

## The Imperial Portrait and Palace Conservatism in Occupied Japan

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Prior to Japan's surrender in 1945, Emperor Hirohito enjoyed sovereign authority over his people. This relationship was inverted during the Allied Occupation with the introduction of popular sovereignty, granting the Japanese people power to decide whether or not to retain the throne. To understand how the imperial institution adapted to this postwar framework, many scholars focus on the use of mass media by the palace leadership, which transformed Hirohito into a likable celebrity figure eliciting popular approval. This article supplements the media-centered narrative through an examination of the Imperial Household Ministry's adaptation of the imperial portrait (*goshin'ei*)—a prewar/wartime symbol of emperor-centered ideology—in the immediate postwar years. The analysis offered here contextualizes these efforts by considering the ministry leadership's conservative agenda of protecting Hirohito, his prewar/wartime form of emperorship, and their own administrative independence. The success of their efforts is shown by the fact that today the imperial portrait has a place in Japanese society, offering particular groups a means to endorse the imperial institution without inviting public criticism.

**Keywords:** *goshin'ei*, symbolic emperor, Allied Occupation, Imperial Household Ministry

“With regard to Imperial Portrait [*sic*], policy is clear,” wrote Second Lieutenant Scott George, a member of CIE—the Civil Information and Education Division, responsible for the demilitarization and democratization of Japanese religion and education after the war—in a memorandum to his supervisor, Lieutenant Colonel Mark Orr, on 10 July 1946. In this memorandum, George was analyzing the Imperial Household Ministry's recent policy towards the imperial portrait (*goshin'ei* 御真影), official photographs of the emperor and empress. Prior to the end of the war, the imperial portrait had been a symbol of the state's emperor-centered ideology and was placed by the Japanese government in public schools

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for nationalistic purposes (see figure 1). As the Allied Occupation (September 1945 to April 1952) began, CIE made it clear that the position of the imperial portrait in public education needed to change drastically. Before the end of 1945, the Imperial Household Ministry had recalled the imperial portraits from public schools and government offices, retaken photographs of both the emperor and the empress, and created new, separate, imperial portraits of the two (see figure 2). In April 1946, the ministry published new guidelines on how these revamped imperial portraits should be distributed and handled.

It was these guidelines that George referred to as “policy” in July 1946. The second lieutenant judged the ministry’s new policy satisfactory, concluding, “New Portraits are presumably being prepared and will be forwarded to all schools [...and] be placed on walls of schools.”<sup>1</sup> Over the following two decades, the ministry and its successor organizations granted more than two thousand five hundred new portraits of the emperor and empress to individuals and institutions in Japan and abroad. The distribution was conducted peacefully, arousing no public criticism regarding a former ideological apparatus of imperial Japan. However, contrary to George’s expectations, none of the portraits were given to public schools. Instead, the Imperial Household Ministry and its successors gave hundreds of portraits to other individuals and groups in areas such as social welfare and diplomacy. This gap between the CIE’s expectations and the actual pattern of distribution suggests that the ministry did not deploy the new imperial portraits merely to satisfy the victors’ demands, but in accordance with its own interests, which cannot be grasped if one limits the analysis to materials produced by the occupation. By incorporating the views of ministry leaders, this article will examine the Imperial Household Ministry’s rehabilitation of the imperial portrait in the immediate postwar years.

The ministry’s efforts to repurpose the portrait arguably aided postwar Japan to look favorably on the *goshin’ei*, and on the imperial institution it represented. The official website of the Embassy of Japan in Israel, for example, shares a story about the birthday reception for Akihito 明仁 (the Heisei emperor; 1933–) held at the ambassador’s residence on 4 December 2014. Alongside pictures of the banquet and a cultural performance, one finds an image of the pair of imperial portraits, captioned “*Goshin’ei* of Their Majesties the Emperor and the Empress displayed during the reception.”<sup>2</sup> The use of that term would typically evoke in scholars of Japanese history memories of imperial Japan’s practices of emperor worship. But for these Japanese diplomats, *goshin’ei* is not simply a symbol of prewar/wartime ideology; the picture of the emperor and empress grants them a socially acceptable way to express affirmation of the imperial institution. It requires a detailed analysis of the object’s trajectory during more than seventy years of postwar Japan to understand the celebratory tone with which certain groups of people today refer to the portrait. This article paves the way for

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1 George 1946.

2 Embassy of Japan in Israel, “Heisei 26 nendo tennō tanjōbi shukuga resepushon no kaisai” 平成26年度天皇誕生日祝賀レセプションの開催, 2014: <https://www.israel.emb-japan.go.jp/html/tentan2014jp.html>. For other examples, the Embassy of Japan in Hungary, “Tennō tanjōbi resepushon no kaisai” 天皇誕生日レセプションの開催, 2007: <https://www.hu.emb-japan.go.jp/jpn/071210.htm>; Miyamoto Shūji 宮本秀治, “Goshin’ei no tōchaku” 御真影の到着, 19 November 2020: <https://blousonite.com/blog/2020-11-19.html>; Denden mushi no kai でんでん虫の会, “Rijichō no hitorigoto” 理事長のひとりごと, 30 October 2019: <https://dendenmushinokai.com/2019-10-30>; Shūkan Nyūyōku Seikatsu 週刊NY生活, “Tennōheika tanjōbi o iwau” 天皇陛下誕生日を祝う, 24 February 2021: <https://www.nyseikatsu.com/ny-news/02/2021/32004/>.

such an understanding by illuminating the *goshin'ei*'s successful reincarnation, which was facilitated by the Imperial Household Ministry leadership soon after Japan's surrender.

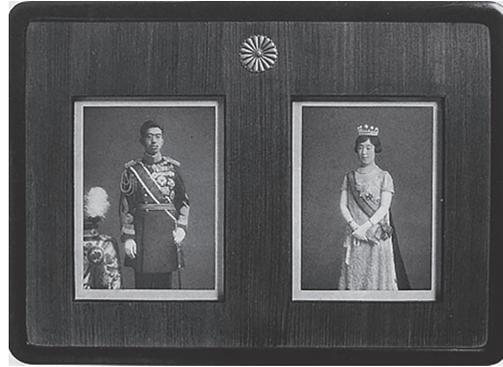


Figure 1. The prewar imperial portrait of Hirohito and Kōjun taken in 1928. Reproduced from KGKC, vol. 1, n.p.



Figure 2. *Mainichi shinbun* front page on the day of the promulgation of the new constitution, 3 November 1946. The new postwar imperial portraits (now separate for Hirohito and Kōjun) appear with the headline “The Symbol of a Pacifist Japan: Their Majesties in Democratic Mode.” *Mainichi shinbun*, “Heiwa Nihon no shōchō” 平和日本の象徴, 3 November 1946.

### Thinking Seriously about the Imperial Portrait in Postwar Japan

In much of the world during the twentieth century, monarchical institutions were on the defensive. From Korea (1910), to China (1912), to Russia (1917), to Germany (1918), monarchies crumbled under the impact of war, foreign domination, or political turmoil. The Japanese imperial institution, however, endured despite the nation's defeat in World War II and the ensuing political turbulence.

The endurance of the Japanese monarchy in the face of these disruptions is largely attributed to the momentous decision of the Allied countries in the spring of 1946 not to prosecute Hirohito 裕仁 (the Shōwa emperor; 1901–1989) for war crimes, instead keeping him on the throne to facilitate the occupation's reforms. Later that year, the new constitution written at the behest of the occupation authorities removed sovereignty from the person of the emperor and granted it to the Japanese people. The constitution significantly reduced the emperor's power, but also guaranteed a potentially lasting role for him as a “symbol.”<sup>3</sup> The emperor was now “the symbol of the State and of the unity of the People, deriving his position from the will of the people.”<sup>4</sup> It was therefore imperative for Hirohito and leaders at the Imperial Household Ministry—the administrative organ serving him and members of the imperial family—to find ways to elicit popular support for the throne.

In analyzing how officials undertook this task, many historians have paid attention to these officials' use of the newly emerging mass media. Historians have shown how Imperial Household Ministry administrators collaborated with journalists from commercial media outlets, which became increasingly popular in the postwar decades, in order to improve Hirohito's image with the public. As a result, the mass media—weeklies, radio, and television—turned the formerly sacred and aloof monarch into a likable celebrity figure, who joyfully mingled with crowds everywhere he went.<sup>5</sup> In explaining the postwar reintegration of the imperial institution, historians have emphasized discontinuities, both in the image of Hirohito projected to the public and the means by which such an image was constructed.

This article instead focuses on certain continuities by examining the fate of the imperial portrait in the immediate postwar years of 1945 and 1946. Though scholars have studied the imperial portrait, they have primarily focused on its role in public schools in imperial Japan. These scholars consider the portrait's history to have effectively ended in November 1945, when the Imperial Household Ministry recalled the portraits from public schools as well as government offices.<sup>6</sup> However, the Imperial Household Ministry did not abandon the use of this ideologically loaded symbol in the postwar era. Instead, the ministry leadership retooled

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3 For an example of this view, including the significance of the constitutional differences, see Bix 1995, chapter 14.

4 *Constitution of Japan* 1946, article 1.

5 Tsurumi 1958; Matsushita 1959; Titus 1980; Yoshimi 1999; Yoshimi 2002; Kitahara 2014. In addition, he was also portrayed as an enthusiastic practitioner of marine biology. For an analysis of this image, see Bix 2000, chapters 16 and 17; Low 2006, chapters 7 and 8.

6 Bix 2000, p. 555; Ruoff 2001, p. 131; Kagotani 2005. The most recent example of this scholarly trend is the historian of education Ono Masaaki's 2023 monograph, *Kyōiku chokugo to goshin'ei: Kindai tennōsei to kyōiku* (The Rescript on Education and the imperial portrait: The modern emperor system and education). The book dedicates the last two of its seven chapters to the postwar period from the defeat in World War II in 1945 through to the mid-2010s, but makes no mention of the portrait after its recall at the end of 1945 (Ono 2023, chapters 6 and 7).

the portrait to save Hirohito and fight against the democratization that threatened their powerbase.

The Imperial Household Ministry at the time was run by men who had been serving the organization before the occupation started, notably Ishiwata Sōtarō 石渡莊太郎 (1891–1950), Kinoshita Michio 木下道雄 (1887–1974), Ōgane Masujirō 大金益次郎 (1894–1979), and Katō Susumu 加藤進 (1902–1993). These four men were the most powerful figures in the ministry, and occupied its leadership positions, including the posts of minister, vice-minister, chamberlain, and vice-chamberlain, which allowed them regular access to Hirohito. As long-term servants from before Japan's defeat, these ministry leaders were attached to Emperor Hirohito and the prewar/wartime status of the imperial institution.<sup>7</sup> They wanted to protect Hirohito and his authority from allegations of possible war crimes and maintain their administrative independence. When their conservative agenda was threatened, they resisted the demands of democratization made by the Allied Occupation known as SCAP (the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers) and its subjugated junior partner, the Japanese government (the prime minister and his cabinet, in particular). The imperial portrait figured prominently in this context, as ministry leaders repurposed the object to advance their preservationist agenda.

As the Japanese cabinet renamed the ministry the Imperial Household Office (Kunaifu 宮内府, 1947–1949) and then the Imperial Household Agency (Kunaichō 宮内庁, 1949–), placing it under the prime minister's control, a group of more democratically inclined leaders replaced the ministry's old-timers. The new palace administration did not promote the conservative agenda their predecessors' had attached to the imperial portrait, but they took its distribution seriously. Examining the new leadership's policy in detail is outside the scope of this article. Yet given the fact that *goshin'ei* plays a positive role when many Japanese reflect on the imperial institution today, this article's analysis of the immediate postwar adaptation of the portrait helps us think of it as not merely a legacy of prewar/wartime imperial ideology, but as a possible contribution to the imperial institution's successful adaptation to postwar Japan.

### **“Repugnant to a Person of Democratic Sympathies”: Occupation and the Imperial Portrait**

The Japanese government introduced the imperial portrait into public schools in the early 1890s, along with the Imperial Rescript on Education (*Kyōiku Chokugo* 教育勅語). The introduction of the portrait involved collaboration between the Imperial Household Ministry, which was responsible for the production of the object, and the Ministry of Education, in charge of public education. The Ministry of Education issued a directive for school ceremonies to be held on notable occasions such as the reigning emperor's birthday (29 April for Hirohito) and imperial foundation day (11 February). The directive made it mandatory for headteachers to read out the rescript in front of assembled pupils on such days. The same instruction also enjoined schools with the imperial portrait—possession of which was expected but not mandatory—to have pupils bow deeply toward it at the start of the ceremony.<sup>8</sup>

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7 Chadani 2011, pp. 183–194.

8 Monbushō 1891, p. 67.

As more and more schools requested the portrait from the Ministry of Education, the object was incorporated into the daily activities of those in public education. By the early 1900s, it was expected in many prefectures that at least one male teacher stayed overnight in a schoolhouse to guard the portrait from danger. The social and bureaucratic pressure on teachers to keep the sacred object safe was such that, in the first three decades of the century, a handful died during their attempts to save the portrait from fires.<sup>9</sup> In the 1930s, a jingoistic Ministry of Education increased its pressure on schools to request the imperial portrait.<sup>10</sup> As a result, by the late 1930s, approximately 70 percent of elementary schools possessed the portrait. It became common practice for pupils to stop and bow in front of their school's imperial portrait at least twice a day—as they walked into school in the morning and out in the afternoon. Teachers encouraged these routines as an ideal way to train children as imperial subjects ready to fight in a total war.<sup>11</sup> Possession of the portrait never became mandatory for public schools in imperial Japan, but the object was widespread in schools and demanded attention from teachers and students on a daily basis. By the time Japan opened hostilities with the United States and the United Kingdom in 1941, the imperial portrait was integral to the educational experience of most Japanese people.

Towards the end of 1943, as eventual Allied victory became foreseeable, U.S. leaders began discussing Japanese demilitarization and democratization. However, no consensus was reached in Washington over the fate of Emperor Hirohito. Some U.S. leaders proposed that he be punished as the commander-in-chief in whose name imperial Japan had launched its war of aggression. Others believed that it would be better to keep Hirohito on the throne and use him to facilitate occupation reforms.<sup>12</sup> Irrespective of whether Hirohito was to be punished or collaborated with, however, U.S. leaders broadly agreed that achieving the demilitarization and democratization of Japan would require a transformation in Japan's emperor-centered militarist ideology. It was understood that such a transformation would entail ending practices of emperor worship in schools, which included the use of the imperial portrait.<sup>13</sup>

As the war ended, U.S. leaders hardened their views on the imperial portrait. In September 1945, the U.S. government solicited advice for the occupation from D. C. Holtom (1884–1962), a scholar of Japanese religion and history at the University of Chicago. Holtom proposed that the emperor be stripped of his spiritual authority:

The ceremony of obeisance before the imperial portrait in the schools should be abolished. . . . The portrait should be hung in an easily accessible place where it will be brought into contact with the normal life of the school—in the office of the principal, for example.<sup>14</sup>

Holtom did not suggest that the portrait should be completely removed, but recommended rather that it be moved to a location of greater visibility. His proposal struck a chord with Ken

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9 Iwamoto 1989.

10 Ono 2014, pp. 240–249.

11 Yoshie 2017, chapter 4; for the distribution data, see p. 3.

12 Pyle 2020, pp. 124–129.

13 Kubo 1984, pp. 31–66; Suzuki 1983, pp. 8–26; Kaizuka 2001, pp. 30–35.

14 Holtom 1945, p. 120.

Dyke (1897–1980), the director of CIE, who wrote that public education in prewar/wartime Japan was a hotbed of militarist ideology. Designating the imperial portrait as an important contributor to this ideology, he cited Holtom's recommendation with approval. "[T]he whole system of obeisance [to the portrait]," he added, "appears repugnant to a person of democratic sympathies who has not long been accustomed to it."<sup>15</sup>

The imperial portrait consisted of pictures of Hirohito and Empress Kōjun. But for Allied leaders, Hirohito was the problem, so the empress's part of the portrait was rarely discussed. Officials at the Imperial Household Ministry took the occupation's focus on the emperor into consideration as they deliberated what to do about the imperial portrait. The following sections detail their response.

### Rebranding Hirohito, Recalling His Portrait

As Hirohito announced the decision to surrender on 15 August 1945, Japanese leaders in Japan and abroad expressed fears that his portraits were in danger. On that same day, Japanese ministers and ambassadors cremated sixty-one imperial portraits collected in neutral Switzerland from across Europe. "There was no guarantee," explained Kase Shun'ichi 加瀬俊一 (1897–1956), the Japanese minister to Switzerland, in his report to Tokyo, "that our enemy would not do something disrespectful."<sup>16</sup> Within weeks of Hirohito's public announcement of surrender, administrative leaders in Karafuto (South Sakhalin) and Taiwan sent the ministry similar reports of officials burning the portraits to avoid sacrilege by the enemy.<sup>17</sup> In September 1945, fourteen public schools in Manchuria returned their imperial portraits to the Imperial Household Ministry "due to the recent breakdown in law and order."<sup>18</sup> In mainland Japan, too, the portrait was a source of anxiety. On 9 September, Imperial Household Ministry leaders were informed, and alarmed, about a group of U.S. soldiers who showed up in a remote village in Kagoshima and vandalized the imperial portrait in the village office.<sup>19</sup> Later that same month, Minister of the Navy Yonai Mitsumasa 米内光政 (1880–1948) notified Imperial Household Minister Ishiwata Sōtarō that officers had burned the 202 imperial portraits in navy bases and arsenals, "lest [they] fall into the hands of the enemy."<sup>20</sup>

The ministry leadership reasoned that the imperial portrait went against their goal of protecting Hirohito. When the occupation began, ministry officials sounded out SCAP about their views on Hirohito, and learned that the occupiers were still divided over his fate.<sup>21</sup> In order to convince SCAP of Hirohito's usefulness as a facilitator of occupation, the ministry judged it best to dissociate him from Japan's wartime aggression.<sup>22</sup> The imperial portrait was considered problematic in this regard, as Hirohito appeared as commander-in-chief in

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15 Dyke 1945, p. 145.

16 NKKZ, file 63.

17 NKKZ, files 62 and 67. I was unable to find records on the portrait from other parts of the world, such as the Americas or parts of Asia which had not been under Japanese rule.

18 NKKZ, file 65.

19 Takahashi and Suzuki 1981, pp. 69–72; *Yomiuri shinbun* 読売新聞, "Junan no tennōke" 受難の天皇家, 31 May 1976.

20 NKKZ, file 66.

21 Takahashi and Suzuki 1981, pp. 32–53.

22 Tanaka 1992, pp. 166–168.



Figure 4. Hirohito in his new official garb, captured in Tokyo Station as he embarked for Ise Shrine and the imperial mausoleums in November 1945. *Asahi shinbun*, “Tennōheika Ise ni gyōkō” 天皇陛下伊勢に行幸, 13 November 1945.



complete by January 1946.<sup>28</sup> Within five months of Japan’s surrender, the portrait of Hirohito and his consort Kōjun had disappeared from the archipelago.

As the ministry’s primary motivation for these decisions was conservative, there are signs of hesitancy and contradictory behavior in their implementation. The supposedly nonmilitary uniform was a case in point. As the art historian Kitahara Megumi 北原恵 points out, the new uniform was hardly civilian dress; it closely resembled the old military uniform, except for minor modifications of color and shape and the absence of a sword. Kitahara convincingly argues that the incompletely demilitarized sartorial change reflected palace leaders’ reservations about the rapid demilitarization of Hirohito’s emperorship.<sup>29</sup>

Another example includes Hirohito’s visit to Ise Shrine and the imperial mausoleums. On 12 November, just five days after the announcement of the new costume, the ministry arranged for Hirohito, clad in his new garb, to travel to these sites. Vice-Chamberlain Kinoshita Michio was the principal architect of the trip, and had proposed that Hirohito wear the new dress.<sup>30</sup> The reason for the trips publicized by newspapers was Hirohito’s intention to pray to his ancestors for the successful reconstruction of Japan (see figure 4).<sup>31</sup> At this time SCAP was contemplating banning the state’s control over Shinto shrines, and of Ise Shrine in particular, as part of the campaign to dismantle the throne-based militarist ideology.<sup>32</sup> While

28 Ono 2014, p. 321.

29 Kitahara 2014, pp. 28–38.

30 Kinoshita 1990, p. 20.

31 Kunaichō 2016a, p. 874.

32 See, for instance, Dyke 1945, pp. 142–144.

Hirohito's continued connection with Ise Shrine was potentially dangerous for the monarchy, the fact that such visits were made indicates that even as the ministry was trying to garner SCAP's goodwill, it was also determined to preserve the throne's traditional sources of spiritual authority. Similarly, it was a delicate combination of SCAP's expectations and the ministry's conservatism that influenced the distribution of the new postwar imperial portrait.

### **Democratization and Conservatism in the New Portrait**

The new imperial portraits (figure 2) were organized by the Imperial Household Ministry, with photographs of the empress and the emperor taken on 26 October and 3 December 1945, respectively.<sup>33</sup> Other than these dates, there is no official information regarding the particulars of the portraits, such as their sizes.

What we do know is that leaders of the ministry were devising plans for the new portrait while the old portraits were being recalled in January 1946. On 17 January, Vice-Chamberlain Kinoshita Michio had an audience with Hirohito and briefed him on the ministry's plans for the new portrait. They proposed stipulating that anyone or any organization—no longer just schools, government agencies, or state dignitaries—was entitled to receive a new portrait upon request. However, the proposals made it clear that people should view the portrait with “sincere feelings of love and respect,” representing an emperor who was the “head (*genshu* 元首) of Japan,” “spiritual leader of the people,” “model of the nation's culture,” “affectionate father of people in this nation as one great family,” and “embodiment (*hyōgensha* 表現者) of the imperial ancestors.” Nothing about the empress was stipulated at this point.<sup>34</sup> It is not recorded how Hirohito reacted to these new plans. But Prince Nobuhito 宣仁 (1905–1987), one of Hirohito's brothers, did respond. When Kinoshita had discussions with the prince about the new portrait on 22 and 23 January, the prince asked Kinoshita, “What about postponing nationwide distribution of the imperial portrait for a while, until the situation gets back to normal (*jikyoku no ochitsuku made* 時局の落ち着く迄)?”<sup>35</sup>

Kinoshita's diary includes no further details of their conversation, so it is unclear what the prince meant by “the situation” and “normal.” The political situation surrounding Hirohito and the ministry was certainly fluid at the turn of 1946. As yet, the Allied countries had not made any official decision on whether or not to try Hirohito as a war criminal. However, SCAP purged Ishiwata from the position of imperial household minister on 16 January 1946 due to his tenure as minister of finance in the wartime Tōjō cabinet. Ishiwata was replaced by Matsudaira Yoshitami 松平慶民 (1882–1948), a career palace administrator who had served two emperors. Furthermore, SCAP made clear it would push ahead with plans to force the Japanese government to democratize the relationship between the emperor and the people, and to reform the Imperial Household Ministry accordingly. Under imperial Japan's legal framework, the emperor was “head (*genshu*) of the Empire” and possessed “sovereignty (*tōchiken* 統治権).”<sup>36</sup> As such, the Imperial Household Ministry was a unique organization directly serving the throne, independent of the cabinet, and with full discretion

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33 Kunaichō 2016a, pp. 862, 913.

34 Kunaichō 2016a, pp. 18–19.

35 Kinoshita 1990, pp. 123–124.

36 *Constitution of the Empire of Japan* 1889, chapter I, article 4.

over its personnel and budget. The organization had no accountability to outsiders other than the emperor. The rules regarding the management of the imperial house and the ministry were not amenable to amendment by the Diet, as they were legislated by the Imperial House Law, an autonomous legal code that only the emperor and adult (that is, over twenty years old) males in the imperial family were allowed to modify. SCAP adjudged that the privileged positions of the throne and ministry were undemocratic and ordered reforms to the situation.<sup>37</sup>

Prime Minister Shidehara Kijūrō 幣原喜重郎 (1872–1951) and his cabinet were reluctant at first but ultimately had no choice but to oblige. Over the first three months of 1946, the cabinet forced the ministry to eliminate 25 percent of its staff positions. On 6 March, the cabinet then announced the “Outline of a Draft for a Revised Constitution” (hereafter, the “Outline”) at SCAP’s behest. The Outline demoted the throne to a subordinate position in relation to the Japanese people, who now held supreme power in the nation: “The Emperor shall be the symbol of the state and of the unity of the people, deriving his position from the sovereign will of the people.” The imperial house’s assets were transferred to the state and its budget required the authorization of a democratically convened Diet. The Imperial House Law, too, was now subject to the Diet, whose assent was necessary for the law to be introduced or modified.<sup>38</sup>

The cabinet’s plans for restructuring the palace administration disconcerted the ministry’s leadership.<sup>39</sup> The Outline’s relegation of the emperor also shocked Hirohito himself, who resisted it until the Outline became public on 6 March, and then expressed his displeasure to Vice-Chamberlain Kinoshita.<sup>40</sup>

In the midst of this uncertainty about Hirohito’s fate and the perceived erosion of his position, the Imperial Household Ministry officially announced guidelines for the new imperial portrait. The “Guidelines for the Imperial Portrait” (hereafter, “Guidelines”) were a more systematic, coherent version of the plans that Kinoshita had presented to Hirohito on 17 January 1946. Vice-Minister Katō Susumu authorized the Guidelines and sent them to the other ministries and government agencies on 5 April 1946. As the ministry leadership was still concerned about protecting Hirohito from prosecution by the Allies, they were careful to ensure that the Guidelines embodied SCAP’s democratic agenda. For example, they enjoined that recipients of the portrait of Hirohito should “never force anyone to pay obeisance (*reihai wa kore o shiizaru koto* 礼拝ハ之ヲ強ヒザルコト)” to it. They also said:

The portrait [of Hirohito] should be displayed in a location where people have easy access to it on a daily basis. No facility of concealment, such as a curtain, is necessary; you should also avoid storing the portrait in a special place such as a shrine-style treasure repository or a locker.<sup>41</sup>

In the Guidelines, the Imperial Household Ministry sought to emphasize the absence of the mystical authority that the portrait had possessed in imperial Japan. Now, bowing to the

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37 Sebata 2013, pp. 1–6.

38 *Draft Constitution of Japan 1946*, chapter I, article 1 & chapter VII, article 84.

39 Funabashi 2010, pp. 41–43.

40 Bix 1995, p. 340.

41 Kunaishō 1946.

portrait was a matter of personal choice. The Guidelines followed D. C. Holtom's suggestions that "The ceremony of obeisance before the imperial portrait in the schools should be abolished" and "The portrait should be hung in an easily accessible place where it will be brought into contact with the normal life of the school."<sup>42</sup> As for eligibility, the Guidelines maintained the principle of nondiscrimination that Kinoshita had earlier discussed with Hirohito: all organizations and individuals were entitled to receive the new portrait.<sup>43</sup>

On the other hand, the ministry's intention of preserving the pre-1945 integrity of the imperial institution can also be found. The Guidelines stipulated that Hirohito should command the people's respect as a fatherly leader:

The portrait of His Majesty the Emperor is that which people should look up to with deep love and respect for him as head (*genshu*) of the state and the affectionate father of people in this nation as one great family (*kokumin daikazoku no jifu* 国民大家族の慈父).<sup>44</sup>

The Guidelines' use of the term *genshu* and the paternalistic language was out of sync with the Outline of the draft constitution publicized a month earlier, which had clearly defined the emperor as a "symbol" subordinate to the Japanese people. The discrepancy demonstrates the efforts of ministry leaders to retain the emperor's prewar and wartime symbolic authority, if not his legal status. This explains why the Guidelines discussed his new portrait extensively, but said little about the empress's, and one only finds a brief note at the end of the Guidelines that states "the [stipulations] above apply" to her new portrait as well.

Despite the Guidelines' conservative interpretation of the emperor's role, SCAP raised no objection. This was because they clearly embodied Holtom's recommendation to make the portrait more visible and accessible in public education. Scott George, whose evaluation of the Guidelines opened this article, was one such SCAP member. Moreover, in a July 1946 report on the status of the imperial portrait that circulated among CIE officers, its author, initialed "W. K. B." (most likely William Kenneth Bunce, chief of CIE's Religious and Cultural Resources Division), noted that "The treatment of Imperial Portraits in public schools as announced by the Imperial Household Ministry would seem to be satisfactory."<sup>45</sup> William Woodard, a scholar of Japanese religion and leading member of the CIE, looked favorably upon the Guidelines' promise that, in his words, "the portraits would be sent gratis to any government office, school, organization, or individual that applied."<sup>46</sup> The mass media, too, found this nondiscriminatory policy notable, and did not fail to mention it in their articles introducing the Guidelines.<sup>47</sup>

The politics surrounding the imperial institution, however, remained fluid even after the announcement of the Guidelines on 5 April. On 18 June, the Allied countries publicized their decision not to prosecute Emperor Hirohito.<sup>48</sup> This was certainly a boon

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42 Holtom 1945, p. 120.

43 Kunaishō 1946.

44 Kunaishō 1946.

45 W. K. B 1946. An anonymous referee brought his name to my attention. I would like to thank them for the suggestion. Other examples of the occupation's positive reaction include George 1946; Wigglesworth 1946.

46 Woodard 1972, p. 168.

47 For example, see *Asahi shinbun*, "Puromaido ten ni heika no osugata" プロマイド店に陛下の御姿, 7 April 1946.

48 Nakadate 2013, p. 58.

for the ministry's leadership, which had spent the past ten months democratizing Hirohito's image. On the other hand, the ministry was losing more and more of its administrative independence. The Japanese cabinet were preparing to pass the Outline and relevant bills in the Diet. The proposed laws would downgrade the Imperial Household Ministry to the Imperial Household "Office," and place it under the supervision of the Diet, with its head, the Grand Steward (*Chōkan* 長官), taking orders from the prime minister.<sup>49</sup> This would remove the administrative discretion that the ministry had exercised in imperial Japan, such as giving orders and awards in the name of the emperor, which could now be exercised only with the permission of a democratically-elected prime minister.<sup>50</sup>

Ministry leaders such as Katō, Ōgane, and Kinoshita resisted this every step of the way. They officially submitted alternative proposals for the cabinet and Diet to discuss, and informally pressured government leaders to reconsider. Hirohito himself endorsed the resistance of ministry leaders to change, and the ministry's officials in turn used the monarch's wishes to gain leverage in their negotiations with the cabinet and Diet. Nevertheless, none of the proposals of the ministry leadership were accepted.<sup>51</sup> On 3 November 1946, the Outline, with only minor modifications, was officially promulgated as the Constitution of Japan. The other bills that curtailed the ministry's power were also put into effect. The Japanese government, after all, was acting on SCAP's behalf and even Hirohito was unable to withstand the victors' call for democratization.

Meanwhile, the Guidelines posed an unexpected administrative problem for the Imperial Household Ministry. Within six months of their publication, the ministry had received 148 letters from individuals requesting the new portraits. Approximately half of these requests asked only for Hirohito's portrait, and the other half petitioned for his and Kōjun's. The reasons these petitions advanced varied, from wishing to apologize to the monarch for miserable defeat in the war to wanting to revere the leader of a new pacifist Japan. Some requested more than one copy. For example, Okuhira Tsunehisa 奥平恒久, an employee at the Nagoya-based Suzuki Manufacturing (Suzuki Seisakujo 鈴木製作所), asked for forty-two imperial portraits of Hirohito—these were for himself, his factory, his dormitory, and fellow factory workers who expressed a similar interest in the portrait.<sup>52</sup> Under the policy of nondiscriminatory access to the new portrait, the ministry had no legitimate reason to refuse a request for forty-two copies, or a request for any number of copies, for that matter.

The policy of nondiscrimination came to be seen as not only unsustainable but also potentially harmful to the dignity of Hirohito. Emboldened by the Outline's assertion of popular sovereignty, some Japanese became more critical of Hirohito and the imperial institution. On 19 May 1946, more than two hundred thousand people congregated outside the imperial palace. They clamored for more generous food rationing, with some forcing their way into the palace to demonstrate their anger at its privileged status. One communist demonstrator carried a placard that decried Hirohito for pampering himself while the rest of the country was hungry. Displeased, Hirohito and ministry leaders interpreted the mass demonstration as a result of "selfish individual desires" running rampant in the country.<sup>53</sup>

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49 Sebatu 2013, pp. 1–6.

50 *Draft Constitution of Japan 1946*, chapter VII, article 7.

51 Chadani 2011, pp. 194–199.

52 OSR, vol. 8928 (1946), file 76.

53 Matsushima 2003, pp. 60–62.

Prior to 1945, the Japanese government could have prosecuted the communist demonstrators for lese majesty, but SCAP disallowed its application in this case. It was expected that the crime would be abolished once the Outline became an official constitution in November, which did indeed come to pass.<sup>54</sup> In this context of declining authority around the throne, it is conceivable that the Imperial Household Ministry reconsidered the policy of nondiscrimination: theoretically, the ministry would be unable to deny even a communist demonstrator the portrait if they requested it. Nor would the ministry have any practical way to prevent the portrait from being vandalized.

Whatever happened in the ministry's meeting room, ministry leaders abolished the policy of nondiscrimination. On 1 November 1946, Vice-Minister Katō Susumu announced to his counterparts in other ministries and agencies that the ministry would now limit eligibility for new portraits of the emperor and the empress. Katō listed eight categories of organizations and twelve kinds of individuals deemed to constitute eligible applicants. There are no SCAP records about the abolishment of this policy, which suggests that Vice-Minister Katō and other leaders did not consult with SCAP leaders. Hirohito was already exonerated, so the ministry likely opted not to go through the trouble of notifying them about this rather awkward change which moved policy in a less democratic direction.

The inclusion of listed groups and individuals can be understood in the context of the ministry leadership's concern about the integrity of the portrait. To ensure that the portrait would be safe once it left the palace, the ministry now allowed it to be sent only to groups and individuals that it trusted. Such trusted organizations included government agencies and regional assemblies, while individuals included high-ranking civil servants and elected officials. Eligibility for those not affiliated with the state was limited, but some exceptions were made. Social welfare organizations and individuals working for them, for example, were permitted to apply for the portrait on the condition that they were "recommended" (*senshō* 選奨) by the Imperial Household Minister or other ministers. Individuals with some form of official recognition by the government, such as "orders (*kunshō* 勳章)" and "medals (*hōshō* 褒章)," qualified, too. There was room for other individuals and corporations to receive the portrait, but the ministry set the bar high for them. They now had to be judged by the ministry to be those "above the common level" (*ittei sui jun ijō* 一定水準以上), or "worthy of special consideration" (*toku ni sengi sareta mono* 特に詮議された者).<sup>55</sup>

While there was no evidence to show the emperor was involved in the revision of eligibility, Hirohito, too, considered his portrait a reward that should be available only to a select few. For example, Ashida Hitoshi 芦田均 (1887–1959), parliamentarian and future prime minister, recorded in his diary that he was conferred a signed copy of Hirohito's portrait on 3 November 1946, the day the new constitution was promulgated. According to the unidentified messenger who handed the portrait to Ashida, Hirohito had remarked:

I should award orders (*honrai nara jokun* 本来なら叙勳) to those who contributed to the drafting of the constitution. But because the time is not right (*jisetsugara tote* 時節柄とて), upon deliberation I have decided to confer a portrait.<sup>56</sup>

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54 Dower 1999, pp. 259–267.

55 Kunaichō 2016b, pp. 115–116.

56 Ashida 1986, pp. 132–133.

On the same day, the new pair of imperial portraits made their first appearance in the media. The *Mainichi Shinbun*, placed the pictures on the front page with an accompanying title, “Symbol of a Pacifist Japan: Their Majesties in Democratic Mode” (see figure 2). The piece also reproduced the complete list of eligible applicants.<sup>57</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Imperial Household Ministry elected to deny the 148 requests for the new portrait that it had received under the previous nondiscriminatory policy.<sup>58</sup>

### Epilogue

On 3 May 1947, the Constitution of Japan came into effect. With the new legal framework in place, the Imperial Household Ministry was renamed the Imperial Household Office. The office had a staff of one thousand five hundred, a fourth the size of the ministry at the time of the surrender, and was now under the control of the prime minister.

Despite this decline in its size, power, and autonomy, SCAP became increasingly distrustful of the leadership of the Imperial Household, and particularly of their purported willingness to democratize their own organization. In 1947 and 1948, for example, SCAP repeatedly reproached the Imperial Household Office leadership for their haughty behavior when they accompanied Hirohito on tours across the nation. SCAP believed that men such as Ōgane and Katō were making local governments prepare and pay for excessively grandiose welcome receptions for Hirohito, and were encouraging specific acts of reverence (such as waving national flags) from local people. SCAP deplored that the office leadership were using Hirohito’s authority to encourage undemocratic practices associated with prewar and wartime Japan. In one meeting between SCAP and the Imperial Household Office, a SCAP member critically noted that, “Katō is [acting as if he is] the Emperor.” In response to SCAP’s requests, Prime Minister Ashida removed Ōgane and Grand Steward Matsudaira from the Imperial Household Office in June 1948, and then Katō two months later. Vice-Chamberlain Kinoshita had already voluntarily left the ministry in May 1946. By the end of the summer of 1948, then, the wartime leadership of the palace administration were gone.<sup>59</sup>

Their departure signaled the end of efforts to deploy the imperial portrait as a means of protecting the throne and the autonomy of the palace administration. In place of Matsudaira, Ashida appointed Tajima Michiji 田島道治 (1885–1968) as Grand Steward. A former banker with no prior experience in the field of palace administration, Tajima was more receptive than his predecessors to the desires of SCAP and the Japanese cabinet that the palace adapt to the postwar legal framework of symbolic monarchy.<sup>60</sup> During Tajima’s tenure as Grand Steward of the Imperial Household Office (1948–1949), and then the Imperial Household Agency (1949–1953), he and his administration did not issue any new policies about the portrait. Nor did the grand steward have many discussions about the issue with Hirohito.

Yet office/agency leaderships did not shrug off the portrait as a legacy of imperial Japan. The administration’s official records of the imperial portrait, *Oshashinroku* (Records of the imperial portrait), show that between 1946 and 1970 the organization granted more than 2,500 imperial portraits in the names of Emperor Hirohito and Empress Kōjun. While their

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57 *Mainichi shinbun*, “Heiwa Nihon no shōchō” 平和日本の象徴, 3 November 1946.

58 OSR, vol. 8928 (1946), file 76.

59 Sebata 2013, pp. 10–19.

60 Manabe 2019.

recipients were diverse, hundreds of copies were given to government officials, lawmakers, medal recipients, and, after Japan's independence in 1952, Japanese diplomats, Japanese diplomatic missions, and non-Japanese dignitaries. Approximately two hundred and fifty pairs were conferred on social welfare organizations (such as reformatories and hospices) and their directors. No portraits were given to public schools.<sup>61</sup>

It is not documented how successive palace administrations made decisions about the portrait. Yet fragmentary evidence suggests that palace administrators took this repurposed object seriously, in order to adapt the imperial institution to postwar Japan. On 11 November 1949, for instance, Tajima told Hirohito that General Douglas MacArthur (1880–1964), the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, had requested a portrait with Hirohito's signature. Tajima hesitated due to "current diplomatic conditions." Because in prewar/wartime Japan Hirohito had typically given the portrait to foreigners as a diplomatic gesture of goodwill, Tajima was perhaps worried that giving the portrait to MacArthur now would make Japan act as if it was an independent country in the eyes of other Allied leaders. But the grand steward was equally concerned that denying the commander his request might cause trouble to the imperial household, even to the point of forcing Tajima to "resign." Hirohito decided it was better to accede to the American general's request.<sup>62</sup>

As this example shows, Hirohito and the palace leadership were sensitive to the diplomatic significance of the portrait. They did not merely follow the rule to grant it upon request or the protocol to give it to certain groups of people. The Imperial Household Agency, for instance, consistently withheld the portrait from Soviet ambassadors, although it was customary to give the portrait to foreign ambassadors at the end of their tenure in Japan. This unexplained anomaly was possibly due to Hirohito's well-documented wariness of communism, potentially sharpened by the Soviet Union's continued requests (made at least until 1950) to try him as a war criminal even after the Allied countries had officially decided against it in 1946. On the other hand, the Imperial Household Agency gave the portrait to Edwin Reischauer, the U.S. ambassador to Japan from 1961 to 1966, as he left office, even though the ambassador said he did not request it (he happily accepted it).<sup>63</sup>

Palace administrators used similar discretion to give or deny portraits to people and groups within Japan. The palace administration, for example, granted the portrait to hundreds of those who were not on the list of eligible applicants, such as corporate scientists or local volunteers in the judicial system (*chôtei iin* 調停委員, volunteers brokering settlements in civil disputes). On the other hand, the agency refused a 1953 request by a sixty-three-year-old man from Akita who proudly detailed his wartime commendation by the Ministry of Health and Welfare for his dedication to mobilizing his village for the war.<sup>64</sup> Like the decisions to give the portrait to scientists and volunteers, palace administrators did not document the reasons for this refusal. But given their desire to accommodate the imperial institution to postwar Japan, they likely wanted to keep the throne away from any association

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61 OSR, vol. 8928–12438 (1946–1970).

62 Tajima 2021, pp. 55–56; another example is Tajima 2022, pp. 218–220.

63 OSR, vol. 8928–12438 (1946–1970). For an example of the Soviet's request, see *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, "Soviet Wants Trial of Hirohito," 3 February 1950. For the agency's case on Reischauer, see OSR, vol. 12437 (1966–1967), file 23. See also Reischauer 2003, pp. 297–298.

64 OSR, vol. 8928–12438 (1946–1970). For the request from the man in Akita, see OSR, 12430 (1950–1953), file 39.



Figure 5. In this picture, taken in November 2016, pupils at Kagoike's kindergarten are reciting the Imperial Rescript on Education in front of a picture of the then Emperor Akihito, Empress Michiko 美智子, and the national flag. Reprinted with permission of Reuters News & Media Inc.

with wartime mobilization. Likewise, the Imperial Household Office/Agency had no good reason to promote the distribution of the portrait to public schools, because doing so would have provoked the ire of teachers and the media who would see it as a revival of the imperial Japanese practice of emperor worship. Since no public schools requested the portrait, palace administrators did not contact them—a strategic caution that CIE members like Scott George had not anticipated.

The cautious attitude of successive palace administrators toward the portrait appears to have contributed to the amelioration of its negative prewar/wartime associations in the eyes of Japanese people today. To highlight the portrait's smooth postwar rehabilitation, it helps to contrast its fate with the Imperial Rescript on Education. When Kagoike Yasunori 籠池泰典 (1953–), director of the Moritomo Gakuen school in Osaka, became the subject of heated controversy in the media and the Diet in 2017, it was because of both his dubious connections to powerful leaders of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and his school's ethnocentric pedagogy. The most salient of his teaching methods, as the media reported, was having students recite the Imperial Rescript on Education daily. This revelation triggered familiar debates about the politics of memory, with conservative politicians, journalists, and scholars publicly endorsing Kagoike's teaching methods, while their liberal counterparts denounced the conservatives' positive reaction as a throwback to imperial Japan's militarism.<sup>65</sup>

An interesting part of this debate is what it overlooked: Kagoike's curriculum included students viewing and bowing to images of former emperors and empresses (see figures 5 and 6).<sup>66</sup> It is difficult to imagine that the pictures were officially granted to Kagoike by the

65 For examples of positive reactions to Kagoike, see *Sankei shinbun* 産経新聞, “Kyōiku chokugo no dokoga warui to iunoka: *Mainichi shinbun* yo, muchi to henken no tasha kōgeki wa mittomonai” 教育勅語のどこが悪いというのか: 毎日新聞よ、無知と偏見の他者攻撃はみっともない, 13 March 2017; for negative reactions, see *Asahi shinbun*, “Inada shi, ‘Kyōiku chokugo no seishin, torimodosu beki dato ima mo omou’” 稲田氏「教育勅語の精神、取り戻すべきだと今も思う」, 8 March 2017.

66 Nakano Wataru 中野渉, “Suga kanbō chōkan, ‘minshin tō ni oite setsumeie sarerunodewa’” 菅官房長官「民進党において説明されるのでは」, *The Huffington Post*, 27 March 2017: [http://www.huffingtonpost.jp/2017/03/27/suga-conference\\_n\\_15633202.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.jp/2017/03/27/suga-conference_n_15633202.html).



Figure 6. A student bowing to a picture of Emperor Shōwa and his consort in the hallway of Kagoike's kindergarten, captured in November 2016. Reprinted with permission of Reuters News & Media Inc.

Imperial Household Agency, but Kagoike likely based this practice on prewar and wartime emperor worship that used the rescript and the portrait in public schools. However, though his use of imperial images was known and reported, this did not elicit the impassioned support or biting criticism his use of the rescript did. It is difficult to understand public silence over use of the portrait if one focuses solely on the object's history in prewar and wartime Japan. Public acceptance of the imperial portrait today is a product of postwar developments attributable to the palace administration's conscious efforts to repurpose the object in the immediate postwar period. Their policy prepared the way for the imperial portrait to be accepted in contemporary Japan—both as *goshin'ei* and as a politically correct medium of imagining the imperial institution.

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