

The *Shinza* or God-seat in the *Daijōsai*  
— Throne, Bed, or Incubation Couch? —

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The *daijōsai* 大嘗祭 is the oldest and most mysterious ceremony in the ritual sequence which marks the consecration of the Japanese emperor. It is also possibly the oldest ritual of its kind to survive in the world. Its exact age is not known. The first record of its performance comes in the reign of Emperor Tenmu 天武 (r. 672–687). But certain features of the rite—the absence of any metal in the building of the Daijōgū 大嘗宮, the rough earthenware vessels and oak-leaf dishes from which the emperor eats and on which he offers food to the kami—indicate that its origin may take us back to a prehistoric age.<sup>1</sup>

During its long history of at least a millennium and a half the rite has naturally suffered many vicissitudes. Wars, rebellions, and impoverishment of the imperial house led to periods, longer or shorter, of discontinuance. The longest lapse lasted for more than two centuries, from 1466 to 1687, when civil war and its aftermath

<sup>1</sup> Studies in English on the *daijōsai* include HOLTOM 1972; ELLWOOD 1973; MAYER 1989; BOCK 1990. The ceremonial prescriptions in the *Engishiki*, book 7, are translated by Felicia BOCK in her *Engishiki, Books VI–X* (1972), and discussed in ELLWOOD 1973, pp. 81–148.

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On the matter of the antiquity of the ceremony, compare the English Coronation Rite. Its present form dates back no further than William and Mary, 1689, though earlier “recensions” purport to take us back to an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon rite. See WOOLLEY 1915, and RATCLIFF 1936.

prevented its performance. During this long gap much of the tradition surrounding the ritual was lost. The ceremonial prescriptions which during the early tenth century had been committed to writing in the *Engishiki* 延喜式 were safely preserved, but much of the surrounding oral tradition, which had been a closely guarded secret of the imperial household, was forgotten.

Among the lost parts of the ritual were the entire *geinō* element—the ancient folk songs, the *furugoto* ふるごと or old stories chanted by the *kataribe* 語部 minstrels, the aboriginal cries and dances. Some of these have been “revived” in recent times by court musicians, but their reconstructions are not the authentic ancient tunes. Lost or suppressed also was the very name of the divinity or divinities in whose honor the rite was performed. Lost also was all knowledge of the symbolic meaning of certain ritual objects prescribed for the ceremony (OKADA 1979, pp. 260–62).<sup>2</sup> It is assumed that, like all rites whereby a sacral king is consecrated, the symbolic sequence confers on the new sovereign the sacred power which transforms him from a human to the divine condition necessary to become a king. But exactly what the ritual sequence signified in terms of symbolism is still far from clear. A number of enigmas still remain.

The purpose of this study is to try to elucidate one of these puzzles: the meaning and purpose of the *shinza* 神座 or “god-seat” which stands in the very middle of each of the two “halls,” the Yukiden 悠紀殿 and the Sukiden 主基殿, in which the rite is performed. This *shinza* resembles a bed, of strange and complex construction, with a well-defined pillow and coverlet. But so completely has its function been forgotten that during the course of the ritual the emperor does not once touch it, let alone lie on it. As Holtom put it in 1928, “the god-seat and its strange furnishings stand there throughout the night as silent witnesses of a half-forgotten past” (HOLTOM 1972, p. 96).

An intriguing variety of theories have been advanced to account for its presence. It has been seen as a throne, as a marriage bed, a symbol of the Sun Goddess, a resting-place for a visiting god, a refuge where the emperor may receive the soul of his ancestors. Before considering these varied explanations, however, let us recall in brief outline the outward sequence of the rite.

<sup>2</sup> YOSHINO 1987 underlines the anomaly that the name of the principal kami is never specified, pp. iii–vi. The question is further discussed by MAYUMI 1978a.

*The Sequence of the Daijōsai Ceremony*

The heart of the *daijōsai* ceremony is apparently a communion meal, in which the emperor eats the first-fruits of the new rice of the season, and offers the same, cooked in the same vessel, to the kami of his ancestors. The very name of the ceremony, Festival of Great Eating, reflects the importance attached to this act of commensal eating, and indeed the rite has much in common with the old annual harvest festival, the *niiname*sai 新嘗祭, also recorded in the *Engishiki*. It is tempting therefore to see the *daijōsai* as simply a grander version of the *niiname*, which is performed at the beginning of the reign of every new emperor, and hence confers, through the spirit of the rice, blessings and fecundating power on the new sovereign. This interpretation, however, leaves several puzzles unsolved.<sup>3</sup>

The ceremony is prescribed for the second hare day of the eleventh month. It lasts for four days and can be seen in three principal stages. On the first day is performed the rite of *chinkonsai* 鎮魂祭, or "pacifying the soul." The emperor's clothes, treated as a symbol of himself, together with a cord of white silk, are brought to two specially constructed shrines. The clothes are shaken ten times, and ten knots are tied in the white cord.<sup>4</sup> The second stage comprises the ceremonies in the Daijōgū, the focus of this study, enacted on the night of the second day and the early morning of the third. These are followed on the third and fourth days, our third stage, by banquets for some hundreds of guests. It is the ceremonies in the Daijōgū, which form the second stage, which concern us.

The complex of buildings known as the Daijōgū, or Shrine of the Great Eating, consists of two identical "halls" known as the Yukiden and Sukiden, surrounded by a fence of brushwood. These are constructed seven days before the ceremony by the specially skilled carpenters known as *miya-daiku*. The architecture of the Yukiden and the Sukiden is of an archaic type similar to the buildings

<sup>3</sup> Similarities between the *daijōsai* and the *niiname* are discussed in HOLTOM 1972, pp. 73–4; MAYUMI 1988, pp. 35–55. The name, *daijōsai*, has been adopted from the Chinese usage. The character 嘗, *nameru*, to eat, taste, or test by tasting, was the name of the third of the four annual festivals whereby during the Chou period reverence was shown to the ancestors by offering them products of the earth.

<sup>4</sup> HOLTOM 1972, pp. 86–7, and MAYER 1989, pp. 24–5, give full descriptions of this ancient rite. My thanks are due to Adrian Mayer for allowing me to read his discerning manuscript on the ritual.

of the Ise Shrines: they stand on piles, with crossbeams on the thatched roof; all posts and timbers are of rough unpeeled pine; the walls and ceilings are of matting; and around each building is a veranda of bamboo. No metal of any kind is used in the building. The brushwood fence which surrounds the enclosure has an entrance to the north and to the south; a kitchen where the sacred rice is cooked is allotted for each hall, one to the east and one to the west of the enclosure (see Fig. 1 on facing page).

The preparations for the rite, which must be accounted part of the whole ritual sequence, begin in the second month of the year, when divination by turtle-shell is performed to discover the two districts where the rice is to be grown. These are known as the Yuki field and the Suki field, and traditionally were located east and west of Kyoto. At the *daijōsai* for the late Shōwa emperor, divination for the two fields took place on 5 February 1928, when the cracks in the turtle shell decreed the Yuki field to be located in Shiga Prefecture, and the Suki field in Fukuoka Prefecture in Kyūshū. Divination for the forthcoming *daijōsai* ceremony next November took place on 8 February 1990; the results decreed that the Yuki field should be in Akita Prefecture, further north than on any previous occasion. The Suki field was located in Oita Prefecture in Kyūshū.

In these fields, and under strict conditions of ritual purity, the rice is sown, cultivated, harvested, and eventually transported to Kyoto or Tokyo. This is the rice which is to provide the meal and the saké which the emperor at the climax of the rite shares with the presiding kami.<sup>5</sup>

Inside the Yukiden and the Sukiden, the furnishings are identical. In the center stands the *shinza*, the focus of our inquiry. It is of exceedingly complex construction, consisting of seven layers of thick

<sup>5</sup> For the construction of the Daijōgū, see TANAKA 1975, pp. 96–129; HOLTOM 1972, pp. 89–94. An invaluable source since the revival of the rite in 1687 is the work of Kada no Azumamaro and his son Arimaro. Kada wrote four treatises on the *daijōsai*, based on the rite of 1783; he had not personally witnessed it but found participants willing to impart to him information on matters which had hitherto been kept secret within the imperial household. Here for the first time we are given details of the furnishings of the two halls, together with many illustrations and diagrams. The treatises are regarded as reliable and have supplied a basis for much later study. First published in 1739, they were suppressed by the Bakufu, and not republished until 1881. All are in *Kada no Azumamaro zenshū* (INARI JINJA 1944, vol. 10).

An account of the process of turtle-shell divination (*kiboku* 龜卜) may be found in my chapter in LOEWE and BLACKER 1981, pp. 65–72.

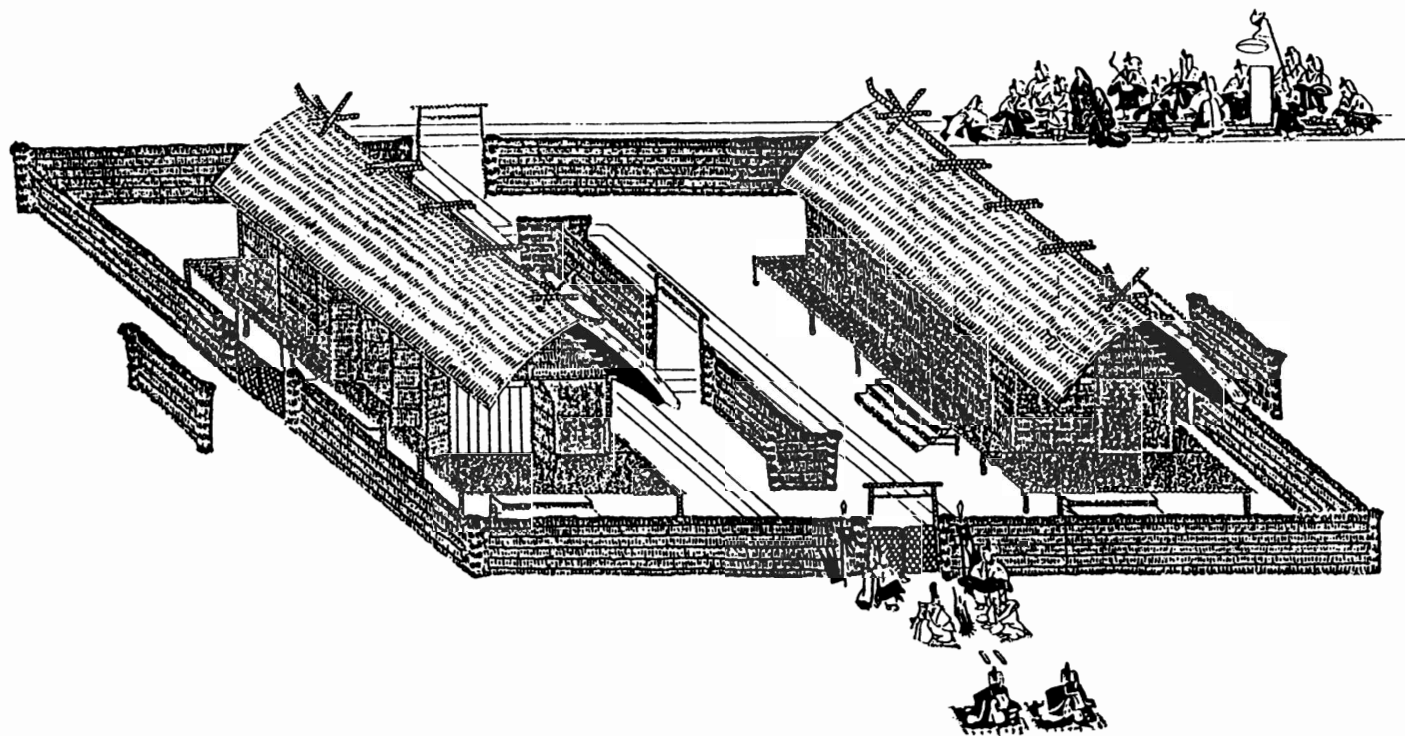


Fig. 1 The Daijōgū complex showing the Yukiden to the right and the Sukiden to the left, with the emperor's procession approaching from the Kairyūden (from HOLTOM 1972).

tatami arranged in three tiers, so that there is a projection or ledge at the foot, to the north, and another to the right or east. On the ledge at the foot lies a pair of slippers, purple with a white pattern. On the ledge to the right lies a comb and a fan, encased in folded white paper, and a length of silk, in a willow box, known as *uchiharai no nuno* 打拂布. On the uppermost layer of tatami, at the south end of the bed, is laid a pillow of triangular shape known as *sakamakura* 坂枕. Over both the pillow and the uppermost tatami are laid eight layers of thinner reed matting known as *yaedatami* 八重畳. Lastly, completely covering tatami and pillow, is a coverlet of white silk, known as *ofusuma* 御衾.

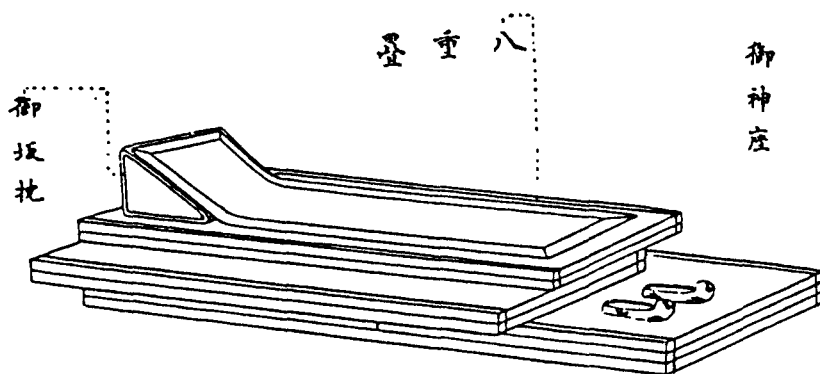


Fig. 2 The *shinza* as reconstructed in Sekine Masanao's *Tairei kōwa*, reproduced in Tanaka Hatsuo's *Senso daijōsai*.

Next, on either side of the *shinza* stands a table supporting a basket of cloth. The basket on the western side contains a soft cloth called *nigitaē*, that on the eastern side a rougher cloth called *arataē*. The function and meaning of these two lengths of cloth have, like the function and meaning of the *shinza*, been forgotten.

Next amongst the furnishings of the two halls are the mats on which are placed the food offerings for the kami, and the food eaten by the emperor. The chamber is lit by two lamps, one white and one black, each standing on an eight-legged table. Finally, the food, which is carried in procession into the halls and which is served in boxes and dishes of oak leaves and on dishes and bowls of unglazed red earthenware, includes steamed rice, fresh and dried fish, seaweed broth, *awabi* broth, fruit, boiled rice and millet, and

two kinds of saké. The emperor's food, *onaorai* 御直会, consists of steamed rice and millet molded into *dango*, or small dumplings.<sup>6</sup>

The ceremony begins on the evening of the second day, when the emperor takes a ritual bath of hot water, in a building to the northeast of the Daijōgū enclosure called the Kairyūden, from an archaic tub known as *miyu no fune* 御湯槽. He wears meanwhile a hempen garment which bears the name of *ama no hagoromo* 天羽衣, or heavenly feather robe. After his bath he removes this garment and puts on another robe of white silk. Wearing this, he walks in solemn procession from the Kairyūden, through the north gateway of the Daijōgū enclosure, and into the Yukiden by its south entrance. As he walks, a mat is unrolled before him, and rolled up again immediately behind him, so that no feet save his own touch it. A sedge umbrella is held over his head. Before him are carried two of the three imperial regalia, the Sword and the Jewels. He enters the Outer Chamber or *gaijin* of the Yukiden, and there waits while certain magic music is performed. Traditionally this music included folk songs from the district where the Yuki rice field was located; ancient ballads called *furugoto* chanted by the minstrels of the *kataribe*; the *Kuzusō*, or song of the Kuzu folk, an aboriginal people from the Yoshino mountains; and the dances and "dog-cries" (*inugoe*) of the Hayato, another aboriginal people from southern Kyūshū. All these ancient songs and tunes were lost during the two centuries of desuetude, and are replaced today by "reconstructions" composed by court musicians.

When the food offerings are in place, the emperor is summoned by a special call to pass into the Inner Chamber or *naijin*. Here he seats himself on a mat placed to the northeast of the *shinza*. In front of him are the two food mats, one for the kami and one for himself. He then offers to the kami the various foods prepared for them, and himself consumes three *dango* of the *onaorai* rice and millet, helping himself with chopsticks in his right hand and placing the *dango* on the palm of his left, followed by four sips each of the two kinds of saké. He then washes his hands, the remaining food is removed, he withdraws and returns, in the same procession, to the Kairyūden. The Yuki ceremony is concluded shortly before midnight.

<sup>6</sup> TANAKA 1975 describes the food, pp. 53-74 and 77-95, and the *shinza*, pp. 129-40. HOLTOM 1972 describes the food, pp. 106-11, and the *shinza* pp. 94-8.

At two o'clock the following morning, exactly the same ceremony is repeated in the Sukiden, the whole ritual sequence ending before dawn. The Daijōgū rite is thus concluded. The buildings are dismantled the same day, and all the *dōgu* or ceremonial implements, together with the remaining food offerings, are buried (*maizō*) at a spot in the precincts of the Kamigamo Shrine. Banquets follow for the next two days (TANAKA 1975, pp. 166–237).

### *Kingship Rituals and the Daijōsai*

A. M. HOCART, in his classic work, *Kingship*, discovered that in the consecration rituals for kings all over the world an extraordinary similarity of structure was discernible. So marked was the similarity, indeed, that he was tempted to wonder whether all could have derived from a single source. From numerous examples he distilled a model rite, to which all more or less conformed. Here he concluded that the general purpose and intention of the ceremony was to enact symbolically the death of the new king to his old human state, and his rebirth as a divine or semi-divine being. The moment of transformation or symbolic empowerment was accomplished when the king:

- a. was invested with special clothes: a tunic, cloak, gloves, hose, or sandals;
- b. received regalia, or magic objects of a power-conferring kind: a crown, an orb, a scepter, a ring, a sword;
- c. was either baptized with water or anointed with oil;
- d. received communion, or ate special food (1969, p. 70–98).

In all Hocart's examples, the king performed at least one of these symbolic actions; in some rituals he was required to enact more than one.

The *daijōsai* did not number among the examples Hocart analyzed to this end. But it is clear that the Japanese rite is no exception to his rule. All scholars who have sought to interpret the general symbolic action of the *daijōsai* agree that the ritual sequence enables the future emperor to pass from a human to a divine condition. Where they disagree is over the question of which action in the ritual symbolizes the principal power-giving transformation.

From our brief description of the rite it is at once clear that the climax appears to be the communal eating, by the emperor in



company with his ancestral kami, of the First Rice grown from the sacred crop. At the same time we note that the *shinza*, with its strange appurtenances, is completely ignored. It is not surprising therefore that explanations of the meaning of the rite should fall into two broad categories. Some scholars give principal importance to the communion meal; it is in the eating of the special magic food that the transforming moment occurs. The bed is of minor importance. Others would have it that the bed does not stand in the center of each hall by accident; some secret or forgotten rite (*higi*) must have taken place upon it which is of equal or greater importance than the communal meal. The explanations offered by these latter scholars come in general under the heading of our first Hocart alternative, the investiture of the King in magic clothes.

Let us now review some of these theories regarding the *shinza* and its function.

In the first category of scholars, who favor the communion meal as the climax of the rite and relegate the bed to a minor appurtenance, comes TANAKA Hatsuo, with his massive and authoritative *Senso daijōsai* (1975). For Tanaka the whole ritual is easily explicable in terms of symbolic action signifying hospitality to a guest. The primary focus of the rite is that the emperor should summon, entertain, and honor the visiting kami, who in return will lavish blessings and protection on his coming reign. Thus the emperor offers food to his divine guests and, like a good host, partakes of the same food himself. But his hospitality does not end here; he also provides a bed for his guests to rest after their journey, and even a pair of slippers, a fan, a comb and a change of clothes for their toilet. The *shinza* is thus not a transforming symbol; it is merely a comfortable refuge for a weary guest. This explanation puts the *daijōsai* into a pattern common to many Shinto *matsuri*, in which kami are summoned, entertained, honored, treated with every mark of hospitality, and finally requested for blessings before being sent back to their own world (1975, pp. 129-44).<sup>7</sup>

HOLTOM, too, regarded the communion meal as the climax of the *daijōsai*, but at the same time he was convinced that the *shinza* must be some kind of throne. It proclaims "by every line of its couch-like construction," he wrote, "that it is the True Throne of the old

<sup>7</sup> Tanaka goes further, p. 142, to assert that the meal served to the kami in the Yukiden is their evening dinner, and the one in the Sukiden, their morning breakfast.

Yamato Sumeragi" (1972, p. 49). He offered no explanation, however, of the function that this throne can have been assigned in the sequence of the ritual, nor of the meaning of the pillow and coverlet placed upon this "throne."<sup>8</sup>

An entirely different explanation, in this same first category, is offered by SAIGŌ Nobutsuna in his *Kojiki no sekai* (1967). The climax of the rite is still the communal meal. By eating with his ancestral kami the products of the earth, the emperor acquires the magical power to bestow fecundity on the land under his rule. But before he can reach this climactic moment of transformation, he must undergo a rite of passage. The necessary power must be conducted from the body of the old, dead emperor into his own body. To this end, he must revert to the condition of an embryo in the womb, wrapped in placenta. By this symbolic action he becomes the actual, direct child of Amaterasu; he is born directly from her womb. At the same time he re-enacts the mythical paradigm, recounted in the *Nihonshoki*, whereby Ninigi-no-Mikoto, the grandson of the goddess, is despatched down to the human world wrapped in a coverlet called *madoko-ofusuma* 真床襲衾. Only when he has thus been symbolically reborn as the child of the Sun Goddess is the emperor ready to receive the final empowering communion of food and wine (1967, pp. 133-36).

ELLWOOD, on the other hand, believes the *shinza* to have been a marriage bed, and that a *hieros gamos* or sacred marriage must have been a feature of the consecration ceremony in ancient times. It is a common Shinto myth, he declares, that a male kami from an upper world should marry a local goddess of the human world, and that their act of union should confer the blessings of fecundity and prosperity on the land. The argument by which he relates this myth to the scenario of the *daijōsai* is, however, speculative and unconvincing. There is no real evidence that, if indeed the emperor did lie down on the bed, he lay in the company of a woman. There is even less indication as to who this woman may have been (1973, pp. 37-77).

We now turn to the explanations of scholars in our second category: those who assign greater importance, in the transforming process, to some secret or lost rite (*higi*) concerning the *shinza*, than to the communal meal.

<sup>8</sup> See Origuchi Shinobu's arguments against the throne theory in ORIGUCHI 1979, p. 221.

Overwhelmingly prominent in this category is the theory of ORIGUCHI Shinobu, expressed in 1928 in his essay "*Daijōsai no hongī*" (1979). This essay has been extraordinarily influential in Japan. Briefly his view is as follows: sacral power comes to the Japanese emperor through the entry into his body of the soul or *mitama* みたま of the imperial house. The legitimacy of the imperial line, dating back to the descent of the divine grandchild Ninigi-no-Mikoto, depends not so much on hereditary blood succession as on the complete and correct transference of the imperial *mitama* from the old emperor to his successor. This transference is accomplished by the ritual of the *daijōsai*, in which we see, symbolically enacted, all the necessary steps of the implanting and gestation of the imperial soul in its new vessel (1979).

The imperial *mitama*, in Origuchi's view, resembles in some degree the ancient Shinto *tama*, which was believed to reside in a host, imparting to him/her life and energy, but not personality. When the *tama* grew weaker, or left the body, the host must fall sick and eventually die. But Origuchi reminds us that the boundary between life and death was by no means clear cut in ancient Shinto belief. Even after bodily death, the *tama* was still subject to recall, by special magic songs and dances, so that life might once more be infused into the dead body. To this end the body was placed in a "mortuary hut," known as *mogari* 殯, where for a stated period the magic songs, dances, and ritual calls were performed which might induce the *tama* to return. Only if the body failed to return to life at the end of the period was the final funeral performed.

But the case of the imperial *mitama*, Origuchi writes, is special in so far as during this period of intermediary waiting the soul must be transferred from the body of the old emperor to that of the new. It does not, as in the case of the souls of ordinary people, simply leave the body and depart for another world. The new emperor's body is a *tamashii no iremono* 魂の容器, a vessel for a soul, ready waiting to receive the soul of his predecessor. The period which is called "mourning" for the old emperor is thus *at the same time* the period in which the soul transfers itself to the body of the new emperor and there gestates.

The initial symbolic implanting of the *mitama*, Origuchi believes, takes place before the beginning of the *Daijōgū* rite, during the ritual of *chinkonsai* which immediately precedes it. Here, it will be recalled, the emperor's clothes are shaken ten times. The act of

shaking the clothes, which symbolize the emperor himself, indicate that the *mitama* is already attached or implanted. It is further consolidated and strengthened by another preliminary step, the emperor's hot bath, which was taken in the Kairyūden immediately before the start of the Daijōgū rite (ORIGUCHI 1979, pp. 220–23).<sup>9</sup>

The reason for this is that hot water, particularly the water from hot springs, was not in ancient times a mere agent of cleansing. It was a magic, purifying, and hence life-giving substance, originating in the paradise of Tokoyo, conducted to Japan over vast distances by underground channels, and eventually bursting through holy vents in the ground. The visits which the *Kojiki* records that the early emperors made to hot springs were hence not for mere purposes of health and hygiene. They were of the nature of pilgrimages to holy places, where pollutions could be washed away and spiritual power consequently strengthened.

The hot bath which the *daijōsai* prescribes that the emperor should take in the *miyu no fune* carries this transformative power. It is enhanced by the robe which the emperor wears during his bath. The *ama no hagaromo*, or heavenly feather robe, is the analogue of the very feather robe, celebrated in legend and drama, by which a *tennyo* or angel is enabled to fly between heaven and earth. Deprived of her robe, she is confined to the human world. Restore her robe, and she once again becomes a divine being. The very name given to the emperor's hempen robe indicates therefore that its purpose is to confer and consolidate nascent divine power (ORIGUCHI 1979, pp. 243–46).<sup>10</sup>

But the next, crucial step, is that the *mitama*, thus implanted,

<sup>9</sup> Origuchi rejects any speculation that the body of the old dead emperor could ever have lain with the new emperor on the *shinza* (1979, p. 221).

<sup>10</sup> The Hagaromo story is an example of the inter-national folktale type known as the Swan Maiden, with analogues in many countries. In IKEDA 1971 it is Type 400, *Tennin nyōbo* or *Hagaromo*. As a folktale and local legend, it has a wide distribution throughout Japan, from Aomori to Kyūshū. A *tennyo* flies down to earth, takes off her feather robe, and bathes in a pool. A hunter or fisherman steals the robe, without which she cannot return home. In the folktale version the hunter forces her to marry him, and she is only able to escape when her husband violates a taboo, and when she discovers where he has hidden the magic robe. In the No play *Hagaromo*, she does not marry the fisherman but consents to dance for him on condition that he gives her back her feather robe.

I confess that I do not understand Origuchi when he writes, pp. 243–46, that the *hagaromo* garment worn by the emperor during his bath should not be a robe, but a *fundoshi* or loincloth. This interpretation surely does violence to the traditional symbol of the magic feather robe, with its shamanistic overtones of a garment which enables flight to another world.

should be enabled to gestate and grow. This it can only do in darkness and seclusion. Thus, during the ceremonies in the Daijōgū, the emperor must have lain on the *shinza*, closely wrapped like a cocoon in the coverlet, and hence in darkness.

Origuchi here reiterates a view to which he often returns in his works, and which he believes to be deeply embedded in Japanese culture: that spiritual power, if it is to grow and mature, needs a period in the darkness of a sealed vessel. Within this vessel it grows until it bursts its covering and is "born" into the world. Certain vessels, he continues, are imbued with the necessary power of containing and nurturing a supernatural principle. The quality is known as *utsubo*, or "hollowness" to the divine. Thus a peach, a gourd, a segment of bamboo, from which in folklore supernatural children are born, are *utsubo* vessels. So is the cave or darkened room in which the religious ascetic secludes himself (ORIGUCHI 1950, pp. 260-74; also the lucid discussion in OUWEHAND 1964, pp. 122-23).

So also, therefore, is the *ofusuma*, which by wrapping the emperor in darkness enables the *mitama* inside him to gestate. Further and more empowering still, according to Origuchi, the *ofusuma* has a mythological analogue: it is the material representation of the original *madoko-ofusuma*, coverlet of the true couch, in which the *Nihon Shoki* states the Sun Goddess's grandson was wrapped during his journey to the human world (ASTON 1972, p. 90).

The coverlet, by its act of transformative wrapping, can therefore be seen in the category of a magic garment, analogous to the cloak, tunic, or shoes which are believed in other consecration rites to endue the king with sacral power. It is, in fact, the second magic garment, after the *hagoromo*, in which the emperor is wrapped in the course of the rite. The *hagoromo* confers powers of magic flight, enabling its wearer to pass from one world to another. The *ofusuma* incubates and gestates the nascent soul of his ancestors, which has been passed on to him from his predecessor, whole and unimpaired from the very beginning of the imperial line.

It is, therefore, the moment when the new emperor *takes off* the coverlet and emerges from the darkness once more into the light, that he is fully empowered and qualified as emperor. The *mitama* is fully matured and safely resident within its new receptacle, the new emperor's body. His emergence from the coverlet is thus a moment of rebirth.

Origuchi's view of the imperial *mitama* and its transference by

means of the coverlet on the bed from the old emperor to the new has exerted an extraordinary influence over subsequent interpretations of the *daijōsai*. Many scholars have reiterated or elaborated the theme. MATSUMURA Takeo, for example, in his four distinguished volumes, *Nihon shinwa no kenkyū*, follows Origuchi entirely when he avers that the real key to the *daijōsai* symbolism is the concept of a *mitama* or soul which can be renewed, strengthened, and transferred from one person to another. The same concept is found among the Ainu, where the bear sacrifice is performed with exactly this intent, and in the Ryūkyū islands, where "soul" may be transferred through magic songs called *omoro*. There, too, soul not only can be transferred and implanted in someone else, like mistletoe which everywhere is revered as a magic plant, but also can even be offered voluntarily, as an act of homage, to a ruler by his people. To attach part of your soul-strength to the ruler was indeed to offer him your most precious possession (1955, pp. 540-44).

MAYUMI Tsunetada (1978b, cited in OKADA Shōji 1989, p. 2) also follows Origuchi when he asserts that the *shinza* symbolizes the form of Ninigi, sent down from heaven wrapped in the coverlet. Every emperor in succession therefore is the ancestor figure, and every emperor can be conceived as emerging from the *shinza*.

Widely influential though his views on the inner meaning of the *daijōsai* have been since 1928, however, Origuchi is not without his critics. Of these, perhaps the most cogent is OKADA Shōji (1989), who argues that there is no real evidence for the existence of any secret rite (*higi*) attached to the *shinza*. In fact, there is not a single mention of any such secret tradition in any of the extant documents concerning the *daijōsai* throughout the ages. We examine in vain the premedieval records, written by those who actually took part in the ritual, for any shred of proof that the *shinza* carried the secret meaning that Origuchi ascribes to it. Nor is there any proper documentary evidence that the coverlet is rightly interpreted as the analogue of the *madoko-ofusuma* in the *Nihonshoki*. The *Nihonshoki* makes several references, to be sure, to *tennōrei*, or imperial soul or spirit, but by no possible stretch of the imagination can the word be interpreted as a soul brought to rest in the new emperor by means of the *daijōsai* rite.

Look at any of the records and diaries of those who actually witnessed or took part in the preparation of the *daijōsai* in any century, and you will find, Okada continues, that what is common

to them all is that it is always the communal meal which is stressed as the central climax of the rite. Any mention of a secret tradition that may happen to appear in these accounts, pertains not to the bed, but to the communal meal, and in these contexts "secret" means no more than "that which is not made public," that which is confined to the Palace tradition.

What is more, Okada continues, all the appurtenances of the bed—the pillow, the coverlet, the eight layers of tatami (*yaedatami*)—are frequently found in old shrines as *saigu* or ritual implements. There are brocade coverlets at Ise, a pillow at Usa Hachiman, a *shinza* with a *yaedatami* at the Kamo Wakeikazuchi Jinja, and a pillow, shoes, and coverlet at the Sumiyoshi Jinja. Such objects must have been common in shrines during the Nara period and before; they are simple *saigu* and nothing more. But there is absolutely no mention anywhere of the emperor, or anyone else, being wrapped in a coverlet or *tatami* (1989, pp. 7–8).

The suggestion that the emperor may have been wrapped in the *ofusuma* before the *ritsuryō* period, and that the practice was discontinued at that time of drastic change, likewise holds no water. We should expect some documentary mention of such a major change in the ritual. The fact that nothing in writing can be adduced in support of Origuchi's theory must lead us to conclude that the so-called "secret rite of the *shinza*" never existed. The theory is pure speculation, with no foundation in history.

But what of the *shinza* itself? What function does Okada assign to this complex object? The simple one that it is, after all, as its name indicates, the kami's seat. It is a seat for the visiting kami, who is doubtless the Sun Goddess since the rite is oriented in the direction of Ise, to rest after her meal. Of course the emperor does not touch it, let alone lie on it, for it is for invisible guests only. The dual nature of the rite, with its two identical halls which have so puzzled scholars, is likewise easily solved. The two halls are really one and the same; they are divided merely because courtesy and regard for purity require that the kami has her morning meal in a different place from her evening one. When the morning rite in the Sukiden ends and dawn breaks, the kami goes home. The rite is at once solemn and simple (OKADA 1989, pp. 16, 23–4).

These are cogent criticisms, which force us to consider whether Origuchi's theory, with its apparently compulsive attraction, may not have generated a mythology of its own.

In conclusion and with diffidence, I offer one further suggestion. Is it possible that we see in the *shinza* an example of an incubation couch, a bed on which a sleeper lies who has solicited an oracular dream from a god?

We know that the practice of incubation—of sleeping in a holy place in order to solicit a dream—survived in Japan until as late as the sixteenth century, usually associated with Buddhist temples, such as Ishiyamadera and Hasedera, dedicated to the Bodhisattva Kannon. But Saigō Nobutsuna, in another interesting book, *Kodaijin to yume* (Ancient peoples and their dreams), suggests that the practice may be far older than the introduction of Buddhism, older indeed than any cultural link with China. At this early period it was the emperor, the sacral king, who was the principal “dreamer” in the land. He was the chief link, through oracular dreams, with the world of the kami and the supernatural knowledge which lay in their gift. He had only to lie down to a “ritual sleep” for a kami to appear with the answer to a problem that seemed hitherto insoluble. Incubation for the emperor was therefore an important religious duty.

The emperor's palace, Saigō continues, always comprised a special hall where such dreams could be solicited, equipped with a special couch, known as the *kamudoko* 神床. The *Kojiki* tells us, for example, that Emperor Sūjin, grieving that so many of his subjects were dying of a terrible epidemic, lay down upon a *kamudoko* in the hopes of learning through a dream the cause of the sickness. Sure enough, the god Ōmononushi appeared to him in his sleep, with clear oracular advice as to how the plague might be stopped. Saigō reminds us also of the Yumedono, or Hall of Dreams, which at the end of the seventh century Shōtoku Taishi is said to have constructed next to his sleeping chamber. After bathing three times, he would enter this hall, to emerge on the following morning to speak of “things good and bad all over the world.” The Yumedono must have been an incubation chamber, and Sūjin's *kamudoko* an incubation couch (SAIGŌ 1972, pp. 35–49).

Could the *shinza* also have had such a function in ancient times? Could the emperor in the course of the rite have lain upon it, slept, and experienced a dream in which the apparition of an ancestor conferred blessings and advice on the coming reign? Could the visiting kami, in whose honor the food, the shoes, the fan, and the comb were laid out, have first manifested themselves in a dream in the emperor's mind?



We have now reviewed a good many suggestions for the presence of the enigmatic *shinza* in the two halls of the Daijōgū.<sup>11</sup> All agree that its function must have in some way contributed to the symbolic passage from a human to the divine condition that every king must undergo. But the extraordinary range of explanations for what exactly that function was, reflects at once the remarkable antiquity of the rite, and the extent to which its ancient symbolic language has been forgotten. We, living in what René Guenon called the impoverished reality of the modern world, have largely lost our intuitions of the holy, and of the holy king. Translated into the language of modern politics, the *daijōsai* may well appear irrelevant, meaningless, and in any case out of step with the *Ningen sengen* 人間宣言, or Declaration of Humanity, whereby in 1946 the emperor renounced all claim to divinity.<sup>12</sup>

In the *daijōsai*, nevertheless, we have, marvelously preserved like a kind of spiritual fossil, one of the most complex and mysterious rituals for the consecration of a king to survive from the ancient world. To suggest discontinuing the rite because it seems irrelevant to the modern scene must be shortsighted and precipitate. Its antiquity and its astonishing powers of survival are enough to remind us that traditional symbols carry knowledge that we ourselves may temporarily have forgotten.

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<sup>11</sup> Iwai 1988, p. 116, lists seven theories purporting to explain the meaning of the rite.

<sup>12</sup> Before we press the issue of the *Ningen sengen*, we should perhaps recall the deliberations of the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451, which pronounced the nature of Christ to be equally human and divine. It is conceptually possible, I am informed by the Norris Hulse Professor of Divinity in Cambridge, to be completely human and completely divine at the same time. Two natures may be united unconfusedly, indivisibly and unchangeably in the same person.

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