

Chapter 1. The Collapse of a Popular View of a “Deity Incarnate”

The “Meiji origin theory” for a deity incarnate:

In the first decade of the new century, intellectuals ceaselessly spread the illusion of *arahitogami*, or “deity incarnate” [in order to describe how the emperor should be viewed]. For example, Tachibana Takashi, a renowned journalist, stated in his “Watashi no Tōdai-ron” (*Bungei Shunjū*, June 1999) essay that from the second half of the Meiji era (1868–1912) to the first half of Shōwa (1926–1989), Japan “was an even stranger nation” than North Korea.” He concluded:

Although Kim Jong-il has been almost defied, he is still “shogun sama (honorific title for a shogun)” or “shuryō sama,” and he is not a kami (deity). No one calls him “kami sama” nor worships him. But in the past Japan, an emperor became *arahitogami* (a living kami) and was worshipped as so. The Japanese people were taught from youth that the emperor was a descendant of the kami, and because they were forced to observe ritual worship, most of the Japanese people believed it. Therefore, during World War II, while crying out “Tennō heika banzai (Long live the Emperor),” many soldiers sacrificed their life for the emperor without hesitation. This is something like the Muslim belief that once *Jihad* (Islamic holy war) is declared, dying a martyr in a war for Allah takes them to heaven and thus are willing to die without any worries (p. 352, underlining added).

Yamaori Tetsuo, eminent scholar of religious studies, also states that “the kind of modernization of Shinto that began during the Meiji era; namely, a policy of ‘forming monotheism’ that sets the emperor *arahitogami* at the apex” existed (“*Chinju no mori wa*

¹ This is a translation of a chapter from Nitta Hitoshi 新田均. “*Arahitogami*” “*Kokka Shintō*” to *iu gensō*: “*Zettaigami*” wo yobidashita no wa dare ka 「現人神」「国家神道」という幻想—「絶対神」を呼び出したのは誰か. Tokyo: Jinja Shinpōsha 神社新報社, 2014.

naiteiru,” in *Chūō kōron*, July 2000, p. 55) and asserts that a break should be made with such a policy.

Furthermore, the philosopher Umehara Takeshi also remarks that “the spirit of the Imperial Rescript on Education, after all, aimed to make the emperor the absolute kami, to establish dying for the sake of the emperor as the fundamental morality, and to make other morals subordinate to this fundamental one (*Asahi Shimbun*, November 17, 2002).

Komuro Naoki’s opinion differs from those of Tachibana, Yamaori, and Umehara in terms of his standpoint, which is favorable to the past, but Komuro states that what the Meiji government created in order to foster the spirit of equality as a premise of capitalism was “the idea to make an emperor who was the sovereign of the nation the only and absolute kami for the Japanese people, and it was like making the emperor an equivalent of the God of Christianity” (*Tsūkai! Kenpōgaku*, Shūeisha Intānashonaru, 2001, p. 214).

It is difficult to judge which research findings these scholars’ opinions are built on, but it is easy to imagine that the opinion of Murakami Shigeyoshi, who was an authority of “State Shinto” studies, must have been extensively influenced by them. Murakami wrote as follows:

By the establishment of the Constitution of the Empire of Japan, the emperor’s attributes changed from Priest-King, who was a man observing traditions historically formed, to the monotheistic arahitogami (*Tennō no saishi*, Iwanami Shinsho, 1977, p. ii).

Tennō as the absolute kami: an emperor who exclusively held political power in both secular and religious realms, military power, and ritual power, was regarded as a living kami, and called arahitogami or akitsukami. Under the modern *tennō-sei* (emperor system), the fundamental characteristic of the emperor as Priest-King before the Meiji Restoration was replaced with the attributes of arahitogami. The emperor’s characteristics as arahitogami differed markedly from his traditional role, and it was invented after the Meiji Restoration (Ibid., p.151).

The process of making the emperor the absolute being, initiated at the time of the Meiji Restoration, finally reached a point that the emperor became sacred and inviolable as kami by establishing the Constitution of the Empire of Japan. The concept of kami, which was invented as the emperor’s new attribute, was quite different from the concept

of kami built on a shamanism that encompassed Japanese religious practices. This new concept was the same as that of God in monotheism and almost close to the concept of God in Christianity. The idea, to deify the emperor by making him absolute, held by a group of leaders in the modern nation with the emperor system, was strongly influenced by Christianity. The emperor, who became *arahitogami*, was created as the embodiment of the absolute truth and ultimate virtue completely separated from human beings (pp.152–153).

The emperor's existence as *arahitogami* regulated the people's consciousness for life in every part and came to powerfully exhibit both political and religious functions, which was incomparable in modern nations of the world. A war in the name of the emperor was regarded as a 'holy war' in order to shine with the glorious virtue of the emperor to the outside and to realize 'hakkō-ichiu (eight corners of the world under one roof).' In the Empire of Japan, invading other countries was justified as an action to spread the universal values of the emperor as *arahitogami* over the world, and the limitless loyalty of 'self-annihilation' for the emperor and the nation was demanded of the entire people, regardless of wartime or peacetime (pp.155–156).

The doctrine of *kokutai* (national polity) signifies, first and foremost, a claim of the sacredness of the Empire of Japan, which was ruled by the emperor as a kami, having its foundation in a political mythology of the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* that the ancient state had created. Both the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* were classified as Shinto scriptures, and the state power viewed both as the orthodox mythology, and made a series of political mythologies such as the divine descent an important theme for school education. The government ruthlessly suppressed not only criticism against these orthodox Shinto scriptures but also objective studies and even questions about them (*Kokka Shintō*, Iwanami Shoten, 1970, pp.141–142).

The mythology became a fact that should not be questioned. This built the conviction in the supremacy of the national polity over the world and the sense of being a chosen people led by kami, which nurtured a rich soil for exclusive ethnocentrism (pp.142–143).

By going back to the roots of the words that these intellectuals used in their heated arguments during the first decade of the 21st century, we understand that their words are only a repetition of the Meiji origin theory for *arahitogami*, which was discussed a generation before. On the other hand, around the early 1990s, those who developed the argument that we may call the Shōwa origin theory for *arahitogami* appeared among scholars specializing in modern history and sociology.

The Emergence of the Shōwa Origin Theory for *Arahitogami*

Suzuki Masayuki, professor of Kobe University, described in *Kōshitsuseido-Meiji kara sengo made* (Iwanami Shoten, 1993) the so-called *tennō kikansetsu jiken* as “a path toward deification of the emperor,” in which the military authorities first “absolutized the emperor’s authority, which led them to absolutize the army led by the emperor, and then they finally tried to govern the state politics” (p.186).

In addition, Soeda Yoshiya, a professor at Tsukuba University, advanced Suzuki’s view, and stated the following in his *Kyōiku chokugo no shakaishi-nashonarizumu no sōshutsu to zasetsu* (Yūshindō Kōbunsha, 1997):

According to the *Kokutai no hongī* (Monbushō, 1937), the emperor is an *arahitogami*, whereas according to the *Kyōiku chokugo*, or *The Imperial Rescript on Education* [Meiji 23], an emperor is not a kami. At least, in terms of the constitutional monarchy indicated by the Constitution of the Empire of Japan, the emperor was first a monarch whose powers were restricted by the government and parliament; thus, he was not a kami. Upon drafting the Imperial Rescript on Education, Inoue Kowashi decided on the principle that he would not contradict the faith of followers of specific religions or denominations. Under this principle, an emperor could not have been a kami. As already described, after the promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education, the deification of an emperor was enforced in multi-faceted ways. However, it was after the theory of the Emperor as an organ of government was negated that the emperor became a kami from the approved view of the state powers (p. 276; the additional information in square brackets has been supplied by the author of this article).

In short, both Suzuki and Soeda asserted that the process of deifying and absolutizing an emperor by the state started after the Shōwa period. Then, is the “Meiji origin” or “Shōwa origin” theory correct?

I have read various kinds of historical manuscripts of the modern era related to religion and politics of Japan and I have rarely found the term “arahitogami” used in the manuscripts written

during the Meiji period. Therefore, I originally suspected that the term would appear more often much later than the Meiji period, or the idea of the absolute emperor would become dominant. However, I did not yet have a way to support my hypothesis, and I could not clarify the process by which “*arahitogami*” emerged. But, I was asked to compare and examine the descriptions of current textbooks of history for junior high schools, and after I conducted the textbook research, an approach came to my mind. If the government of that period had a view of the emperor which they wanted the Japanese people to hold, such a view should have appeared in the textbooks at that time. Then, if we want to understand changes in the view, we should examine the textbooks for “moral training” and “Japanese history.” Thus, I examined the changes of descriptions of textbooks for moral training and Japanese history, which most of the Japanese people used, while paying close attention to appearances of the terms “*arahitogami*,” as well as “*hakkō-ichiu*,” which had been often mentioned in connection with “*arahitogami*.” I found that descriptions about the emperor in the textbooks for moral training and Japanese history went through three stages of changes, and surprisingly, “*akitsukami*,” interchangeably used with “*arahitogami*,” and “*hakkō-ichiu*” appeared in the final and third stage, which was after Shōwa 16 (1941).

Changes in Elementary School Textbooks for Moral Training and Japanese History

Although I wrote that I investigated the elementary school textbooks for moral training and Japanese history, unified textbooks did not begin to be distributed in the entire country until 1904, when the textbooks were standardized, so I could only examine changes in the textbooks after that happened. I determined that textbooks for moral training had been revised four times, while those for history were revised six times. In other words, historically, there are five editions

of the government-designated textbooks for moral training, and seven for history. When I examined them chronologically by focusing on ways in which the emperor was explained, three stages of changes were observed in the textbooks for both moral training and the Japanese history.

First, the explanation of the first stage after 1904 consists of two theories of *shinson* (divine descent), claiming first that the emperor is Amaterasu's descendant and second that historical Japan persisted due to the emperor's virtue and his subjects' loyalty, or *tokugi* (virtue and loyalty). Below are some examples of these theories (underlining added by the author).

The Emperor as a “Divine Descendant” Theory

Textbook for moral training

Amaterasu Ōmikami bestowed the three imperial regalia upon her grandson Ninigi no mikoto and said to him, “Govern this country Japan.” Ninigi no mikoto's descendant, Emperor Jinmu.... (*Elementary school textbook for moral training for the fourth grade*, 1903, p.1).

The successive generations of emperors from Emperor Jinmu are all his descendants. The presence of the unbroken line of emperors from time immemorial is unparalleled in the world (*Ibid.*, 2).

Textbook for Japanese history

Amaterasu Ōmikami is our emperor's ancestor (*Elementary school textbook*, vol. 1, 1903, p.1).

The “Virtue and Loyalty” Theory

Textbook for moral training

The successive generations of emperors loved their subjects, and their subjects wished for prosperity of the imperial household (*Elementary school textbook for moral training for the fourth grade*, 1903, pp.45–46).

The successive generations of emperors loved their subjects as if they were their children, and our ancestors all respected the imperial household and devoted themselves to the emperor and the country with loyalty and love (*Elementary school textbook for moral training*, vol. 5 for children for the fifth grade, 1911, pp.1–2).

Textbook for Japanese history

In this way, our country gradually enhanced its national prestige in the world and finally reached a position where it was able to be compared with other great powers in the world. This was achieved by our emperor's greatest virtue and the people's selfless loyalty and devotion to the country. Moreover, this was solely due to the fact that the successive generations of emperors from time immemorial were virtuous, merciful, and always concerned with the national prosperity and the people's well-being, and that the people also devoted themselves to their emperor and country (*Elementary school textbook for the Japanese history*, vol. 2, 1910, pp.97–98).

Next, upon the second stage, in addition to the “divine descendant” and “virtue and loyalty” theories, the *kazoku kokka* (nation as family) theory began to be narrated, claiming that the emperor is a parent while his subjects are like his children. This happened after 1921.

The “Nation as Family” Theory

Textbook for moral training

It has been a little over 2580 years since Emperor Jinmu's enthronement. During these years, our country has centered on the imperial house and has been flourishing, united as one big family. The preceding emperors have cherished their subjects, like their own children, while we subjects have revered the emperor as our parent and devoted ourselves to the country and emperor with loyalty. Although there are many countries in the world, there is no other country like Japan which has the emperor unbroken for ages eternal and where both the imperial house and its people are united (*Elementary school textbook for moral training*, vol. 5, for children, 1921, pp.1–2).

Textbook for Japanese history

For the enthronement ceremony at the *shishin-den*, Emperor Taishō stated in his imperial rescript: “the emperor of an unbroken line since time immemorial has inherited the three imperial regalia and nurtured his people. His subjects have served the imperial court with loyalty over the generations. The subjects' loyalty as well as feelings between the emperor and his subjects, like father and son, have formed the national polity of our country, which is unparalleled in other countries.” His words are highly respectable (*Elementary school textbook for the Japanese history*, vol. 2, 1921, pp.146–147).

When the third and final stage appeared, in addition to the “divine descendant,” “virtue and loyalty,” and “nation as family” theories, both “*arahitogami*” and “*hakkō-ichiu*” theories began to be narrated. Precisely speaking, “*arahitogami*” began to be used after 1941, while the term “*hakkō-ichiu*” after 1943.

The Emperor as “Arahitogami” Theory

Textbook for moral training

The Emperor whom we venerate as kami is Amaterasu Ōmikami's descendant and governs the country, keeping Amaterasu's great heart in mind (*Elementary school textbook for moral training*, vol. 6, 1939, p. 5).

There is no parallel example in the world in terms of the way we have established our country, revering the emperor as kami and respectfully considering the imperial household to be the head family of the Japanese people (Ibid, p.6).

We Japanese people revere the Emperor as *akitsukami* and humbly accept the imperial family as the head of Japan (*Elementary school textbook for moral training*, vol. 3, 1943, p. 92).

Textbook for Japanese history

Being recipients of the Emperor's great virtue, we have venerated the Emperor as both *akitsukami* and the father of Japan, and have been loyal to him (*Elementary school textbook for Japanese history*, final volume, 1941, pp. 178–179).

Being recipients of the Emperor's blessings, the people of Japan have revered the Emperor as *akitsukami* and as the father of the country and have been loyal to him (*Elementary school textbook for Japanese history*, final volume, 1943, p. 184).

The “Hakkō-ichū” Theory

Textbook for moral training

Now Japan attempts to righteously lead the people of the world by following the kami's great heart at the time Japan was created (*Elementary school textbook for moral training*, vol.1, 1942, p. 9).

Our great Japan is a country that values morality and loyalty. Japan intends to create a bond among the people of the world, to thrive together, and to enjoy together in order to create world peace. This spirit has permeated the country and remained unchanged since the origin of the country.... When Emperor Jimmu founded the capital in Kashihara of Yamato, he said: “I shall cover the eight directions and make them my abode” and spread the imperial ancestor Amaterasu Ōmikami's great heart. Keeping her great heart in mind, the subsequent emperors governed the country in order to influence the world by the imperial virtue (*Elementary school textbook for moral training*, vol. 3, 1943, pp. 96–97).

Textbook for Japanese history

Soon Emperor Jinmu founded a capital in Kashihara at the foot of Mt. Unebi and, with his intention to spread Amaterasu Ōmikami's heart, said: "I shall cover the eight directions and make them my abode (*Elementary school textbook for Japanese history*, vol. 1, 1943, p. 12)."

Based on these changes in descriptions in the elementary school textbooks, at least two things can be said. First, it is likely that the concepts "*arahitogami*" and "*hakkō-ichiu*" were not taught during the Meiji period, but were a result of certain social changes that caused those concepts to appear in the textbooks from the 1920s. Second, considering the fact that, although the theory of the emperor as "divine descendant" had been taught for a while, the "*arahitogami*" theory was newly introduced after 1931, there seems to be a difference between the ideas of the emperor as "divine descendant" and "*arahitogami*."

In a related episode, the Deputy Grand Chamberlain Kinoshita Michio found fault in the occupation authority's draft of the Emperor Shōwa's [Emperor Hirohito] declaration that he was an ordinary human being, because it denied the idea of "the emperor as a divine descendant." He thought it absolutely unacceptable and proposed an amendment to replace the part in question with a denial of "the emperor as *arahitogami*," with the Emperor Shōwa's permission (Kinoshita Michiko *Sokkin nisshi*, Bungei Shunjū, pp. 89–90). Kinoshita's proposal for this amendment was accepted, and this resulted in the "humanity declaration" of the Emperor Shōwa, negating "the emperor as *arahitogami*." This suggests that if there were no difference in meaning between the ideas of the emperor as "divine descendant" and "*arahitogami*," Kinoshita's intention in making the amendment would have been inconceivable.

This leads us to the following questions: what were those social changes that influenced the

changes of the textbooks; and what was difference between the “divine descendant” and “*arahitogami*” theories. Just viewing the textbooks will not bring us these answers. And so, the questions have to be explored by expanding our view and examining how the government dealt with the matter of the basis for imperial rule in terms of policy for education, and how such governmental efforts were related to the movement of social thought over time. These are examined here in four periods:

- (1) From the beginning of the Meiji period to the promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education
- (2) From the promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education to World War I
- (3) From World War I to the Manchurian Incident
- (4) After the Manchurian Incident

Before entering deep analysis, two aspects are provided as additional explanations on the textbooks. The first one is about “*hakkō-ichiu*,” the description of Emperor Jinmu ascending the throne in the palace of Kashihara and becoming the first emperor in Japan, which continued to appear in the Japanese history textbooks from 1904. However, in 1943, his words that “I shall cover the eight directions and make them my abode” from the imperial edict at his enthronement were first introduced and an interpretation of “*hakkō-ichiu*” appeared as the diplomatic policy toward the world.

The second one is about the phrase “the land of the kami,” which former prime minister Mori Yoshiro (b. 1937) uttered in 2000, causing a dispute. In fact, it was in 1940 that this word appeared in both the elementary school textbooks for Japanese history, and in the elementary

school textbooks for moral training.

I will explain a little further. Concerning the textbook for Japanese history, the textbook of 1904 described the wind, which had blown at the time of the Mongolian Invasions, as simply “big wind,” and similarly it described Kitabatake Chikafusa as a loyal retainer who had devoted himself to the Southern court. However, in the textbook of 1934, “big wind” was corrected as “kamikaze (divine wind),” and in the textbook of 1940, Chikafusa was described as the author of the *Jinnō Shōtōki* (the Chronicles of the Authentic Lineages of the Divine Emperors) where he explained that “Japan is the land of the kami.” This is the first example of the term “the land of kami” being introduced in a school textbook. (In connection with this, it is around this time when the proclamation of *tenjōmukyū* (as eternal as heaven and earth) [uttered by the deity Amaterasu to her grandson] began to appear in the opening of the school textbooks.) Furthermore, in the textbook of 1943, the first chapter was entitled “the land of kami;” the headline of the passage on the Mongolian Invasions became kamikaze, and a passage appeared stating that “the reason why this large difficulty was able to be overcome was absolutely attributed to Japan being the land of the kami.”

Similarly, in the case of the elementary school textbook for moral training, “the land of the kami” was first introduced in *Yoikodomo*, vol. 2 in 1941: “Japan is a country of righteousness and pureness, and the only land of kami in the world; Japan is a country of righteousness and high spirits, and the shining and great country.” Also, in a textbook for moral training (vol. 2, 1942), the article on Kitabatake Chikafusa was entitled “Japan is the land of the kami,” while in another textbook for moral training (vol.3 of 1943), the following passage came to be written: “Japan as the land of the kami has existed since the time before Japanese history was orally narrated or written down.”

Chapter 2. From the Beginning of the Meiji Period to the Promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education

A Bitter Experience During the Beginning of the Meiji Period

Shortly after the Meiji Restoration, it was thought to be an urgent matter for all Japanese people to feel unity with the state, feel unity as a nation, and have loyalty to the state in order to maintain independence while confronting Western powers. Thus, a movement to educate the people developed, one which we can call a movement to form the “consciousness of the nation” (*kokumin ishiki*). It placed primary importance on Shinto, and secondary importance upon Buddhism and Confucianism in the government’s great promulgation campaign (*taikyō senbu undō*). This happened from 1872 to 1875 during the Meiji period (1868–1912). The priests and monks who were engaged in this education movement were called *kyōdōshoku* and they educated the people according to three standards of instruction (*sanjō kyōsoku*), which were general principles for educating the people: “to revere the deities and love the state;” “to clarify heavenly principles and the righteous path of men;” and “to humbly serve the emperor and observe the will of the court.” They educated the people accordingly.

However, a dispute occurred at Daikyōin, which was established as both a “research institution of education” and “facility for preaching to the people” for both Shinto and Buddhist priests. Daikyōin was located at Zōjōji Temple in Tokyo, and the government established an altar within it, where three deities of creation (Amenominakanushi no kami, Takamimusubi no kami, and Kamimusubii no kami, who appear at the beginning of the *Records of Ancient Matters* (*Kojiki*)) and Amaterasu Ōmikami were enshrined. Then, the government compelled the Buddhist monks to worship them as well. As a result, Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land Sect), which

did not believe in worshipping Shinto deities, opposed such an order, and initiated a movement to leave Daikyōin in order to start preaching on their own. This was called the *Daikyōin bunri undō* (movement to separate from Daikyōin). This dispute continued for more than one and a half years, but, in the end, the government accepted the True Pure Land Sect's position. Not only was their independent teaching allowed but the Daikyōin was also terminated, and the collaborative missionary work of Shinto and Buddhism ended with it (although other Buddhist sects did not necessarily oppose the collaborative missionary work).

This incident became an important lesson to leaders in government who were involved in religion and education. At the time of this dispute, the foundation of the government had become unstable due to a disagreement on whether to launch a punitive expedition against Korea (*Seikanron*). The policy to educate the people, instead of uniting the nation and supporting the government, brought confrontation and split the world of religion, and this made the government deeply concerned. Officials learned the hard way that it would be troublesome for them to clumsily get involved in issues relating to the teaching of religion.

There is an interesting document which was drafted by Shimaji Mokurai in his position as a leader of the Honganji school of the True Pure Land Sect (Nishihonganji) and submitted by the head priest of Nishihonganji Ōtani Kōson to Chief Minister Sanjō Sanetomi. This document states that “as we adore the Emperor, it is natural to worship the imperial ancestral deity Amaterasu Ōmikami, but the three gods of creation is a doctrine created by followers of Shinto. A single person cannot believe in two religions, so as the True Pure Land Sect, we can never accept it.” What I thought was interesting is Shimaji's words at the beginning, saying that because Amaterasu Ōmikami is the Emperor's ancestor, he respects her. It is not that he respects the Emperor because he is a descendant of Amaterasu Ōmikami, but that he also [in addition to

respecting the emperor] has to respect Amaterasu Ōmikami because she is the Emperor's ancestor. The government recognized the claim of the True Pure Land Sect and allowed them to separate from the Daikyōin, and this would have a significant impact later.

The Meaning of the Theory Claiming the Emperor as the Divine Descendant

Before moving to the late 1870s and early 80s, let us examine what view of the Emperor was introduced to the people in the early years of the Meiji period. We can understand it from a book of commentaries on the three standards of instruction at that time (Miyake Moritsune, *Sanjō kyōsoku engisho shiryō shū*, vols. 1–2, Tokyo: Kinseisha, 2008). According to these texts, many phrases referring to the Emperor as Amaterasu Ōmikami's descendant using terms such as “*shinson*,” “*shinin*,” and “*shinei*” often appeared. Among these phrases, some examples stated that as the Emperor was “*shinson*,” he was to be revered as an “*arahitogami*,” or a living deity.

On the other hand, though, it is noteworthy that there are many examples explaining that “the Japanese people are also descendants of kami.” For instance, according to a book of commentaries by the Kogi sect of Shingon Buddhism, “the people are deeply aware of their identity as divine descendants and never disrespect their ancestral deities to this day.” Similarly, a book of commentary of the five sects of True Pure Land states: “Our people are also the people of Imperial Japan and the divine descendants.” The *Sansokukyō no shōkei*, written by Kanagaki Robun in July of 1873, clearly explains it for a general audience:

The Emperor of no other country but ours is the descendant of the Sun Goddess or the enshrined deity of the Ise Grand Shrine; thus, there is no higher status than his, and he is the Emperor of the eternal imperial line who is allowed by heaven to govern Japan. Although we are inferior to the Emperor, because we were born in the land of deities

(*kami*), our ancestors were also the deities who served Amaterasu Ōmikami. While comparing to paper [also pronounced *kami*] of high quality made from mulberry trees, we are lower like tissue paper, but the ordinary paper of Asakusa is still paper [deities]. Thus, those who do not worship their ancestors go against heaven, and are devils and heretics.

Considering these examples, in terms of the theory that the Emperor was “*shinson*,” the difference between the Emperor and ordinary people lies in whether he or she was the descendant of Amaterasu Ōmikami or other deities, and there was no difference in a respect that both the Emperor and the people in general are descendants of deities. Therefore, in this discussion, “deification” due to being the descendant of deities was insufficient to make the Emperor an absolute being.

If one reads mythology in a straightforward manner, it depicts the order of heavenly deities centered on Amaterasu Ōmikami, then the descent to earth of Ninigi no mikoto, the grandson of Amaterasu, the creation of earthly deities and the organization of their descendants, so one should not be surprised at the emergence of the idea that the Emperor and the nation are no different in terms of their commonality as the divine descendants, no matter which deity is considered superior. Before the next section begins, it should be mentioned that after the mid 1890s, the theory of the people as “*shinson*” continued to be used in commentaries on the “Imperial Rescript on Education,” where the term frequently appeared.

The Lesson of the Pantheon Dispute (*Saijin Ronsō*)

In 1881, when the democratic movement reached a peak, the government was concerned by internal disputes within Shinto. After the termination of the Daikyōin, an institution called the Office of Shinto Affairs (*Shinto Jimukyoku*) was established for Shinto proselytizers to conduct

missionary work, and a dispute took place on whether Ōkuninushi no kami should be enshrined there. The details will be omitted here, but this dispute became so great that it ended up splitting the domain of Shinto into two: the Izumo faction, which demanded Ōkuninushi no kami be enshrined, and the Ise one, which opposed it. Because they could not solve the dispute within the domain of Shinto, the government was brought in to make a judgement, and, in the end, in February of 1881, an imperial decision brought the dispute to a close.

As a result of this dispute, many officials were concerned that if the government continued to allow the Shinto priests to freely conduct missionary work, there would be a risk of similar internal disputes in Shinto, and if that happened, it might weaken the authority of the enshrined deities of the state. This made the government decide in January of 1882 to ban senior priests from proselytizing or conducting funeral ceremonies. This divided Shinto priests into two groups: Shrine Shinto, which engaged in rituals, and Sect Shinto, which engaged in proselytization and funeral ceremonies. This incident also gave a lesson to the officials of the government that when they were directly involved in theological aspects of Shinto, they risked unintentionally undermining the authority of deities, which might then undermine the Emperor's authority.

The Ideas in the Constitution and the Imperial Rescript on Education

Inoue Kowashi, who was deeply interested in religious policies from early in the period, clearly articulated the lesson from experience that occurred in the first half of the Meiji Period. At the time of drafting “the Imperial Rescript on Education,” he stated in an opinion submitted to Prime Minister Yamagata Aritomo in June of 1890 that: “Words to worship and respect deities should

be avoided in the Imperial Rescript on Education because such words will soon become seeds for religious disputes,” and “[t]here should be no such words that please one sect and anger another.”

These words show that the primary concern of Inoue Kowashi, a central figure in drafting the Meiji Constitution as well as the Imperial Rescript on Education, was exploring a placement of the Emperor that would satisfy most of the people. In his “Dai nihon teikoku kenpō happu no chokugo,” he included the following in the conclusion on the February 11, 1889:

Looking back, my ancestors and ancestral deity established this country for eternity with the support of their subjects. This is thanks to my ancestors’ great virtue and their subjects’ loyalty and braveness; thus, the magnificent history of the country with the love for the country and the public has been preserved.

Here, Inoue showed a historical consciousness that saw the wonderful history of the nation—what it might be more appropriate today to call a “story”—as the result of a collaboration between the imperial ancestors’ virtue and their subjects’ loyalty, which formed the essential framework of the nation. Moreover, he suggested the fundamental structure of the state aimed to make it prosper through maintaining the collaboration based on the mutual respect of the imperial ancestors and those of their subjects. In short, Inoue’s main point was to sustain the narrative of “the history of collaboration between the Emperor and the people” by showing reverence toward each other’s ancestors.

Inoue, whose framework formed the greatest common factor in the nation’s reverence for the Emperor, must have thought that what was built upon this framework as the political system was “the Meiji Constitution,” and the people, who should make the Constitution function, were shown the necessary virtues in the “Imperial Rescript on Education.” Because of that, he drafted at the beginning of “Imperial Rescript on Education:”

Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting, and have deeply and firmly implanted virtue; Our subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Empire, and herein also lies the source of Our education.

Inoue recognized the same framework of “the Meiji Constitution” as the “fundamental character of Our Empire” and situated it as the origin of education.

The Basis of the Relationship between the Emperor and His Subjects

What should be noted here is the fact that Inoue found the basis and result of the fundamental framework of the state in “the magnificence of the national history.” I think he found his answer to the question of a lesson he had learned from the experience of making policies since the first year of the Meiji period. In other words, Inoue, through establishing the foundation of the reign of the emperor on the basis of physical (historical) things, attempted to avoid causing dispute on metaphysical matters such as religion or philosophy that would involve the emperor or government in such disputes.

Looking at it this way, one could say “that’s not right, because phrases such as “our ancestors and our beliefs” and “our imperial ancestors and our beliefs” clearly show that Japanese mythology has been made the foundation, and there would be no way that Inoue considered other religious groups.” The possible counter argument is based on the interpretation of the word “my ancestral deity” as “Amaterasu Ōmikami.” It is true that Murakami Shigeyoshi said in the past that these words are based on myths and “a specific religious perspective” is expressed, and due to this, “State Shinto” arose out of the Imperial Constitution and the Rescript on Education as a

system of thought.

Today, the expression “*kōso* Amaterasu Ōmikami” is commonly used; thus, from the viewpoint of present-day common knowledge, the “ancestral deity” of the Imperial Rescript on Education signifies Amaterasu Ōmikami. However, in the case of the terminology used in general during the Meiji Period, it was the term “*tenso*” that was common to signify “Amaterasu Ōmikami.”

For those readers who are not convinced by the usage of terminology, there is another example. Soon after the promulgation of the Imperial Rescript on Education, the Ministry of Education decided to create a book of commentaries, and requested a professor at Tokyo University and the philosopher Inoue Tetsujirō to prepare it. Upon receiving this request, Inoue drafted it and explained in the draft that the term “*kōso*” used at the beginning of the Imperial Rescript on Education means “Amaterasu Ōmikami,” and “*kōsō*” means “Emperor Jinmu.” In other words, Inoue Tetsujirō tried to explain the meaning of “*kōso kōsō*” based on the theory of the Emperor as “shinson.”

However, Inoue Kowashi presented a different opinion, pointing out that “in the context of building the country, *kōso* refers to Emperor Jinmu while *kōsō* refer to successive emperors in praise of them, which should not be misunderstood” and demanded a correction (Inada Shōji, *Kyōiku chokugo seiritsu katei no kenkyū*, Tokyo: Kōdansha, p. 345). Whereas Tetsujirō interpreted “*kōso*” as Amaterasu and “*kōsō*” as Emperor Jinmu based on the theory of the Emperor as the divine descendant, Kowashi asserted that in the case of explaining the establishment of Japan, “*kōso* should refer to Emperor Jinmu while *kōsō* should refer to the successive emperors based on the theory of “*tokugi*,” or virtue and duty.

Inoue Kowashi also stated the following:

After the splendid achievement of Emperor Jinmu and the successive emperors of the past few thousand years, the greatness of the nation's virtue and duty is that they are loyal to their Emperor and dutiful toward their parents; this has become so great it is now the unique basis of the education of our country. Therefore, education should be pursued according to the history and customs of the country. This is the way of education for the people (underlining added. Ibid., p. 349).

These sentences show that Inoue Kowashi placed the basis of both the Meiji Constitution and Imperial Rescript on Education upon not “mythology” nor “age of kami” but “history” and “virtue and duty” after Emperor Jinmu’s establishment of the country.

With this fact in mind, when one reads *Dainihon teikoku kenpō gige: Kōshitsu tenpin gige* by Itō Hirofumi, which is a book of commentary of both texts drafted by Inoue Kowashi), one should notice that the three terms “tenso,” “shinso,” and “sosō (an abbreviated form of “kōso kōsō”)” were used as words signifying ancestors of the Emperor, and that distinctions were made among them: “tenso” meant “Amaterasu Ōmikami,” “shinso” meant “Emperor Jinmu,” and “sosō” referred to the successive emperors after Jinmu.

However, just because Inoue established the basis of the relationship between the emperor and his subjects in “history,” it is not necessarily the case that his view had nothing to do with “mythology.” Inoue’s specific assertion on the reign of the emperor is famous, because he said that it was not the private reign of the premodern era, or *ushihaku*, but a public reign of the modern era, or *shirasu*. Itō Hirofumi’s *Kenpō gige*, originally drafted by Inoue, explains it in the following way:

Shirasu means nothing but the righteousness of the emperor’s reign. Certainly, the successive emperors valued the work assigned by the heaven as a mission, and that the

emperor's virtue was to reign over the people, which is not private work to serve his family. This is the foundation of the Meiji Constitution (Iwanami Bunko, p.23).

Inoue was inspired by the words in “the mythology of the transfer of the land by Ōkuninushi no kami,” which he mentioned in his lectures and recorded in his personal writings. Also, in the official commentary of the Meiji Constitution, *Kenpōgige*, the four ancient passages were cited as proof of the emperor's reign as “shirasu:” “the oracle that is as eternal as heaven and earth,” “Yamato Takeru's words,” “Emperor Monmu's edict at the time of his enthronement,” and the “imperial rescripts of the successive emperors.”

Thus, Inoue regarded both mythology and history as the base of his view when he spoke about the characteristics of the emperor's reign. However, he did not use the mythology as the foundation when he spoke about the emperor's reign itself.

As for “the Imperial Rescript on Education,” Inoue asserted that those who were in charge of it should carefully consider not only its content but also the way of being publicized and enforced. As he placed an importance upon an issue of freedom of thought, Inoue suggested that “the Imperial Rescript on Education should be publicized not as an imperial edict that is legally binding, but as the Emperor's literary work for the public. This view was supported by the government, and “the Imperial Rescript on Education” was publicized not as the Emperor's official document along with an attached paper showing the ministers who signed onto it, but as the Emperor's social writings without mention of the ministers and without having any legal obligations. However, the Imperial Rescript on Education eventually gained absolute authority as the Emperor's direct words free from the intervention of ministers.