

## On the Gender of Shrines and the *Daijōsai*

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Of all the ceremonies of succession in which the emperor of Japan takes part, it is the sequence of rituals known as the *daijōsai* 大嘗祭 that has excited the greatest interest from scholars and commentators. Following a ceremony of accession (*senso* 踐祚) held shortly after the demise of the previous emperor, and then an enthronement (*sokui rei* 即位礼) after the period of mourning, the *daijōsai* now provides the final phase in the installation of the new monarch.<sup>1</sup> Not only is its performance a matter of public controversy because it relates to questions about the emperor's divinity and hence to political debate, and because it is an undeniably Shinto ceremony in a polity that holds Shinto rites to be incompatible with the emperor's position; it is also academically controversial since its meaning is the subject of widely differing interpretations. In this article I wish to contribute further to the problem of interpretation by bringing forward a fact about the physical setting that has, I believe, hitherto escaped notice. Let me explain.<sup>2</sup>

*Daijōsai* has been translated as "Great New Food Festival." The central ritual is the bringing of (inter alia) boiled and steamed rice and rice wine to two halls within a sacred compound (*Daijōgū* 大嘗宮). These are then offered to the kami and then, after a solemn dedication, partaken of by the emperor. The rice and wine offered in each hall derive from grain grown in different fields (regions) during the past year. The fields are entitled *yuki* 悠紀 and *suki* 主基, and the halls are therefore called the *Yukiden* 悠紀殿 and the *Sukiden* 主基殿. The ritual is held first in the

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<sup>1</sup> The *daijōsai* is now seen as an integral part of the imperial succession, though this was not always the case (see, e.g., MAYER 1990, p. 11).

<sup>2</sup> The main material on which this article is based was gathered during a 3-month stay in Japan in 1987–1988, with the generous support of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science and The British Academy. But the specific observation which forms its focus was made during a visit to Tokyo in December 1990, to take part in a symposium to honour Professor Fei Hsiao-tung. I thank the symposium organisers, Professors Nakane Chic and Chien Chiao for their invitation, as well as Dr. Carmen Blacker for her comments on an earlier version and Miss Shimizu Mayumi for help in translation.

Yukiden before midnight, and later occurs in the Sukiden after midnight and before dawn.

Two main lines of interpretation have been advanced. One is that the ritual is an honoring of the kami, and an ingesting of sacred food, through which the emperor derives spiritual strength and divine protection. The other is that the ritual is, with the aid of certain objects (the royal couch, the cloak) a *rite de passage* in which the emperor is reborn or is infused with an imperial soul that has passed down from his divine ancestor, the goddess Amaterasu-ōmikami 天照大御神. I put forward these approaches baldly and oversimply<sup>3</sup>—but not, I hope, unfairly—because they are tangential to my present problem, namely, why is the ritual duplicated in the two halls of worship?

This question has been little considered although, it is true, several views have been put forward. One is that the taking of rice from two different regions of Japan symbolizes the unity of the realm (HIRANO 1986). Another is that the two halls symbolize the death and rebirth, respectively, of the emperor (BOCK 1990a, p. 34). A third is close to this interpretation, pointing out that the rite was traditionally held at the time of the winter solstice. The weakening of the sun to its lowest point in the evening during the ritual at the Yukiden, and the taking of food in the Sukiden in the morning, at the start of the sun's return, fills the emperor with "young power as the revived sun rises" (MAYUMI 1986, p. 178). Again, HOLTOM (1972, pp. 91, 94), pointing out that the two words *yuki* and *suki* "have long been obsolete" and their meaning obscure, notes that *suki* may simply mean "following," without implying that it is less important. Finally, ELLWOOD (1973, p. 77) suggests that the question, though it "has some relation to" a more general duplication in ritual and the alternate location of buildings at Ise Jingu, is "another of those subtle and intractable mysteries that lie beneath the seemingly simple surface of Shinto."

A factor underlying these interpretations is that the rituals in the Sukiden and Yukiden are apparently exactly the same. The official texts to which I have had access either make no statement of any difference, but simply repeat for the Sukiden the list of the events that have occurred in the Yukiden (KUNAICHŌ 1918, p. 471; 1931, p. 318) or, in the case of the Meiji *daijōsai*, say explicitly that the second occasion was just like the first (KUNAICHŌ 1968, p. 588). But in addition, there is an implication that the Yukiden and Sukiden are physically also the same; in fact, some writers explicitly characterize the halls as being "identical" (BLACKER 1990, p. 181; LISCUTIN 1990, p. 32) or "built in exact duplicate" (HOLTOM 1972, p. 90) or "one and the same."<sup>4</sup> Whilst doing some

<sup>3</sup> MAYER 1991 considers them in more detail.

<sup>4</sup> OKADA Shōji 岡田荘司, quoted by BLACKER 1990, p. 193.

earlier documentary research, I had also assumed this. But I then had the good fortune to pay a visit to Tokyo after the *daijōsai* had taken place, but before the Daijōgū had been dismantled; and I was able actually to see and to photograph the Yukiden and Sukiden in the Eastern Gardens of the Imperial Palace. Upon inspection of the photographs, a significant feature of architectural and symbolic difference became apparent.

Shinto shrines are built according to one of a number of architectural traditions. The style of the halls we are considering includes exterior beams (*chigi* 千木) that cross each other at each end of the hall above the ridgepole. When the ends of these beams are cut horizontally each *chigi* is called *uchisogi* 内削, and when they are cut vertically the *chigi* is called *sotosogi* 外削 (NISHIKAWA 1987, pp. 13, 100). The characters *uchi* and *soto* – which can also be read as *nai* and *gai* – can be glossed as “facing in” and “facing out,” or more simply as “inner” and “outer.” And indeed, the inner (Naikū 内宮) and outer (Gekū 外宮) shrines at Ise Jingū, for instance, have horizontal and vertical *chigi* respectively. The distinction has many further connotations; for instance, *uchi* represents order and the known, whereas *soto* represents disorder and the unknown (CRUMP 1989, p. 36). What interests me here is that the presence of horizontal (*uchi*) *chigi* is believed to mean that the shrine’s main kami is female, and that of vertical (*soto*) *chigi* that the main kami is male.<sup>5</sup>

Hence, the visitor can ascertain the gender of a shrine’s main kami on the basis of this architectural style. Thus, at Ise Jingū the main kami of the inner shrine is female, and that of the outer shrine is male (NISHIKAWA 1987, p. 101). Again, the *chigi* at the chief shrine at Izumo Taisha are vertical and hence male. The architectural style at Izumo differs from that at Ise, in that both ends of the *chigi* are visible, whereas at Ise only the top end of the *chigi* is visible, the bottom end being bedded into the roof. At Izumo both ends of the *chigi* are vertically cut.

When we come to consider the *chigi* of the Yukiden and Sukiden, we find that they are of the Izumo style; that is, both ends are detached from the roof. However, they differ in one significant feature from the *chigi* at Izumo. For the *chigi* of the Yukiden are cut horizontally at the top but vertically at the bottom, whereas the reverse is the case at the

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<sup>5</sup> I base this statement partly on written sources (PONSONBY-FANE 1942, p. 323 and HERBERT 1967, p. 111) and partly on the result of my own discussions in Japan. The distinction was made to me by Mr Senshū Sueyori 千秋季頼 of the Atsuta Jingū (interview 13.12.87) and by a ritualist interviewed at Hinomisaki 日御碕 Shrine (28.11.87); also, Prof. Watanabe Kan 渡辺 寛 of Jingū Kōgakukan University told me that the distinction existed at Ise, adding that it was, however, not in ancient historical texts. The possibility is that the belief originated after the time of the *Engishiki*, in which it is written that “gableboards are extended” (BOCK 1990b, p. 320) but without specifying their cut and in which only horizontal *chigi* are shown in illustration (see footnote 6), but before the hiatus of the 16th and 17th centuries in which this symbolic meaning was “lost.”

Sukiden, where the *chigi* are cut vertically at the top and horizontally at the bottom (see Plates 1 and 2). Hence, whereas we can identify unequivocally the gender of the main deity at the shrines of Ise and Izumo, the same does not seem to be the case for the halls of the Daijōgū.

There is a further difference between the constructions of the two halls. The *chigi* are placed above the ridgepole and are hence detached from the thatched roof of the hall below. Under each side of this pitched roof runs a bargeboard (*hafu* 破風), which meets its opposite number under the ridge. But they do not meet at the center of the ridge: rather, one overrides the other and continues to the opposite side. In the case of the Yukiden the western (i.e., lefthand) *hafu* overrides the eastern (righthand) *hafu* at the ridge; whereas in the Sukiden the reverse is true, with the eastern (righthand) *hafu* overriding that of the western one.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the front-and-rear position of the two *chigi* making up each pair differs in a corresponding way. For the *chigi* that slope in the same direction as the overriding *hafu* are placed in front, and those in the direction of the subordinate *hafu* are to the rear. Diagram 1 makes this clear.

I have identified two features of the Yukiden and Sukiden that are not identical: the cut of the *chigi* and the placement of the *hafu* and the *chigi*. How might the variation in placement be explained? I suggest that the matter is related to that interpretation of the duplication of the ritual that has to do with the weakening and then strengthening sun at the moment of the solstice—i.e., the moment that notionally occurs in the interval between the Yukiden and Sukiden rituals. For the earlier ritual takes place in the Yukiden, where the *hafu* pointing in the direction taken by the growing sun (east to west) is overridden by the eastward pointing *hafu*; and above it, the *chigi* pointing westward is placed behind, and in a sense eclipsed by, the eastward pointing *chigi*. In the Sukiden, on the other hand, the *hafu* pointing west (the path of the growing sun) is given free reign, and the *chigi* pointing in the same direction is in front of its fellow. The diagram makes this point clear; if I am correct, the

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<sup>6</sup> The positioning of the *hafu*, as well as the vertical and horizontal cut of the *chigi*, are described in the official accounts of both the Taishō and Shōwa successions (KUNAICHO 1918, p. 395, and 1931, p. 277). I had not consulted these sources, supposing the Yukiden and Sukiden to be identical, and it took an actual observation, therefore, to bring home to me what I then found to be available in the documents. Though there is no mention of the subject in the Meiji account (KUNAICHO 1968), the difference is not new. Although the classical illustration reproduced by HOLTOM (1972, facing p. 88) appears to show both halls with female *chigi*, that reproduced by MAYUMI (1988, pp. 88–89) has a clear difference in the shapes of the *chigi* tops—and since it is this picture that is included in the booklet produced for the recent *daijōsai* by the United Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja Honchō), and kindly given to me by officials of the Kunaichō, I think it is safe to say that the present forms are officially seen as being ancient in origin.

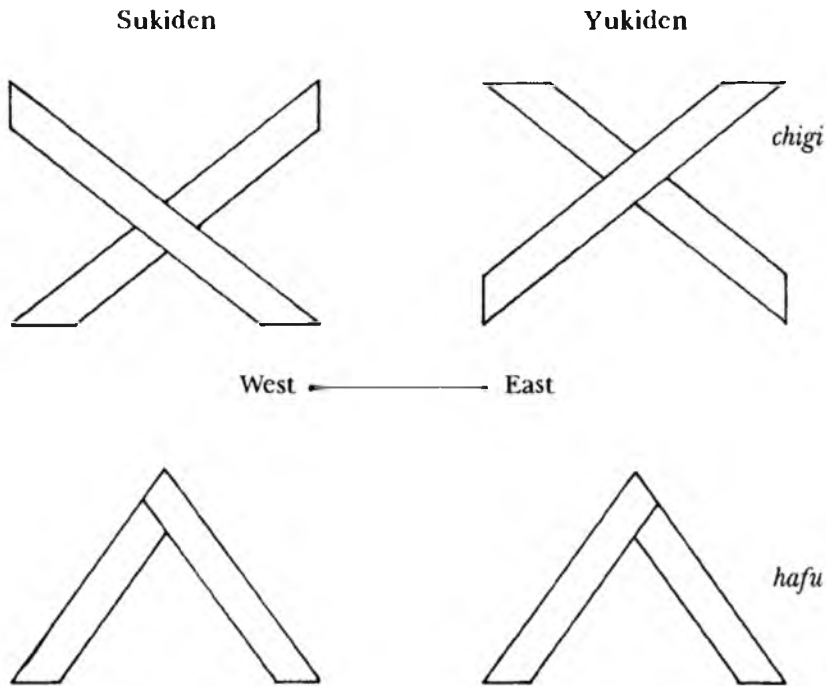


Diagram 1.

material symbolism lends support in this way to the “solstice interpretation” as at least one element in the meaning of the *daijōsai*.

Coming to the problem of the cut of the *chigi*, I have to deal with two points. First, why does each *chigi* signal a different gender at the top from the bottom? Second, why is the top of the *chigi* horizontal (female) in the Yukiden but vertical (male) in the Sukiden? A clue to the first answer may perhaps be found in HERBERT’s account of the different cuts of the *chigi* (1967, p. 111). His general statement implies that there is no such variation. But he then mentions two shrines as being exceptions. One is Kumano Hongū Taisha and the other Okayama Ise Jinja, where the *chigi* are cut horizontally at one end of the roof and vertically at the other.<sup>7</sup> Herbert says that it is believed that one pair of *chigi* represent Amaterasu-ōmikami and the other Toyo-uke-bime 豊宇気毘売. In this, the Okayama shrine mirrors the situation at Ise itself, where the outer

<sup>7</sup> This was not the case for the halls in the Daijōgū, where I observed that the *chigi* at the front and back of each hall had the same pattern.



**Plate 1. The Yukiden**



**Plate 2. The Sukiden**

shrine has male *chigi* and represents Toyouke Daijin, the god<sup>8</sup> of food, clothing, and housing (NARAMOTO & TODA 1983, p. 338), and the inner shrine, with its female *chigi*, is of course the home of Amaterasu-ōmikami.

May not the cut of the Yukiden *chigi* (top: female, bottom: male) also replicate the combination of the kami at Ise? And in doing so, may it not also provide a reverberation in the *daijōsai* of the first-fruits ritual (*kannamesai* 神嘗祭) that takes place annually at Ise? Here I follow MAYUMI, who points out the similarity in the patterns of the two occasions (1986, p. 180). At the *kannamesai*, a ritual is performed at the shrine of Toyouke Daijin in the evening, and before dawn at the shrine of Amaterasu-ōmikami—that is, first at the shrine of the provider of food, etc., and then at the shrine of the kami for whom it is provided. The duplication of ritual between the shrines at Ise is at the *daijōsai* symbolically compressed into the contrasting ends of the *chigi* in a single hall, the Yukiden. In this way, the *chigi* of the Yukiden symbolize the two main kami at Ise Jingū, besides implying the duplication of ritual that they entail.

The explanation of the dual gender of the Sukiden *chigi* must await my suggested answer to the second question: Why do the upper parts of the *chigi* at the Yukiden and Sukiden have a different gender?

My answer rests on events that are believed to have taken place during the reign of Emperor Sujin (reigned 97–30 B.C.). According to the chronicles, it was Sujin who effected the removal of the Sacred Mirror from his palace; and it was during his reign that the ties between the realms of Yamato and Izumo were strengthened by Sujin's recognition of the two main kami of Izumo.<sup>9</sup> These were Ōkuninushi, who is legendary ruler of Izumo and the main kami at the Izumo Taisha shrine, and Susanoo, who is Amaterasu-ōmikami's brother (and Ōkuninushi's father-in-law) and whom Sujin installed as the main kami at the Kumano Hongū Taisha (HERBERT 1967, p. 410). Now, Ōkuninushi's shrine at Izumo Taisha has male *chigi*; and what better symbol of the unification of these realms could there be than a female-male combination as shown in the upper profiles of the *chigi* of the Yukiden and Sukiden respectively?<sup>10</sup> According to this interpretation of the *daijōsai*,

<sup>8</sup> Toyouke Daijin 豊受大神 is called a goddess by some writers (e.g., BOCK 1974, p. 56 and ITŌ 1983, p. 132). I am not expert enough to judge which view is correct, but in the context of the male *chigi* on the Ise shrine and Naramoto and Toda's unequivocal statement cited in the text (as well as Herbert's statement about the Okayama shrine), I assign the kami a male gender.

<sup>9</sup> This may be set in the more general context of Sujin's "new beginning in imperial religion" marked by the "replacement of Jingō-era female deities above and priestesses below with male counterparts" (ELLWOOD 1990, pp. 201, 199).

<sup>10</sup> The linkage of Ise and Izumo is, again, symbolized in the male and female *chigi* at Kumano, as I have mentioned. More specifically, the first sacred fire drill, by which the ritualists at



the emperor first offers food in the Yukiden to Amaterasu-ōmikami as his ancestress, and then in the Sukiden to Ōkuninushi (or perhaps even Susanoo) as the representative of Izumo, whose addition to his realm increases his greatness, symbolized by the post-solstice increase of the sun as the ritual is performed.

I can now suggest an explanation for the female cut of the base of the *chigi* at the Sukiden. Since I have hypothesized that the male cut at the top is linked to Izumo, is it too farfetched to see the lower part also in an Izumo perspective? The mixed *chigi* at Kumano Hongu Taisha can be seen as symbolizing Emperor Sujin's linking of the great male and female kami. Again, at Hinomisaki (near Izumo Taisha), for instance, we see the cults of Amaterasu-ōmikami and Susanoo in adjacent shrines that have "a very close association."<sup>11</sup> May not this closeness also be expressed in the *chigi* of the Sukiden?

My analysis has been based on the view that the different gender of the *chigi*, and the differences in the material form of the two halls, must mean something, and that this meaning is reflected in the *daijōsai* ritual. Of course, this may not be so at the level of much present behavior and belief. If people believe that the two halls are identical in construction, and if they believe that there is a single main kami involved in the ritual of the *daijōsai*, and that that kami is Amaterasu-ōmikami – or even Marebitogami 客人神 (ORIGUCHI 1955, p. 223) – then this is what is real to them. Rather, this article is an attempt to speculate on what meaning might be given by those who do in fact recognize the differences in construction. Of course, this meaning may well refer to symbolic patterns and ideas about kami that no longer have currency – in short, to the

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Izumo Taisha cook the sacred rice at the annual first-fruits festival, was given to the chief ritualist of Kumano "at the order of Susa-no-Wo-no-Mikoto **and** [my emphasis] Amaterasu-Oho-mikami" (SCHWARTZ 1913, p. 527).

<sup>11</sup> MASON 1935, p. 130. A visit to Hinomisaki showed that the main shrine, dedicated to Amaterasu-ōmikami, had male *chigi*, whereas that dedicated to Susanoo had female *chigi*. When I questioned the ritualist (thanks to Mr Adachi Akira's interpretation), he replied that only at this place did such a reversal of architectural symbolism exist, and that there were "many theories" to explain it. One was that the main shrine was first dedicated to Susanoo, but when worship started at Amaterasu's shrine it was found that the ritualist worshipping Susanoo turned his back on Amaterasu. This was felt to be unseemly, and the two divinities were transferred. When I observed that this presumably meant that Susanoo did not object to seeing the back of Amaterasu's ritualist, he replied that, although Susanoo had come first to Hinomisaki, Amaterasu had become more powerful and had been placed in the larger of the two shrines (implying that any feeling that Susanoo might have had about the matter had been ignored). One can speculate that the goddess had taken over the central shrine as her influence increased over the centuries of cultural domination from the south. But it was clear to me that the ritualist did not believe that the situation overturned the general linkage between the cut of a shrine's *chigi* and the gender of its divinity.

associations of kami and hall that were lost, like much else (BLACKER 1990 p. 180), during the centuries in which the *daijōsai* was not held.

However, a recognition of the differences between the halls might reinforce some scholars in their existing views. Take, for instance, YAMAGUCHI's view of Japanese kingship as integrating and mediating the dual principles of order and disorder. He sees the *daijōsai* as having a dualistic structure that should be relevant, especially to Susanoo as representing this mediation "although there is no reference to Susanoo in the actual ritual procedure" (1977, p. 162). What I am suggesting is that there may indeed be a reference to Susanoo, not in the ritual but in the cut of the *chigi*; and the acceptance of my hypothesis might strengthen Yamaguchi's argument.

My explanations depend on the symbolism of the architecture of the Yukiden and Sukiden. They assume that the form of the *chigi* and *hafu* reflected the beliefs about the main kami in the halls at the time that the architectural form evolved. The specific kami associated with each hall may well have been forgotten in the centuries during which the *daijōsai* was not performed, and, later, Amaterasu-ōmikami came to hold paramount sway over both halls. But perhaps the reason for the duplication can be clarified by the thought that different kami were being respected in each one, as well as that a more general duplicative symbolism held sway in the ritual. As a South Asianist with little experience in the study of Japanese subjects, I put forward my interpretation in the hope that it may stimulate further discussion through either expansion or refutation.

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