

The Emperor System as Japanese National Religion:
The Emperor System Module
in Everyday Consciousness

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The Emperor System as a Religious Tendency

The emperor system is a system of the imagination that exists by being believed. Sometimes it is a matter of conscious belief. There are even some people who hold as an article of faith that the emperor is a living god. On the other hand, however, there are those who lend themselves unconsciously to supporting the institution of the emperor and place belief in it unawares. These people also fall within the realm of this imaginary institution. Perhaps we can say that the real nature of the emperor system surfaces, as a structure, in the unconscious behavior of those young people who for some unknown reason ended up going to the Imperial Palace grounds and signing their names in the condolence books at the time of the death of the Shōwa emperor, despite the fact that they knew nothing about the emperor except the smattering of information they had picked up from television. To the extent that it exists by being believed, this system of the imagination is a religion in the broad sense. In this regard, the concept of "Japanese national

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religion" discussed by TOSAKA Jun in his 1936 work, *Shisō to fūzoku*, and which he used in order to grasp the state of contemporary thought in Japan (including the problem of the emperor system), was useful.

In fact, whether or not this concept is meaningful even today depends on whether there is any correspondence between the situation in the 1930s and the situation today. Well, the removal in the 1980s of the 1% ceiling on military spending corresponds to the militarizing of the country that went ahead in the 1930s, and the recent National Secrets Act corresponds to the Military Secrets Act and the Maintenance of the Public Order Act of the earlier era. And the outstanding special feature of the recently announced New Course of Study Act, something very new, is that the singing of the "national" anthem (*Kimigayo*) and hoisting of the flag (*Hinomaru*), neither of which have legal status, are mandated; this corresponds with the fostering of national polity that went on before the war. In addition, the U.S.-Japan security setup and the U.S.-Korea-Japan military alliance correspond with the German-Italo-Japanese Defense Pact. Emergency legislation corresponds with the National Mobilization Act, while the growing conservatism of political parties and labor unions, and the new corporatism of politicians, government bureaucrats, business leaders, and labor correspond with the Imperial Rule Assistance Association and the Industrial Associations to Contribute to the State. Because there is this sort of parallelism, the concept of Japanese national religion is something very applicable today.

Tosaka Jun pointed out three tendencies in religion in the 1930s.

The first tendency was a phenomenon that contemporary journalism styled a "religious renaissance." Buddhist, Christian, Shinto, and other religions' sacred scriptures were being published, and prophecies, spiritual experiences, spiritual communications, mysticism, and occultism were the fashion. In more recent times, the phenomenon of religious books piled high in the book shops resurfaced in the early 1970s. Mysticism, occultism, spiritual experiences, and similar trends have grown in momentum as we head towards the end of the century.

We also have television programs of religious talks given by self-styled as well as eminent and noted monks; the early 1930s were a time when radio religious talks began, when the "religious resurgence" linked up with the mass media to achieve rapid growth.

The second tendency pointed out by Tosaka was the rising tide of New Religions and folk religions. Examples of New Religions which emerged around this time are the Hito-no-michi, the Dainihon Kannonkai (later named Sekai Kyūseikyō), the Oomotokyō, and the Reiyūkai. These New Religions reached peaks of prosperity, each of them with believers said to number in the hundreds of thousands. The basis for this second tendency was social anxiety: people who had no place to go, no place where they could be saved, ran to the New Religions. A recent phenomenon similar to this began again as early as the 1960s, when the unlucky ones who missed out on the so-called “high economic growth” turned to New Religions. The New Religion boom has continued ever since, and as we head for the end of the century the “lesser gods” are more and more popular.

The third tendency is what Tosaka called the “Japanese national religion” (*Nihon minzoku shūkyō* 日本民俗宗教). It refers not only to State Shinto, but also to the mentality that supports an emperor system. It was a concept that widely embraced such things as national polity (*kokutai* 国体), Japanism (*Nihonshugi* 日本主義), idealism (*seishinshugi* 精神主義), and “crisis ethos” (*hijōji no seishin* 非常時の精神).

Tosaka pointed out the trinity that supported the Japanese national religion: the military, government officialdom, and “Big Bourgeoisie, Japan-style.” At the same time he says that, supported by this trinity, the Japanese national religion penetrated into all spheres of life: education, folklore, literature, the arts, and even politics and economics. In other words, the ultimate attainment of the emperor system was to be the religion of everyday life, to be an emperor system at work in everyday consciousness. This, according to Tosaka, is what the Japanese national religion was all about.

Tosaka recognized the critical capacities of the common people’s religions, the “New Religions.” Despite that feature of the New Religions, however, he predicted that the first and second religious tendencies would, on the whole, probably be swallowed up by the third one, the Japanese national religion, with its greater centripetal force. And as a matter of historical fact that is exactly what happened.

The headquarters of the Oomotokyō twice, in 1921 and 1935, was subjected to severe repression on such charges as *lèse majesté* and violation of the Maintenance of the Public Order Act. When the Shōwa emperor died in 1989, the Oomotokyō expressed sentiments

of veneration and allegiance towards the emperor, taking his death as a loss. I believe this is a sign that the phenomenon of religious movements being drawn towards the third tendency is occurring now, just as it occurred in the 1930s.

At the heart of the Japanese national religion is the "willing submission" mechanism. As everyone knows, at the present time neo-centrism, neo-conservatism, and neo-militarism are on the march; to this can be added the political reorganization styled "The 1986 System." We cannot overlook the fact that the "willing submission" mechanism is operative as the structural factor for why brakes on these new trends do not work.

"Willingness" (or "spontaneity") and "submission" are two words that, in the nature of things, are contradictory. Joined together, they form a concept, "willing submission," that involves a contradiction. To convince yourself that you are voluntarily submitting, that your submission was a spontaneous affair—this is a mechanism for internal control that is also a feature of a managed society. I believe it overlaps with the mechanism of "willing submission" in the Japanese national religion.

Human beings are most liberated when decisions do not have to be made. At such times government is not needed. But when a large number of human beings live together, the need to make decisions arises. At such a time, human beings think, "If decisions have to be made, I will make my own decisions about what affects myself." This is the first step in human government, this is the starting point of government as self-determination, as autonomy.

"Willing submission" is at the opposite pole from this "I will make my own decisions about what affects myself." First of all, one's actions and way of life are coerced by others. Secondly, the submission is embellished with the window-dressing of "It's something I chose to do voluntarily" and "It's spontaneous." In other words, in "willing submission" a person is subjected to a double insult.

Performance Model of the Emperor System

In order to understand the emperor system as Japanese national religion, let us consider a performance model of the emperor system.

The star performer is, needless to say, the emperor himself. The ones in charge of production and writing the scenario, it can safely be said, are those in political power.

For the actors on the stage (though they also intervene in the scenario making), we have in the foreground the Imperial Household Agency (Kunaichō) and the relevant government organizations and, in certain cases, self-governing local communities. The background is more important, however, and there we find the Liberal Democratic Party, the middle-of-the-road political parties, the financial world, officialdom, the right wing, and the decision-making organs of giant enterprises exerting pressure.

There are others on the stage as well; we can call them the chorus, or maybe the middlemen. They are the intermediate decision makers who pass down political decisions made at a higher level to the general public, i. e. the middle-level leaders who mediate authority down to the people. They are for the most part public organizations and the media industry, and they are indispensable actors in the performance model of the emperor system.

Last of all there is the audience. The audience is made up of different types. Some of them even have their backs turned to the stage; in other words, they reject the emperor system performance.

There you have it: a broad sketch of a model of the performance. Let us proceed along the above lines to consider how the various parts interact to stage the performance which is the emperor system.

The Structure of the Emperor System

In regard to the star performer, the emperor, I would like first of all to pin down the spatial structure adapted for the existence of the emperor and the temporal structure of the emperor system.

Regarding the spatial structure of the emperor system, we have the theoretical position culled out by Orihara Shūzō: "The very essence of the emperor system is an empty core." In my opinion, this is the key point in the spatial structure of the emperor system.

According to Orihara, the emperor is *ama no manai* 天の真名井 (the sacred well of heaven). In other words, a circle of light comes down from the ceiling, and in that spotlight there is, no, not a person, but simply a stage, bathed in white light.

Still, this empty core of a stage has the tremendous centripetal power of a black hole. Around this empty core whirl a variety of powers, which spread out in concentric circles to the Palace, from the Palace to Tokyo, from Tokyo to Japan, and, before the war, from the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere to the world. This

idea of an empty core may seem farfetched, but many years after Orihara and I pushed the argument, Roland Barthes said something similar about Tokyo with the Imperial Palace at its center.

Secondly, there is the temporal structure of the emperor system, a device by which the emperor system freezes time. That is to say, the myth of “an unbroken imperial line” has, as the adjectival modifier “eternal” that goes with it signifies, the function of suspending time, erasing history, making people oblivious to time.

Not so long ago the newspapers reported that the president of South Korea, before a visit to Japan and under pressure of public opinion in South Korea, insisted that “the emperor make an apology for the crimes of Japanese people against the Korean people during the war.” I don’t know about others, but this came as a jolt to me, as if someone had suddenly hit me on the head. This shows that I, too, had slipped into this obliviousness to time. It seems that there is in the Japanese national religion a device of obliviousness to history, and that at its source is the structure for freezing time within the emperor system.

Let us reflect upon the person of the emperor that is supposed to occupy the “stage” that has this spatial-temporal structure. The emperor’s person forms a trinity: as flesh-and-blood (*namami* 生身), as a public figure (*utsushimi* 現身), and as a hidden figure (*kakuremi* 隱身). It used to be that these three aspects were involved in fierce confrontation within the person of the emperor. That is why it was possible to get a hold on the flesh-and-blood emperor and divest him of value, or, conversely, invest the public and hidden figures with extremely powerful taboos. It was a pluralized person subject to violent fluctuations, so that Meiji elder statesmen could manipulate him, referring to him as a “pawn” (*tama* 玉), at the very same time as he was being treated as a living god (*arahitogami* 現人神).

Today, however, this trinity has been emptied of its content and become a mere image through the intermediation of the mass media. In this sense you might say the “replication” of the emperor’s person has made progress. The pattern has been set for representing the person of the emperor to the world through the media, and this is the all too familiar copy that we keep seeing. It is all geared to breaking down the imperial “aura.” To use the expression of Walter Benjamin, they have transformed the person of the emperor from a “worship-able asset” to an “exhibit-able asset.”

Still, even though the person of the emperor, which is supposed to be occupying the center stage that forms the empty core, is only a simulation, there is still the need to envelop it in an aura. And so what happens is that the person of the emperor is filled out by a "personality myth." They cloak the person of the emperor in the false aura of a "pure, innocent, spotless person," or, depending on circumstances, "so kindhearted" or "in his private capacity, a pacifist."

But a "pure, innocent, spotless person" is but an empty canvas; it does not signify anything. You could also call it a *screen*. One could say that on this screen, on which the person of the emperor is projected, dual images overlap each other—the intent of a desire for state order and the self-image of the people. The person of the emperor is at once a projection of the desires of civil society and a representation of what is distinctively modern. In this sense there comes about the paradox that his being the "symbol of the Japanese nation" (as described in the Japanese constitution) is a truly accurate description.

At this point let us look at a catalogue of the performances of the imperial person.

First, there are the performances of the sacred emperor. For example, take the Mikuni Hōshidan (associations for serving the country). These started from several dozen youths from village communities in Miyagi Prefecture mowing the grass in the Imperial Palace, taking the cuttings back home, producing "pure rice" using them as fertilizer, then donating the rice to the emperor. Then similar groups spread throughout the country, so that at the present time it's so popular that you have to apply to the Imperial Household Agency and wait from six months to one year for your group's turn to come.

I shall touch upon this later, too, but I think this can be called an example of the peasant class's redistribution fantasy being linked up with the belief in the power of production in the wide sense through the symbolic activity of mowing grass in the Imperial Palace. It is a well-known fact that places where the emperor has planted trees and rooms where he has slept are treated as sacred.

A special-edition newspaper of the Meiji period carried the story of how an old woman who had lost her sight through illness ate some rice left over from a meal Emperor Meiji had eaten during one of his trips around the country and her blindness was cured.

The repeated telling of tales of such miracles and myths produced the sacred-emperor image. The emperors in the modern period have played the part of the principle founder and chief priest of religions of every description, including New Religions. The image of this sacred existence has been cast repeatedly since the time of the Meiji emperor and right up to the present day, and this idea is being acted out in the form of events and rituals.

Next we have the performance of the man-of-letters emperor. The most obvious example of this is the traditional poetry-reading party at New Year's time. In the words of the literary critic Yamazaki Masakazu, "Waka converges on the noblest and simplest individual." By "noblest and simplest individual" he means, of course, the emperor, and on this occasion the emperor, playing the role of priest of traditional culture, stands at the apex of the cultural hierarchy.

Thirdly, there is the performance of the scientist emperor. The biology the present emperor specializes in is taxonomy. Now, taxonomy represents the modern age, and so the emperor is enacting the symbol of order in modern science. Articles in the natural science area written by members of the imperial family are always put first even in scholarly journals, so I am told.

Fourthly, there's the performance of the working-man emperor. From time to time photographs and captions of "the emperor busy performing official duties" flow out to the mass media. I do not think it necessary to say very much on this point.

In the fifth place we have the performance of the patriarch-emperor, as also the performance of "the emperor and his family." When the young people who visited the Imperial Palace to sign the condolence books after the emperor's death were asked what image they had of the Shōwa emperor, one of the set replies was "father of Japan." Thus the emperor has the image of patriarch of the Japanese race. Further, the portrait of the imperial family, with the clichés that go with it, such as "getting along harmoniously," "pleasant," "mutually caring," and the like, is also a symbol of the happiness of the average Japanese person, sharing the idea with everyone else that "everyone belongs to the same middle-class." You could say that the imperial "Holy Family" stands at the apex of the social hierarchy.

The imperial family's manners, dress, and habits are often taken up by women's magazines and the like. There is a hierarchy, so it is said, among marriageable women, with the ultimate young lady

being the one who can become empress or princess of the royal family, followed by the "genuine young lady" class, under which comes the class of those who could become genuine young ladies with some effort, and finally the false pretenders to being young ladies. This hierarchy exists in parallel with a hierarchy for boys based on a standard score.

Using the above catalogue of performances of the imperial person, government authorities work out the scenarios.

Scenarios by Government Authorities

First of all, there's the scenario for the promotion of neo-nationalism by means of administrative reform. In the name of self-help of the individual, the doctrine of a Japanese-type welfare society was preached, privatization (or what was eulogized as the "introduction of private business vitality") was carried out, and development was promoted by a relaxation of governmental controls. At the same time, the dismantling of giant labor unions and their absorption into the system proceeded at full steam ahead.

What we have here are conditions in which there is a sort of rationalization of society, a rocking of the old order, and a shift towards a new state of competitiveness. Within such conditions, therefore, the need arises to bring about a reorganization of order and fresh unification. And so national identity is emphasized. Efforts to combine anew government, bureaucracy, business, and a part of the labor world under the leadership of government and bureaucracy, and yet to shift towards a style of government that includes the general public—this, I believe, is the scenario for the promotion of neo-nationalism.

In connection with this we have a second scenario: the comprehensive incorporation into the political base of the inhabitants of urban-type society simultaneously with the promotion of rationalization towards urban-type society. The redevelopment of large-scale cities (which is what provided the structural basis for the occurrence of the Recruit Scandal) gets promoted, and in the industrial structure the weight shifts towards high-tech industries and the information industry.

Parallel with these activities there takes place a continuous expansion of what former prime minister Nakasone used to advocate, force against the left wing. According to Shindō Muneyuki, the

reform of the tax system is aimed at incorporating workers in urban-type society into the political base.

The third scenario is the promotion of neo-nationalism by means of education reform. Some of the aspects of the proposed draft of the New Course of Study Act are the inclusion of courses on internationalization and information society into high schools and the fostering of favorable attitudes towards development. At the same time, the government pushes the thoroughness of moral education and strong disciplinary action to be taken against those teachers who do not carry out the obligatory ceremonies involving the flag and the national anthem.

At the same time as this is happening, the Minister of Education, Mr Nishioka, is stating that it is desirable to centralize matters relating to private schools, which are at present under the jurisdiction of the municipal governor's bureau, with public education. In other words, it is a policy aimed at shifting things to the jurisdiction of the Board of Education and centralizing them under state administration. Thus some things in the scenario for promoting neo-nationalism in the area of education are quite obvious for everyone to see.

The fourth scenario is the promotion of ultranationalism in the name of internationalism. Speaking about the revised version of the Course of Study Act, Mr Nishioka stated that "Only when children feel the national flag and the national anthem are something special can they have an attitude of respect for other countries as well" (10 February 1989). This is the logic used: that the Japanese national anthem and the Japanese flag are being emphasized for the sake of internationalization.

Probably the ultimate in these scenarios for promoting a new nationalism is the manipulation of the emperor system. For the purpose of providing a national identity in a period of shifts in society and a period of reorganizations in government, repeated use is made of a cultural device and a political "system" that performs a national unifying function: the emperor system as Japanese national religion.

The state rituals connected with the emperor's death and the change in reigns can be styled the crowning events, the grand spectacles, included with premeditated design among the stratagems for building a new nationalism.

There were in my opinion three events after the war in which

the emperor formed the nucleus of measures for stirring up nationalism.

The first was the Shōwa emperor's imperial tour immediately after the war. In his role of religious priest he made a pilgrimage around the country to pacify through prayer the *aramitama* (violent spirits) and replace them with *nigimitama* (peaceful spirits). This was modelled on the Meiji emperor's tours: whenever society is breaking up and in chaos and there is a need for knitting it into a governable society, an imperial tour takes place. In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict ANDERSON (1983) analyzes why, from the second half of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth, the Spanish empire in the Americas dissolved into eighteen separate nations and why various creole communities developed the notion of "we people." Anderson says that the new republics in South America were administrative units from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and that creole bureaucratic functionaries were sent around these units on administrative rounds, in much the same way as people made religious pilgrimages. This fact, together with newspapers published by creole printers, played a decisive role in forming the imaginary communities called nations. This is a completely different model of national formation from the Western European model of a state in which nationalism is supported by a middle class, a bourgeoisie.

Perhaps we should think of the tours of Japan's emperors as the same sort of political pilgrimage. In actual fact the first imperial tour after the war did bring about national unity. And guaranteeing that unity in the form of "after care" is the National Athletic Meet held annually in one of the prefectures in turn and where a member of the imperial family normally makes an appearance. The National Athletic Meet is a variation of the political pilgrimage.

The second event was the ritual of the wedding of the Crown Prince (the present emperor) and Shōda Michiko in 1959. It is, as everyone knows, nationalism for the nuclear-family age, based on the "new family" legend that it all started with a chance meeting in Karuizawa. When the state ceremony of the enthronement of the Shōwa emperor was held in 1928, radio became popular overnight. Everyone knows that television became popular at the time of the Crown Prince's wedding. Whenever the emperor system arouses nationalism, it is always accompanied by a spectacle, and meshed with it is the spread of mass media.

The third event is the death of the Shōwa emperor and the enthronement of the new emperor. With the anthropological theme at its core of the community's experiencing a death and resurrection in the death of its king and rites of rebirth, the long-drawn-out state rituals, from the state funeral through to the state rite of enthronement and the Great Thanksgiving Festival after the enthronement, are prize plums for nationalism.

*Intermediate Decision Making:
Transmission of the Emperor System's Performances*

When the above scenarios of the authorities descend to those below in the form of notifications, commands, and "requests for cooperation," and go on to penetrate into the community, they pass through the community's intermediate-decision-making stage. It is there that the transmission and amplification of authority are thought to be carried out by agents for the performances of the emperor system.

The place where this intermediate-level decision making takes place can be seen if we look at where and how the decision making and formulation of guidelines in regard to "self-restraint" (*jishuku*) concretely took place during the prolonged illness of the Shōwa emperor.

In the case of newspapers, you had a "request to the press" going from the Cabinet Secretariat to the Newspaper Association.

In the case of television, it is said that on 22 September 1988, immediately after the news of the emperor's deteriorating condition, agreement was reached on steps for special programming on X-Day (the day of his death), in a meeting of programming department heads from the five television stations located in Tokyo.

In the case of banks, the National Banking Association produced a twelve-article memorandum. This they sent on to the national association of regional banks and the national association of mutual banks, which in turn sent it on to each of their individual member-banks.

In the case of the movies, the decision regarding self-restraint was apparently made at an ordinary board meeting of the National Federation of the Entertainment and Environmental Sanitation Trade Association. This then flowed on to unions and chapters in each of the prefectures, and from there on to individual theaters.

As regards the day of national mourning (24 February 1989), all

91 central markets in the 56 prefectures and those cities designated by Cabinet order, as well as the majority of the approximately 1,700 regional markets, would be completely closed down. The first to make an informal decision to close for the day after receiving a directive from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries were, it seems, the central wholesale markets in Tokyo at Tsukiji and Kanda. This triggered off an announcement from the National Central Wholesale Market Association formed by Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, and other large cities, that there would be a special holiday. And the regional markets then decided to follow suit.

As regards the decision to cut Tokyo's traffic volume on the day of national mourning down to thirty percent of a normal day's traffic, the Traffic Section of the Metropolitan Police Office requested the cooperation of the Tokyo Transport Regulation Council, to which the transport industry groups belong, in self-restraint in the operation of vehicles so as to meet the target of a 70% reduction below normal traffic volume. The Council called a general meeting and decided to cooperate, then conveyed the decision to the approximately 200 industry groups that belong to the Council.

For a concrete look at an intermediate level of decision making we can take the case of actions carried out in Hachiōji City, the location of the Musashi Mausoleum where the Shōwa emperor would be interred. The city formed a "Hachiōji Citizens Committee for Welcoming Emperor Shōwa." Hastily formed around the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the committee asked the Rotary Club and Lions' Club for contributions of ¥10,000 per person by way of condolence gifts. Acting as fundraisers for the "Citizens Committee" cause were conservative and middle-of-the-road assemblymen, the president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the like—people who are the pillars of Hachiōji's conservative base. The story goes that, because the fundraisers were the powers-that-be in the local community, there was a general atmosphere that made it impossible to refuse when contributions were solicited, a feeling that anyone who did not cough up was not being part of the gang. One report referred to the contribution as a sort of loyalty test.

Resistance and opposition to the committee was strong among middle-aged people, who had had personal experience of the war. Nevertheless, Chief Cabinet Secretary Obuchi betook himself to a meeting of the Hachiōji Citizens Committee, and in his speech said, "Hearing that Hachiōji citizens of their own accord set up this

committee, I want to express my heartfelt feelings of admiration," then went on to weave the phrase "of your own accord" repeatedly into his speech.

In sum, then, because decisions are made and carried out by intermediate-level leaders, and the reason given is that "it is connected with the emperor," people step into line and go along with the crowd, even though they cannot agree with what's happening. On top of this, the whole exercise is camouflaged under a cover of spontaneity, by painting it as being carried out of the citizens' own accord.

The Emperor System Module

Once the design for the reception of decisions of intermediate leaders is in place in this way, what happens to the everyday consciousness of the people, who, in terms of the performance model of the emperor system, are the audience? So at this point let us consider the structure of the emperor system as it works out in everyday consciousness.

As a module (*module* refers to an interchangeable, functional constituent unit) the concept "emperor system" combines with political, ideological, and cultural contexts to form diverse "variations" in the emperor system. *Module* is a word that in computer language originally referred to a unit in programs and hardware functions. The meaning was then transferred to signify, for example, a part of a spaceship that, though a constituent unit, can separate from the main spacecraft and perform on its own; again, we call a house made up of prefabricated parts a "modular" house. A module, therefore, once it has been produced, can, as an interchangeable constituent unit, be transplanted and propagated in many different social and cultural contexts. The transmitting devices of the emperor and those in power interweave several strands of the module whose highlight is the empty core of the emperor into the fabric of politics, economics, culture, and society, till at the end of the process it is picked up by the receivers of people's bodies. This is projected onto the person of the emperor and bounces back. Here we have, I suggest, the circulation schema for the Japanese national religion.

In that case, the emperor-system module can be thought of as having a "frame." The range of the module is determined by expanding or contracting this frame. The frame operates on the

principle of expanding without limit, spatially and temporally; when the frame becomes fixed, the emperor system appears as an institution. The smallest module, therefore, is the situation in which the frame is restricted to only the relationship between the person of the emperor and "the stage."

Another example (which also reveals the assumption of male supremacy) is the case in which only the Crown Prince, as successor to the emperor and to the imperial throne, is at the center of the frame of the module. In September 1988, when the deterioration in the emperor's condition was announced, the Crown Prince and Crown Princess went to visit him. During the visit the Crown Prince stood beside the bed looking down at the emperor. The Crown Princess, however, was kneeling on the floor. Her posture expressed the idea that looking down from above was something it would be wrong for her to do. On that occasion the Crown Princess entered within the frame, but only in a relationship that placed her at a distance from the core of the module. If you enlarge this assumption, it will extend to the scene of ordinary citizenry running to the area in front of the Imperial Palace and kneeling on the gravel.

There are cases in which the entire imperial household is the frame; and there are other cases in which the imperial household and the Imperial Household Agency enter within the frame. When you see on the television screen how the prime minister, acting as a representative of the people, spoke and acted when he visited the ailing emperor, what comes across clearly is that the prime minister, at the same time that he is representative of the people, also is merely a subject to the emperor, the center of the module.

This module can expand indefinitely. For example, at the time of the state funeral ten thousand people were chosen to attend. It is a commonly held view that these ten thousand, representing the social establishment, were perhaps the core of the module.

This module expanded so as also to cover the pages of newspapers and the screens of television sets with the words "emperor's demise" upon his death. The module reached its maximum spread on those pages of the newspapers and those television programs that had been prepared in advance for the awaited X-Day. To be sure, sometimes an effort was made to strike a balance in the module by mentioning, albeit briefly, wartime responsibility, and sometimes, too, the module was shrunk a bit to avoid boring the masses with the ready-made newspaper copy and TV programs.

When you think of it this way, the people who are in a special way at the interface of the frames of the module of the emperor system are especially interesting. These are the people who have a deep connection with the emperor system because of their life histories, especially those people who have experience of the war.

Of these people, there are some whose commitment to the emperor as an individual used to be deep, but who nonetheless would consider themselves as having nothing to do with the emperor. There are also those who feel hate for him. And there are also a large number of people who have consistently maintained a critical attitude towards the emperor in regard to war responsibility. Still, sometimes the love or hate does an about-face. Quite a few people who came to sign a condolence book had had wartime experiences that left them critical of the emperor down through all the postwar years. Here we see the problem of the depth of the emperor-system module, to go with its spread; it is obvious that connections with the emperor system are not merely matters of opinion or knowledge, but that the roots go deep into the emotional makeup.

On the other hand, there are times when the module's frame can dissolve to meet the needs of economic activity. Thus, for example, even when the top leaders of giant enterprises and the like outwardly bowed in the direction of self-restraint, this doesn't particularly mean they were emotionally committed to the emperor. When their economic activities suffered too much, they did not hesitate to set self-restraint aside.

Noteworthy at the receiving end of the module are those, mainly young people, who knew nothing at all about the emperor or the emperor system, and who formed their frames by what they learned on television and in the weeklies from September 1988 on. The emperor image that the information industry projected from September on was of a wonderful emperor, an emperor who was a sincere, good person and a pacifist. No doubt a great many of the young people who went to sign a condolence book did so because they felt sorry that such a wonderful person had died.

Furthermore, there were cases in which this frame came to the surface on X-Day, even though it hadn't been a conscious thing in daily life before that. There was one young man, for example, who had started working for a certain company after graduation from university and who ended up quitting the company because he did not want to take on some work connected with a nuclear power

plant. The day of the emperor's death, the 7th of January, this fellow, without thinking, took along a camera and went to sign his name in the condolence book. When he later realized that in effect he had been caught up in actions that meant praise of the emperor, he was absolutely astonished, he said.

It is more difficult for those young people who had known absolutely nothing about the emperor system and had crash courses in the subject via TV and the weeklies to put a finger on the emperor-system module anchored inside themselves and to objectify it, than for other people. Thanks to the existence of the myth that, in the midst of a political society filled with in-fighting of all sorts, the emperor wears immaculate white raiment and is the embodiment of sincerity and goodness, the emperor system can exert a powerful centripetal force. One cannot avoid the conclusion that the supporting structures endorsing the "empty core" within the module go deep into a person's body.

The problem of the emperor system, ultimately, the problem of dissolving the willing submission that surrounds the emperor system, is probably a problem of shrinking the frame of the emperor system module, or of breaking down the emperor-system module within everyday consciousness. What is considered vital is to dismantle the module and pull the emperor system's cultural apparatus down from its place in the reverse-perspective light source, then to proceed to form a new image somewhat like that of an administrative body along the lines of commercial firms, universities, or the like.

The Problem of Everyday Consciousness

The emperor system can be thought of in this way as having receptacles in people's everyday consciousness onto which the modules can fit adequately. Because of them, even though civil society may on the surface be bored with excessive news coverage of the emperor, at a deeper level they internalize and structurally accept the emperor system.

The first thing that could be mentioned as a receiving device on the part of everyday consciousness, one that goes on creating an emperor-system corporatism, is lifestyle conservatism.

Lifestyle conservatism is, basically, the egoism of defense of one's lifestyle. The egoism of defense of lifestyle emerges especially clearly

in residents' action (*jūmin undō*). Lifestyle conservatism and residents action are two sides of the same coin.

In February 1988 ninety-three citizens of Yamato City went to Miyake Island on a "Tour to Petition for the Limitation of Night Training Sites for Carrier-based American Aircraft." The gist of their request was, "Training in the skies over Yamato City is a noisy nuisance, so we want you blokes here on Miyake to take it over, thank you." Now, I ask you, can you call this "tour" residents' action? Unfortunately, I think the answer is yes. Indeed it is an example of how lifestyle conservatism combined with residents'-egotism has reached extreme proportions.

But the problem only starts there. Instead of asking the government to conciliate interests, the way is to sit down together on the citizen level or on the resident level to talk over and understand the fact that this training would also be a nuisance to the people of Miyake Island, and then to figure out how to make the present training exercises stop. This is the way one has to solve the problem, by transforming one's own egotism. In other words, at the root of lifestyle conservatism there is an "I," and this "I" sometimes bows compliantly to "the state" in acceptance of the status quo, and sometimes, firmly attached to the "I," it transforms the "I" and forms an alliance of "I"s into a "co-".

When the deteriorating condition of the emperor was announced to the public, many young people felt "Ah, the Shōwa era I grew up in is going to come to an end." Unconsciously, young people had internalized the emperor system in a "Shōwa" time-sense, and they had anchored their identities to a "Shōwa" frame. As a result, that time-sense comes to overlap with the lifestyle conservatism that does not want the status quo to change, that hopes it will not change.

The second thing that can be pointed out as a device on the part of everyday consciousness is organization-centered productivity nationalism. This is the way of thinking that says if you want to increase the size of your share of the pie by increasing productivity, you first have to make the pie itself bigger—that is, the productivity of organizations.

High economic growth more or less ended in 1973, to be followed by a period of low growth. At present we are in a period of re-arranging the productivity doctrine around the information, high technology, and development industries. And in this case, too, the

same organization-centered way of thinking is at work. To make one's share of the pie bigger, one first makes the pie of the organizations and of the state bigger. At the base of this reasoning is that of productivity nationalism. It works along the lines of: make the pie of the organization you belong to bigger→make the pies of affiliated organizations bigger→make the pie of Japan Incorporated bigger.

Put in terms of relations among organizations, it was a matter of organizations acting in concert or organizations toppling in concert. Self-restraint, which even the trees and flowers seemed to comply with, was carried out on an organization basis. There was a practical reason for it—to avoid being attacked by rightists at annual general meetings of the company—and perhaps they figured that, even if they did exercise self-restraint, they could fob the losses off onto their subcontractors. But more than that, self-restraint reveals the strong taboo consciousness that was operative in the acting in concert of the organizations. The inescapable fact is that the Imperial Rule Assistance predisposition of organizations was operative.

The globalism and nationwide orientation that are found in development and the changeover to an information society are in the same lines of this organization nationalism. The redevelopment of cities, the development of waterfronts and resorts, and so on, are going on all over the country. The moves presently underway in the area of information, too, are appearing in the form of information nationalism. The first step is to make a nationwide information network, then one secures a portion for one's own use; this line of thought is taken for granted. The idea that you create your own life-size information network in your immediate neighborhood, and every so often you link up with a nationwide network, should have been quite acceptable, but that is not how things are done.

The third thing is the mentality of willing submission to "the government" or "the authorities." A way of thinking that regulates interests between groups within civil society and has groups creating order within themselves is almost totally lacking; instead, you have a structure of consciousness that takes things like regulations, notifications, and instructions from "the government" and "the authorities" as a given and accepts them without question.

On the other hand, residents' action groups, which parted ways with all direction or governance based on party or ideology and put their livelihoods at risk when they rise up in resistance, glory

in the strength of negativity. Residents, and that is what the fishermen of Minamata are, for example, have made long-drawn-out refusals to "the government" and "the authorities" a weapon they will not lay down. Folk reason, whose existence has been proved by residents' action, appeared in numerous instances of criticism of and battles of resistance to the emperor system. Despite the fact that the mentality of willing submission to "the government" and "the authorities" continues to have deep roots, there are many cracks running through the pot holding this plant. It is this that marks the difference between the 1930s and the 1980s.

In the fourth place is the redistribution fantasy. That is, that values will flow into the empty core that is the emperor and then will come out redistributed to people. This doesn't mean *things* or *money* or the like will move as such and be redistributed, but, as I explained earlier using the example of the Mikuni Hōshidan groups, taken on a spiritual level, on the level of values, even today the fantasy lives that the emperor will, out of the greatness of his heart, redistribute "happiness" and "peace" to his subjects. The feeling that the country will go to pieces if there is no emperor is also a part of this fantasy.

It is said that a rumor circulated among old people in the countryside that if they did not go to sign a condolence book they would not get their pensions. This could be called the redistribution fantasy in the form of an urban legend caused by the anxiety of urban society, where communities are disintegrating. The locations for condolence books set up in all the regional cities were treated as sacred sites, and the people went to condolence book locations, which were modules of the Imperial Palace, instead of going on pilgrimages. On the assumption that this sort of composition is alive and well, can we not say that the redistribution fantasy is, like an undercurrent, spread quite widely? I think this could also be an explanation for the way young people ended up going to the condolence book locations without even thinking about what they were doing.

In the fifth place is a hierarchy-orientation in the direction of the establishment. For example, in the supplement to the January 5/January 12 1989 double issue of the women's magazine *Josei seibun*, there was a snakes-and-ladders type game based on women's lives; the game was called "I have my eyes on you, Den'enchōfu Itchōme" (the most prestigious and coveted residential district in Tokyo today). Included among the squares one could land on were:

“Don’t give up, keep aiming for a good firm,” “Hanging on to a good man is the shortcut to happiness,” “It’s about time I had my own car,” and “It’s terribly hard to get one’s kids into good schools.” Now, this game, by making a happy family and a happy old age the ultimate goals, and by setting down the conditions that ought to be achieved in sequential order, is showing a hierarchy-orientation in the direction of the establishment, one that includes social status, power, money, a dwelling, and even customary ways of acting. Another women’s magazine, *Josei jishin*, carried out a survey in its January 29 issue. Entitled “Questions to Daughters of Presidents of Famous, Top-ranking Businesses, of Former Nobility, etc.,” the survey involved interviewing “one hundred young ladies from illustrious, distinguished upper-class families from throughout the nation.” And at the top of the list of the families from the establishment depicted here, is, you guessed it, the “Imperial Family.”

In the sixth place there is the problem of the willing submission mechanism, the mechanism for controlling one’s interiority in a managed society. When you persist in restructuring human relations in urban societies by means of manager/managed relations, they emerge as abstract and manipulative and hence repressive relationships in which such things as direct dealings between one human being and another human being, or flesh-and-blood relationships, have been attenuated. Of course, in the background there is always the state’s physical power-apparatus, which unveils its capacity for strong measures at times of such events as, say, the state funeral. At ordinary times, however, soft management is preferred. What “soft management” means is that you voluntarily submit to control that goes by the name of “management,” that you give yourself to the “internal-control mechanism” automaton, in which the design itself for such submission has been internalized.

There are two kinds of political language for bringing about the managed-society type of willing submission.

The first is the technical jargon of scientific technology, economics, and so on; when you mythologize technical jargon and apply it to other uses, at work is the mechanism by which objects come to appear quite value-neutral. For example, if instead of saying “assist in the Vietnam war” you talk of “special procurements for Vietnam,” it will pass without any opposition as being a neutral, economic matter. Political language like this is used frequently, mainly in connection with development, and it is one of the languages for

promoting forgetfulness in a managed society. The second one is classical Japanese, and it is the political language used when one speaks in traditional figures of speech. As symbol, it is the language that converges on such things as the *Hinomaru* national flag or the *Kimigayo* national anthem; it is a political language that has the function of using the classical language to obfuscate things, and by obfuscating things to win people over to the Japanese national religion without any resistance.

These two languages are also the languages of the emperor system. That is to say, the emperor is both scientist emperor and man-of-letters emperor. The two political languages very nicely fit in with the symbolic nature of those aspects. As I said earlier, one of the functions of the emperor is to freeze time, so that a state of oblivion to time is produced. When one is able to be conscious of the state of being oblivious to time, one can still reverse the situation, but if one is unable to realize one is oblivious, if one can be oblivious to being oblivious, then a happy state is produced. It is the state of happiness one feels in balmy autumn weather.

This state of being oblivious to being oblivious, of double oblivion, is at the same time linked with the freezing of time, the causing of people to forget history, and the attenuation of corporality that is produced by the ever-flowing information created by the electronic media. I stated earlier that the emperor's person is an empty core, a tenuous body. Conversely, if you look at it as a projection of the desires and egos of civil society, what the emperor's body being tenuous means is that in actual fact our bodies have become tenuous and are becoming like electronic copies. Through the electronic media the body becomes extremely indirectified. Because the electronic media itself has that kind of structure, the double oblivion and empty body structures sometimes end up linked, exactly as they are, with the structure of information society. If we look at it structurally, I believe we find that, the more the information society develops and grows, the more the emperor system will attain the height of its prosperity.

Constraints Caused by the Emperor System

As a result of the modules of the emperor system entering every facet of everyday life, we have constraints forced upon us. We would like to rid ourselves of this double oblivion, in the world we live

in we would like ourselves as well as others to be free, to be liberated. Constraint is a condition in which we cannot decide our own things by ourselves. Let me expand on this state of affairs.

First of all, there is constraint in ordinary living. For example, on the day of the state funeral, the constraints were that we were not allowed to go out in automobiles, and markets were closed because of self-restraint and special holidays. As the time of the state funeral ceremony drew close, the Civil Aviation Bureau of the Ministry of Transportation would not permit the loading of any air cargo, including mail, as part of anti-terrorist measures. Having to accept these things with a helpless “Oh, I see” is a constraint.

Along with this there are, of course, constraints of thought. Why were the mayor of Nagasaki (who spoke up critically of the emperor’s wartime responsibility), and Meiji Gakuin University on another occasion, isolated within civil society? And what about the countless young people who, because they criticized the emperor system or passed out leaflets questioning the emperor’s war responsibility, had their apartment rooms searched without warrants or were arrested at demonstrations?

There are also constraints of the spirit. The magazine *Tanka* put together a special issue dedicated specially to the emperor, and the first items in the magazine were elegies composed by people chosen for the New Year’s poetry reading party.

Ōkimi wa sayakeku arite no no kusa no na sura tadashiku uta yomimashiki

大君はさやけくありて野の草の名すらただしく歌よみましき

The emperor is brilliant; he can use in poetry the correct names
for even the common field plants.

Okano Hirohiko

These are words of highest praise for the poet emperor.

Arahitogami ningen tennō futatsunagara ikite rekishi no naka ni irimashinu

現人神人間天皇ふたつながら生きて歴史のなかに入りましぬ

Living as both a living god and a human being, the emperor has
entered into history.

Ueda Miyoji

Japanese tanka like these are not free from the emperor system. According to the analysis of Watanabe Tamotsu in his *Onnagata no*

unmei (Fate of a female impersonator), the head master system (*iemoto seido*) in the traditional performing arts is nothing but a module of the emperor system.

There is such a thing as constraint on existence as an individual. It is not this individual "I" that counts, but the concept of "people"; the prototype of this is subsumed in the pseudo-tribal "state" located precisely in the empty core that is the emperor. As long as such an impersonal form of being exists as a module, we cannot possibly become free as beings who are individuals.

The Shōwa emperor once said that the dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the Americans was unavoidable. I find this statement absolutely unpardonable. The reason is that I cannot detect in it the slightest care for the lives of the innocent, for the lives of little ones. Furthermore, as Maeda Tetsuo has made clear, in Hiroshima and Nagasaki the Japanese were not merely the victims. Leading up to Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a holocaust, the wholesale indiscriminate slaughter from the air that was the strategic bombing of Chungking by the Japanese army for over three years. The consequence of this bombing was Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The ghost of a double responsibility for lives wanders back and forth in midair, and nobody wants to lay it to rest. It is not merely a question of whether the emperor had responsibility for the war or not; it is difficult to excuse what the emperor said, for it is a problem of the present-day way of life that lacks a caring attitude towards human life.

A structure that strikes into our living, our thought, our behavior, our spirit, and even our emotions in this way so that freedom is lost, is something that needs to be dismantled. To do this, what it seems we need is a viewpoint that peels off the emperor system modules in each concrete, individual, everyday setting and phase-shifts the modules. On this point, I would like to give further consideration to the viewpoint of the people who are dead set against worship of the emperor. It is the viewpoint of the Okinawans, the viewpoint of Asians, the viewpoint of Asians living in Japan. Extend this line of vision, and I think what the identity of "Japanese in Japan" should be will appear.

Furthermore, in view of the fact that this emperor system is a religion that goes by the name of Japanese national religion, carrying out the phase shifting, or the dismantling, of the modules into four groups within the arena of religion itself becomes one of the key

points. I would like to make much of the popular mystics, who belong to the same phase of religion.

The word "popular mystic" is, as far as I know, the creation of Hayashi Tatsuo, who gives as an example of a popular mystic St Francis of Assisi. "Mystic" originally referred to a craftsman, especially a migrant craftsman. St Francis, who wandered about as an itinerant *artiste* and was a craftsman of a life of honorable poverty and equality, was a popular mystic in the true sense of the word. When I turn to popular mystics in Japan, I immediately think of Shinran, Ippen, Ryōkan, and Deguchi Ōnisaburō. Popular mystics are dynamic mechanisms that can cross swords with the Japanese national religion armed with no other weapon than a spiritual sensitivity to life, and can dismantle its false image. In people like Ishimure Michiko and Tanaka Shōzō who, while respinning the connections and mutual symbiosis of life in local communities, seek the rehabilitation of human beings, we can discover the structural emergence of the workings of "ultimate sensitivity to life." Therefore, the way of life of a "popular mystic" can be discerned in them, no mistake about it. The reason I say popular mystics are in the same arena as the emperor system is that, for one thing, the emperor himself, as a biologist, loves nature; nature is woven into his tanka; and, as is shown by the emperor's birthday becoming "Midori no Hi" (Green Day), the emperor system, albeit precariously, holds the point of tangency between living beings and the ecology.

Therefore, it is precisely by crossing swords with the emperor system inside the same arena that it is possible to triumph over it even while sustaining injury to oneself. And that is precisely the reason why I would like to get a clear view of the popular mystic's perspective.

Hayashi Tatsuo states that the emperor system is "a sort of preventive scheme taken in advance out of wariness and fear of something" (HAYASHI and KUNO 1974). It is this "something" that has more claim to legitimacy, he says. This "something" that causes the emperor system fear, Hayashi locates in the "undercurrent" of the common people, in other words in the world of the folklore of the masses, where "swarming things," "murky things," "fretting things" are seething. It is the "undercurrent" of the common people, who are messy, yet transparent, egotistic, yet gentle to other living beings, that is the anchorage of the popular mystic. And if that is true, then it can be said that the body of the common people, which

ends up accepting modules of the emperor system, becomes, in its ambiguousness, a nursery for producing popular mystics. There is no way to smash into smithereens the image in the mirror of the imaginary system that is the emperor system except by the common people themselves, in their role as craftsmen of how to live. And here I would like to remind you that the "swarming things" are the "I"s of civil society. The breaking of the spell of the emperor system by the "I" will depend on how the "I" transforms the "I" in mutuality with other "I"s as it opens up the domain of "symbiosis" and walks forward towards the networking of life.

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