

## CHAPTER 8

# IMPERIAL SUCCESSION AND THE PURITY AND DEFILEMENT OF DEATH

### 1. Prologue: Max Weber's Discussion of Asian Religion

Max Weber takes up the lamaism of inner Asia in "The Asiatic Sects and the Redemption Religions," part three of his book, *The Religions of India*, considering it along with the religions of the Indonesian archipelago, China, Korea, and Japan.<sup>1</sup> His article surveys the forms in which Mahayana Buddhism was transmitted from India to the various regions of Asia and the character of the "sects" it gave birth to. In discussing the theocracy of lamaism, Weber hints that in certain respects it resembles the Japanese tennō 天皇 (emperor) system. The only concrete evidence he gives for comparison is the following:

[In Japan,] after the establishment of the baku-han clan system, the sovereign [tennō] of the theocratic state came to be *ensconced in a closed chamber* [gosho palace] surrounded by an organization of the upper sacred ranks. (Section on Japan; emphasis added)<sup>2</sup>

The incarnation of the Dalai lama received training as a member of the practicing monks for seven years in a *closed chamber* in the monastery, and during the period up to maturity, received scholarly education in a life of strict and austere practice. (Section on Lamaism; emphasis added)<sup>3</sup>

In the course of his discussion of Japan, Weber describes the political role of the shogun 將軍, who was the actual head of the feudal system, and concerning Tibet, he details the political authority of the Chinese government, which is the suzerain state. He points out that in both Japan and Tibet, the authority of the tennō emperor or dalai lama by itself is not self-sustaining. At the same time, he implies that the shogunate or the Chinese government could not assert the legitimacy of its authority without the sacred charisma possessed by the tennō or the dalai lama. Further, Weber characterizes the residential space in which the charismatic tennō or dalai lama carried on their daily lives with the key term “cloister” (*Klausur*). It appears that through this metaphor of the “cloister,” Weber attempts to identify the deep structure of the theocracy that the two systems share. Nevertheless, in reading Weber, it is easy to overlook this matter, for there is only a slight mention of it. It is not a mere aside, however, as is clear from a comparison with the corresponding section of *Sociology of Domination*, where Weber’s intention in the use of the metaphor of the “cloister” is shown to possess an unexpected scope.

According to *Sociology of Domination*, the sovereign as manifestation of a divinity—for example, the Japanese tennō—was actually politically powerless and was placed in perpetual confinement in the court (*Palasteinsperrung*),<sup>4</sup> a condition of enclosure (*eingekapselt*).<sup>5</sup> Weber employs the word “cloister” to express this confinement. The term is applied not only to the emperor, but also to the situation of the dalai lama. The sovereign as manifestation of divinity was politically powerless, and for this reason at times was murdered before reaching maturity. Nevertheless, care was taken not to overturn the entire system of the domination by charisma, for attempts at such political overthrow or abolition frequently resulted in shaking the legitimacy of the actual dominant authorities themselves. As a result, the de facto ruler (for example, the Japanese shogun) or professional specialists such as court ministers and priests were instituted separate from the sovereign as divine manifestation, in a form parallel to him.

It is clear that Weber applies the same notion of the perpetual court

confinement of the "king" to both the Japanese emperor and the Tibetan dalai lama. How, then, is such regal charisma transmitted? In Tibet, the dalai lama is said to be reborn upon death in the body of a special spiritual child. A search is conducted throughout the country for the new lama-manifestation, and after various tests have been conducted, the successor is designated. Weber explains that in the rebirth of the lama, the charismatic quality of the sage is strengthened and transposed to one who possesses the same quality. He speaks of this as the heightened prestige of sanctity, and this way of thinking may likewise be applied to the case of the Japanese emperor.

What underlies the notions of the rebirth of the manifestation-body lama and the transposition of heightened sanctity that Weber speaks of? They of course signify the transmission of charisma, but what, in this case, constitutes the charisma? Weber does not pursue further the nature of precisely what is reborn or transposed. He does not explain the transmission of charisma as, for example, the transmission of a spirit or soul or as the transmission of a lofty rank or status. It may be that Weber's notion of charisma signified simultaneously both a spiritual sanctity and a sanctity based on rank. In this case, however, the nature of the relationship is unclear. As mentioned before, Weber may be said to present an original view in discerning the similarity of court confinement or cloistering as the structural characteristic of both Tibetan and Japanese sovereign authority. Nevertheless, in employing the ambiguous and polysemous concept of charisma in discussing the problem of the transmission of sovereign authority, he left unresolved an important underlying problem.

## 2. Theories of Sovereign Authority

There are two dominant views regarding the basis for the notion that sovereign authority in Japan (the emperor system) is founded on an unbroken line of sovereigns or "one lineage transmitted to all ages" (*ban-sei ikkei* 万世一系). These are the theories of Tsuda Sōkichi 津田左右吉 and Origuchi Shinobu 折口信夫, which may be said to represent two

basic models.<sup>6</sup>

Concerning the single lineage of emperors, Tsuda adheres to the notion of the status of emperor, while Origuchi designates the emperor's spirit as the central issue. This is the fundamental point of contrast between these two scholars, and it has served to animate the discussion of the nature of the emperor system. We must note here that the rank or status of emperor emphasized by Tsuda and the emperor's spirit indicated by Origuchi are both encompassed in the notion of charisma employed by Weber. Weber's conceptual framework of charisma has multiple meanings and forms a complex theoretical network. At the very least, however, when he uses it with regard to the lama theocracy of Tibet and the emperor system of Japan, the two aspects of the political rank of sovereign authority and the magico-religious sacred rank are associated with each other, as we have seen earlier. In Weber's conception of charisma, political rank and sacred rank are both included in an overlapping and, as yet, undistinguished form. If this is the case, then with regard to the problem of sovereign authority in Japan, it may be said that Tsuda and Origuchi discern and analyze in the foundations of the emperor system two opposite poles that are both included in the concept of charisma. Both Tsuda and Origuchi share with Weber the same roots of conception of the theory of sovereign authority.

In any case, the thinking thus put forward by Tsuda and Origuchi separates and places in opposition political status and sacred status, and in the background of this difference in argument lies the difference in their evaluation of the significance of the Daijōsai 大嘗祭 discussed earlier. In considering the nature of sovereign authority in Japan, it is impossible to avoid confronting the problem of whether we see, in the Daijōsai, the traces of a magical and imaginary structure born from the political mythology that Tsuda points out, or whether we recognize an immovable matrix (the emperor spirit) related to the emperor system.

### 3. The Death of Tenmu

In *Kojiki* 古事記 and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀, the words *daijō* 大嘗 and



*shinjō* (*niiname* 新嘗) appear in the stage of mythological narrative.<sup>7</sup> They convey multiple meanings and do not necessarily indicate one fixed direction. The confusion in their usage was eliminated and they gradually came to be clearly distinguished from the time of Tenmu on. That is to say, while “Daijōsai” signified the *jō* ceremony at the time of Tenmu’s coming to power, the Niinamesai (Shinjōsai) came to be used for the *jō* ceremony performed each year, so that between the two a specialized usage or differentiation was born.<sup>8</sup> The Senso 踐祚 Daijōsai that marks the change in generations of emperors was formally determined in the *Kōnin shiki* 弘仁式 (established in Kōnin 11 [810]), and the early form of this Senso Daijōshinji dates back to the Daijōsai of Tenmu 天武.

In the winter of 672, Tenmu emerged victorious in the Jinshin 壬申 Disturbance. He moved the capital to Kiyomihara no miya in Asuka 飛鳥淨御原宮, and in the second month of the following year underwent the accession (*sokui* 即位) rites in the new palace. Then, in the eleventh month of the same year, the Daijōsai was performed. Concerning it, *Nihon shoki* states:

Presents were given to all those who were in attendance on the emperor at the feast of first-fruits (*ō-nihe*), viz. The Nakatomi and Inbe, with the officials of the Shinto department, the district governors of the two provinces of Harima and Tanba, and also to the labourers under them. A grade of cap-rank was accordingly conferred on each of the district governors.<sup>9</sup>

Although matters concerning the Daijōsai ceremony are recorded in the article for the twelfth month, this is a record of gifts to the people who served, and the Daijōsai itself, as determined in the *Jingiryō* 神祇令, was held in the eleventh month. Tenmu, who had emerged from the danger of internal strife, sought to strengthen the religious foundation of sovereign authority through the Daijōsai. In fact, from the time of Tenmu’s reign to the eras of Jitō 持統 and Monmu 文武, the emperor’s authority rose remarkably, as the following history demonstrates. The

Daijōsai was not merely a ceremony of making offerings to the gods with new grain; it came to be consciously thought of as a ceremony that confirmed the authority of the imperial family and the imperial status, and also augmented the effectiveness of the accession (*sokui*) rites. In other words, there was at work the intention of clearly distinguishing the annual Niinamesai (Shinjōsai) ceremony as a harvest rite performed by the people and the Daijōsai as a rite performed within the imperial court.

If this is the case, is it possible to say that the Daijōsai performed in the eleventh month of the second year of Emperor Tenmu had attained a genuinely stable position as completing internally the accession of Tenmu? Was it actually thought of as a secret rite of the state that could affect the foundation of sovereign authority? I believe this extremely doubtful. Even though the Daijōsai as a concept clearly possessed the status of a court rite at the time, the inevitability of the Daijōsai as a secret rite was probably not fully recognized. Let us consider the reasons for this. Here, the question naturally arises of the relationship between the Daijōsai of Tenmu and that of Jitō. The consideration of their relationship should allow us to investigate the status and original form of the Daijōsai.

As mentioned earlier, the Daijōsai of Tenmu took place in 673, the year after his successful conclusion of the Jinshin Disturbance, that is, in the second year of accession. Thereafter, the era of Tenmu continued for thirteen years, and in the first year of the Shuchō 朱鳥 era (686), he died. One of his consorts (the later Empress Jitō) promptly took over the reins of government in Tenmu's place. This is called "*shōsei* 称制," meaning that after the death of an emperor, the new emperor commences governing without conducting the rites of succession (*sokui*). Providing for an unforeseen accident, the new empress began conducting affairs of state. Immediately after, Tenmu's third son, Prince Ōtsu 大津, was seized on suspicion of insurrection and committed suicide. Jitō declared Prince Kusakabe 草壁, a son by Tenmu, the crown prince, but this prince also died in 689, at the age of twenty-eight. With the imperial succession in uncertainty, misgivings arose concerning the stability of the imperial

throne, and in the first month of the following year, 690, Jitō acceded to the throne and took up sovereign authority. The next year, 691, on the second day of the eleventh month, the Daijōsai ceremonies were performed.

Approximately four years had passed between Tenmu's death and the accession of Jitō, and it was five years before the Daijōsai. This is a lengthy interval between the death of the previous emperor and the accession of the new sovereign. It may be said that there was a break in the succession of sovereign authority. Further, as we have seen, there was an undercurrent of feuding and intrigue surrounding the transmission of the imperial throne, with the political intentions of Jitō, who had declared control, obstructing other political ambitions. The imperial consort, confronted by the death of Kusakabe, and with her third son Karu 輕 (the later Monmu) still only seven years of age, decided to undergo accession.

Although there was a long break in the transmission of sovereign authority, we should note that for the first half of that period, the corpse of the previous emperor Tenmu lay in the palace. That is, the body of Tenmu, who died on the ninth day of the ninth month of 686, had been immediately moved to a temporary structure, the *mogari* 殯 hall, and for two years and two months, he was the object of worship, offerings, mourning, and condolence messages. Not to bury the remains of the dead immediately, but to place the corpse in state for a determined period of time is called *mogari*, and the site for temporary interment is called the *mogari* hall or shrine (*mogari no miya*). This is one method of funeral of ancient times and indicates in particular the stage before burial. The *mogari* hall for the corpse of Tenmu was constructed in the southern courtyard of the Asuka Kiyomihara palace; hence, during that period it was the place where the body decayed and decomposed, gradually changing into bone. The southern court was surely filled with the odor of death and the defilement of the corpse.

Tenmu's remains were finally buried in the Ōuchi 大内 mound on the eleventh day, eleventh month, 688. As mentioned before, a period of two years and two months had passed since death. In the following year,

689, on the thirteenth day, fourth month, Prince Kusakabe died. At that point the imperial consort decided to accede herself to the imperial throne. In the first month of the next year, 690, the accession ceremony was performed, and after another year and ten months, the Daijōsai was conducted. We see, then, that from Tenmu's death to Jitō's accession to the imperial throne, five years had passed. The first half of this period was filled with symbols of death, and in the second half the rites of accession and the Daijōsai were performed. Here, together with the confusion in the political situation, there arose the issue of newly positioning the emperor's death.

#### 4. The Death of Jitō

The succession to the imperial throne triggered by the death of the previous emperor is distinct in character from succession triggered by yielding of the throne. The former is assailed by the urgent necessity of dealing with the problems of the management of death (or the arising of pollution) and the rebirth of sovereign authority (or the birth of a sacred king), while the latter involves no such concerns. The process of the reception of sovereign authority operating between Jitō and her successor Monmu had precisely this latter character.

Eight years after Tenmu's death, Jitō moved the capital to the Fujiwara 藤原 palace. This was on the sixth day, twelfth month, 694, the twenty-second year after Tenmu had moved to Asuka Kiyomihara palace. Fujiwara palace was the capital for sixteen years, during the reigns of Jitō, Monmu, and Genmei 元明, until Genmei moved to Heijō-kyō 平城京 in 710. Thus, it served as palace for three generations of emperors. By contrast, until the time of Jitō it was the custom for each generation of emperor to move the palace. We see that "capital" and "sovereign authority" shared a single fate, but this custom of a new palace for each succeeding emperor was abandoned with Jitō's move to Fujiwara palace. This was probably the result of a change in Jitō's thinking about the nature of sovereign authority. Further, it may have subtly influenced the attitude toward the Daijōsai also.

In the third year after her move to Fujiwara palace, Jitō retired and Monmu acceded to the throne (697). Monmu was a posthumous child of Prince Kusakabe and hence Jitō's grandchild. A direct hereditary line of imperial succession was therefore maintained, although at the time Monmu was but fifteen years of age. The previous sovereign, Jitō, as the retired *dajō tennō* 太上天皇, took a position of guardianship and continued to hold power over political affairs. While Monmu was emperor, the Taihō *ritsuryō* 大宝律令 reforms were enacted (Taihō 1, 701) and the formation of the *ritsuryō* state system reached final completion, but we must also bear in mind that Fujiwara Fuhitō 藤原不比等, the father of Monmu's consort Miyako 宮子, was gradually ascending in power. In any case, Monmu ascended to the imperial throne in the eighth month of 697, and the following year (698), on the twenty-third day of the eleventh month, the Daijōsai ceremonies were performed. This is an example of accession to the imperial throne upon abdication. Here, transmission of sovereign authority occurred free of the shadows of death and of the mediating presence of death pollution.

It was three years later that the first formal change in era was promulgated as the Taihō era beginning in 701. The following year, on the twenty-second day of the twelfth month, Jitō's stormy life of fifty-seven years came to a close. A *mogari* of approximately one year followed. On the seventeenth day of the twelfth month, 703, the remains were cremated and, on the twenty-sixth day, placed together with her husband Tenmu's remains in the Ōuchi burial mound. As we have seen, the lengthy *mogari* of Tenmu's corpse preceded the accession (*sokuī*) and succession (Daijōsai) ceremonies for the new tennō (Jitō), giving rise to an interval of approximately five years in the succession of sovereign authority. The *mogari* on the occasion of the death of the retired tennō Jitō, however, resulted in no such predicament.

Jitō left instructions that her funeral be conducted with simplicity and frugality, but her will was not necessarily followed. A temporary *mogari* hall was immediately constructed in the western part of the Fujiwara palace, and for a year thereafter a solemn period of mourning beginning with lamentation followed. Compared with the two year, two

month *mogari* or mourning period for Tenmu, Jitō's mourning was only half as long; nevertheless, it was still a lengthy period. As mentioned before, after this *mogari*, her remains were placed in the Ōuchi mound together with Tenmu's, but immediately preceding this, the corpse was cremated at Asuka no oka 飛鳥岡, a step not seen with Tenmu. This appears to have been a treatment to reduce the remains from which the flesh had fallen to white bone. We should note, however, that Jitō's cremation parallels that of the priest Dōshō 道昭 just two years earlier. According to *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀, Dōshō's cremation was performed according to his last will, and accordingly thereafter "cremations throughout the country" began. The special method of treatment of Dōshō's corpse, which is said to be the first example of Buddhist cremation in Japan, came to be applied after only two years to the remains of the former sovereign Jitō. In this, it is natural to assume the working of some conception common to both.

Jitō's mortuary handling as a lengthy observance of *mogari* closely parallels Tenmu's, but a new element was added to the method of treating the remains after the *mogari* period. It would be expected that Buddhist thinking came to be intermixed here, but at the same time there emerged a conception of purification of the corpse by fire. Of course, it is difficult to determine precisely when and in what form people became conscious of the pollution of death arising from the corpse. Nevertheless when, as in the scene of Tenmu's death, the unburied interment (*mogari*) of the corpse influenced publicly and privately the setting up of the accession and the Daijōsai, it is unavoidable that the problem of the defilement of death should come to the fore together with the conception of mourning. In the case of the death of Jitō, who had abdicated, such a situation was of course absent. At the very least, however, when we consider that there is always a possibility of succession of sovereign authority mediated by death, it is hardly strange that the problem of the defilement of death and the rites of purification to treat it should emerge strongly in awareness. Here, the issue of the death of the sovereign and the rebirth or revival of sovereign authority is deeply involved.

When we bear this in mind, the method of treating the corpse by fire suddenly comes to life with an urgent meaning. Jitō's death may not have possessed a character that directly affected the direction of the accession and the Daijōsai. Nevertheless, from beyond the smoke of the cremation fires that marked the conclusion of a lengthy period of *mogari*, a sense of crisis surely arose like an omen. As we shall see, that omen became an actuality in later periods, particularly the eras of Monmu and Genmei.

## 5. The Death of Monmu

Four years after Jitō's remains were finally laid to rest in the Ōuchi burial mound, Monmu died. This occurred on the fifteenth day of the sixth month, 707, when he was twenty-five years of age. Since he ascended to the throne at the age of fifteen, he was emperor for only ten years. His last will prescribed "three days of lamentation and one month of eschewal," but the *mogari* period extended for five months. On the twelfth day of the eleventh month, a formal condolence ceremony was conducted, a posthumous name was presented, and cremation was performed at Asuka no oka. On the twentieth day of the month, the remains were buried. Thus, as in the case of Jitō, a procedure of cremation, collection of bones, and burial was followed.

When Monmu died, the crown prince Obito 首 was only seven years old. Since he was too young to succeed to the imperial throne, according to the last will, Monmu's mother Genmei succeeded. This occurred on the seventh month, seventeenth day. It was one month after Monmu's death, and the corpse was still in *mogari*. Fujiwara palace was still filled with the pollution of death. Gradually, however, cremation and burial were performed, and in the opening of the following year (708), the beginning of the new era of Wadō 和銅 was proclaimed. On the twenty-first day of the eleventh month of this year, the Daijōsai ceremonies were performed.

Let us compare this process with that following the death of Tenmu. Both Tenmu and Monmu left behind at death the problem of

succession. Tenmu died in 686 and, after a *mogari* period of two years and two months, was buried in the Ōuchi mound. The accession of Jitō took place two years after that, and the following year, the Daijōsai was performed. After the remains of the previous emperor Tenmu were buried, the accession and Daijōsai were held within a short time. By contrast, in the case of the death of Monmu, as we have seen, accession of the new sovereign occurred while he was still in a state of *mogari*, and after his remains had finally been buried in the mountain mound, the Daijōsai was performed. While Jitō acceded to the throne at the point she was freed from the defilement of death, Genmei underwent accession while the condition of pollution still lingered. Of course, in the background of this difference lay the political discord surrounding the designation of the crown prince, because of which the period of *mogari* for Tenmu was extended.

It is necessary, however, for the transmission of sovereign authority to be conducted so that there is no gap between the previous emperor and the new emperor. This is an urgent concern for the nation that transcends the problem of "the pollution of death." In light of this, the fact that Jitō underwent accession only after completing the final burial of Tenmu appears abnormal and unusual. Even if a temporary solution was enacted during this period in the "*shosei*" or declaration of rule, it remains the case that the foundations of sovereign authority were placed in a dangerous situation. If this is so, then Genmei's course following Monmu's death, conducting rites of accession only one month later, may be said to be natural and reasonable. Although Monmu's *mogari* extended for approximately five months, it is important that "accession" as an event of the nation should follow on the heels of the death of the previous emperor, and the condition of the corpse cannot be taken into consideration in its determination.

In this sense, the precedent of Jitō's eventual accession occasioned by the death of Tenmu was clearly modified in the case of the accession of Genmei occasioned by the death of Monmu. Genmei sought to actualize even to a small extent the reception of sovereign authority that Jitō had struggled for. Genmei reduced the four year gap between



Tenmu's death and Jitō's accession to the single month that passed between Monmu's death and her own accession. Since this problem is intertwined with unforeseen events and political factors, comparison merely in terms of numerical figures is impossible. Logically speaking, however, one month between the death of the previous emperor and the accession of the new emperor is not a short interval. Ideally, succession to the imperial throne should occur without a moment's interruption. In this, succession that occurs upon death, compared with that occurring upon abdication, must be said to harbor dangers. Genmei was surely well aware of this. When she considered Jitō's handling of matters upon the death of Tenmu, the sense of precariousness probably grew. Perhaps because of this, as we will see, gradually Genmei took the plunge into a transfer of sovereign authority based on abdication.

## 6. The Death of Genmei

Accession is a matter that must be considered not in terms of the problem of "death pollution," but solely in terms of the "death" of the previous emperor. By contrast, the Daijōsai is clearly different. It is a ceremony that must include awareness in particular of the defilement arising from the death of the previous emperor. This may be seen from the fact that Jitō and Genmei both performed the Daijōsai ceremonies after the burial of the remains of the previous emperor. They waited until the defilement of death had been expelled from the palace to conduct the rituals. While the rites of accession were held regardless of whether or not there was defilement because of the death of the previous emperor, the Daijō rituals were held at the point the death defilement was removed from the imperial palace. In this connection, let us consider the regulations of the *Jingiryō*. According to these regulations, the Daijōsai is held in the eleventh month of the year if accession takes place by the seventh month, and when accession takes place in the eighth month or later, it is held in the eleventh month of the following year. In this latter case, if the accession is set at a time close to the death of the previous emperor, the time of the Daijōsai of the new emperor is consciously sep-

arated from the death of the predecessor by a determined period. Even though the accession rites and the Daijōsai must be considered a single set of rituals performed to solidify the transmission of sovereign authority, a defiled period and a pure period mediated by the remains of the previous emperor were clearly distinguished.

Empress Genmei moved the capital to Heijō-kyō in 710. Leaving the imperial capital of the three generations from Jitō on, she built a new capital. This occurred three years after the death of Monmu, and two years after her own Daijōsai. In 712, commands were issued for the composition of *Kojiki*, and in the following year, for the composition of *Fudoki* for the various provinces. In 715, however, on the second day of the ninth month, Genmei suddenly yielded the throne to the princess Genshō 元正. Genshō was the elder sister, by the same mother, of Monmu, who had died an untimely death. That year, the name of the era was changed to Reiki 靈龜. While the accession of the empress Genmei had been exceptional, that of Genshō was even more so. For example, the female sovereigns before her—as in the cases of Jingū 神功, Suiko 推古, and Kōgyoku 皇極—had all been imperial consorts, but this was not true of either Genmei or Genshō. Of course, in the case of Genmei, accession came about because of the unforeseen condition of Monmu's early death, but there was no such condition in the case of Genshō. At the time, it had already been decided that Monmu's prince Obito (the later Shōmu 聖武) was heir apparent, and he had reached the age of fifteen. When we consider that Monmu acceded to the throne when he was the same age of fifteen, the puzzle of Genshō's accession deepens. It has generally been thought that the succession of the female sovereigns seen from Genmei to Genshō was a mediating link leading to Shōmu, but the conditions underlying this are not necessarily simple. It is not possible, however, to pursue this problem here. Rather, there is a slightly different matter that intervenes. Just as Genmei yielded the throne to Genshō, Genshō also abdicated in favor of the next emperor, Shōmu, and afterward Shōmu further relinquished the throne to Kōken 孝謙. It may be said that at the same time that the capital was moved to Heijō-kyō, imperial succession upon abdication began to become the

regular practice. At the very least, a tendency in this direction appears to have begun to be fomented in the inner circles of imperial authority. In other words, a conscious effort to avoid imperial succession mediated by death appears to be at work.

As mentioned before, in the ninth month, second day, of 715, Genmei yielded the throne to Genshō. The following year, on the nineteenth day of the eleventh month, the Daijōsai ceremonies were conducted. Five years later, on the seventh day of the twelfth month, 721, Genmei died in a hall within the Heijō palace. She was sixty-one years old. After a *mogari* period of merely one week, her remains were put to rest in the mountain mound of Shiiyama 椎山. Genmei made her last testament two months before her death and instructed that after death a furnace be constructed for her cremation. Hence, after a one-week *mogari* period, she was cremated and buried. I will touch on this problem later, but Genshō, who newly underwent accession, abdicated in favor of Prince Obito on the fourth day of the second month, 724. This was the birth of Emperor Shōmu. Here, the "relay" through the reigns of the two female tennō Genmei and Genshō came to an end. Nevertheless, Shōmu also, on the second day of the seventh month of 749, abdicated in favor of the next tennō Kōken. On the twenty-fifth day of the eleventh month of the same year, the Daijōsai was performed.

The move to Heijō-kyō signified a political reform, and at the same time it was an event that brought pressure for a change in the conception of the sovereign's death. In order to achieve the transmission of imperial authority without rupture, the secret separation and isolation of the sovereign's death was plotted. Through this, it became possible to conduct both the accession rites and the Daijōsai in a time and a space unconnected with the ruler's death, and in conditions thus completely freed from the pollution of death. It is hardly accidental that, together with the move to Heijō-kyō, three generations of tennō transferred imperial authority by abdication. Several issues related to the "death" of Empress Genmei cast light on the situation.

As mentioned before, Genmei died on the seventh day, twelfth month, 721. In her last will delivered on the thirteenth day of the tenth

month, she gave instructions that her remains be cremated. In her will, the retired tennō brimming with self-confidence boldly declared that the funeral rites and mourning should be brief and simple. Her wishes were probably respected. The *mogari* period for Genmei was limited to one week, and after cremation her remains were buried. We should note that this attenuated funeral, with a compressed period of *mogari*, was also adopted in the case of the death of the next tennō Genshō. Genshō died in a hall of the Heijō palace on the twenty-first day of the fourth month, 748, and just one week later was cremated and placed in a burial mound on Mt. Saho 佐保. In exactly the same way as in the case of Genmei, the *mogari* period for Genshō was a brief seven days.

By comparison, Tenmu's *mogari* was two years and two months, Jitō's one year, and Monmu's five months. On coming to Genmei, this period was abruptly reduced to one week. This procedure was inherited by Genshō, and as I will discuss below, even in the case of the next tennō Shōmu, the *mogari* period was only seventeen days. We see then that the move to Heijō was an epochal event that brought about a fundamental alteration to the conception of the death of the sovereign. Needless to say, the explicit will of Empress Genmei was at work here.

We know that after the *mogari* period, the remains of Jitō and Monmu were cremated. To repeat, in the case of Jitō, there was a *mogari* of one year, and in the case of Monmu, a *mogari* of five month, after which they were cremated and buried. The corpse, which had undergone a process of decomposition, in the end quickly turned to white bones. The separation of flesh and bone was in this way completed, and the white bones as the essence of the remains were extracted. The remains were imparted an aura of purity. The corpse in the process of putrefaction constantly exudes the defilement of death. By contrast, the remains turned to white bone undergo a transfiguration into sacred relics after the death pollution has been exorcised. The compression of the period of *mogari* may be said to have been a necessary ritual procedure for bringing to quick conclusion the pollution of death emanating from the corpse. Through this, it became possible to limit to a minimum the smell of the corpse pervading and polluting the air in the imperial

palace. It was a rite of resistance that formed a close relationship with the attempt to separate the ritual space of the Daijōsai from the pollution of death and give it the boundaries of the sacred. At that time, the cremation of Dōshō was called to mind by the administrators of Heijō-kyō, beginning with Genmei. The symbolic meaning possessed by cremation was reflected upon together with the Buddhist thought that gave rise to the manner of the procedure. The ritual value of Buddhism gained recognition as an ideological apparatus for the purpose of expelling from the interior of the imperial palace all the defilement arising from death.

Considering matters in this way, we grasp the social and psychological background of the inclination of the state toward incorporating elements of the conceptual world of Buddhism. Genmei's transfer of the capital indicates the onset of the process, and Shōmu's policies for the adoption of Buddhism represent its climax. In giving direction to this political process, Genmei's "death" fulfilled a larger role than has commonly been imagined.

According to *Shoku Nihongi*, the funeral rites for Genmei, who died in 721, were simple in the extreme. The officer responsible for the construction of the burial mound site was appointed, and the provisions in the will stating there should be no mourning rituals were observed. As stated before, in this Genmei's firm determination was reflected. By contrast, in the case of Genshō, who died in 748, we see that procedures for mourning were somewhat organized. Just as in Genmei's case, the "mound constructor" (*sansakushi* 山作司) was appointed, but following that there was a three-day period for mourning throughout the country. After sutras were chanted at Daianji 大安寺, Yamashinadera 山科寺, Asukadera 飛鳥寺, and other temples as offerings for the deceased, the remains were cremated and buried at the mound on Mt. Saho. The period required for this was, as with Genmei, only one week. Let us now turn to the case of Shōmu.

## 7. The Death of Shōmu

Shōmu, after occupying the throne for twenty years, abdicated in 749 in favor of Abe Naishin'nō 阿倍内親王 (the later Kōken Tennō), the daughter of his consort Empress Kōmyō. As stated earlier, the example set by the female sovereigns Jitō, Genmei, and Genshō was being followed. Among the activities of Shōmu's twenty years of rule, the construction of *kokubunji* 国分寺 temples and the making of the Great Buddha Rushana 盧舍那 are well known, but during the rebellion of Fujiwara no Hirotsugu 藤原広嗣, for a long period of five years, he moved his capital to Kuni no miya 恭仁宮, Shigaraki no miya 紫香樂宮 in Ōmi, and Naniwa no miya 難波の宮. His return to Heijō-kyō came in 745, and thereafter he directed his energies toward the construction of Tōdaiji 東大寺 temple and suddenly made approaches to the world of Buddhism. In the fourth month of 754, after his abdication, he received precepts in front of the Great Buddha Hall from the T'ang dynasty monk Chien-chen 鑑真 (Jp. Ganjin), and two years later, on the second day of the fifth month, he died in the Heijō palace at the age of fifty-six.

After Shōmu's death, following precedent, officers were appointed, beginning with the burial mound constructor, and on the fourth day, sutra chanting was held in the seven great temples. On the sixth, Shōmu's officers (*hyakkan* 百官) donned mourning clothes (*sofuku* 素服), and emerging from the south gate of the inner chapel (*naiin* 内院), performed lamentations. On the eighth, which marked the first seven-day period after his death, sutra chanting was again held in the seven great temples, and this was done again on the fifteenth, marking the second seven-day period. Then, on the nineteenth, as in the case of Genshō, his remains were interred in a burial mound on Mt. Saho. As we see here, the period of *mogari* lasted seventeen days. Compared with the cases of Genmei and Genshō, it was longer by ten days, but when we consider the character of the reign of Shōmu, it may be said to have been the briefest possible period. A negative sense with regard to the lengthening of the *mogari* period, in the stage of Shōmu also, was already becoming established as an inalterable policy.

What is puzzling concerning Shōmu's burials rites, however, is that there is no mention whatsoever of cremation. From the fact that in the case of the following sovereigns, Shōtoku 称徳 and Kōnin 光仁, there was also no cremation, it may have been that there was for a period a change to burial methods. The procedure of cremation for four generations of sovereigns—Jitō, Monmu, Genmei, and Genshō—was suddenly discontinued. The reasons for this break are not clear, but we should note regarding it that the funeral rites for Shōmu at this time were performed as a grand ritual "as though for the Buddha." It was performed just as for the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, or for the Buddha Rushana in the Great Buddha Hall. However, the passage in *Shoku Nihongi* concerning the funeral rites performed for Shōmu "as though for the Buddha" seems to imply more than this. That is, we sense here the notion that after dying, Shōmu returned to life. Shōmu's corpse ultimately came back to life as the beautiful physical body of Rushana Buddha, and did not decay; he shone as a gold and bronze object of worship within a fantasy or vision. Shōmu was given the flesh of sacred adornments and came back to life as Buddha. At that time, the conception of the defilement of death was surely swept away at once from the imperial palace. Within the vision in which tennō and Buddha stood as equals, the separation of purity and defilement was completed. On the one hand, the reduction of the period of *mogari* brought about a liberation from the traditional conception of death, and on the other hand, the construction of a lasting capital, through the adoption of the ritual apparatus of Buddhism, created a mechanism for dispersing defilement. In the outer areas of the imperial palace, Buddha halls were constructed, and a system of the division of labor between sovereign authority and Buddhist ritual produced a device that made possible the division of purity and defilement. This was the fundamental meaning of sovereign authority symbolized by Heijō-kyō.

In the funeral rites given Shōmu as though "for the Buddha," an incense burner was placed at the seat of the chief officiant, and a place for the emperor was made, decorated with a banner of gold wheels, large and small jewel banners, incense banners, and varieties of covered

parasols. Resplendent lines of monks and musicians were arrayed, and flutes sounded. During the observance of the third seven-day period, temples of the left and right sections of the capital performed sutra chanting. There was a distribution of awards to the monks who cared for Shōmu in his sickbed late in life and were present at his death. During the fifth seven-day period, more than a thousand monks and *shami* 沙弥 were invited to Daianji temple for a feast. An imperial edict prohibiting the taking of life was promulgated, and repairs were ordered for the Buddhist statues of the state-built *kokubunji* temples in the various provinces. On the memorial day of Shōmu's death the following year, offerings were made to these statues. During the sixth seven-day period, at Yakushiji 薬師寺 temple, and during the seventh seven-day period at Kōfukuji 興福寺 temple, more than one thousand monks and *shami* gathered for a Buddhist feast. One year later, on the second day, fifth month, 757, on the occasion of the memorial day of the retired emperor (*dajō tennō*), one thousand five hundred monks were invited to Tōdaiji temple for an elaborate service. The altar adornments to Shōmu continued after his death. Shōmu, who constructed the Rushana Great Buddha and called himself a "slave of the Three Treasures," was himself, after death, virtually exalted to the level of the Three Treasures.

## 8. The Division of Purity and Defilement

According to Francois Macé, who has attempted a trenchant analysis of the funeral rites for Genmei, in the interval of the lengthy *mogari* periods following the death of sovereigns and the interregnum, there existed an interior linkage. As mentioned earlier, the observance of an extended *mogari* period had the meaning of allowing the process of decay to work on the corpse. The mortuary procedures applied to corpses during this period are not known in detail, but of course the decomposition here is not merely a natural process of putrefaction. As Macé points out, the role played by decomposition during *mogari* was above all deeply related to the destination of the spirit of the dead.<sup>10</sup> In a variety of cultures we find the notion that, as long as the corpse is not reduced to bone, it is



impossible for the spirit of the dead to reach the other world.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in order for a new sovereign to be born, it was necessary for a new time to be recovered by passing through the rites of *mogari*. For example, Roger Cailliois states that the loss of order represented by the death of the sovereign was an unavoidable catalyst for the birth of a new sovereign, that is, a new order.<sup>12</sup> This thinking was surely applied to the interval between *mogari* and the accession of the new emperor. Without the decomposition that symbolizes loss of order, the spirit of the dead cannot depart for the other world. It was thought that the accession of the successor could not occur, and that it was impossible for society to regain order. The putrefaction of the corpse was a source of defilement, but at the same time it played a positive function in the fate of the spirit of the dead, in the stability of society, and in the succession to imperial authority of the new emperor.

Earlier, we touched on Empress Jitō's transfer of the capital from Asuka to Fujiwara in the eighth year of her reign. With the move of the capital, the system of a new palace for each new emperor, which had been observed until then, was discontinued. The political basis for the system of one palace for each generation of emperor had been connected with the death of the sovereign (decomposition) and the birth of the new sovereign (new order). At the time, the conclusion of the *mogari* period in the case of emperors tended to occur from the ninth month to the twelfth month. In other words, when the Daijōsai ceremonies were held, the *mogari* rituals for the remains of the previous emperor were ended and burial was performed. The decomposition of the remains of the previous emperor reached its climax, and through this, preparations for the reception of the new order (birth of the emperor) were completed. In fact, it had been customary for the *mogari* shrine of the emperor to be constructed in the south court of the palace, and this was at the same time the site of the Daijōsai ceremonies, which were closely associated with the accession rites.

With the shortening of the *mogari* period and the adoption of cremation, however, thinking concerning the decomposition of the remains underwent a fundamental change. This is because the idea of

gradually bringing about a revival or return to life of the spirit of the dead or the order of society came to be rejected. This change was anticipated by Jitō's transfer of the capital to Fujiwara and by the adoption of cremation for Jitō, Monmu, Genmei, and Genshō. With these changes, the system of each emperor constructing a new residence collapsed, and Buddhist ideology rapidly permeated the rituals of the imperial palace. One theme underlying this transition was the division and separation of the accession ceremonies conducted amid the defilement of death, on the one hand, and the purity of the Daijōsai rites, on the other. A second theme was the restriction of the defilement arising from the death of the sovereign to the shortest possible period. In other words, the issue of the elimination of death pollution from the scene of imperial succession was pursued as the highest imperative. As a logical consequence, the path from imperial succession occasioned by death to imperial succession occasioned by abdication came to be followed as a more stable method of transmitting imperial authority. From the construction of a perpetual capital and the practice of imperial succession by abdication there arose the notion of a "single lineage transmitted to all ages," of the generations of emperors as held together in one, direct, linear temporal consciousness. Here, the *ritsuryō* 律令 system was internalized as a particular sense of time. The primitive concept of death and revival through physical decomposition had nurtured, instead, a dynamic, circular sense of time. Macé speaks of a pre-*ritsuryō* "cyclical time" and a *ritsuryō* "linear time."<sup>13</sup> The transition from a sense of time in which each new emperor constructs a new residence to the sense of time of the *ritsuryō* system corresponds, regarding the death of the sovereign, to the shift from the stage of the coexistence with defilement to the stage of separation from defilement.

Detachment from pollution clearly signifies the division of purity and defilement. Further, within the notion of purity and defilement, the dualism of the pure spirit and the defiled corpse was implanted. In other words, the division of purity and defilement was further the division of spirit and body. The phenomenon of decay arising with the death of the sovereign was tied to defilement. Nevertheless, the period of decay and

pollution played an indispensable role in the birth of the new emperor. In other words, decay and defilement fulfilled a positive function regarding the problem of imperial succession. By contrast, the intervention of Buddhism aroused great interest in the revival and resuscitation of the spirit of the dead. It was because of this that cremation was adopted to reduce and minimize the decomposition and defilement arising from the corpse. Moreover, Buddhism introduced a consciousness of the taboo regarding the decay of the corpse and did not possess a worldview that recognized any special value in it. The Buddhist rituals of the Asuka and Nara periods were always unrelated to corpses and were performed in temples that were totally unconnected with physical decay. In other words, the matters of greatest concern for Buddhists were the existence of the spirit liberated from the defilement of physical remains and the working of the spirit.

For example, Tenmu issued an edict less than three months prior to his death in which he declared that he was lying in sickbed, but that he aspired to attain recovery from physical illness through the "majestic power (i.e., "the working of the spirit" *kashikoki mi-tama no fuyu*) of the Three Treasures (Buddha)." The Buddha's majestic power or transcendent powers is referred to with the image of a special manifestation of the spirit (*mi-tama*) harbored within the Buddha. We see here an example of the ritual of *mi-tama furi* regarding the emperor spirit transferred to the majestic power of the Buddha, an object of worship that has been adopted from abroad.

There are a number of examples in *Nihon shoki* in which the "spirit" of emperors and kami is glossed as "*mi-tama no fuyu*," the movement or working of the sacred spirit. For example, the "divine spirit" of the emperor ("Record of Keikō" 景行紀, twenty-eighth year, second month), the "spirit" of the emperor ("Record of Kinmei" 欽明紀, thirteenth year, fifth month), the "trust" in the emperor ("Record of Kinmei," second year, fourth month), the spirit of the gods ("Record of Keikō", fortieth year, seventh month), and the spirit of the imperial ancestors (*Jingū sesshō zenki* 神功・摂政前紀). In each case, there was an expectation of the subjugation of territory or the prevention of disaster

through the exercise of imperial charisma. This was a natural development of the view of spirits that regarded the emperor's spirit as the source of supernatural powers. With the introduction of Buddhism, this tradition gave birth to an overlapping of the charismatic power of the emperor's spirit and the supernatural powers of the Three Treasures.<sup>14</sup>

Above, I have proposed that the foundations for imperial authority in Japan lay in the special structure of the rites of accession and the Daijōsai ceremonies in the ancient period. Further, we have considered the significance and role of the Daijōsai ceremonies within the imperial palace. We have seen that the *mogari* observance that occurred with the death of the sovereign, that is, the decomposition of the remains, was associated with the problem of the defilement of death. Further, we have noted that the process of decay held both positive and negative functions with regard to the birth of the new imperial authority. This involves the problem of the transformation from, on the one hand, the performance of the accession and Daijōsai ceremonies within a gradual transition in death defilement to, on the other hand, the conduct of these ceremonies within a radical division of purity and defilement. The process of this transformation appears in typical form, as we have seen, between the death of Tenmu and that of Shōmu. The period linking Tenmu and Shōmu includes the reigns of the empresses Jitō, Genmei, and Genshō, whose common intention we cannot ignore. Nevertheless, the trend is given clear outline when viewed with Tenmu and Shōmu as poles. Through the systematization of the mechanism of the radical division of purity and defilement in the accession and Daijōsai ceremonies, the emperor's spirit came to be all the more sharply objectified, and to enter prominently into people's consciousness as the fundamental "agent" in the transmission of imperial authority. The accession and Daijōsai ceremonies were reformulated taking as their single major concern the transmission of the charisma of the emperor's spirit.

## 9. Epilogue: The Emperor System and the Lama Theocracy

At the opening of this chapter, I have taken up the theoretical basis for the transmission of imperial authority in the emperor system, considering the views of Tsuda Sōkichi and Origuchi Shinobu. To return to this question, according to Tsuda, the legitimacy of "one lineage through ten thousand generations" turns on the lofty status of the emperor. By contrast, in Origuchi's view, the sanctity turns on the immutability of the emperor spirit that has been received and passed down through the physical bodies of the generations of emperors.

I believe that the legitimacy of imperial authority, viewed historically, lies both in the emperor's lofty rank and also in the charisma attached to the emperor spirit. At the least, Tsuda's historical perspective must be augmented by Origuchi's view from the stance of religious ethnology. Further, the strong similarities between the Japanese emperor system and Tibetan lamaism must be noted.

In Lhasa, the Potala palace rises above the city like a floating fortress. It was built in the seventeenth century by the fifth dalai lama, but its roots go back to the seventh or eighth century. Built on a rise three hundred meters high, the palace contains a thousand rooms, and the interior is divided into areas for political activities and for religious rites. Viewed from afar, the red walls and white walls of the palace are clearly distinguishable; the red-walled areas are religious facilities, while the white walls indicate spaces for political functions.

Until the present fourteenth-generation dalai lama went into exile in India in 1959, the generations of dalai lamas occupied the sacred precincts within Potala palace. Surrounding his chambers were offices for political functions, but the palace was also the center for religious rites. As a sacred site, a kind of Asian Vatican, it attracted numberless pilgrims. Moreover, in the center of the highest story of the building, mummies of sages, including the generations of dalai lamas, are enshrined in stupas and worshiped. In short, Potala palace was not only governmental center and sacred hall, but also a mortuary hall. It was not only a political and religious center, but simultaneously a mausoleum for the perpetual

preservation of the remains of the dead.

Let us compare this situation with the Heijō and Heian palaces in Japan. Within the imperial palace compound (*daidairi* 大内裏), the emperor's personal residential space (*dairi* 内裏) was surrounded by ministry offices for the conduct of political and religious ritual activities. Regarding religious activities, there was the Shingon'in chapel, the Ministry of Divination (Onmyōryō), and Ministry of Kami Rituals (Jingikan). The site for the funeral rites for the remains of the emperor, however, were built outside the palace. This was to avoid the pollution of death. In this chapter, we have considered the historical changes concerning these practices. When we note that the emperor's remains were carefully placed outside the palace, we see a fundamental difference with the function of the Potala palace in Tibet.

When we focus on the mummification of the remains of the dalai lama and their enshrinement in sacred stupas, however, we are reminded of Chūsonji 中尊寺 temple in Hiraizumi 平泉. At Chūsonji, the golden Konjikidō 金色堂 hall was built to manifest the world of utmost bliss in this world, and beneath the central *shumidan* altar stand, the mummies of three generations of Fujiwara—Kiyohira 清衡, Motohira 基衡, and Hidehira 秀衡—are enshrined in coffins. These mummies of the Konjikidō hall are thought to be manifestations of eternal life based on the belief in stupas taught in the *Lotus Sutra*. In this, also, we see similarities with the belief in the stupas of the mummies in Potala palace. In the Japanese emperor system, the remains of the sovereign are placed outside the palace, while in the Tibetan lama theocracy, the remains are taken into the depths of the palace. In this, we see two different ways of handling the symbol of death.

Here, I wish to note the belief that, upon the death of the dalai lama, who occupies the supreme position of authority in both religious and secular spheres, his spirit transmigrates and is newly born in the body of a child. The spirit of the generations of dalai lama is unchanging, and the charisma of this spirit ensures the legitimacy of sovereign authority. Thus, there is a clear contrast between the enclosure of the remains of the dead sovereign in the case of the dalai lama and the

expulsion of the remains from the palace in the case of the Japanese emperor. When we focus, however, on the notion of the rebirth of the spirit, we see the close similarity between these two systems. In this sense, there appears to be a fundamental difference between the autocracies seen in Indian and Chinese civilization and the systems of divine authority seen in Tibet and Japan.

