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RELIGION AND ITS RELATION TO POLITICS
in Japan and the United States

THE SEPARATION OF RELIGION AND POLITICS IN POSTWAR JAPAN

In present-day Japan all religions - Shinto included - are independent and separated from the state and from politics. This situation obtains since December 1945, the year in which the war ended. The principle of separation of religion and politics in its present form was first enounced in the so-called Shinto Directive, issued at that time by the Occupation Authorities to the Japanese Government, and was later confirmed by the postwar Constitution. But, even if this has been the situation since the end of the war, it is by no means Japan's natural state of affairs. Originally there was an inseparable link between the state and Shinto - not between the state and religion in general - which found its expression in the term saisei-itchi (unity of government and worship). It was this unity which was forcibly destroyed while the Occupation Forces were in power.

Why did America separate the state from Shinto, and why did it put an end to this unity of religion and politics? I think there are two viewpoints or two reasons for this. One is, of course, the point of view which looks at this problem in relation to the war. It is clear from the Shinto Directive how America judged Shinto in its connection with Japan's so-called Greater East Asia War. State Shinto or Shrine Shinto was said to contain "militaristic and ultra-nationalistic elements or ideology." It was declared that these elements or ideology embrace "those teachings, beliefs, and theories, which advocate or justify a mission on the part of Japan to extend its rule over other nations and peoples," and that the main reason used to justify this ideology is the doctrine that the Emperor, the people and islands of Japan "are superior to other lands because of divine origin."

These three elements - ruler, people, land - are, in jurisprudence, the factors that constitute a so-called nation, but the fact that they are of divine origin is reported in the myths recorded in the Nihongi and Nihon Shoki, the sacred books of Shinto. Therefore, Shinto offers a ground for militarism and ultra-nationalism. Consequently, America was of the opinion that Shinto and the myths ought to be separated from the state in order to eliminate militarism and ultra-nationalistic ideology. So, from the very beginning of the occupation it issued the Shinto Directive and took measures for the separation of politics and Shinto. For the same

reason it also issued a directive prohibiting the teaching of the "myths" of Japan in the schools.

Another viewpoint or reason for separating politics and Shinto was said to be based upon the fundamental insight that, according to democratic principles, politics and religion should be separated by nature. This was a reason which had no direct connection with the war. Although this fundamental insight is partly influenced by the thinking of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, it originated mainly from the historical experience of the Americans themselves. The Americans are convinced that this constitutes the summum of political wisdom. Therefore, America thought that, because of the first reason - the connection with the war - "Shinto" had to be separated from politics, and issued the Shinto Directive as a first step to accomplish this. Afterwards it linked this reason to the democratic principle of respect for individual freedom and established the permanent separation of religion and politics by means of the "Constitution."

If we have a look at the Shinto Directive, we read in item 2 a. that "the purpose of this directive is to separate religion from the state." If at that time religion and politics had to be separated, this seems to imply that, until then, both were united. However, it is not true that in prewar Japan all religions were "one" with politics or with the state. One with the state was only Shinto, more strictly speaking State Shinto, which was not regarded as a religion because it was not a private affair. All the other religions, which belonged to the category of private matters, were separated from the state. Because the Occupation Authorities regarded State Shinto on an equal basis with the other religions, namely as a religion belonging to the category of private affairs, they separated it from the Japanese state. What was the reason why the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers did not state that "the purpose of this directive is to separate Shinto or the shrines from the state" but "to separate religion from the state"?

Our interpretation of this fact is as follows. When the Shinto Directive spoke about the separation of religion and state, and not of church and state - as is seen in modern European history - this was an attempt to separate not only the shrines but all Shinto elements from the state, and so to eradicate the very spiritual foundations of the Japanese people. According to this interpretation, America should have been expected "to separate the state from the shrines" if it would have followed the trend of the separation of church and state that exists in modern Europe. Instead, when it stated that "the state should be separated from religion," this was seemingly done in order to separate from the state not only the material shrines but also all "Shinto elements," including many immaterial forms. However, in this case, it would have been enough to speak about "separation of Shinto from the state" because Shinto includes both material as well as immaterial forms. Therefore, we should interpret the fact that America did not put it this way but spoke in general about the "separation of religion and state" as

meaning that the General Headquarters of the Allied Powers wanted to separate not only Shinto but also all other religions from the state. Therefore, it did not use the term Shinto but the more general appellation of religion. This is also clear from the following sentence in the Shinto Directive (2 a.): "The purpose of this directive is... to put all religions, faiths, and creeds upon exactly the same legal basis (and) forbid affiliation with the government (to all of them)." We learn from this that the Occupation Authorities intended to treat all religions in Japan on an equal, impartial basis. It goes without saying that all the religions outside Shinto welcomed this as an impartial measure.

However, was this really so impartial? This problem cannot be simply solved by only having a superficial look at it and with enlightened rationalism. It is a very important and fundamental problem which needs therefore a more profound historical examination.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SEPARATION OF RELIGION AND STATE IN AMERICA

Since the discovery of the New World by Columbus at the end of the fifteenth century, people from various races and with various beliefs emigrated from the different countries of Europe and settled in the new land. They came mostly in groups over a long period of time, and established colonies in different places. In 1776 thirteen English colonies on the East coast of North America declared their independence from the motherland and formed a republic. Its nucleus was the small colony, started in 1620 by 102 Puritans who, in search of religious freedom, had set sail from England on the Mayflower and had landed at Cape Cod because of a storm. Before debarking they had signed a compact on the ship in which the following words were written:

"We ... have undertaken for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia; do by these presents, solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God and of one another covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic for our better ordering and preservation, and furthermore of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof do enact, constitute and frame just and equal laws ... as shall be thought most mete and convenient for the general good of the colony."

The small settlement was later on absorbed in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which in its turn developed into one of the original thirteen states of the independent United States. When we look at this country that stretches out now as far as the Pacific Ocean, and probe into its history, we find at its core indeed the Puritans who arrived on the Mayflower. Also Jefferson, the drafter of the Declaration of Independence, was one of those who come with that sailing-vessel (sic). In its vast territories America developed its

abundant natural resources with scientific knowledge and became a rich and powerful world nation. Therefore, many people are inclined to regard America as the country of materialism or as a people which worships the god of wealth. This is, however, an extremely superficial judgment and we must say that, in its core or basis, America is very religious.

The various states which formed the original United States were all of them very religious. New as well as old believers who came to the new continent in order to obtain religious freedom declared publicly that liberty of faith should be guaranteed for all, without persecution as they had suffered in Europe. So the various religious bodies which had come from Europe were able to gain many followers in America. The various colonies saw religion as a means for social control and regarded religious interests as a matter of primary concern.

When Jefferson proposed constitutional separation of religion and state, this was to avoid religious conflicts, and bore certainly not the meaning of exhorting indifference towards religion. If one should make one religion into a state religion, in spite of the fact that there exist various denominations with different creeds, like the Puritans, the Catholics, the Quakers, etc., then all the other religions would be placed in a subordinate position. A sense of oppression of religion would result. So, religion and state were separated for no other reason than for ensuring the freedom of each denomination.

When, thanks to the separation of religion and state, religious freedom was completely guaranteed, priests and ministers rejoiced in the fact that in this way religious interests were most perfectly protected. Of course, there is nobody who wishes for a change in this system. However, religious rites like, for example, the designation by the President of a day for fasting and prayer on Thanksgiving Day or on other occasions when events of great importance to the country have occurred, or the opening of the sessions of Congress with a prayer, are approved of. We, Japanese - as I will explain further on - should pay particular attention to these exceptions.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SAISEI-ITCHI IN JAPAN

On reflection, how have the relations been in our country between religion and state? Our country is said to have been established as a state at the time of the first emperor Jinmu. This is related in the Nihon Shoki (Chronicles of Japan) which describes how Jinmu set out from Kyûshû, moved up the Inland Sea eastwards to the Kinai region (the five home provinces), and there he assumed the imperial dignity at Kashiwahara after having conquered the Yamato district. This eastern expedition was, however, not merely a military exploit. It was also one of diplomatic negotiations in order to make the powerful clans, who

worshiped other deities, revere the kami worshiped by Emperor Jinmu. During the battle the divine will was always invoked and the battle itself was carried out under the authority of the kami. As a result of this, the powerful clans of the Yamato district finally agreed to worship the kami of Emperor Jinmu. From the moment that "all the enemies were subdued and there was peace within the seas" the Emperor has always fervently worshiped the heavenly deities. The kami worshiped by Emperor Jinmu were the heavenly deities with Amaterasu-Ô-Mikami (the sun goddess) at the center. Afterwards the successive emperors conducted the affairs of the state and fervently worshiped the sun goddess. This spiritual principle became tradition and found its expression in the greatest state ceremony of the daijôsai, the great festival performed on the occasion of the coronation of the emperor. In this festival the principle of saisei-itchi comes to its most complete realization. From the description alone of Jinmu's activities in the Nihon Shoki we can learn that our country is a religious community, and at the same time a political community; in other words, it is a religious state. The chapters on the "age of the gods" in the Nihon Shoki, which describe the events before the founding of the country by Emperor Jinmu, are nothing else than an account of the battle or the negotiations by which the different religious communities in Kyûshû, Kinai, San'in and other regions with their respective kami succeeded in making other communities with other kami worship their own deities. From among these, the religious community of the clan descended from the kami, which worshiped the heavenly deities and was outstanding both in virtue and in military power combined with wisdom, was able to establish political unity for the first time under Emperor Jinmu in the Kinai region.

The accounts of the Nihon Shoki, described above, are also confirmed by archeological findings. Dr. Watsuji Tetsuro writes as follows:

"From ancient times, the government of our country was a matter of worship and not merely a rule of power. This fact is proved by the copper halberds, swords, and bells (dôtaku). These instruments indicate at the same time the unity of the respective 'cultural areas' ... 'One power,' which attributed a sacred meaning to weapons not useful as such and performed matters of worship by means of them, developed from a worshiping unity in western Japan with Tsukushi as center, into a worshiping unity in central Japan with Yamato as center, and a unity of the whole of western Japan. During this development the unity of worship, which had as symbols of sacrality the mirror, the jewel and the sword, became more and more manifest. If one abstracts from this religious meaning and considers only a unity of the state by means of power, it is impossible to understand this fact. Evenso, understanding becomes impossible if one abstracts the political meaning and considers only the development of kami rites and

primitive faith, and their union."

In connection with what I have explained above, I would only like to replace the words "cultural areas" and "one power" (which performed matters of worship) by the word "religious community."

As indicated earlier, the pacification of the Kinai region by Emperor Jinmu means that the various religious communities, which had worshiped other kami until then, agreed to worship the kami of the clan descended from the kami. Therefore, the whole region, the whole community ruled over by Emperor Jinmu, in other words, Japan, came to worship only the heavenly deities with Amaterasu-Ô-Mikami in the center. Furthermore, in those times there were in the land no other beliefs in other deities. So, from the very foundation of our country in ancient times, there was one native faith (which the Japanese call Shinto, and which Isaiah Ben-Dasan calls Nihon-kyô, the religion of Japaneseness). Government too was in line with it, and the state and this religion were one and indivisible. This principle was maintained also at times when the imperial authority was in decline. It was reaffirmed very clearly in the period since Meiji. But, since there are in our country also foreign religions like Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity besides Shinto, the official state religion, we have to say a word about the relationship between Shinto and the other religions.

Because Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and others, are not religions which originated in Japan, they did of course not yet exist in our country in the age of the gods nor at the beginning of the historical era. In different periods of history they were brought to Japan from abroad. That the name "Shinto" was given to our own native religion was in order to distinguish it from Buddhism when this foreign religion was introduced into the country. Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and other religions originating with other peoples, came to Japan and started missionary activities. So they were able to increase their number of adherents. This was made possible because the religious state of Japan since Emperor Jinmu had established a stern order and could obtain that the various religions which were engaged in missionary activities did so in a generally peaceful way. We can say therefore that these foreign religions have reason to thank and to cooperate with the Shinto religion, which is concomitant with the power sustaining the order of the Japanese state and constitutes the basis itself of the state. It is good to recall in this respect the example of the venerable Buddhist priest Jiun of the late Tokugawa era, the founder of the Kôkiji temple, who at the age of more than seventy became aware of his debt towards his country and, with a grateful heart, turned to Shinto and rendered service to the state.

We cannot possibly call it an impartial and appropriate judgment, then, to look at the Japanese state and at Japanese society from a contemporary viewpoint, in a way which cuts it up into different pieces and, seeing the dislocations which appear in the resulting sections, says only that "in our country the various religions have developed and 'coexisted' in a pluralistic and multi-layered way" (cf.

the Supreme Court decision on the case of the ground-breaking ceremony in Tsu). It is a similar way of thinking to consider it an impartial judgment that the Occupation Authorities put Shinto on the same level as the other religions, as "one religion" among the many others, and having to exist with them (cf. Shinto Directive, 2, e2). It is, indeed, true that nowadays Shinto coexists simultaneously with these foreign religions. But seen in historical context it has always existed together with the country and has been moreover the first, the oldest, and the only one to do so. Therefore, Shinto should not be put on the same level as the other, foreign religions. Let me illustrate the difference in dimension between Shinto and the foreign religions. Matsumiya Kanzan in the Tokugawa era compared Shinto to the head of a family and Confucianism and Buddhism to its guests. He said that "it resembles the head of a family, who has the sole duty of waiting on the guests, and the guests who do not know how to return this favor." If we add Christianity to the two religions he mentioned, his saying holds true also nowadays. Therefore, if we look only at the aspect that Shinto coexists at present with other religions and disregard the other aspect, namely that its life has continuously been interwoven with the country since ancient times, we can never reach a fair judgment about the relation between Shinto and the other religions.

(Summary)

When we shed light, then, on the differences of the historical conditions in Japan and America, we have to acknowledge that the separation of state and religion in America was the right thing to do and was an appropriate and sound measure. But, even so, we cannot but think that the saisei-itchi in our country, the fact that religion and politics have been united for such a long time, is an extremely natural way of things and that this has truly been the best way for the Japanese.

Therefore, we cannot compare the separation of religion and state in America with the unity of government and worship in our country, and ask which one is the truth or which one is best. Much less can we say that only one of both is good or right. This is because both separation and unity of religion and state have to be judged in terms of the historical conditions of both peoples. If we disregard these, our judgment lacks the necessary qualities. In the same way we cannot judge whether the respiratory organs of living organisms have to be lungs or gills, if we do not take into account whether they live in the air or in the water. We can only speak conditionally and say that land animals breathe better through lungs and water animals better through gills.

In conclusion, when America during the occupation period separated Shinto from the state by the Shinto Directive and the occupation-based Constitution (to separate the other religions was only natural, and moreover had already been done in the Meiji Constitution), this is similar to putting birds in the water and make fishes live on the land. It is a matter of an extremely irrational vio-

lence and a problem of life or death for our country.

"CIVIL RELIGION" IN AMERICA

It is said that the separation of religion and politics is a basic principle in modern states and that America is an example thereof. However, Hegel has said that "religion is at the basis of all states." Is it possible, then, that a state exists without any relation to religion, or that it is completely separated from religion?

"In establishing the principle of separation of religion and state, Japan's present Constitution considered complete separation between the state and religion as an ideal and has tried to guarantee the non-religious nature of the state and religious neutrality" (Tsu decision). Yet, the Swiss theologian and philosopher Emil Brunner, who came to Japan after the war as a visiting professor at International Christian University in Tokyo, said that "the doctrine of moral and 'religious' neutrality of the state is a product of abstract rationalism. It forgets upon what basis the state is built. By claiming religious neutrality a state destroys its own living roots." When a state loses religion or its religiosity, it cannot subsist. How much America might have made the separation of religion and state into a principle, this does absolutely not mean that the American state is not religious, or that it has no relation to religion. I would like to make clear now how the American state is "in fact" religious and how it "in reality" has a kind of state religion.

I have mentioned already briefly how in America, based as it is upon the separation of religion and state, there are - exceptionally - some political events with a religious, that is, Christian flavor. For example, on Thanksgiving Day every year or when events of great importance for the country occur, the president designates a day of fasting or prayer. Also at the opening of Congress there is always a prayer ceremony. These things are requested from all Americans whatever faith they profess. Christians alike as non-Christians do not consider the performance of these Christian customs by the state as an infringement upon the freedom of religion. The reason is simply that they are considered as public political affairs which the American people, as a matter of course, have to carry out as citizens, and which have no relation to religion in the sense of mere private belief. So, also in America it is recognized that an area exists which is related to religion and is, moreover, public.

In this connection, there is a trend recently in America which deserves our special attention. It is the theory which propounds the existence of a so-called "civil religion." This theory states that a public area related to religion, as indicated above, has to be openly acknowledged; or better, that prior to the discussion whether now for the first time we should acknowledge it or not, this area already exists in fact. The only thing is that until now it was not called religion. Therefore, the theory urges us to realize that it is religion. Because it is a public and political matter, it is of course

not religion in the sense of a purely personal inner affair, a problem of mere private belief. Yet, it is not unrelated to religion. What kind of things do its advocates call "civil religion"?

Prof. Bellah states that "few have realized that there actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America." As a good example and clue for understanding this civil religion, he cites president Kennedy's inaugural address of January 20, 1961:

"I have sworn before you and Almighty 'God' the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago " - " the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of 'God' " - " knowing that here on earth 'God's' work must truly be our own "

President Kennedy's inaugural address is rather brief, but in it there are three places in which he mentions the name of 'God'. Similar references to God are almost invariably to be found in the pronouncements of other American presidents on solemn occasions.

Considering the separation of church and state, how can the use of the word 'God' by the president be justified? Bellah's answer is as follows:

"The separation of church and state has not denied the political realm a religious dimension. Although matters of personal religious belief, worship, and association are considered to be strictly private affairs, there are, at the same time, certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. These have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling the American civil religion. The inauguration of a president is an important ceremonial event in this religion."

Bellah argues further as follows. The words and acts of the founding fathers of America, especially the first few presidents, shaped the form and tone of the civil religion. The subsequent presidents inherited and developed this religious spirit and beliefs, which have formed the keynote of the inaugural addresses of each president since the Declaration of Independence. In this way, civil religion has become more and more abundant in its contents and has become gradually institutionalized. Particularly through important events like the War of Independence and the Civil War, the civil religion made epoch-making progress. For example, after the Civil War a number of national cemeteries for the war dead were established; and subsequently the Arlington National Cemetery, site of the "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier" after World War I, became the new symbol of the civil religion. Furthermore, "Memorial Day," which is the day on

which the war dead of the Civil War are remembered, gave ritual expression to the civil religion, and just as "Thanksgiving Day," which was institutionalized as an annual national holiday only under the presidency of Lincoln, served to integrate the family into the civil religion, so Memorial Day has acted to integrate the local community into the national cult. Independence Day and the birthdays of Washington and Lincoln provide an annual ritual calendar for the civil religion. The religious critics of "religion in general" or of the "religion of the 'American way of life'" or of "American Shinto" have really been talking about the civil religion.

AMERICAN CIVIL RELIGION AND JAPANESE SHINTO

What is our impression when we, Japanese, hear this opinion of an American thinker? What strikes us first is that this so-called "civil religion" (most Americans do not think of it as a religion) is not the object of separation - although in America politics and religion are said to be separated. The religion which is separated from politics is the religion which is a private affair of the individual. Although Bellah calls civil religion a "religion," it does not enter the framework of religion because it is a public and not a private affair.

Is this not in perfect agreement with the prewar situation in Japan, where the rites based on the principle of saisei-itchi were distinguished from the religions belonging to the private sphere?

Furthermore, the inaugural address of the American presidents corresponds to the Imperial Rescript at the occasion of the enthronement of Japan's emperor, and the national cemeteries in America to our Yasukuni shrine and the local shrines for the war dead; Memorial Day corresponds to the festival day of the Yasukuni shrine, and the birthdays of Washington and Lincoln to the anniversaries of Emperor Jinmu and Emperor Meiji. Between America's so-called civil religion and Japan's Shinto it is possible to find, on an almost parallel and corresponding level, similar national beliefs, symbols and rites. Nobody would be able to suppress the feeling that the so-called civil religion of this American intellectual is nothing else than "American Shinto" or, if I am allowed to give it this name, "America's State Shinto."

If they had possessed a sufficient understanding of this, it would absolutely not have been irrational for America during the occupation to have approved of saisei-itchi as it was realized in the relation of Shinto and politics in prewar Japan. Yet, by means of the Shinto Directive and the occupation-based Constitution, America separated Shinto and politics, because it misunderstood Shinto unjustly due to the war. America deprived the emperor of a public, state dimension, which is at the same time religious, although it attributed a similar dimension to its own president since the founding of the country. America reduced the ritual ceremonies of the emperor to completely private affairs; it did not acknowledge their public

national character, nor did it recognize the status of being a national cemetery to the Yasukuni shrine, the symbol of Japan's civil religion. It did not approve of the holidays on the anniversaries of emperors Jinmu and Meiji, nor of the Niiname-sai (harvest festival), which corresponds to America's Thanksgiving Day and bears a still deeper religious meaning. In this way, America divested all religious and historical meaning from the prewar national holidays. What an irrational one-sidedness. If America did so unknowingly, it was crass ignorance; if it did so knowingly, it was the summum of contradiction with its own revered spirit of "fair play."

UNPERVERTED SHINTO

America declared in the Shinto Directive that the government of our country "perverted Shinto theory and beliefs into militaristic and ultra-nationalistic propaganda." If so, America itself acknowledged that there are in Shinto elements which were perverted and elements which were not. But in its hurry to cut out the perverted elements, America did all it could to separate the whole of Shinto completely from the state without taking care to preserve the unperverted elements. Yet, even when we take an American viewpoint, such unperverted elements exist, and it is no more than fair to recognize that they persist. Which are these unperverted elements of Shinto? I think that they are those corresponding to what a number of present American intellectuals call "civil religion."

Therefore, even if we keep the principle of separation of religion and state in Japan's Constitution, it is necessary to distinguish Shinto, which is centered on state ceremonies and belongs to the category of matters of national public interest with a concomitant religious dimension, from the religions, whose primary aim is to provide spiritual peace and which belong to the category of private affairs. If this is officially recognized and Shinto regarded in the same way as the so-called civil religion in America, the problem of Shinto and the state - which has been the most important and most difficult problem under the principle of separation of religion and state - and also the problem of the relation of Shinto with other religions, will be solved.

In regard to this point, the recent decision reached by the Supreme Court in the lawsuit of the Tsu ground-breaking ceremony is based upon the following reasons: "It is near to impossible to realize a complete separation of state and religion" and "the principle of separation of religion and politics does not mean that it is completely forbidden for the state to have any relation to religion." Based upon this way of reasoning the Court stated that, as a ceremony of the municipality, "the ground-breaking rite has a religious origin (in other words, has a relation to religion), but it is a secular matter being a social rite." Because it is different from religion as a non-secular private affair, the Supreme Court judged it to be constitutional. This means that the Court recognized "in fact" that

also in the society of Japan there exists a so-called "civil religion which is a national, public, and also religious sphere or dimension."

It goes without saying that the significance of the decision by the Supreme Court on the Tsu affair is, in the first place, that it gave a very adequate solution to the actual lawsuit. But at the same time we have to evaluate very highly that it also recognized implicitly and in principle the so-called civil religion. If the separation of the "national, public, and also religious sphere or dimension", pointed out in the decision, from religion as a purely private affair is established, then there is also no collusion with the principle of separation of religion and state under the present Constitution when the Daijûsai, the biggest national rite only once celebrated in the life-time of an emperor at the occasion of his enthronement, should be held as an event of the state. The Court decision guarantees this. Just like there was no legal problem when the city of Tsu bore the expenses for the ground-breaking ceremony of its gymnasium, so there would be no problem when the state would bear the expenses of the Daijûsai. And the same thing could be said about the state rites at the Yasukuni shrine and about the rites of the rebuilding (sengû) of the Grand Shrine of Ise.

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