

Notes for the Comparision
Between

the Japanese Enthronement Ceremony

And

the Thai Coronation

MATSUI Yoshikazu*

Preface

Though a funeral is not happy occasion, I felt very fortunate to have had the opportunity to observe one of the most important state ceremonies of Thailand, the cremation ceremony of the late Queen Rambhai Barni, on April 9, 1985. Thanks to a television broadcast, I was able to watch the ceremony and pageant. This ceremony impressed not only such resident in Bangkok as me, but also people all over the world. The world Service of the BBC referred to it saying, "Thailand has not seen a ceremony like it for thirty years."

* a doctoral candidate for the Japanese religion at the Kokugakuin University in Tokyo. a visiting lecturer at the Kasetsart University in Bangkok sent by the Japan Foundation

My interest in traditional ceremonies stirred, I wondered what had been held thirty years ago; it may have been more correct, I think, to have said "thirty-five" instead of "thirty," for the coronation ceremony of the present King, Rama IX, had been held thirty-five years before this cremation.

In a Kingdom which has been independent as long as Thailand has, it would be natural to assume that the enthronement ceremony would be extremely significant. So I began to study the coronation of Thailand. Shortly, I came across these interesting words of Prince Dhani:

แต่พระองค์ทรงเป็นแต่ผู้สำเร็จราชการแผ่นดิน ไม่ก่อนจนกว่าจะได้ทรงรับราชภัตเชก ในระหว่างที่ยังไม่ได้รับนั้น เครื่องยศบางอย่างก็ต้องลด.....

(His Majesty had but acted as king for the interim prior to his coronation. Until this was accomplished, some of the regalia could be borne only in a reduced degree.)¹

I interpreted this to mean that, though the king reigns, he is not yet regarded as fully a king until the coronation ceremony takes place. This interpretation agrees with that of Wales, who states that the coronation ceremony is essential to the accession to the throne.²

This Thai concept of kingship struck me as very similar to that held by us Japanese. In the history of 124 reigns of the Ten'no³ there is one, the 85th Chukyo, who held the throne for three months in A.D. 1221 and is called **Hantei** (literally half-Emperor), because he was obliged to resign from the throne before holding **Daijo-sai**, the enthronement ceremony.⁴

I The Enthronement Ceremony in Japan

(1) How the present Ten'no ascended the throne

To understand the succession to the throne in Japan, it will be useful to look back to the suc-

sion of the present Ten'no. He ascended the throne immediately after his father passed away at 1.25 a.m. on December 25, 1926. The new Ten'no received two of the three most important of the Sacred Regalia at 3.15 a.m. in the same palace where he and his consort had been attending on their father.

On the 26th, the day following his predecessor's demise, the new era, which had commenced the previous day, was named **Showa**; thus, that entire calendar year was designated the First Year of the Showa Era. This year, B.E. 2529 or A.D. 1986, is the 61st year of the Showa Era.

On the 28th a royal audience was held to declare that a successor had ascended. On this occasion Ten'no wore a mourning band on his left arm and the Empress was dressed in black as a sign of mourning. The cremation ceremony began in the evening of February 7th and continued to the following morning in the Second Year of Showa Era, A.D. 1927.

In the Third Year of the Showa Era, in the month of January, the period of mourning was completed, whereupon the date was set for the enthronement ceremony, called **Senso-Daijo-sai**, which may be translated the Great Thanksgiving Festival for Accession. The date was reported first to the Ancestors of the Ten'no Family and after this to the public.

Following this, the preparatory ceremonies were held until the day of the Great Ceremony in November. The Ceremony was held in Kyoto, which was the capital of Japan from A.D. 1794 to 1868. On November 10, 1928 the enthronement ceremony, **Senso-no-gi**, was held with high dignitaries in attendance. **Daijo-sai**, a series of rites, which is those most important for enthronement, began on the evening of November 14 and continued through that night.

(2) The ancient Japanese enthronement

The details of the most ancient prototype of the Japanese enthronement ceremony are not known with certainty, however, the ceremony described above can be considered to have been performed in traditional style since it was performed according to rubrics laid down in the Imperial House Act, which was promulgated in A.D. 1909 in order to revive the traditional style to the fullest possible extent.

Probably the best source of information on the ancient enthronement ceremony is *Nihongi*, the first authorized⁵ history of Japan, which was compiled in A.D. 720 and relates events from legendary times up to the year A.D. 697. This work consists of 30 volumes, the first two of which contain myths explaining the origins of the dynasty of Japan. The remaining volumes are the chronicles from the first reign **Jinmu** to the 41st **Jito**, who ruled A.D. 689-697. According to this work, most **Ten'no** ascended the throne on New Year's Day as the first **Jinmu** did; however, this is not believed to be historical fact but rather to reflect an ancient belief that the start of a new sovereign's reign means the beginning of a new year.

Volume XIV, in which the events of the 21st **Yuryaku**'s reign are narrated, gives an account of the place of the accession, "The Emperor ordered commissioners to erect a lofty pavilion at Asakura in Hatsuse, in which he assumed the Imperial Dignity."⁶ From this description we can see that the pavilion **Takamikura**, which is the Imperial Throne, was built when new **Ten'no** was to ascend.

In the last volume, the accession ceremony of **Jito** is described. The description presented below is an abridgement of the translation by W.G. Aston with the translator's notes in parentheses.

"4th year, Spring, 1st month, 1st day. **Mononobe no Ason** set up great shields (or a great shield. Shields were set up as offerings to the Shinto-Gods). **Nakatomi no Ohshima no Ason**, Minister of the Department of Shinto religion,

recited (a prayer invoking) blessings from the Gods of Heaven. When this was over, **Shikofuchi, Imbe no Sukune**, delivered to the Empress-consort the divine seal, sword and mirror (Another rendering is "the divine tokens, i.e. the sword and mirror). The Empress-consort accordingly assumed the Imperial Dignity (The delay was no doubt in compliance with the Chinese idea of a three years' mourning). The Ministers and public functionaries ranged in order, made obeisance in rotation, and clapped their hands.

2nd day. The Ministers and public functionaries presented their respects at Court with the same state as at the New Year's audience. **Tajiki no Shima no Mobito** and **Fuse no Miaruji no Ason** presented their congratulations to the Empress on her succession to the throne.

3rd day. A banquet was given to the Ministers in their precinct.

7th day. A banquet was given to the Ministers in the inner precinct, and presents of clothg giving them.

17th day. There was a general amnesty throughout the Empire. Widows, orphans, lone persons, sufferers from grave illness, and those who from poverty were unable to support themselves were granted presents of rice, and exempted from commuted taxes and forced labours.

23rd day. Offerings were distributed to the Gods of Heaven and the Gods of Earth in the Home provinces.

11th month, 24th day. The festival of first-fruits(Ohnihe) was held. **Ohshima, Nakatomi no Ason**, Ministers of the Department of the Shinto religion, recited the (prayer invoking the) blessing of the Heavenly Dieties."⁷

Though many details of the accession ceremony have changed in the course of history, comparing the **Jito**'s accession with that of the present **Ten'no**

described in the previous section, and taking descriptions of other accessions not presented in this paper into consideration, we can see some common and permanent characteristics of the Japanese enthronement:

(1) The holding of the Three Sacred Regalia is essential to being *Ten'no*.

(2) On the day of enthronement the blessings from the Heavenly Dieties are invoked.

(3) Public audiences are held after accession.

These three rites are the essence of the accession and together compose the enthronement ceremony proper.

(4) In the autumn following accession, the annual harvest festival, called *Niiname*, or *Shinjo-sai*, assumes greater than ordinary importance, for it is the first *Niiname* of a new *Ten'no*. This festival, which is called *Ohnihe*, or *Daijo*, is the enthronement ceremony of Japan.

(5) The mourning period for the predecessor is observed with solemnity, so the grand festival for accession is held after it. But a new sovereign is decided as early as possible after a predecessor's demise.

(1) and (3) have a social function, while the others are characterized by religious elements. (1) and (2) were two main components of an enthronement, for from the beginning of *Heian* period, about the ninth century A.D., the recital of the blessings came to be performed at the time of *Daijo-sai*, the Great Thanksgiving Festival, which Aston translated as "the festival of first-fruits." Thus *Daijo-sai*, called *ohnihe* in *Nihongi*, has been held as the most important ceremony for accession, and the rite in which the Sacred Regalia are conferred is repeated during this ceremony, *Daijo-sai*.

(3) *Daijo-sai*

The most serious duty of the *Ten'no*, is to perform numerous religious rites over the course of the year for the welfare of the nation. Among

these, *Niiname-sai*, an annual ceremony held each Autumn in November, is the most important. The *Nii* in *Niiname* means 'new', and *name* means 'to eat together,' or 'to lick'

Daijo-sai is the first *Niiname-sai* (*Niiname* is often called *Shinjo*) after a new *Ten'no* has ascended. *Dai* means 'big, or grand' and *jo* is equivalent to *name*, so we can say that *Daijo-sai* is a grand *Niiname-sai*. In Kenkyusha's New Japanese - English Dictionary,⁸ *Niiname-sai* is rendered as the Harvest Festival while *Daijo-sai* is rendered the Great Thanksgiving Service after the Enthronement. We also note that the word *ohnihe* in *Nihongi*, mentioned in the previous chapter, is written with the same character as *Daijo*.

Thus we can see that both *Jito* and the present *Ten'no* were the focus to the same ceremony in November, the former in A.D. 691 and the latter in 1928.

Daijo-sai begins soon after the ancestors and the public are informed of the date of the ceremony. The two provinces where the rice used in the ceremony is to be harvested are chosen, one in the western part of Japan and the other in the eastern provinces, a procedure already codified in the A.D. 905 statute book called *Engishiki*, in which it was prescribed that *Daijo-sai* alone among the many state ceremonies was to be called a grand ceremony.

Then the official priests who will perform the ceremony, *Daijo-sai*, are elected. On an auspicious day in September envoys of the court hold religious ceremonies in the two provinces selected and then harvest the rice. The harvested rice is sent to Kyoto, the traditional capital, to a granary area near the court where preparations for the ceremony are made.

At court, the main buildings for the ceremony, called *Daijo-gu* or palace of *Daijo-sai*, are set up. These huts are so simple and modest that are completed within four or five days. This palace, *Daijo-gu*, consists of two huts, *Suki-*

den in the east and **Yuki-den** in the west.

On the day of the ceremony **Ten'no**, arrayed in vestments, proceeds to **Yuki-den**, having spent the previous month purifying himself in conformity with the regulations of **Ryo**, enacted in A.D. 689. When **Ten'no** comes to the front of **Yuki** hut, participants from various provinces, including the one designated **Yuki-no-kuni**, the province of the west in which the rice was harvested, perform their own traditional songs and dances for **Ten'no**. Then **Ten'no** enters into **Yuki-den** and alone performs rites in which he eats the newly-harvested rice.

From ancient times many scholars in Japan have speculated as to what **Ten'no** is doing in the hut; however, no one knows, for this climactic moment of the ceremony performed by **Ten'no** himself alone. After completing the rites in **Yuki-hut**, **Ten'no** proceeds to **Suki-hut**, where the same procedure is repeated.

Many scholars have interpreted this act of eating the rice in two ways. The first is that in eating the newly-harvested rice the **Ten'no** identifies himself with the ancestral spirit emanating from the origin of the dynasty. The second is that by this act the **Ten'no** embodies in himself the spirits of all places in the country, here symbolized by the rice from the two provinces.

II Comparision between the Japanese Enthronement Ceremony and the Thai Coronation

(1) Succession

According to Wales, a law of A.D. 1458⁹ stipulated that the eldest son of the queen shall have precedence over all other members of the royal family in Thailand. However, this was often violated during Ayudhaya period. Similar departures from custom are also seen in Japan, especially

during the middle ages. In modern times, however, this rule has been kept with few exceptions in either country. This question of priority of succession to the throne involves the structure of the society under considerations, a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁰

What interests me is the fact that the coronation should be held as soon as possible after the demise of the last king "within the period of mourning, which was suspended during the ceremonies."¹¹ Another source says, "a king was bound to hold his coronation, even during the period of mourning for his predecessor."¹²

As we have seen before, the present **Ten'no** was instated immediately after his father's demise through the conferral of the Regalia. We may then speculate there is a belief common to both kingdoms that to leave the throne vacant for even a short time will cause disorder in society.¹³ It may also be speculated that there is a second belief significant here: namely, that every monarch is a reincarnation of the great ancestral spirit who founded the country. So the succession is regarded as far more important than the funeral. I pointed out in I-(3) that a belief in reincarnation, the identification of the new **Ten'no** with his great ancestors, is seen to play an important role of the enthronement ceremony in **Daijo-sai**. To realize reincarnation it is necessary to hold a ceremony of succession as soon as possible after a predecessor's demise.

Nevertheless, there is the question as to why in Japan the period of mourning is not suspended. Historically this period was not as long and often not observed. Interestingly, there is in Japan a family as old as the **Ten'no's**, and both these families trace their origins to the times described in myth. This other family, the **Izumo** family, has no funeral ceremony when the head of the family dies, for their belief is that the head of the family is always a reincarnation of the ancestor, who never dies. We believe that this belief of the **Izumo** family represents the traditional Japanese

concept of life. So the mourning period now observed in Japan might be an influence of Chinese culture. It is natural that tradition maintains itself adopting to changing circumstances. This may be one of the reason why modern Thai Kings, influenced by modern trends and adopting them to traditional ways, had coronation twice, first immediately after the predecessor's demise and second after the mourning period was completed.

(2) Regalia

One of evident differences between the two countries, one which impresses me greatly, is the concept of the regalia. The Thai regalia are nothing more than the insignia of the kingship. whereas the Japanese Regalia, which are called Shin-ki, literally translated "Holy Instruments or Instruments of gods," play a far more important role, for no prince can enthroned himself without having the Regalia, which are believed to have been given by ancestral deities.

The Regalia are three in number: a comma-shaped bead, a sword and a mirror. Two of these are handed to a new *Ten'no* as a sign of the succession, and the third, the bead, is always kept by *Ten'no* himself, enshrined in the Imperial Palace. **A new *Ten'no* gains access to the bead when he has identified himself with the ancestral spirit in *Daijo-sai*.**

These three sacred Regalia have never been opened to public view, while the Thai Regalia have been displayed to the public and photographed for publication.

The myths explaining the origins of the Japanese Regalia are related in *Kojiki*¹⁴ compiled in A.D. 712, and in *Nihongi*. Since then the mirror and the sword have been enshrined in the grand shrines in *Ise* and *Atsuta*, respectively, and replicas of them are kept in the shrine in the Imperial Palace. These are handed to a new *Ten'no* on the occasion of enthronement, as described earlier.

In Japan the Three Sacred Regalia have often been interpreted as symbols of the people's moral life. For example, Ichijo Kanera (1402-1481) wrote that the sword symbolized encouragement, the mirror knowledge and the bead mercy. These three were regarded as the fundamental virtues of human life.¹⁵ And it was thought that "without the combined strength of these three fundamental virtues, peace in the realm cannot be respected."¹⁶

(3) Consecration

H.H. Prince Dhani points out, "ลักษณะของพิธีบรมราชาภิษกเวลานี้ เรามักจะเข้าใจตามธรรมเนียมฝรั่งไปเสียว่า สำคัญอยู่ที่การสวนพระมหาพิชัยมงกุฎ แต่ข้าพเจ้าคิดว่าแต่เดิมเห็นจะสำคัญอยู่ที่การทรงรับน้ำอภิเชก เพราะชื่อพิธีก็บ่งอยู่ชื่อนั้นแล้ว"

(The most significant feature of the enthronement ceremony is understood) at the present time under the influence of European usages to be the crowning with the Phra Maha Phichai Mongkut, or Great Crown of Victory. However, it is my belief that traditionally the greatest significance was attached to the Anointment, as the (Thai) name of the ceremony (aphisek = 'anointment') indicates.)¹⁷

Wales states, "the earlier, and originally the essential, part of the ceremony was the anointment and not the crowning."¹⁸

During an enthronement ceremony in a kingdom which has a sufficiently long tradition we might hypothesize that the climax of the ceremony must be the moment when a king is identified with a supreme being, the ancestral Sun Goddess in Japan or the god Siva in Thailand. In the case of the Thai coronation, this moment is the anointment with the sacred water from eighteen ancient districts of the country, and in Japan it is when *Ten'no* eats of the new rice corp in *Daijo-gu*.

If this hypothesis were correct, it will be correct to think that after passing this climactic ceremony an heir becomes a king completely. We, however, find in the Thai ceremony as event which seems to disprove the hypothesis. After the anointment, a king proceeds to พระที่นั่งกัตรบูรุ, the Noble Throne Bhadrapith, which has พระมหาเศตฉัตร, an Umbrella of State, with only seven tiers, and there the rites of crowning and recital of the blessings are held. After crowning, two tiers are added to give the nine-tiered umbrella¹⁹ which symbolizes the kingship. Taking this procedure into consideration, we must accept that anointment alone does not fully instate the king.

It is probable that crowning has as significant a role as the anointment in the Thai coronation. That is the reason why it is said that the moment when a king puts the crown on his head is "the supreme moment of the Coronation."²⁰ It is noteworthy that a king puts the crown on his head himself. This is unique to the Thai coronation, for in the Hindu ceremony, the crown is put on a king's head by Brahmans.²¹ This indicates the importance of the king in the Thai Coronation, for by this act he asserts his absolute supremacy in society. Nevertheless, this climax of the ceremony is accompanied by recitals of the blessings by Brahmans and Buddhist monks. So we can see that crowning ceremony is not only political and secular but has religious significance as well.

(4) Sovereignty

Whatever political form they may have today, any enthronement ceremony of kingdoms includes a rite which expresses the assumption of sovereignty in the country and the world.

In the Thai coronation sacred water is consecrated in eighteen places across the country and collected for anointment. This water is poured on the king eight times as he faces in each of the eight cardinal directions. This rite of anointment, as we saw before, is one of the climaxes of the

Coronation. To collect water from historical places implies that a king possesses all the territory and embodies the tradition in himself through anointment. And to face to the cardinal direction means to declare his sovereignty to all the world and thus get the power to order the cosmos.²²

In Japan, two provinces, one in the east and one in west, are selected from which the harvests are collected for *Daijo-sai*. There is no doubt that these two provinces symbolize the whole country. By eating of the crop from these provinces *Ten'no* embodies the souls of all the territory in himself. In addition to this rite, folksongs and dances are performed by people from the provinces far from the capital. In doing this, they give the souls of their own provinces to *Ten'no*. In these rites we can see how the sovereignty of a *Ten'no* is recognized and ensured.

But it is difficult to find a symbolism of directions in the Japanese enthronement ceremony. There is, however, a royal ceremony called *Shihohai* which can be translated "worship to four directions" which is held at dawn every New Year's day. This ceremony has been performed as one of the most important ceremonies since A.D. 889, but has little relation to the enthronement ceremony.

Afterword

It is surprising to a Japanese that today no European royal family performs a coronation ceremony except that of Britain. For the Japanese royal family is seen as the protector of the national tradition rather than the political leader of the nation. Thus, the royal enthronement ceremony is seen as an important act in preserving and renewing the national tradition.

Fortunately in Japan we have many ancient accounts and in Thailand many traditions have been preserved despite the total destruction in B.E. 2310(A.D.1766).²³ Thus comparison of the royal ceremonies of Thailand with those of

Japan may yield insight into common concepts of kingship.

Though H.H. Prince Dhani says, "the coronation ceremony had been extensively studied and accurately described,"²⁴ the study of Thai coronation ceremony is still difficult of access for me mainly because of my poor ability in the language. I do not yet have enough knowledge to

write a detailed account of Thai coronation. This paper, therefore, is but a collection of thoughts which I present to readers in the hope that they may share with me their reactions, corrections, and criticisms.

I would like to express my thanks to Mr. Richard Goldrick, a lecturer at the Kasetsart University, for his kind help with English.

Notes

Preface

1. เรื่อง บรมราชาภิเษก, พระนิพนธ์ของพระวรวงศ์เธอ กรมหมื่นพิทัยลาภพุฒิยกร (On the Coronation, Royal edition by Phraworawongthoe Krom Mun Phitiyalab Pru'thiyakorn) Bangkok, 1971, P.273.

2. *Siamese State Ceremonies : Their History and Function*. London: Bernard Quaritch, 1931, P.70.

3. The word "Ten'no" is a term of honor for the sovereign in Japan and is derived from Chinese. But it designates the royal family of Japan, for they have no family name.

4. This is recorded in the chronicle entitled *Teio-Hennen-ki*, a chronicle of the Emperors, which was compiled about A.D.1300.

I-(1)

5. Here I used the word "authorized" to mean that the book, *Nihongi*, had been regarded as a formal history of Japan and has often been read in the Court. This history has served as a source of legal precedents.

I-(2)

6. *Nihongi, Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D.697*. English translation by W.G.Aston in 1896. Tokyo: Tuttle, 1972, Vol.I, p.337.

7. Ibid., Vol.II, PP395-404.

8. Ed. by Koh Masuda, Tokyo: 1984.

II-(1)

9. *Supplementary Notes on Siamese State Ceremonies*, London, 1971, P.13. Some scholars are now in doubt about the dating of the Palace Law.

10. *Siamese State Ceremonies*, pp67-69.

11. Ibid., P.70.

12. *The Coronation of His Majesty Prajadhipok, King of Siam*. Bangkok: B.E. 2468 (A.D.1925). Anonymous, the author might be H.H.Prince Dhani.

13. When talking of kingship, J.G.Frazer's theory of the murder of a sacred king is often quoted. This theory based on the ancient concept of a king whose health is connected with the welfare of society. Here, however, I am not concerned with this famous theory or with the power and health of the king but merely with the fact that the vacancy of the throne brings about social disorder.

II-(2)

14. *Kojiki* (records of ancient matters) in which mythology and genealogy of Japan are narrated. This book is more a literary work than a history.

15. Besides Ichijo the most famous thinkers who had regarded the Regalia as symbols of the moral life are Kitabatake Chikafusa (1293-1354) and Yamaga Soko (1622-1685).

16. *Shinto and The Japanese Way of Life*. Pensri Kanchanomai; Bangkok, Kasetsart University: 1976, P.21. Her views of Shinto are agreeable to a Japanese.

II-(3)

17. เรื่องบรมราชาภิเษก, cited in Note 1 above. I am told this book is also work of H.H. Prince Dhani Nivat. P.275.

18. Wales, op. cit., p.70.

19. I am not sure whether the Umbrella with seven tires is replaced or whether two tires are added to it. In any case it is interesting that we can find umbrellas similar to the Thai State Umbrella among the decorations in pictures of the enthronement ceremony of Japan-not *Daijo-sai* but the rites to bestow the Regalia and to recite the Blessings. There are two, and each also has 9 tires too. But they have no so significant a meaning as in the Thai Coronation.

20. See Note 12, p.15.

21. *Hinduism in Thailand*. Santosh N.Desai, Bombay, 1980, p.38.

II-(4)

22. On the symbolism of the four cardinal directions, see Robert Heine-Geldern, "Conception of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia." New York, 1958.

23. L.M. Gesick points out that after assuming power the new king, Rama I, declared that all royal ceremonies should be patterned on those of King Borommakot's reign. "Kingship and Political Intergration in Traditional Siam," Cornell Univerisity, 1976.

And Yoneo Ishii also points out this fact in his paper "Introductory Remarks on the Law of the Three Seals," *Tonan Ajia Kenkyu* (Southeast Asian Studies) VI-4, Kyoto, 1969, PP.155-178.

24. "The Old Siamese Conception of the Monarchy," *the Journal of the Siam Society XXXVI-2*, Bangkok, 1947. Republished in "Collected Articles by H.H.Prince Dhani Nivat," Bangkok, 1976. P.91.