

## Questioning the Emperor System in the National Diet

by Yasuko Takemura

Yasuko Takemura, Upper House Diet member from Hokkaido, questioned the Upper House Budget Committee on May 21, 1990 concerning the use of public funds for the enthronement ceremonies of Akihito in November this year (Sokuino-rei and Daijosai). The following is a translation and summary of her inquiries and the responses offered by government officials.

**Takemura:**

Regarding the government statement of December 21, 1989, what are the Sokuino-rei and Daijosai ceremonies, and how did you make these determinations?

**Mr Sakamoto** (Minister of State Affairs):

On September 26, 1989, a preparation committee was set up with the Chief Cabinet Secretary as Chair. The 15-member committee met four times to discuss what ceremonies should be performed, considering both guidelines of the Constitution and traditions of the imperial family. The findings were reported to the Cabinet on December 21, 1989.

There will be three ceremonies related to the Sokuino-rei. First is the public proclamation of the Tenno's enthronement before the attending delegates from Japan and foreign countries. Second will be the celebration march and third the banquet. There will be 2,500 delegates invited to the proclamation and 3,400 at the banquet.

The Daijosai is rooted in the old traditions of Japan's rice-farming culture. After the Sokuino-rei, the Tenno will offer new rice to Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess and origin of the imperial line, as well as all other gods. Following imperial tradition, the Tenno will eat rice with the gods and pray for the safe and abundant harvest of the five different rice grins.

Since the ceremony is religious in nature, some feel that the Daijosai should not be a national affair. This, however, is the most important ceremony for succession to the imperial throne. Thus it should be in the national interest, and the government should facilitate it in any way possible. This includes paying expenses for the ceremony.

**Takemura:**

Will all related ceremonies be performed by Shinto officiates?

**Mr Miyao** (a government official): These are all religious ceremonies.

**Takemura:**

The government is paying for all expenses related to the ceremonies. Isn't this violating the principle of religious freedom as defined in the Constitution?

**Mr Kudo** (a government official) These are all religious ceremonies.

**Takemura:**

Then all celebrations will be carried out in non-religious ways?

**Mr Kudo:**

Sokuino-rei has no religious character.

**Takemura:** What of Daijosai?

**Mr Miyao:**

The Daijosai will be held at the Imperial Palace on November 22-23. The ceremony will be defined as a tradition of the Imperial Household. Specific plans will be decided later.

**Takemura:**

The Daijosai sounds like a very mysterious ceremony. The Takamikura (Imperial Throne) with its octagonal roof symbolizes the line of succession from Amaterasu. I understand that this is a Shinto ceremony of the Imperial Household. Why then should this be a public affair? Why pay public taxes for these ceremonies?

**Mr Miyao:**

The Preparation Committee concluded that the Daijosai is of a public nature.

**Takemura:**

This is the first time the Daijosai will be conducted under a constitution which proclaims the Tenno as a national symbol (rather than a god in human form). Whatever we decide about this now will set significant precedents for the future. Is it necessary for the Tennō, who claims to be human and not a god, to proceed with this ceremony, the historic purpose of which is to lift him to the level of a god?

**Mr Miyao:**

There are many academic theories concerning the Daijosai. Our understanding is that it is the ceremony during which the new emperor offers new rice to Amaterasu and all shrines, and he also eats.

**Takemura:**

So the Tenno, who claims to be human, needs the Daijosai ceremony. What does the Tenno himself think of this?

**Mr Kaifu** (Prime Minister):

Article 1 of the Constitution states that the Tenno is a symbol of the State, and that his position is based upon the will of the people. The enthronement ceremony is

part of the process for proclaiming the Tenno's status, which is legitimized by the will of the people. Therefore, we solemnly welcome this ceremony.

**Takemura:**

I have asked Mr Shigenori Nishikawa to comment on the government's statement concerning the Sokuino-rei and Daijosai.

**Mr Nishikawa:**

I have been struggling with the issues of separation of religion and state. The Preparation Committee met four times last November. However, by the second meeting, newspapers had already announced the government's position on the Sokuino-rei and Daijosai. I wondered then about the purpose of those meetings. I questioned whether or not the government's position had already been decided before the committee was ever formed.

**Takemura:**

What is your understanding of the role of the Tenno in public activities?

**Mr Nishikawa:**

Article 1 of the Constitution stipulates that the Tenno shall be the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people. His position is derived according to the will of the people with whom resides sovereign power. The government itself has said that national ceremonies should not be of a religious nature. Yet the Daijosai and related ceremonies have not been kept as private matters of the Imperial Household. Rather they have been designated as official ceremonies requiring government facilitation.

The Daijosai, having religious implications, cannot be held as a national affair because this would violate Article 1 of the Constitution. Thus it has been designated as a "public activity" of the Tenno, which does not fall under observance to Article 1.

**Takemura:**

Please give us your understanding of the principles of religious freedom and separation of religion and state.

**Mr Nishikawa:**

The Sokuino-rei and Daijosai have not been publicly discussed by the government as an issue in relation to the constitutional principle of separation of religion and state. The government has, from the beginning, handled this matter with the presumption that the ceremonies would not be judged in violation of that principle. The principle of religious freedom in Japan is necessary in order that we may evaluate what Japan has done in our past to other Asian countries. Religious freedom and separation of religion and state should be discussed within the context of what type of relationships Japan should establish with other Asian countries.

**Takemura** (addressing government officials)

Please itemize for us the total expenses for the ceremonies which the government is asking of the Budget Committee.

**Mr Hashimoto** (Secretary of State):

The Sokuino-rei will cost 1.43 billion yen, related celebrations are 120 million yen, public relations 542 million yen, media recording 427 million yen, administration expenses 428 million yen. The Daijosai will cost 1.83 billion yen, Imperial Household expenses 12 million yen, police security 1.17 billion yen, Foreign Affairs Ministry expenses 981 million yen. The total cost will be 8.12 billion yen (\$54 million).

**Takemura:**

During World War II, more than 18 million people throughout Asia were killed by the Japanese Imperial Army in the name of the Tenno. In these same countries, so many people are presently suffering from poverty. Every day, more than 50,000 children are dying from starvation.

Knowing this reality, it is difficult to understand why Japan will be spending 8 billion yen for the enthronement of the new Tenno.