Kami Rituals Seen from the Perspective of “Interruption of Service” (Haimu)

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In this paper I will examine changes in the conception of the monarch and the attitude of the court towards rituals for kami through an analysis of the practice of “interruption of service” (haimu 廃務). While haimu was originally prescribed under the “Regulations for Ritual” as a rite to be carried out in case of solar eclipses or on the anniversary of the death of a monarch or consort (kokki 国忌), starting from the first half of the ninth century it started to be carried out also in occasion of rites for the kami. On the basis of regulations found in the Engishiki, this kind of haimu associated with rites for the kami is thought to have been carried out during the strict purification procedures (chisai 致斎) conducted by the various government bureaux before kami rites. These procedures were not in place from the establishment of the centralized administration system based on the ritsuryō legal codes, but are believed to have been enacted in the Kōnin era (810-824).

In addition, scholars so far have interpreted the rules for officials' attendance in the “Regulations for Kami Rites” as being actively enacted in the case of Kinensai 祈年祭—a rite for the promotion of good harvest conducted every year on the fourth day of the second month—and Tsukinami no matsuri 月次祭—kami rituals performed on the sixth and twelfth month of the traditional luni-solar calendar,—and have thus attempted to see the significance of the distribution of offerings to shrines that these rituals involved through those regulations. However, during the eighth century, the regulations for officials' attendance were not yet enacted, and it is only from the Kōnin era that their practical application was finally pursued. In addition, we have pointed out that at least in the case of the proclamation of the ritual prayers conducted during the Kinensai and Tsukinami no matsuri there was a strong performative aspect conceived to promote the creation of a sense of unity among the officials from the many government bureaux. Under the ritsuryō system, kami rituals were ideally conceived as a moment in which the monarch and their subjects would become one before the kami, with the monarch functioning at the overseer. It can be said that during the implementation of this ideal starting from the Kōnin era, haimu came to symbolize the unity between the monarch and his subjects in the act of praying to the kami. However, this process did not go as planned, and in particular after the rule of Uda tennō (r. 887-897), haimu was discontinued. In its stead, another aspect of the monarch, this time as the leader of the ritual, became more prominent with the inception and popularization
of kami rites carried out as expression of the monarch’s individual belief (gogan saishi 御願祭祀).
In this paper, we have surmised as context for this change, in addition to the systematization of the tennō’s family — which has already been pointed out before, — the establishment of a royal lineage based on a novel understanding of family relations that took root between the second half of the ninth century and the first half of the tenth century. If the primary goal of the ruler’s prayers, as typified by gogan saishi, is the prosperity of his family lineage, they will not require unity between him, and the government officials and all the provinces of the ancient polity. The notion of the monarch as the one who rules the realm in a centralized fashion as the absolute overseer fades away from kami rituals, and in its place we see the establishment of a medieval conception of the monarch, in which he is guaranteed his position by the kami, now understood as religious and transcendent “others.”

Key Words: “interruption of service” (haimu 廃務), the strict purification procedures (chisai 致斎) conducted by the various government bureaux, officials’ attendance in the “Regulations for Kami Rites”, the monarch and their subjects would become one, a medieval conception of the monarch