノ保証、支援、保全、監督並ニ弘布ノ廃止ニ関スル件).

Due to the considerable efforts of individuals who foresaw how severe occupation government administration would be, the Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja Honchō 神社本庁), a juridical person for overseeing shrines that are not religious juridical persons, was established on 3 February 1946, the day after existing ordinances related to shrines and Shinto were abolished. The traditions of shrine rites were thus just able to be passed down, and without any major disorder, the post-war journey of shrines began. Taking Ise Jingū as its main source of tradition, the Association of Shinto Shrines established priest licensing and training systems, as well as a system for the protection of shrines in which its “head of administration” (*tōri* 統理) approves matters; promoted Shinto education and edification; and distributed Ise Jingū talismans (called *Jingū taima* 神宮大麻). It worked to protect Shinto religious belief and practice from the Shinto Directive under the occupation.

What about Imperial Household rites? This is closely connected to the process by which the Constitution of Japan was created and came into force. Therefore, I want to go over these circumstances.<sup>8</sup> The Shidehara Cabinet, to which the GHQ suggested revising the Meiji Constitution in order to eliminate Japan’s militarism and democratize the country, held that naturally revision should be carried out by the Japanese government. It launched a Minister of State Matsumoto Jōji 松本蒸治–led Constitutional Issues Research Council (Kenpō Mondai Chōsa Iinkai 憲法問題調査委員会) and drew up a basic outline for constitutional revision. This “Matsumoto draft” was scooped by the newspaper *Mainichi shinbun* 毎日新聞 on 1 February 1946, and the GHQ found out about it. On 8 February, the Japanese government officially submitted a constitutional revision outline based on the Matsumoto draft to the GHQ. However, the GHQ had already examined the Matsumoto draft, which did not allow for basic changes in the emperor’s position. The GHQ rejected this outline, and instead they delivered an English-language proposal to the Japanese government on 13 February. This draft had been drawn up by the GHQ’s Government Section from the 4th to the 12th. It was based on the so-called “MacArthur’s Three Principles.”

The Japanese government worked on translating it and modifying expressions, and then completed the Japanese version on 2 March. This Japanese version was then submitted to the GHQ on 4 March. After the details were ironed out regarding all items, agreement was reached and the outline of a constitution revision proposal was completed on 6 March. This outline of a proposal was released to the public after having been explained to Emperor Shōwa in advance.

On 17 April, an actual proposal was created based on it and released to the public at the same time as the Privy Council (Sūmitsuin 枢密院) was asked for its opinion. After

---

<sup>8</sup> See Shūgiin Kenpō Shinsakai Jimukyoku, “‘Nihon koku kenpō no seiritsu katei’ ni kansuru shiryō.”

being adopted by the Privy Council, following the steps established in Article 73 of the Meiji Constitution, the proposal was submitted with an imperial rescript to the ninetieth Imperial Diet's House of Representatives on 20 June, which, after deliberations and making limited revisions, approved it on 24 August. It was then sent to the House of Peers. The House of Peers also made limited revisions and then approved it on 6 October. On the following day, the House of Representatives agreed to these revisions.

After going through Privy Council deliberations, the constitutional revision proposal received the emperor's approval on 29 October, and was promulgated as the Constitution of Japan on 3 November. It went into effect on 3 May 1947.

MacArthur's three principles were as follows "I. Emperor is at the head of the state. His succession is dynastic. His duties and powers will be exercised in accordance with the Constitution and responsive to the basic will of the people as provided therein. II. War as a sovereign right of the nation is abolished. . . . III. The feudal system of Japan [hereditary peerage] will cease."<sup>9</sup> The first and most important principle forced a major change. It took away the emperor's sovereignty, which included his supreme command over the armed forces.

As a result, Article 1 of the Constitution of Japan became the following: "The Emperor shall be the symbol of the State and of the unity of the People, deriving his position from the will of the people with whom resides sovereign power." Article 2, 3, and 4 became the following: (2) "The Imperial Throne shall be dynastic and succeeded to in accordance with the Imperial House[hold] Law passed by the Diet." (3) "The advice and approval of the Cabinet shall be required for all acts of the Emperor in matters of state, and the Cabinet shall be responsible therefor." (4) "The Emperor shall perform only such acts in matters of state as are provided for in this Constitution and he shall not have powers related to government." Article 18 states, "All property of the Imperial Household shall belong to the State. All expenses of the Imperial Household shall be appropriated by the Diet in the budget."

As is clear here, the Imperial Household Law also became subject to the Diet's deliberations and was positioned as an associate law of the Constitution of Japan ("with the Imperial House[hold] Law passed by the Diet"). Also, due to all Imperial Household property becoming that of the state, a law regarding the Imperial Household's finances was seen as necessary. Thus, the drafting of a new Imperial Household law and imperial family finance law was carried out in parallel with constitutional revision deliberations. The Provisional Legislative Investigating Committee (Rinji Hōsei Chōsakai 臨時法制調査会; led by the prime minister) was established by the government, and its first general meeting was held on 11 July. There, Imperial Household-related laws were deliberated

---

<sup>9</sup> GHQ/SCAP, "Three Basic Points Stated by Supreme Commander to be 'Musts' in Constitutional Revision."



by its First Committee. Proposals were drawn up primarily under the leadership of Ministry of the Imperial Household Councilor Takao Ryō 高尾亮. The First Committee met multiple times to draft them and on 6 August approved a tentative proposal for an outline of an Imperial Household law's bill. After deliberations at the general meeting, on 26 October an outline for the bill was submitted to the prime minister. The Privy Council was asked for its opinions regarding the bill, and it was then submitted to the Diet. On 16 January 1947, it was enacted, and then went into effect on 3 May, along with the Constitution of Japan.<sup>10</sup>

The old Imperial Household Law was thus abolished. Therefore, the Imperial Household ordinances associated with it were also abolished on 2 May 1947 (by the “Kōshitsu Rei Oyobi Fuzoku Hōrei Haishi No Ken” 皇室令及附属法令廃止ノ件). This meant that all ordinances regarding imperial rites ceased to exist. However, rites that had been carried out in the Imperial Palace for many ages did not come to a halt. They would continue due to a 3 May 1947 official note (“Kōshitsu Rei Oyobi Fuzoku Hōrei Haishi Ni Tomonai Jimu Toriatsukai Ni Kansuru Tsūchō” 皇室令及び附属法令廃止に伴い事務取扱いに関する通牒; no. 45). It was sent out by head of the Archives Division (Bunshoka 文書課) of the Imperial Household Agency Grand Steward's Secretariat (Kunaifu Chōkan Kanbō 宮内府長官官房). This official note consisted of instructions divided into five sections. The third is relevant for our purposes, so I will include it in its entirety below.

With regard to things for which prior prescriptions have been abolished and new prescriptions have not been created, carry out work in accordance with precedents (for example, the legally-established ceremonies of the Imperial Household, and ranks of the imperial family).<sup>11</sup>

Despite the ordinances that served as their basis having been abolished, rites continued to be carried out. This is because these imperial rites emerged in the Age of the Gods and were solemnly passed down by emperors throughout history or revived after being lost.

The Imperial Household Rites Ordinance (the foundational ordinance of regular rites), had been enacted on 18 September 1908. This was due to the existence of the rites that had been passed down since the Age of the Gods, as well as Imperial Household rites having taken shape, switching from a Buddhist to Shinto format after the establishment of the Three Palace Sanctuaries (Kyūchū Sanden 宮中三殿; the Kashiko-dokoro 賢所, Kōrei-den 皇霊殿, and Shinden 神殿) on the imperial grounds in Tokyo after entering the Meiji period. A strong rites tradition first existed, and related legal work had been done

---

<sup>10</sup> See Takao, *Dokumento kōshitsu tenpan*.

<sup>11</sup> Fujimoto, *Yoku wakarū kōshitsu seido*, p. 114.



afterwards.

While the various rituals and ceremonies accompanying imperial succession had been prescribed in the Ascension Ordinance, the new Imperial Household Law only prescribed that “if the emperor dies, the crown prince immediately ascends to the throne” (Article 4) and “the Sokui No Rei will be carried out when there has been imperial succession” (Article 24). With the laws and ordinances that served as their basis having been abolished, no one knew what forms they should take. This spurred confusion. Next I will go over the state of Imperial Household rites during the occupation.

## ***2. The State of Imperial Household Rites During the Occupation***

On 15 December 1945, the GHQ issued the “Shinto Directive,” ordering the abolishment of shrines’ state management and State Shinto, as well as the thorough separation of the state and all shrines. It abolished the Institute of Divinities (a government agency), prohibited Shinto education and surveys by public educational institutions, removed Shinto facilities (for example, altars) from facilities (such as schools and government offices), and prohibited shrine visits in an official government capacity. It ordered the thorough separation of the state and “all ceremonies, customs, myths, legends, and everything else related to Shinto.” It was a particularly strict measure against shrine Shinto, which it saw as a hotbed of militarism and ultra-nationalism.

With the issuance of the Shinto Directive, there was no choice but to revise the Imperial Household Rites Ordinance. On 22 December 1945, mention of the presentation of offerings (*hōbei* 奉幣) for imperial shrines and national shrines (*kankoku heisha* 官国幣社), government bureaucrat’s shrine visits, and other items were removed, and revisions were made to items such as the announcement of important state matters to the Three Palace Sanctuaries and imperial graves. The relationship, though, between the Imperial Household and Ise Shrine was maintained as before. However, on 2 May 1947, the day before the Constitution of Japan went into effect, the old Imperial Household Law was abolished, as were its associated ordinances. Subsequently, based on the aforementioned 3 May official note, imperial rites continued to be carried out. Below I will review developments that followed while referring to the research of Shibukawa Ken’ichi.<sup>12</sup>

In July 1948, the National Holidays Act (*Kokumin No Shukujitsu Ni Kansuru Hōritsu* 国民の祝日に関する法律) was promulgated and the previous corresponding imperial edict was abolished. This did away with existing national holidays with roots in Imperial Household rites as well as changed one of the Japanese terms used in this context for “holiday” from *kyūjitsu* 休日 (lit., rest day) to *shukujitsu* 祝日 (lit., celebration day).

---

<sup>12</sup> Shibukawa, “Sengo, kōshitsu saishi no ayumi.”

The “Ascension and Founding Holiday” (Kigen Setsu 紀元節) was thus done away with, and the “Meiji Holiday” (Meiji Setsu 明治節) was renamed “Culture Day” (Bunka No Hi 文化の日). Their associated festivals were also abolished. However, they did not simply disappear. On these days, Emperor Shōwa engaged in extraordinary worship, working his hardest to pass on time-honored rites. Subsequently, due to a 23 December 1955 decision based on an inquiry placed to the emperor, the fundamentals continued to be carried out based on the Imperial Household Rites Ordinance, as they are today. The emperor’s Meiji Holiday extraordinary worship continued until 1987. The Ascension and Founding Holiday was revived in 1967 as National Foundation Day (Kenkoku Kinen no Hi 建国記念の日). Today, the emperor still carries out extraordinary worship on this day. In other words, Imperial Household rites continued insofar as they did not violate the constitution or laws of Japan. However, ambiguous points remained regarding the relationship with Ise Shrine and shrines where imperial envoys perform rituals (*chokusaisha* 勅祭社). This included the sending of imperial envoys and the presentation of offerings.

There is a related record of pre-Shinto Directive negotiations between the Japanese side (the Central Liaison Office [Shūsen Renraku Jimukyoku 終戦連絡事務局] and Institute of Divinities) and the GHQ’S Civil Information and Education Section on 4 December 1945. According to it, the Japanese side proposed that rites be carried out by shrines themselves based on the free will of the Imperial Household and the people, as well as that state rites be abolished. The state would no longer provide financial support to Ise Shrine but the Imperial Household’s monetary offerings would continue. The imperial family would maintain some say in the appointment of the heads of Ise Shrine (*saishu* 祭主, *daigūji* 大宮司). Regarding the Imperial Household’s monetary offerings to Ise Shrine, William Bunce, the chief of CIE’s Religions Division, expressed his view that while this would be no problem if not taken out of the Imperial Household budget (part of the state’s budget), he was concerned that by using the “imperial gift” (*gonaidokin* 御内帑金) funds for offerings, the Imperial Household budget would be indirectly covering them. He said nothing regarding the appointment of Ise Shrine heads.

In the next set of negotiations on 14 December, the Japanese side explained that state minister visits to Ise Shrine announcing assumption of office are not state affairs but, rather, merely visits that have become a custom in recent years. Bunce had asked about this at the previous meeting. The Japanese side also said that they thought it would be excessive for the U.S. to specifically ban such visits, but they were willing to halt Ise Shrine announcements and visits by public officials in a public capacity. Furthermore, they continued by stating that the Ministry of the Imperial Household would not require the attendance of anyone besides members of the Imperial Household and court officers at Shinto-style ceremonies in the Imperial Palace. The U.S.-side also asked if the emperor’s worship at Ise Shrine is a public affair, but the Japanese side was unable to provide a clear

reply. In other words, we can see that it was explained in advance to the CIE that Imperial Palace rites have a special relationship with Ise Shrine and shrines where imperial envoys perform rituals, as well as that this relationship cannot be easily cut off.

After the issuance of the Shinto Directive, the sending of imperial envoys and presenting of offerings to these shrines, which were now separate from the state, became an issue. Bunce interviewed the Imperial Household Agency's administrative career bureaucrat (*jimukan* 事務官) Kuroda Minoru 黒田美 and the palace-shrine ritualist (*shōten* 掌典) Yaoita Atsushi 矢尾板敦 in the summer of 1947 regarding this. In essence, they said that Imperial Palace rites were the object of the private religion of the emperor as an individual, that they were cut off from his existence as a public figure of state, and that the employees involved were not state bureaucrats but the emperor's private servants. They said that the same was the case for the emperor's religious activities relating to shrines; offerings were provided with his private funds and dispatched envoys were now the private servants of the emperor. While accepting this explanation, Bunce said that he wanted to look into the issue further because the way in which these imperial envoys—ordinary people—were greeted, as well as the format of the rituals and visits, had not changed, and this would lead to misunderstandings that the separation of politics and religion lacked thoroughness. However, subsequently, no measures were taken.<sup>13</sup>

The GHQ did nothing to intervene in the emperor's religious beliefs and practices as they manifested in Imperial Palace rites. This stands in contrast with its demand that shrine Shinto be completely separated from the state.

Ashizu Uzuhiko 葦津珍彦, who was the managing editor of the journal *Jinja shinpō* 神社新報 at the time, states the following about this.

The Shinto Directive ordered the thorough separation of the state and Shinto. Certainly, it was quite strictly applied to ordinary shrines that were under the control of the Home Ministry. However, it is evident that the Imperial Household rites under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Imperial Household were treated in a different way. The Shinto Directive banned placing Shinto shrines and physical symbols of Shinto in public facilities and ordered that these items be removed immediately (only Shinto—Buddhism and Christianity were different).

However, while the Imperial Household's mausolea and tombs had become state property, not only were the *saikan* 齋館 and *shinsensho* 神饌所 [Shinto rites and training-related buildings] not removed from them, but not one torii was either. And that is not all—the Three Palace Sanctuaries exist completely unchanged form in the Imperial Palace, which became state land. This was an

---

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66–70.

era when even the small Shinto shrines in countryside village heads' offices met the misfortune of being removed.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, MacArthur, the supreme commander of the occupying army, was seriously aiming to turn Japan into a Christian country in order to democratize it. He favorably treated missionaries, allowing them to use military vehicles and military mail. He even allowed their children to study at schools for military families. In some places crosses were placed on the U.S. military's Quonset huts, making them into churches. From April 1946 to the end of February 1948, 51,819 Old Testaments, 1,432,021 New Testaments, and 701,487 individual Bible volumes were sent to and distributed to Japan. From 1949 to 1952, the total number of such books sent to and distributed in Japan was 8,508,000.

At the Imperial Palace, starting in April 1948, Bible lectures by Uemura Tamaki 植村環 (vice-president of World YWCA) began weekly for the empress and three princesses. They continued for five years and ended after the peace treaty went into effect.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding this, Ashizu Uzuhiko says the following.

Incidentally, while it is well-known that MacArthur fervently recommended to the emperor that he convert to Christianity, MacArthur never committed the disrespectful act of forcing it on him. MacArthur was harsh in his assessment of ordinary Japanese people. This can be seen in his statement that the Japanese have the minds of a twelve-year-old. However, this was not the case for the emperor. He respected the character of the emperor from the bottom of his heart, and probably thought that if this person converted, then Japan would be saved.

This is nothing more than my speculation, but the devoted Christian (Anglican) MacArthur, hoping that the emperor would convert at his own volition, did not apply pressure or act coercively. He did not apply pressure or act coercively. He must have thought that pressure and coercion get in the way of true, deep-down conversion. Until then, MacArthur [decided to] allow Imperial Household rites to continue as before, not touch the Three Palace Sanctuaries, and also allowed [*sic*] state funds to be used to cover Shinto rites via the inner court budget (*naiteihi* 内廷費). No, actually, he did more than that. In the end, the emperor did not convert to Christianity and maintained the transmitted way (*dōtō* 道統) of the Imperial Household. The circumstances of this were probably best known by Yoshida Shigeru 吉田茂 and MacArthur.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ashizu Uzuhiko, "Shintō shirei to kōshitsu saishi: Shirarezaru shijitsu o otte (jō)" 神道司令と皇室祭祀—知られざる史実を追って—(上), *Jinja shinpō* 神社新報, 1984.6.11.

<sup>15</sup> Takahashi and Suzuki, *Tennōke no misshi tachi*, pp. 115–117.

### 3. *The State of Post-War Extraordinary Rites*

Next, based on the work of Shibukawa Ken'ichi, I will go over the position of the extraordinary rites carried out from the occupation period to after the conclusion of the peace treaty (in other words, after independence).<sup>17</sup>

#### 1. The Funeral of Empress Teimei (22 June 1951)

A quasi-state funeral for this member of the Imperial Household was carried out in a Shinto fashion at Toshimagaoka Funeral Site. A committee appointed by the prime minister and led by Imperial Household Agency Grand Steward Tajima Michiji 田島道治 oversaw all related matters.

#### 2. The Crown Prince's Coming-of-Age Ceremony/Crown Prince Proclamation Ceremony (10 November 1952)

(1) At 8:00 AM, emperor and empress worshiped at the Three Palace Sanctuaries and announced the crowning of the crown prince.

(2) At 10:00 AM, with the emperor and empress at the head, a coming-of-age ceremony was held at the Omote-kita-no-ma 表北の間 (Front North Room) of the Imperial Palace.

The prime minister, speaker of the House of Representatives, president of the House of Councillors, Supreme Court chief justice, foreign countries' ministers and ambassadors, and other invited guests were present. Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru delivered congratulations (*yogoto* 壽詞).

(3) At 11:00 AM, with the emperor and empress at the head, the crown prince proclamation ceremony was held at the Omote-kita-no-ma. The proclamation itself (Sensei No Gi 宣制の儀) was carried out, and the prime minister gave a congratulatory address as the representative of the nation. Then, a sword transfer ceremony (Gyoken Denshin No Gi 御剣伝進の儀) was held.

(4) This was followed by the crown prince visiting the Three Palace Sanctuaries while the East Palace chamberlain (*tōgū jijū* 東宮侍従) held the sword.

(5) At 3:00 p.m., the crown prince's first audience with the emperor and empress was held at the Omote-nishi-no-ma 表西の間 (Front West Room). This was followed by the presentation of ceremonial clothes and decoration presentation ceremony.

(6) Then, the crown prince visited Ise Shrine and the mausoleum of Emperor Jinmu.

The coming-of-age and crown prince proclamation ceremonies were carried out as

<sup>16</sup> Ashizu, "Shintō shirei to kōshitsu saishi: Shirarezaru shijitsu o otte (jō)," op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> Shibukawa, "Sengo, kōshitsu saishi no ayumi," pp. 70–73.

acts in matters of state and the others as private matters of the Imperial Household.

### 3. The Funeral of Yasuhito, Prince Chichibu (12 January 1953)

The prince wished in his will to be used for medical research, cremated, and have a non-religious funeral. His wishes regarding the first two were respected, but a Shinto-style funeral was held and he was buried at Toshimagaoka Cemetery. Expenses were covered with state funds.

### 4. The Marriage of Crown Prince Akihito

(1) At 10 a.m. on 10 April 1959, the marriage ceremony was held in front of the Kashiko-dokoro. The crown prince wore *sokutai ōninobō* 束帶黄丹袍 and Shōda Michiko 正田美智子 *itsutsuginu-karaginu-mo* 五衣唐衣裳. They worshiped in front of the Kashiko-dokoro, in its outer chamber engaged in a sake sharing ritual, and then announced their marriage at the Kōrei-den and Shinden.

(2) At 2:00 p.m., the prince and princess held their first audience with the emperor and empress. They offered their post-wedding greetings.

(3) Later, on the 13th celebratory banquets were held at the Imperial Palace.

(4) On the 18th, they visited Ise Shrine. Then, they visited the mausoleum of emperor Jinmu, as well as the mausolea of Emperor Taishō and Empress Teimei.

The above ceremonies, rites, and banquets were carried out as acts in matters of state, and the announcement visit at Ise Shrine and those that followed elsewhere were carried out as quasi-matters of state.

Regarding the reason that the marriage ceremony in front of the Kashiko-dokoro was carried out as an act in matters of state, the Imperial Household Agency's Deputy Grand Chamberlain (*jichō* 次長) Uryū Noriyoshi 瓜生順良 said the following in an interview with *Jinja shinpō*.

It's my interpretation that the Shinto-style marriage ceremony in front of the Kashiko-dokoro being a state ceremony didn't violate the "separation of politics and religion" constitution.

Even at weddings of ordinary members of the nation, it is socially customary for the marriage vow ceremonies to be religious rituals carried out, based on their own religious beliefs, in, for example, a Shinto or Buddhist style.

When it comes to events for which the social custom is for ceremonial forms to be religious, even if the state carries them out as a public event, this does not mean that the state engaged in religious activities, which is prohibited by the constitution. . . .

Weddings are carried out with the vows ceremony and reception being an inseparable set—this is the nation's common sense. Therefore, it was decided

that the marriage ceremony held in front of the Kashiko-dokoro, the first audience ceremony with the emperor (who is the country's symbol), and the banquets (which are equivalent to a wedding reception) would be carried out as state ceremonies. Insofar as the wedding is carried out as a public event, one surely cannot choose to only have the ceremony in front of the Kasihiko-dokoro—which is socially accepted to be an essential condition of the wedding—be a private event of the Imperial Household.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequently, the weddings of Masahito, Prince Hitachi; Prince Tomohito of Mikasa; and Norihito, Prince Takamado; and so on were all held as public events. Upon the wedding of Prince Hitachi, Uryū said, “Prince Yoshi [=Hitachi] is the next in line for imperial succession [after the crown prince], but it is not definite that he will assume the throne. However, I think that it is not simply a private matter but something like a public matter” (31 January 1959 House of Councillors of Japan Budget Committee meeting).

For the marriage of Crown Prince Akihito, the ceremony in front of the Kashiko-dokoro was held as an act in matters of state, and, using the example of ordinary people in Japan, Uryū expressed the view that even if it had religious characteristics, conventional wisdom held that it does not violate the constitution's principle of the separation of politics and religion. This was a great change; ever since the occupation period, Imperial Household rites were treated as private matters of the Imperial Household. Imperial Household rites thus began to be considered either state or public matters (depending on their content).

However, from the second half of the 1970s, with conservatives and progressives neck and neck, again an attitude of strictly applying the constitution's principle of the separation of politics and religion appeared within the ruling party and bureaucrats. At a House of Councillors Cabinet Committee meeting on 29 May 1975, the Japan Socialist Party's councilor Hata Yutaka 秦豊 suggested that it is a violation of the constitution to send the Grand Chamberlain (*jijū* 侍従), who is a state employee, to Ise Shrine, which is a religious juridical person, as the emperor's representative. Legislation Bureau Director-General (Hōseikyoku Chōkan 法制局長官) Tsunoda Reijirō 角田礼次郎 replied,

Our understanding is that the emperor visiting Ise Shrine has always been a private act of the emperor. We understand it to be a private act. . . .

There is the issue of who will attend to the emperor when he does various private acts, including religious ones. There was the idea that everything be taken care of just by the people who are, should I perhaps say, the private

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 74.



servants of the emperor. But, in the first article of the current Imperial Household Agency Law, it says that all Imperial Household-related state business will be dealt with by the Imperial Household Agency—there is this prescription, so after various discussions, at the time it was decided based on this that even tending to the emperor’s private sphere will be done by the inner court, that is to say, the emperor’s personal servants, as well as the Imperial Household Agency’s employees.<sup>19</sup>

As we can see, he held that based on the Imperial Household Agency Law, which had been followed for such matters up until then, this did not violate the constitutional principle of the separation of politics and religion. However, after this exchange, the emperor’s “surrogate worship” (*godaihai* 御代拝) came to be carried out by not the grand chamberlain but palace-shrine ritualists (*shōten*), who are inner court employees. Also, the crown prince’s surrogate worship, which had been done by the East Palace chamberlain, began to be carried out by palace-shrine ritualists as business of the East Palace. A pronounced tendency emerged for state employees to not be involved in Imperial Household rites.

However, being affairs of the inner court, those on the outside did not know what was actually going on. However, at a meeting of The Society of Shinto Studies (Shintō Shūkyō Gakkai 神道宗教学会) in December 1982, Nagata Tadaoki 永田忠興 (an assistant palace-shrine ritualist or *shōten-ho* 掌典補) discussed the Imperial Palace’s changing rites in a presentation. This was published as a special feature article in January of the following year in the magazine *Shūkan bunshun* 週刊文春, with added original coverage. His presentation included the following points: (1) The Grand Chamberlain started performing daily morning surrogate worship in Western morning dress, and the worship location was moved from inside to outside of the Three Sanctuaries. (2) The offering of the kagura ritual dance *Azuma asobi* 東遊 to Ōmiya Hikawa Jinja 大宮氷川神社 ceased to be treated as public business. (3) The disposal location for Ōharae 大祓 ritual purification items changed. Regarding this, the Association of Shinto Shrines submitted, in the name of its director, a ten-item written inquiry to the Imperial Household Agency’s grand steward (*chōkan* 長官).

The Cabinet decided that the crown prince’s marriage ceremony would be carried out as a Shinto ceremony in front of the Kashiko-dokoro, as well as that it was a state affair. Subsequently, the marriage ceremonies of Prince Hitachi and Prince Tomohito of Misaka were held to be public imperial court matters. It is my understanding that Kashiko-dokoro rituals are, depending

---

<sup>19</sup> Ōhara, *Shōroku kōshitsu o meguru kokkai rōgi*, p. 197.

on the event, sometimes considered to be state matters, public matters, or affairs limited to the inner court. I think that this was the understanding of the Imperial Household Agency authorities after liberation from the Shinto Directive. Do you deny this? If the essence of your understanding is different from your predecessor, I would like for this to be stated publicly.

If one understands the nature of the Kashiko-dokoro as above, then the daily surrogate worship by the grand chamberlain, a state employee, is only natural. However, what is the reason that the daily morning surrogate worship by the grand chamberlain was changed from time-honored traditional vestments to morning dress?

It is my interpretation that the Three Palace Sanctuaries, including the Kashiko-dokoro, are, along with Three Sacred Treasures, covered by Article 7 of the Imperial Family Finance Law, but what is the Imperial Household Agency's understanding? . . .<sup>20</sup>

The Imperial Household Agency sent a reply, dated 13 May 1983, in the name of the chief palace-shrine ritualist (*shōten-chō* 掌典長) Higashisono Motofumi 東園基文.

As you know, the various ceremonies for the marriages of the imperial princes were carried out as state or public affairs. I think that in the future as well, there will be cases in which they could be matters of state, and that sometimes they will be carried out as public matters.

I am fully aware that the grand chamberlain offering daily morning surrogate worship is important. Currently, the same ceremonial wear as [other] ordinary ceremonies [of the Imperial Palace] is used, but the traditional spirit of surrogate worship is not being neglected one bit.

I wish to not have the Three Palace Sanctuaries become state property but remain as [dictated in] Article 7 of the Finance Law.

With regard to Imperial Palace rites, I think that one can tell that their decay is quite exaggerated in the article that is going around in society.

While Imperial Palace rites may have changed somewhat due to various factors, their proper procedures are being carried out without one bit of change,

---

<sup>20</sup> Shibukawa, "Sengo, kōshitsu saishi no ayumi," pp. 80–81.

and I am confident that they will not change in the future.<sup>21</sup>

Due to these questions from the Association of Shinto Shrines, the state of the post-war Imperial Palace rites over time was confirmed, and their track record of having been carried out as public affairs was affirmed. Furthermore, strict interpretations of the constitutional principle of the separation of politics and religion would be curbed to a degree.

#### **4. Critical Joint Research on the Current Imperial Household Law**

The book *Critical Joint Research on the Current Imperial Household Law* (*Kyōdō Kenkyū: Genkō Kōshitsu-hō No Hihanteki Kenkyū* 共同研究 現行皇室法の批判的研究) was released by the Imperial Household Law Research Society (Kōshitsu-hō Kenkyū-kai 皇室法研究会) in December 1987 (pub. Jinja Shinpōsha; non-commercial item). Its introduction, written by the society's secretary Tao Norio, states the following about their joint research: "In the little over three years from its beginnings in the fall of 1981 until the end of 1984, a general outline came together. However, noting that the issue is an important one, we decided it would be best to be cautious and try our hardest to be successful by seeking out the criticisms from as many scholars and researchers as possible. We printed out about two hundred copies. It was mostly Matsuda and I that went around with them, asking learned people for their opinions."<sup>22</sup>

At the time, there had been an increase in the number of government bureaucrats who, strictly interpreting the constitution, saw the rites of the Imperial Household as its private matters. These rites were thereby being forced to change. We can see that in this context, Ashizu Uzuhiko, a friend of Jinja Shinpōsha who had kept a close eye on post-war Imperial Household rites, and others became alarmed and decided to engage in joint research.

In the introduction, Tao states, "The Imperial Household Law was hurriedly enacted during the occupation period, and there are therefore points that deserve criticizing. This book is a fruit of joint research . . . carried out to make this clear, as well as, while noting the existence of many deficiencies, for the purpose of the proper interpretation and administration of the current Imperial Household Law."<sup>23</sup> Here we can see that while the book took aim at the defective current Imperial Household Law, it also makes clear that it is erroneous to hold that proper interpretation and administration of the law would

---

<sup>21</sup> Jinja Honchō, *Jinja honchō shijū nen shi*, pp. 146–147.

<sup>22</sup> Tao, "Shōgen," pp. 9–10.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

warrant turning the Imperial Household rites of the emperor that are being carried out today into private matters of the Imperial Household.

This voluminous book covers a diverse set of content and therefore its arguments cannot be easily summarized. Instead, I will explain only their essential points, which are premised on the fact that state affairs and imperial court affairs were strictly differentiated between until the end of World War II. As I have already stated, per the Meiji constitution, the government (Cabinet) saw to state affairs, and state affairs' budgets and settling of accounts were subject to Diet deliberations. In contrast, the Ministry of the Imperial Household, which saw to business of the emperor, was positioned as government office that, based on the old Imperial Household Law, saw to imperial court affairs—which were outside the sphere of state affairs. In many cases it was funded by Imperial Household assets, which were not part of the state coffers. It was also placed outside of the sphere of the Diet's political debates. This political form unique to Japan was established based on the Imperial Household's long tradition.

However, as a result of defeat in World War II, Japan was occupied by the Allied Army, and government administration subsequently was primarily done by the United States Army. The actual work of occupation administration would be carried out by U.S. General Douglas MacArthur, who had assumed the position of Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers. MacArthur was ordered by the U.S. Department of State to “insure [*sic*] that Japan will not again become a menace to the United States or to the peace and security of the world.”<sup>24</sup> This was the ultimate aim of the occupation. As I have discussed, some occupation policies—such as restricting the authority of the emperor, discouraging the nation's veneration of the emperor, and confiscating and turning into state property Imperial Household property—were based on MacArthur's three principles that became the framework for the Constitution of Japan.

Also, the “Shinto Directive” (issued 15 December 1945), seeing shrine Shinto as hotbed of militarism and ultra-nationalism, ordered the complete separation of the state from Shinto and shrines. Based on the principle of the freedom of religious belief, it called for recognizing Shinto only as private religious belief that is divorced from the state and that can be held by Japanese people if they wish.

The same went for Imperial Household Shinto. The directive only permitted the emperor to engage in Shinto ceremonies as private matters. This had a coercive force that went beyond a constitution, and at the time nothing really could be done. This then connected to the drafting of a new constitution. The ideas of the Shinto Directive were carried on by the new constitution's principle of the complete separation of politics and religion, and would cast a dark shadow even after the occupation ended. All of the

---

<sup>24</sup> State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, “U.S. Initial Post-Surrender Policy for Japan (SWNCC150/4/A).”

imperial ordinances associated with the old Imperial Household Law would be abolished when the new constitution went into effect. Therefore, in parallel with the drafting of the new constitution, a new Imperial Household law and imperial family finance law were also written. These were quickly enacted amidst the occupying army's strong pressure without time for adequate deliberations. People in Japan strongly felt that its inadequacies should be addressed after Japan became independent.

In this context, Article 7 of the Imperial Household Finance Law established the following:

All time-honored items that are passed down along with the imperial throne will be received by the imperial heir upon ascension.

“All time-honored items that are passed down along with the imperial throne ” refers to the likes of the Three Sacred Treasures, the Three Palace Sanctuaries, and the *Tsubo kiri no gyoken* 壺切の御剣 (a sword). In other words, while generally imperial household assets were being made into state property, this law recognized that these are inseparably tied to the imperial throne and dictated that they be received by the imperial heir upon ascension. The tradition of the Imperial Household clearly shows that to pass down the Sacred Treasures is to pass down Imperial Household rites. Therefore, this was not put down in writing. The law affirmed that the Sacred Treasures are time-honored items inseparable from the imperial throne. Due to the occupation, this was done by positioning their succession in terms of economic rights. It also included in their succession the passing down of the Imperial Household rites that were associated with them. In this way, the essence connecting to the tradition of the Imperial Household was maintained.

However, it was difficult to acquire the U.S.'s approval of this law. Some even held that these items should just be made state property and then given to the current emperor by the head of the Diet or prime minister as the representative of the nation. The passing down of the Sacred Treasures was an issue related to the bedrock of the character of the country of Japan. Article 10 of the old Imperial Household Law dictated, “When the emperor passes away, the imperial heir immediately ascends to the throne and receives the Treasures of the [imperial] ancestors.” In order to keep the meaning of this article alive, the above-quoted sentence was included.

In the past, the passing down of the Sacred Treasures was referred to as the *Kenjitogyo* 劍璽渡御 (“the passing on of the sword and jewel”). It was seen as a manifestation of the intentions of the gods. They were Imperial Household property—different from public property but also not the private property of the emperor. They were always passed down upon imperial ascension and the emperor was prohibited from dividing them up or

disposing of them as he wished. However, the U.S. occupying army had adopted the basic approach of only leaving private assets in the Imperial Household and turning all of its public assets into state property. Therefore, formally these were made into private assets of the inner court while preserving their essential meaning. The occupying army's objective was to ensure that the Imperial Household did not have a massive fortune. It appears that the army, noting that these items had little economic value, therefore allowed this.<sup>25</sup>

Let us next review the meaning of "inner court." The Imperial Household Agency's website states the following. Article 3 of the Imperial Household Finance Law establishes that Imperial Household funds will be the inner court budget, the court budget, and the imperial family budget. Article 4 explains the content of each, establishing that the inner court budget is for the everyday expenses of the emperor, retired emperor, and imperial family members in the inner court, and other inner court expenses. It is spending money and not managed by the Imperial Household Agency. Article 5 establishes that the court budget is public money managed by the Imperial Household agency, and includes funds necessary for the likes of the Imperial Household's public activities (such as ceremonies, hospitality including state and public banquets, imperial visits, and trips to overseas countries), funds necessary for the management of Imperial Household property, and funds necessary for the maintenance of the Imperial Palace and other facilities. Article 6 establishes that imperial family budget is to be used for the maintenance of the imperial family's dignity and will be issued yearly to imperial prince houses. This budget is spending money and not public money managed by the Imperial Household Agency.

While at first glance it seems like there is no problem here, the distinction between the inner court budget and the court budget is ambiguous. Its meaning is not self-evident. Article 5 itself states, "The court budget is for court expenses that are not inner court expenses and is managed by the Imperial Household Agency." The line between everyday life and public things is unavoidably ambiguous. This is true even for food, clothing, and shelter. Furthermore, the Imperial Household's "shelter" is both Imperial Household property and state property.

"Speaking from the perspective of Japan's native thought, all imperial court things are public matters. Inner court expenses are also covered by national funds precisely because they are public matters." However, the management method of the inner court budget was distinguished "from the public money management method of administrative offices, recognizing that it was different from ordinary budgets due to the special circumstances of the Imperial Household that differ from ordinary government offices."<sup>26</sup> However, when the Imperial Household Finance Law's bill was being deliberated, Minister of State

---

<sup>25</sup> Kōshitsu Hō Kenkyūkai, *Kyōdō kenkyū genkō kōshitsu hō no hihanteki kenkyū*, p. 97.

Kanamori Tokujirō 金森徳次郎 said, “There is no very clear boundary that divides the inner court budget and the court budget. [I] think that generally the inner court budget [is used] for personal things, and that the court budget [is used] for things in which the personal and public are integrated.”

This book puts forth the critical view that this ambiguous explanation of this bill then took root amongst scholars and the government. In other words, it became an established idea that private matters of the Imperial Household would be carried out with the inner court budget and public matters of the Imperial Household with the court budget. It also argues that bureaucrats would then appear who saw all important rites of the Imperial Household as private matters, and, eventually, even took the meaning and significance of these rites lightly.

Under occupation, the occupying army issued the Shinto Directive, which ordered the separation of the state from Shinto and Shinto shrines. It strictly prohibited all organs of the state (including the emperor) from engaging in religious acts (particularly all acts relating to Shinto) and only allowed for Shinto ceremonies to be carried out as private matters. The emperor had no choice but to carry out Imperial Household rites as private rites. Explaining that the inner court budget is a private budget, Imperial Household rites were carried out as “private matters.” This was unavoidable due to the occupation.

However, when the occupation ended and the Shinto Directive became void, these restrictions ceased to exist. Insofar as the constitution’s twentieth article (guaranteed freedom of religion and prohibition of state religious activities) and eighty-ninth article (prohibition on using public money and other public property for religious institutions and associations) were not violated, there was no longer any need to adhere to the previous explanation.

Therefore, as I previously mentioned, the 1959 wedding of Crown Prince Akihito was held in front of the Kashiko-dokoro, and Shinto rituals were carried out as acts in matters of state. This was a landmark move and a good opportunity to go past the explanation offered during the occupation. However, subsequently, the Imperial Household Agency continued to divide acts of the Imperial Household into the three categories of matters of state, public matters, and private matters, as well as discuss the Imperial Household’s rituals and ceremonies only as private matters. The interpretation from the occupation was left standing.

The book thus makes the following proposal: “Rites carried out at the will of the emperor (without the cabinet’s advice or approval) are important acts of the Imperial Household. Along with the public, non-political social acts that are carried out by the emperor and that are not acts in matters of state, they should be interpreted as valuable

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 71.



public matters on par with the constitution's 'acts in matters of state.'<sup>27</sup>

### ***5. Conclusion: The Meaning of the Inner Court***

Let us again consider the nature of the "inner court." As I have stated, the Ministry of the Imperial Household that existed before the end of World War II was a government office with a different nature than the government (Cabinet), which was rooted in the Meiji Constitution and dealt with state affairs. It was part of a different lineage and rooted in the old Imperial Household Law. It was not an organ of government administration. Ministers of state had to face the Diet and answer exacting questions regarding the country's governance. The Diet was also able to censure ministers of state and the Cabinet, as well as possessed the power and authority to approve or block the budgets of government administration.

Unlike the position of the government that dealt with state affairs, the Ministry of the Imperial Household was outside the sphere of the institutions of governmental administration. It greatly relied on Imperial Household assets that were not part of the state coffers. The management of these assets was outside the scope of Diet discussions—entirely unrelated to the Diet's political debates.

However, after the end of World War II, Japan's constitution, laws and ordinances, and system of government changed. The Ministry of the Imperial Household, which had been located outside the realm of state affairs, ceased to exist, and the majority of its work was inherited by the Imperial Household Agency, an organ of government administration under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Office. The Ministry of the Imperial Household became subject to Diet discussions along with other organs of government administration. It was now subject to political debates, including budgets and the settlement of accounts. However, it was the wish of policymakers at the time to place only the inner court, which was the core of the Imperial Household and the closely connected to the emperor, outside the sphere of political debates.

This is the meaning of the Imperial Household Finance Law dictating the following in Article 4:

- (1) The inner court budget is for the everyday expenses of the emperor, empress, grand empress dowager, empress dowager, crown prince, crown princess, the emperor's eldest grandson, the emperor's eldest granddaughter, and imperial family members in the inner court, as well as other inner court expenses. An amount established separately by law will be disbursed yearly.
- (2) Disbursed inner court funds will be spending money and will not be public

---

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

money under the management of the Imperial Household Agency. . . .

“Will not be public money under the management of the Imperial Household Agency” of course does mean that it is private funds of the Imperial Household but, rather, public money that is *not* the public money of the Imperial Household Agency, an organ of government administration. In other words, the simplistic interpretation that “it is not public money and therefore is private money” is incorrect. Therefore, the “inner court” can be seen as what remains of the Ministry of the Imperial Household, which saw to “imperial court matters” that were outside the realm of state affairs. The correct interpretation is to see the Imperial Household rites that have been carried out in the inner court as important ceremonies and public matters of the Imperial Household that are outside the government’s secular administrative realm.

Imperial Household rituals and ceremonies are carried out by the emperor. The authority to carry out them has been with the emperor ever since Japan’s beginning. It is a sacred authority. In today’s legal terms, it is the emperor’s inner court authority (*naitei kengen* 内廷権限). It originates in Japan’s uncodified constitution that has existed since Japan began.

Inner court daily life is a realm based on the free will of the emperor. In other words, it is a sacred realm. Stating that Imperial Household rites are inner court acts has quite significant meaning. Japan’s sacredness can be maintained precisely because there is this sacred realm.<sup>28</sup>

Understanding the divine rituals of the inner court, which carries out public worship for the entire realm under heaven (*tenka no ōyake no matsuri* 天下の公の祭り) as the private affairs of the emperor is disrespectful and goes against reason. The son of heaven’s worship is single-heartedly praying “may the country be tranquil and the people at peace” (*kuni tairaka ni tami yasukare* 国平らかに民やすかれ). The everlasting mission of emperors that they have inherited from the imperial ancestors is to carry out the rites of the realm under heaven from the beginning to the end of every year that comes, even if the emperor changes. By fulfilling this mission, the outstanding air of the emperor—“only public and nothing private”—arises.<sup>29</sup>

At the time of the Heisei enthronement ceremonies, there was a great debate about the separation of the state and politics, confusion, and disorder. This time, there was none.

<sup>28</sup> Ōishi, “Kōshitsu saigi to kenpō tonō kankei,” p. 143.

<sup>29</sup> Ashizu, “Tennō ni watakushi nashi: Naitei shinji no tanteki na imi,” p. 201.

We find no lines of argument objecting to the basic approach previously outlined by the government. The attitude of the nation regarding imperial rites changed. In a recent *Asahi shinbun* 朝日新聞 public opinion poll (March to April 2019), a question asked (multiple responses permitted) about the best roles for the emperor. “Maintaining traditions such as palace rites” was selected the fourth most frequently (47%), after visiting areas affected by disasters, Imperial Household diplomacy, and memorializing the war dead. 53% of people agreed with using state funds to hold the Daijōsai as an Imperial Household event. It is good news that the number of people who understand the meaning and significance of Imperial Household rites is increasing.

## REFERENCES

- Ashizu Uzuhiko 葦津珍彦. “Tennō ni watakushi nashi: Naitei shinji no tanteki na imi” 天皇に私なし—内廷神事の端的な意味—. *Kyōdō kenkyū: Genkō kōshitsu hō no hihanteki kinkyū* 共同研究 現行皇室法の批判的研究. ed. Kōshitsu Hō Kenkyūkai 皇室法研究会, Jinja Shinpōsha 神社新報社, 1987, pp. 200–211.
- Fujimoto Yorio 藤本頼生. *Yoku wakarū kōshitsu seido* よくわかる皇室制度. Jinja Shinpōsha, 2017.
- GHQ/SCAP. “Three Basic Points Stated by Supreme Commander to be ‘Musts’ in Constitutional Revision” (1946). *Birth of the Constitution of Japan*, National Diet Library.  
<https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/shiryō/03/072/072tx.html#t002>.
- Jinja Honchō 神社本庁. *Jinja honchō shijū nen shi* 神社本庁四十年誌. Jinja Honchō, 1986.
- Kōshitsu Hō Kenkyūkai 皇室法研究会. *Kyōdō kenkyū Genkō kōshitsu hō no hihanteki kinkyū* 共同研究 現行皇室法の批判的研究. Jinja Shinpōsha, 1987.
- Motegi Sadasumi 茂木貞純. “Daijōsai o meguru kokkai ronsō” 大嘗祭をめぐる国会論争. *Jinja Honchō Kyōgaku Kenkyūjo kiyō* 神社本庁教学研究紀要1 (1996), pp. 41–73.
- Ōhara Yasuo 大原康男, ed. and auth. *Shōroku kōshitsu o meguru kokkai rongi* 詳録・皇室をめぐる国会論議. Tendensha, 1997.
- Ōishi Yoshio 大石義雄. “Kōshitsu saigi to kenpō tonon kankei” 皇室祭儀と憲法との関係. *Kyōdō kenkyū Genkō kōshitsu hō no hihanteki kinkyū* 1987, pp. 143–148.
- Saitō Kenji 齋藤憲司, ed. “Seifu Kenkai “Sokui no rei” no kyōkō ni tsuite” 政府見解「『即位の礼』の挙行について」. *Jurisuto* ジュリスト 974 (1991), pp. 128–129.
- Saitō Kenji. “Daijōkyū no gi” no kenkai” 「大嘗宮の儀」の見解. *Jurisuto* 974 (1991), p. 142.
- Shibukawa Ken'ichi 澁川謙一. “Sengo, kōshitsu saishi no ayumi” 戦後、皇室祭祀の歩み. In *Shōronshū: Ichishintō jin no sokuseki* 小論集：一神道人の足跡, pp. 62–85. Jinja Shinpōsha, 2008.

- Shūgiin Kenpō Shinsakai Jimukyoku 衆議院憲法審査会事務局. “‘Nihon koku kenpō no seiritsu katei’ ni kansuru shiryō” 「日本国憲法の制定過程」に関する資料. *Shū ken shi* 衆憲資 90 (2016), pp. 1–10.  
[http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb\\_kenpou.nsf/html/kenpou/shukenshi090.pdf/\\$File/shukenshi090.pdf](http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_kenpou.nsf/html/kenpou/shukenshi090.pdf/$File/shukenshi090.pdf).
- State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee. “U.S. Initial Post-Surrender Policy for Japan (SWNCC150/4/A)” (1945). Birth of the Constitution of Japan. National Diet Library.  
[https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/shiryō/01/022\\_2/022\\_2tx.html](https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/shiryō/01/022_2/022_2tx.html).
- Takahashi Hiroshi 高橋紘 and Suzuki Kunihiko 鈴木邦彦. *Tennōke no misshi tachi* 天皇家の密使たち. Tokuma Shoten, 1981.
- Takao Eiji 高尾栄司. *Dokumento kōshitsu tenpan* ドキュメント皇室典範. Gentōsha, 2019.
- Tao Norito 田尾憲人. “Shogen” 緒言. In *Kōshitsu Hō Kenkyūkai* 1987, pp. 4–10.
- Yamaguchi Tsuruo 山口鶴男. “Danwa (Daijōsai)” 談話(大嘗祭). *Jurisuto* 974 (1991), pp. 202–203.