

Japanese Imperial Rites as Restoration of Behavior

In the rites conducted at the *Shinto* sanctuary located deep inside the palace, it is the emperor who alone serves as a mediator between the heaven and the earth. Considered the sole descendent of the sun goddess *Amaterasu*, who created Japan ex nihilo, the emperor requires no interceding powers beside himself. Even after the renunciation of his divine status after the defeat in World War II, the emperor continues to perform the role of the priest-king.

Yet like most rituals of the modern nation state, rites officiated by the Japanese emperor are the invented traditions dating back to the nineteenth century. They are restored behaviors whose imagined origins are shrouded in the mythical time past. This paper examines the processes how these rites came to be performed again in a histrionic guise after the “restoration” of the imperial rule in 1868. The imperial rites were, combined with more secular, showy spectacles, and in tandem with the newly introduced systems of discipline and surveillance, utilized as ideological apparatuses of the state. They had a clear purpose of unifying the nation and fashioning loyal subjects.

Between 1868 and 1945, Japan was a theatre state in which the emperor played the lead, ostentatiously wearing a cloak of western civilization from which protruded a *samurai* dagger. The paper goes on to consider the implications of imperial rituals, restored again (perhaps for the nth time in history), under the new, “democratic” constitution written by Douglas MacArthur’s U.S. occupational forces. Their performance remains to this day an important function of the emperor. Special attention will be given to visibility/invisibility of the emperor, divine/human attributes of his body, and the performance of masculinity and femininity.

About the Author

TAKAHASHI Yuichiro teaches performance studies at Dokkyo University, located on the outskirts of Tokyo, where he is a professor in the Department of Tourism and Transnational Studies. In 2002, TAKAHASHI organized a conference entitled “PERFORMANCE STUDIES: Resistance, Mutation and Cultural Hybridities” at Dokkyo University to which Richard Schechner was invited as a keynote speaker. TAKAHASHI’s writing in English has appeared in *TDR* and in other publications.