



A KORERO Report

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SO MUCH has been written and spoken about the position of the Japanese

Emperor in the life and thoughts of his people that there is danger of our picture of Japanese psychology being out of perspective. The Imperial cult, though it can truly be called the national religion, is of comparatively recent growth. It has influenced the Japanese people far less than either the domestic or communal cults. In very early days Japanese society was a collection of clan families. The "heavenly sovereign" was simply the head of a clan. As the clan increased by expansion and absorption, so his authority increased until he was recognized as the head of all. It is almost certain that the idea of divinity being attached to kingship was brought into Japan by the Southern or Malaysian immigration. To the "king" was traditionally attached the right of representing the different Uji or clans before the common ancestor. He was therefore held to have a unique relationship with the gods. In the early eighth century the ruler of the time ordered the compilation of the first official record of the past—the *Kojiki*. He, and he alone, it was to be shown, was in direct line from the divine

ancestors, and so forestalled any rival claimant. Two other functions also rested by tradition in the "king"—that of commander-in-chief of all forces in the field, should united action be necessary, and of deciding when a war involving such forces was to be declared, and when peace was to be made.

The eighth century also saw a marked intensification of Chinese influence, which had made its first strong impression 100 years before. The Japanese were so struck by the splendid culture of China that Chinese manners and customs, methods of administration, and ceremonial were taken over completely without regard for the existing differences in background and circumstances. As could be expected, many breakdowns occurred, particularly in matters of administration. So by trial and error the Japanese learned the art of adaptation rather than of slavish imitation—an art of which they are now past masters.

It was Chinese influence in the court that led directly to the eventual seclusion of the Emperor. The Japanese were fascinated by the stately and complicated ceremonial of the Chinese court. Constantly added to and modified by succeeding Emperors, it became so burdensome that it was impossible for one man to perform both administrative and religious duties. The ruler could appoint a deputy for the former, but he alone could fulfil the latter. So arose the dual role in Japanese government—the Emperor with all the prestige and reverence attached to the office, and a regent or Shogun holding the real authority.

We have seen that the basis of the Shinto religion was the conception of

