

" CELEBRATION"

By Ralph Fujimoto

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CELEBRATION

There are still many mysteries that continue to confound me --some quite trivial , one being the origin of the term " morning coat" used to describe a formal coat with the front cut away to form tails. It seems that it matters not what time of the day the event is to occur, one must begin dressing in the morning coat in the morning. Such was the case on my recent trip to witness the enthronement of the new Emperor Akihito of Japan.

Sunday, November 11, 1990, was a beautiful Autumn day in Tokyo, fit for a stroll through Hibiya Park toward the Imperial Palace grounds where the 125th enthronement ceremony was to take place the next day; then across the Marunouchi section of the city to the Takashimaya Department Store in Nihonbashi. Awaiting me there for a final fitting was a morning coat--all this being the result of having my body measurements transmitted across the Pacific Ocean via the Fax machine and a telephone call from Takashimaya to my home at 1:30 a.m.(cst) asking for my height in centimeters. (at 1:30 a.m., I am hardly in condition to convert inches to centimeters). In any event, the morning coat fit me fine.

In the evening, we gathered for an orientation session and a dinner hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Akasaka Hanten, a Chinese restaurant. "We", hereafter, refers to the overseas individuals of Japanese ancestry who were invited to attend the enthronement ceremony. There were twenty-six (26) of us altogether, including ten (10) from the United

States and sixteen (16) from other parts of the world, primarily Canada and the Latin American countries. The U.S.delegation was composed of representatives from the following cities: San Francisco--(1); Los Angeles--(2); Denver--(1); Chicago--(1); Portland--(1); New York-- (1); Tacoma--(1); and Honolulu--(2). Canada was represented by two (2) and Brazil was represented by six (6)--people of Japanese ancestry living in Brazil is estimated to number one million three hundred thousand (1,300,000). Other countries, each represented by one, were Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina.

THE CEREMONY OF ENTHRONEMENT (SOKUI NO REI--SEIDEN NO GI)

Quoting from a translation of an article by Kozo Kaku, a Japanese historian and writer ---
" The enthronement of the Emperor of Japan is the oldest state ceremony in the world. It has a documented history of 2,000 years but actually the rites are much older and go back to an age before recorded history to a time of myths and legends.

According to Japanese myths, the Imperial ancestor , the Sun Goddess Amaterasu Omikami, handed her grandson, Prince Ninigi, the Three Sacred Treasures of the Mirror, Sword and Jewel and commanded him to govern the Luxuriant Land of Reed Plains --- the western part of Japan.

Descending from the Plain of High Heaven to Hiuga in southern Kyushu, Prince Ninigi came into conflict with the powerful tribal chiefs who owned the land. It was his

grandson, the Emperor Jimmu, who subjugated the aboriginal tribes and gathered the lands under his sovereignty.

Jimmu, thus, became the first Emperor of Japan. He settled in Yamato Province where, in accordance with the instructions of his celestial ancestors, he built himself a palace in which he enshrined the Three Sacred Treasures he had inherited and worshiped the eight gods of heaven and earth, the protectors of the country.

For generations, the enthronement ceremonies involved the handing down of the Imperial regalia -- the Mirror, Sword and Jewel - to the new Emperors.

The enthronement ceremonies changed significantly in the Nara Period when the culture of Korea and China began to filter into Japan. The enthronement ceremonies, which had been conducted in almost pristine purity with simple Shinto essence, suddenly became lavish and spectacular. Imperial Court etiquette, costumes and buildings began to be affected by outside influences during the brief Nara Era (710-794). More pageantry was added to the ceremony. Officials wore purple, red or blue robes to signify their ranks; head-dresses were adorned with jewels and facing them, in a courtyard decorated with blue dragon and white tiger banners, were military officers armed with bows and arrows." (unquote)

On Monday, November 12th at 10 a.m., we assembled in a waiting room of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Building to be transported to the Imperial Palace for the Ceremony of

Enthronement. At 11 a.m., we were asked to board a special bus and to occupy seats towards the front, leaving the back of the bus for officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other distinguished government officials including the former Japanese Ambassador to the United States, The Honorable Yoshio Okawara. Arriving at the palace gate, we passed through two security posts before entering the Central Palace grounds. We joined the Japanese officials and were escorted through the large palace hall to our seating area along side the central courtyard.

In the courtyard were placed two rows of Imperial banners, gongs, drums and halberds at opposite ends of the area. At twelve o'clock noon, officials wearing traditional ceremonial costumes began entering the area carrying ceremonial items such as swords, bows, quivers, shields and halberds, and seated themselves in two rows facing each other at opposite ends of the courtyard.

At precisely one o'clock p.m., members of the Royal Family proceeded down a corridor which encircled the Seiden Hall and made their way to the State Room (Matsu-no-ma) where the Emperor, wearing a traditional redish brown robe ; a coronet with a pennant of silk gauze standing at the back; wooden shoes with embroidered covers and holding in his right hand a wooden baton, ascended the Imperial Throne (Takamikura). The Empress, dressed in a robe of five layers made of silk damask ; her hair tied at the back and hanging down in traditional style, adorned with a saishi (a kind of small mirror with crystals) , and

holding in her hand a ceremonial fan, ascended the August Seat of the Empress (Michodai). Prime Minister Kaifu, wearing a morning coat, presented himself in front of the Imperial Throne while the Emperor delivered the Imperial Address. The Prime Minister then delivered his congratulatory address after which he led the audience in three cheers "banzai" for the Emperor.. This was followed by a twenty-one gun salute by the Ground Self-Defense Force. The ceremony ended with the Emperor and Empress and the Royal Family leaving the State Hall at 1:30 p.m.

The Ceremony of Enthronement (Sokui no Rei--Seiden no Gi) was witnessed by 2,000 Japanese guests and 500 delegates from overseas representing 158 countries.

Before the ceremony began, we were instructed on two points---(1) to stand at the sound of the gong; (2) to bow at the sound of the drum. We were also told that we need not join in the banzai cheer which was to be led by Prime Minister Kaifu .

THE PALACE GARDEN PARTY (ENYUU-KAI)

The garden party took place in the afternoon on Tuesday, November 13th at the Akasaka Palace Gardens. Designed for the foreign missions and visitors who attended the Enthronement Ceremony, there were 800 participants including members of the Imperial Family, the Prime Minister, the Chief Judge of the Supreme Court, Chairmen of both the House of Councillors and the House of Representatives, Ambassadors and other dignitaries from foreign countries.

Located within the Palace grounds are two buildings ---the Akasaka Imperial Palace which serves as the residence of the Emperor and Empress and the State Guest House which is used to house foreign heads of state and other dignitaries when they visit Japan.

The Garden itself is a spacious park which feature beautiful ponds bordered by a series of promenades. Neatly sculptured evergreen trees and shrubs adorned the garden as well as beautiful displays of colorful Chrysanthemum.

Refreshment tents had been set up for this occasion and we enjoyed the drinks and food as we listened to the military band play old familiar songs--"Kuroda -bushi" (a samurai drinking song) and " Yu ya ke -ko ya ke"(a children's song of sunset and eventide)-- songs quite appropriate for the occasion and for the time of day.

The Japanese Government had originally decided that only one representative from each country would be chosen to personally greet the Emperor and Empress. At the last moment , however, we were asked to form a line and each of us was accorded the rare opportunity of being personally introduced to and shaking hands with the Emperor and the Empress as they walked from one end of the line to the other.

Thus ended an unforgettable afternoon at the Akasaka Palace Gardens

THE COURT BANQUET AFTER THE ENTHRONEMENT (KYOEN NO GI)

The "Court Banquet After the Enthronement ", as it was officially referred to, was held on four separate days to accommodate the 2,500 guests. We were invited to attend on

November 14th. This banquet was preceded by our gathering in the Seiden State Hall to view at close hand the Imperial Throne (Takamikura) and the August Seat of the Empress (Michodai). We were then led to the Grand Hall (Shunji no ma) to view a performance of traditional Bugaku before proceeding on to the State Banquet Hall (Homei-Den) . We were fortunate in being assigned seats at a table which had an unobstructed view of the Emperor and Empress at the royal table. Following the entrance of the royal family, the program proceeded as follows: The Emperor delivered a short welcoming speech; a representative of the guests offered congratulatory remarks ; the Japanese National anthem was played by musicians using ancient court instruments and a toast "kampai" to the Emperor was led by a representative of the guests. After enjoying a traditional banquet together with the guests, the royal party left the hall. Before leaving the Hall, we were each presented with a " take home box" of gourmet food including a whole baked red snapper,"(tai) ; fish loaf (kamabuko) ; poached salmon; pate'; and yokan (a form of cake). What happened to this wonderful but perishable gift is a story for later, as is the recounting of other highlights of the trip and some personal observations.

THE DAIJOSAI (The great food offering)

A very important ceremony accompanying the enthronement of the Emperor is called the Daijosai , an event to which only 1,000 Japanese were invited and the foreign representatives were not invited. According to a report prepared by the Imperial

Household Agency, the Daijosai is an ancient ritual celebrating the harvesting of rice. It is performed at the Daijoku Hall where the new Emperor offers newly-harvested rice to the Imperial Ancestors and the deities of heaven and earth and then partakes of the rice himself, expresses gratitude to the Imperial Ancestor and these deities for peace and abundant harvests, and prays for the same on behalf of the country and the people. On this occasion, the ritual began on the evening of November 22nd and ended at pre-dawn of the next day.

A set of buildings called Daijokyu was constructed solely for this event in the East Garden of the Imperial Palace Grounds in Tokyo.. They consisted of three main buildings. The first two are the Yukiden and the Sukiden , where the rites of offering are to be performed and the third is the Kairyuden , where the Emperor and Empress are to perform ceremonial purification and to change clothes before the ceremony. There are approximately 30 other buildings and pavilions on the grounds for those attending. Among some of the unusual features of the buildings was the floorings made of bamboo and covered with straw and rush mattings. Specific rules for construction of these buildings are set forth in a book of rituals (Jogan-Gishiki) compiled during the 9th century and have been observed through the ages.

This ancient book of rituals and the Imperial Ordinance promulgated in 1909 set forth the tradition governing the ascension to the Imperial Throne. According to the Imperial

Household Agency, the rites performed during the ceremony of Emperor Akihito's ascension followed the long-established tradition of his ancestors. The Rite of Offering is performed at the Yuki Hall first and the ceremony is duplicated at the Suki Hall as follows:

Newly-harvested rice is polished

Offerings, consisting of farm, forest and marine products indigenous to the prefecture are displayed according to prescribed form.

The Grand Master of Ritual recites a ritual prayer

The Emperor proceeds from the Kairyuden to the Yukiden

The Empress proceeds from the Kairyuden to the Choden in the southern courtyard of the Yukiden

Ancients airs of Kuzu(people of Yamato Province) are sung.

Folksongs of the Yuki prefecture are sung.

The Empress and other members of the Imperial Family make obeisance.

Oblations are brought to the Yukiden in procession.

The Emperor offers oblations (food and sake prepared with new rice and other food) to the Imperial Ancestors and the deities of heaven and earth.

The Emperor makes obeisance and reads a dedicatory address in which he expresses gratitude to the Imperial Ancestors and the deities of heaven and earth for peace and abundant harvests and prays for the same on behalf of the country and the people.

The Emperor partakes of food and sake prepared with new rice.

The oblations are withdrawn.

The Emperor returns to the Kairyuden.

The significance of the two buildings -- the Yukiden and the Sukiden -- relates to the Japanese tradition of having two prefectures chosen in which the sacred rice for the Great Food Offering is to be grown.-- one of the prefectures must be to the west of Kyoto and one must be to the east..The complicated process of selecting the two prefectures is said to be based on an ancient Shinto ritual . After three days of purification, a Shinto priest starts a fire by rubbing two pieces of wood together.. A tortoise shell is placed over the flame until it cracks. A priest, knowledgeable in the ancient art of tortoise shell reading , deciphers the result like a map and gives his interpretation of the names of the prefectures to the Prime Minister who informs the Emperor of the news. For this occasion, Akita Prefecture in Eastern Japan and Oita Prefecture in Western Japan were chosen as the Yuki and Suki Districts respectively, and new rice from the Yuki District was offered for use at the Yukiden and that from the Suki District at the Sukiden.

The 56 year old Emperor Akihito (Heisei), thus became the first monarch to be enthroned under Japan's postwar Constitution, which changed the status of the Emperor from head of state to symbol of the state. The state-funded Enthronement Ceremony was last held in 1928 for the late Emperor Hirohito((Showa). In 1946, the Emperor renounced his divinity by issuing the "Human Declaration" statement. To be noted is the fact that this

was the first time that the enthronement ceremony was held in Tokyo. In the past, the ceremony was held in other cities including the ancient city of Kyoto. Although this 125th enthronement ceremony contained traditional rituals, some modifications were made to conform with modern needs, that is, to create a new image of the Emperor as a symbol of Japan. Of great significance, was the fact that the Prime Minister Kaifu, dressed in morning coat, stood on the same platform as the Emperor as he read his congratulatory message to the Emperor and led three cheers from the same level, whereas, in 1928 during Emperor Hirohito's ceremony, Prime Minister Giichi Tanaka was required to descend the 18 step staircase and to lead the three cheers from below. On a personal level, as we mentioned previously, we had the privilege of shaking hands with the Emperor and the Empress, a privilege which would have been unthinkable back in 1928, when the people were forbidden to even look directly into the face of the Emperor. This uncontestable fact was attested to by a 92 year old grandmother who claims that, as a young girl, she stood with other worshippers alongside a railroad track and joined them in obeisance as the royal train sped by, not allowing even a glimpse of the Emperor Showa. When I returned from my trip to Japan and reported on my experience during the Enthronement Week, she stood in disbelief as I told her of my being personally introduced to the new Emperor and Empress and shaking hands with both of them, as she was when I presented her with the cedar box packed with gourmet

food (kept frozen during my journey home , courtesy of the Imperial Hotel and the Japan Air Lines) and told her it was a gift from the Emperor. The package immediately found its way into the freezer where it remained until New Years Day, 1991, when the delicacies were thawed, admired and consumed by the family and friends.

As evidence of the changing attitudes in Japan, the decision to celebrate the Daijoshi ,or Rite of Offering of New Rice , was opposed by a vocal minority in Japan, an act which would have been dealt with severely in the old days. Precautionary measures against terrorist actions were in evidence--from rigid control of vehicle traffic routes into the city to the marshalling of policemen from outside the city raising the aggregate number of security forces in Tokyo to 37,000. Entrance to the Imperial Hotel , which housed many foreign dignitaries, was strictly controlled. According to reports, more than 90 regularly scheduled flights in and out of Haneda Airport in Tokyo where many foreign representatives were to arrive, were cancelled during the period and transportation of ordinary domestic air cargo was temporarily suspended. As a result, when a Tokyo friend invited me to dinner at his favorite fish restaurant, we were told that they had only enough fish to serve those already seated and were sorry but they could not take any more customers that evening.

Because of the tight security measures, however, there were only a few minor incidence to mar the week-long proceedings.

The modern enthronement event thus had its unsavory aspects. On the other hand, the feelings manifested in the demonstrations and the public debates in the Parliament on the question of whether the government should or should not fund the cost of the rituals having a religious origin may signify Japan's coming of age towards a more open society. In a more significant way, Japan's post-war constitution changed the Imperial role from a sacred sovereignty to that of a national symbol. The Emperor will sit on the Chrysanthemum throne, not as a living God, but as a cosmopolitan man. He has dropped the court language of his father. One of his sons recently married a middle class, Western-educated Japanese woman. The Emperor himself, trained in his youth by an American Quaker woman, Elizabeth Vinning, displays some interest in breaking tradition. He was the first modern Emperor to take a commoner for a wife. As he commutes daily from his residence in the Akasaka Palace to his office in the Imperial Palace, his car will stop for traffic lights as would any other commuter in Tokyo.

Emperor Akihito's reign has been designated in Japanese as the Heisei era which means "achievement of universal peace" In his address during the formal ceremony of enthronement, the Emperor stated--" On this occasion, I pledge anew that I shall observe the Constitution of Japan and discharge my duties as symbol of the State and of the unity of the people, always wishing for the well-being of the people, in the same spirit as my father, Emperor Showa, who, during his reign spanning more than 60 years, shared joys