

The “Imperial Court” and Meiji Constitutionalism:
The enactment of the 1907 Koshikirei and the debate over issues
pertaining to the commissioner of coronations

by *KOKUBU Koji*

During the late Meiji era, the Imperial Household Research Committee headed by Ito Hirobumi 伊藤博文 drafted laws and ordinances pertaining to the imperial family system. Imperial Ordinance pertaining to state documentary forms (Koshikirei 公式令) enacted in 1907 is one of the most representative laws the Committee was involved in. The present article outlines the process involved in the enactment of this ordinance and examines its impact on issues pertaining to the commissioner of coronations, in order to focus attention upon the emergence of debate over the relationship between the “imperial court” and “provincial offices” during the era of Meiji Constitutionalism and upon the perceptions held by the two entities.

Deputy Governor Ito Miyoji 伊東巳代治, who interpreted the Imperial Household Research Committee’s focus to be one prescribing imperial affairs through a judicial system, worked to reinterpret its affairs in a “constitutional” context by recognizing the existence of ambiguous margins when attempting to categorize matters into those of the imperial court and those of the provincial offices. The Koshikirei was revised to expand the scope of the Imperial Household Ordinance (Koshitsurei 皇室令) further than the Committee’s original draft submitted to the Emperor, leading to the creation of the imperial rescript and the imperial writ documentary forms, in addition to the Imperial Household Ordinance itself.

This enactment process not only gave rise to contradictions between existing imperial ordinances and the Imperial Household Ordinance, but also became the cause of a debate regarding the commissioner of coronations that occurred later on during the early Taisho era. The commissioner of coronations was responsible for state ceremonial affairs, including the Emperor’s enthronement

ceremony and Daijo-sai 大嘗祭, the first fruits festival celebrating imperial succession. Regulations Governing the Accession to the Throne in the Imperial Household Ordinance enacted in 1909 provided that the commissioner of coronations shall be appointed by the imperial court, and in 1913, the commissioner was established through imperial order.

The above official interpretation also stirred debate concerning the relationship between the imperial court and provincial offices, in addition to its form of promulgation. The Diet and the Cabinet, which constituted the “provincial” entity at the time, debated over the positioning of the two entities. The matter was also referred to the Privy Council after the Imperial Household Ministry filed for mediation. Consequently, both parties came to recognize the subtly inseparable nuances between what should be considered “imperial” and “provincial”, which had seemed clearly distinct and in principle contrasting from the time of the establishment of the cabinet system.