

## THE EMPEROR OF JAPAN

THE JAPANESE Emperor, being divine, is more than the head of the state. He is the state. Sovereignty is believed by the orthodox to reside actually *in* the person of the Emperor, not in any organ of government. The Emperor and the people are one. Portraits of the Emperor are comparatively rare. By common custom the face is covered with tissue or cellophane.

*Time* magazine published a front-cover portrait of the Emperor in 1936. The editors were asked to appeal to their readers not to handle the magazine upside down, or to place any object on it. The cartoonist William Gropper once caricatured the Emperor in *Vanity Fair*—not very savagely. The Japanese Embassy in Washington immediately lodged an official protest. The Japanese issue of *Fortune*, an admirable job, was suppressed in Japan, not so much for its contents but because on the cover it printed the imperial chrysanthemum, a precious Japanese symbol.

Doctors were not allowed to touch the bodies of the Emperor's father and grandfather, except with silk gloves. The leg-

end is that even the court tailor had to measure the late Emperor's clothes from a respectful distance—which made a good fit somewhat difficult.

Servants in the imperial household purify themselves by special ceremonies before approaching the august presence.

A very distinguished jurist and professor, Dr. Minobe, who had held the chair in government at Tokyo Imperial University for thirty years, lost his job and narrowly escaped assassination because it was discovered that in a book published twenty years before he had referred to the Throne as merely an "organ" of the state.

His Imperial Majesty Hirohito, one hundred and twenty-fourth Emperor of Japan in an unbroken dynasty, was born on April 29, 1901, in Tokyo at 10:10 P.M. He was educated by tutors, in the Peers' School, and on a trip to Europe. He became regent in 1922, when his father, not a strong man, was overcome by illness. In 1924 he married Princess Nagako Kuni, by whom he has five children. On Christmas Day, 1926, Hirohito ascended the throne, and in 1928 he was formally enthroned.

First let us tackle the name. Japan has had only one dynasty in 2,598 years, according to Japanese mythologists and historians; thus no family or dynastic name is necessary. Literally Hirohito, the given name of the Emperor, which is written in two ideographs (symbols) in Japanese, means "magnanimous" and "exalted." The second ideograph in the name, "hito" (exalted), appears in the names of most emperors. Only the first ideograph varies. No one else in Japan may use the syllables "hito" in his name; the law does not forbid it, but implacable custom does. Rumor has it that a peasant in a remote district once named his son "Hirohito"; when he discovered that this was the Emperor's name he killed his family and committed *hara-kiri*.

Immediately an Emperor begins his reign, he chooses another name. This is the name of the reign, while he lives; when he dies, *he* becomes known by this name. Thus the last Emperor, Hirohito's father, was named (at birth) Yoshihito; now he is called "Taisho," the name he adopted for his reign. The present emperor calls his reign "Showa," which means—curiously enough!—"Radiant Peace." After his death his reign will be called the Showa period, and he him-

self will be known, not as Hirohito, but as Showa. Years in Japan are calculated in these periods; 1938 is Showa 12.

Japanese never refer to the Emperor by his name. To do so would be to commit sacrilege.

The term "Mikado" is never used in Japan to identify the Emperor. Such usage of "Mikado" is purely foreign. Literally Mikado means "gate" with an honorific prefix; hence "Gate of Heaven," which is analogous to terminology in our experience, like Sublime Porte. Japanese sometimes use "Mikado" as an indirect way of referring to the Emperor impersonally, as someone in London might as "the Court" to indicate George VI. But he is *never* called "the" Mikado.

Emperors seldom even write their own names; names were not, in fact, used on official proclamations until 1868. Japanese Emperors are not crowned. They simply accede to the succession. There is no crown. The equivalent of coronation is the great festival of enthronement (*Go-Tai-rei*) and the food festival (*Daijo-sai*), held in Kyoto, the old capital, after the accession. These are a combination of secular and religious rites—just as is a coronation in Westminster Abbey—but the religious element is more pronounced.

Three paramount symbols of kingship and divinity play their role in these rites, The Mirror, The Necklace, and The Sword, which the Sun Goddess gave Jimmu as symbols of sovereignty. Of these the mirror is the most sacrosanct, because in it one sees the soul of the sun; even the Emperor is supposed never actually to look at it; in a black box, bound with white silk, it reposes in the great shrine at Ise. A replica of the mirror, however, is kept in that room of the Tokyo palace known as the Kashkidokoro, or place of awe.

The necklace or chaplet, composed of stones—rather like our wampum—is kept in Tokyo. The sword exists only in replica, since the original was “lost” in battle in feudal times. When a new Emperor accedes to the throne, his first privilege is to accept custody of the sword replica, the mirror replica, and the necklace. All three, the supreme holinesses of Japan, go with him to Kyoto for the enthronement; but the *original* mirror never leaves the shrine at Ise, near Nagoya, which is the most hallowed place in Japan. It was put there by an Emperor in the year 3 A. D.

Shinto, the national religion is an extraordinarily difficult concept to define. Recently a government commission spent

three years trying to do so, and then gave up. In essence it is simply worship of Japan—the nation itself. It exists in two forms, secular and theological; all Japanese patriots are believers in Shinto, but they may be Buddhists—or even Christians—at the same time. Its distinguishing mark is a combination of ancestor worship and patriotism.

The Emperor lives to-day in the inner, hidden halls of Kyujo palace in the center of Tokyo, one of the most formidably picturesque buildings in the world. For centuries it was the fortress and castle of the shoguns; the imperial family took it over on being restored to temporal power in 1868.

In summer Hirohito and his family go as a rule to Hayama, a watering place near Kamakura, about thirty miles from Tokyo. Here the Emperor swims (he is an excellent swimmer) and otherwise relaxes. Often he collects specimens of marine biology for laboratory work. His routine of work, his official occupations, are determined by ancient custom and are severely circumscribed. Twenty-one times each year there are ceremonies of worship to conduct. He receives newly accredited foreign ambassadors, and occasionally gives audiences to other distinguished foreigners.