

THE ORIGINS OF
GOSHIN'EI (1988)

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1. WHEN THE FIRST PHOTOGRAPHS WERE TAKEN

IN 1872, THE year after he appeared in a commemorative picture taken at the Yokosuka Naval Arsenal, the emperor had his portrait photograph taken in traditional court dress (fig. 1). The following year he had another portrait photograph taken, this time in Western dress (fig. 2a).¹ After these portraits taken in two successive years, a long interlude ensued for reasons that are not clear, and no further portrait photograph—at least, one that is publicly known—was made until 1888. Why did the emperor have a portrait made specifically in 1872 and 1873? Some might argue that this is a matter too trivial to investigate and that there is nothing really remarkable about the emperor having his picture taken. But as long as we are talking about photographs of the emperor, these are not ordinary photographs. Nor were photographs of the emperor ever taken at this time for personal enjoyment or on a whim.

As I have often explained, what was happening was that a gaze belonging to a new era had come in from abroad and reached this particular head of state. Modernity had given birth to that gaze, and from the Himalayas to the remotest Pacific isle, every place in the world was about to be subjugated by it. It may sound like something of an exaggeration, but photography had expanded its field of vision in perfect lockstep with the march of Western imperialism. This was the age when photography started to render even the furthest corners of the world visible. Riffing on what Mallarmé said about everything in the world existing in order to end up as a book, the contemporary

1 [All dates are given according to the Western calendar. The Meiji era began in 1868 (and ended in 1912), so the 1872 photograph of Emperor Meiji was taken in the fifth year of his reign (Meiji 5). The two other portrait photographs discussed in this chapter were taken in 1873 (Meiji 6) and 1888 (Meiji 21).]

American critic Susan Sontag stated that “everything exists to end in a photograph.”² That wave had finally reached the emperor of Japan. From the early days of photography, there was a belief that a photograph was a direct copy of a person. This was not exclusive to Japan. Even among the earliest photographers, however, there were a handful like Kitaniwa Tsukuba, who disliked the Japanese word for photograph, *shashin*, so much that he refused to use it, because he understood that a photograph was not simply a copy [*sha*] of reality [*shin*]. At the same time, it was an indisputable matter of fact that a photograph was an image made directly through contact with something that existed. That was what inspired a sense of quasi-occult suspicion and political trepidation toward photography.

² [Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977), 24.]

As I have mentioned, after the 1872 and 1873 photographs were taken, the Meiji government hardened its stance on portrait photographs of the emperor, making its policy of strictly controlling photographs of the emperor even more rigorous. It implemented a system of exclusive control, forbidding not only the sale of photographs of the emperor (as one might expect) but also the ownership of them. According to contemporary newspaper reports, in 1875 a photographer was fined for reproducing and selling a photograph of the emperor.

Setting aside *nishiki-e* woodblock prints of the emperor, which circulated widely, photographs of the emperor could not be seen in the early days, and the only way to acquire one was to be issued with one through official channels. Over time, this policy of management and control evolved into the *goshin'ei* ritual of worshipping the emperor's portrait. Yet when the first photographs of the emperor were taken, it is unlikely that the governing class yet had a sufficiently clear sense of the political functionality of photography to envisage later developments, such as the ritual worship of *goshin'ei* on national holidays and in the education of subjects.

What, then, was the real motive for taking the emperor's photograph?

First, it can be assumed that there was a need at this early stage for a portrait of the head of state to symbolize sovereign authority to a foreign audience.

The direct trigger was likely a request that Komatsu Seiji, an attendant to the 1871–73 Iwakura Mission to the United States and



fig. 1

Emperor Meiji, photographed by Uchida Kuichi in 1872. Courtesy of the Imperial Household Agency.



figs. 2a & 2b

Emperor and Empress Meiji, photographed by Uchida Kuichi in 1873. Courtesy of the Imperial Household Agency.



Europe, made to the Imperial Household Ministry for a portrait photograph of the emperor. The request was submitted when the mission's vice ambassadors Ōkubo Toshimichi and Itō Hirobumi briefly returned to Japan in February 1872, and was ordered by Iwakura Tomomi, ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary, who had himself remained in the United States. Of course, considering the spread of photography in the early Meiji years, it would not have been unusual for the Imperial Household Ministry to have already had a plan to photograph the emperor in the near future, but no evidence for such a plan exists.

Still, the fact is that, when Iwakura made his request, the Imperial Household Ministry did not have a portrait photograph of the emperor. Nor was one ready by the time Ōkubo and Itō returned to the United States. The Imperial Household Ministry had to promise to send the photograph through Ministry of Foreign Affairs channels as soon as it was ready. *Record of Emperor Meiji*,³ the official history of the reign, says nothing about when Uchida Kuichi photographed the emperor, and the only mention is limited to when the photographs were delivered to the imperial court. By cross-referencing multiple sources, however, a group of scholars led by the science historian Higashino Susumu has worked out that Uchida photographed the emperor in Japanese dress on April 12 and April 13, 1872, and that the reason the portrait was not ready in time for Ōkubo and Itō's departure for the United States in May was because what they wanted was a photograph of the emperor in Western dress, as befitted the head of a modern nation. The scholars state that Uchida photographed the emperor again in May 1872, this time in Western dress, completed the photograph in June, and that it reached Iwakura, who was by then in Great Britain, in August. These facts show that the first proper portrait photograph of the emperor had to be worthy of his image as the head of an independent state.

The photographs of 1872 and 1873 were taken by Uchida Kuichi, who had a studio in a Western-style building in the area of Tokyo then known as Asakusa-daichi. Uchida had an impressive career. Born in Nagasaki, he studied science with the Dutch physician J.L.C. Pompe van Meedervoort and photography with Ueno Hikoma, the so-called founder of Japanese photography. He launched himself

³ [Kunaichō, ed., *Meiji tennō ki*, 13 vols.

(Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1968–1977).]

as a photographer in Osaka in the Keiō era (1865–1868) and took photographs of the shogunate army performing drills; these still survive today. When Shogun Tokugawa Yoshinobu returned to Edo on a warship, Uchida traveled with him in an official capacity, moved to Tokyo, and was so successful that, by 1870, his name was already appearing in *Self-Guided Tour of Various Noteworthy Experts in Tokyo*,⁴ a pamphlet listing Tokyo notables.

In 1872, Uchida took photographs of the emperor and the empress (figs. 2a–b) and then, after an interval, of the empress dowager. In September, he submitted a total of seventy-two photographs. The photographs of the emperor from this period fall into two categories. According to *Record of Emperor Meiji*, “In the one, he wears formal court dress, while in the other he is wearing an informal nobleman’s robe and a gold headpiece,” while seated on a Japanese stool in both cases.⁵ They are full-length portraits of a beardless young man looking at the camera almost face-on.

The following year, in October 1873, because the emperor’s appearance changed when he cut off his top knot, Uchida was asked to photograph him again. On this occasion, the emperor is shown wearing an army uniform of the kind instituted in June 1873 and is seated on a Western chair, with a cocked hat on a side table, but there were a variety of poses within that same mise-en-scène. As far as we know, there is one where he rests both hands on the hilt of his sword and another where he clasps it with one hand. He is presented in three-quarter view, but the portrait is still a full-length one. While the emperor’s appearance was modernized over the course of these two years, the character of Uchida’s photography remained the same, and the emperor is still presented as a young man.

Around the time that the government issued the 1872 portrait photograph to the Iwakura Mission, they also decided to display the emperor’s photograph in all overseas embassies and consulates. The first one was given to Consul General Nakayama Jōji when he returned to his post in Italy at the end of 1872.

Starting in 1873, it became customary to present a photograph of the emperor to visiting foreigners, in particular royalty and heads of state, as well as diplomats stationed in Japan. The exchange of photographs was a symbolic act that signified friendship between

4 [*Tōkyō shosensei kōmyōgata hitori annai.*]

5 [Kunaichō, ed. *Meiji tennō ki*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1969). The emperor wears a *sokutai* in the first photograph and *nōshi* and a *kinkoji* in the other.]

nations and affirmed the equal status of their respective heads of state. From this sequence of events, it seems reasonable to assume that the emperor's photograph gradually began to be recognized as a symbol expressing independent nationhood. The fact is that, from a photograph, one could recognize only that the emperor himself represented a symbol of sovereignty rather than any practical political function. Naturally, this perception of the photograph as a symbol of the nation first came into being within the context of international diplomacy. As long as the emperor himself did not travel abroad, a photograph, without doubt, had to take his place.

As a result of this experience, however, the government—albeit perhaps on an unconscious level—developed a deeper awareness of the political symbolism of photographs and their function as a stand-in for a real person. As a reproducible sign, a photograph can perform a semantic function in a political society. The Imperial Household Ministry and people in government came to understand this in a comparatively short time and, for the period, in considerable depth too. It is perhaps for this reason that interest in portrait photography rose so quickly in court circles.

In 1874, the idea emerged to display at court the painted portraits of the heads of all the countries with which Japan had signed treaties. The government wanted to express the world as a conglomeration of the portraits of the heads of state. Nakayama Jōji, who was stationed in Italy, was put in charge of this project. Nakayama had the idea to have portraits of the emperor and empress created at the same time and hired the Milan-based painter Giuseppe Ugolini to paint their portraits based on the 1873 photographs. Ugolini painted half-length seated portraits based on Uchida's full-length portrait photographs. When Nakayama returned to Japan in October 1874, he brought the portraits with him and presented them to the emperor.

Hearing of the Italian artist's portrait of the emperor, the Western-style painter Takahashi Yuichi enthusiastically petitioned for permission to make a copy in December of the same year. On this occasion, however, his wish was not granted.

In early 1988, an oil portrait of Emperor Meiji was found among the possessions of Ninagawa Noritane (1835–1882) in the Ninagawa family collection in Kyoto. The discovery was announced in August of the same



fig. 3

Yokoyama Matsusaburō, *Emperor Meiji*
(1872), oil painting. Courtesy of Higashino
Susumu.

year, after scholars had examined the painting. The portrait is small and painted on cardboard (fig. 3). On the back is written “M. Yokoyama” in Roman alphabet and “1872” in kanji. Research by Higashino Susumu and other museum personnel has revealed that this portrait is one of those produced in 1872 by Yokoyama Matsusaburō, who was then a leading painter and photographer, at the behest of Ninagawa Noritane who, as a senior official in the foreign ministry, was responding to Ōkubo and Itō’s request. In instructing Uchida Kuichi and Yokoyama Matsusaburō, Ninagawa played a key role in making the 1872 *goshin’ei* and in photographing the objects to be exhibited at the 1873 Vienna World’s Fair. Ōkubo and Itō may have taken this portrait painted by Yokoyama with them in place of the Western-dress photograph of the emperor. At the same time, given that Yokoyama painted a mustache on the still-beardless emperor and the lack of realism, despite Yokoyama’s descriptive abilities, it seems likely that it was painted as an idealized portrait of the emperor. In this regard, we can think of it as a precursor to the 1888 portrait of the emperor by Edoardo Chiossone. Many of the negatives of Yokoyama’s photographs are preserved in the Ninagawa family collection. Among them is a stereoscope negative of a heroic picture of the emperor on horseback that is mentioned in *Record of Emperor Meiji*.

It was around this time that the emperor finally began making imperial tours, with the initial goal for the emperor to appear before the people and present the nation as a unified space. Yet this was also when photography was beginning to have a role as a completely new political symbol, albeit on a small scale. In one sense, the imperial tours may have stimulated demand for the emperor’s photograph, or to put it another way, they perhaps stimulated an expectation for a more symbolic emperor.

Photographs of the emperor were issued in two ways. One involved issuing them to the emperor’s closest advisors, whether politicians or high-ranking bureaucrats. The privilege of receiving a portrait photograph was a measure of one’s proximity to the emperor. The other and more significant way involved issuing the photograph to local government offices.

This wider distribution started in June 1873 with Shijō Takatoshi, the governor of Nara Prefecture. He had applied to the minister of the

Imperial Household to be granted a photograph of the emperor: “When we receive it, we shall place it in a lofty position in government offices at New Year, on the emperor’s birthday, and on other public holidays, because we want prefectural residents and government employees alike to worship it.” This was the starting point of the *goshin’ei* ritual of worshipping the emperor’s portrait. That November, the decision was made to issue the photograph to all prefectures. The issued photograph was on the large side, about 45 centimeters high by 30 centimeters wide, approximately the size now called a “half sheet.”⁶

The following two passages make clear that welcoming the imperial tour and worshipping the emperor’s photograph were similar acts. The first passage comes from a congratulatory speech given by Shirane Tasuke, the governor of Saitama Prefecture, to welcome the emperor during the 1876 Tohoku imperial tour. The second passage is from an article published in the *Nisshin Shinjishi* newspaper on December 5, 1873, reporting on the decision to issue the emperor’s photograph to every prefecture.

It is the task of the monarch to spread peace throughout the land, and it does not seem acceptable for him just to sit doing nothing with his arms folded at court. Without displaying any arrogance, His Majesty has come out on an imperial tour. Surely the people must welcome that.

On the twenty-eighth of last month, the [*goshin’ei*] photograph of His Majesty the Emperor was issued to every prefecture. . . . In past times, the emperor used to reside deep within the Imperial Palace, cut off from his people, who could not worship the Imperial Countenance. . . . Now he has decided to bestow his venerated photograph upon his people in response to the prefectures’ request. We think that the people and the prefectural officials should have the honor of venerating it and be grateful for the imperial blessings of the glorious reign of today.

Both passages express joy that the emperor appears in places where ordinary people can see him and express gratitude for the opportunity

to exalt and worship him. People worshipped the emperor's photograph with the same mindset as when they knelt before the imperial palanquin as it went by on an imperial tour.

The distribution of the photographs was at this point still very restricted. Further, awareness of the functionality of photographs was generally extremely low in comparison with awareness of the effectiveness of imperial tours. But by 1874, when the photograph had been distributed to and displayed in all the prefectural offices, a number of newspaper articles describe how sometimes an endless stream of people gave offerings and paid homage while chanting *banzai*.

It took almost twenty years for the *goshin'ei* to make its way down to the primary school, the very lowest echelon of the state. The expansion in the interim of the distribution of the emperor's photograph has significance as an indicator of the advancement of the political system of the Meiji state.

Aside from the prefectural offices, the armed forces were the other early recipients of the photograph, a circumstance that itself symbolized the emperor as commander-in-chief. Records show that a photograph was issued in 1880 to be exalted and worshipped on the warship *Banjō* in response to a request from the navy's Enomoto Takeaki. Considering that the Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors was issued in 1882, one can see that consciousness of the armed forces as belonging to the emperor was gradually taking shape around this time.

The early policy of the Meiji Restoration was to visualize the emperor, making him visible to the people. Yet within a short time, the possibility emerged of using photographs as a means of conveying the emperor's presence.

The photograph of the emperor thus began to fulfill a twofold political function: as a symbol of sovereignty in overseas embassies and consulates, on the one hand, and as an object of worship for the people through local government offices in Japan, on the other. In the same way, it symbolically depicted a national policy in which the emperor-system nation [*tennōsei kokka*] outwardly existed as an independent state while inwardly cohering around the figure of the emperor.

Widely circulating *nishiki-e* woodblock prints had already made the

emperor a sort of superstar among the citizenry, as I explained earlier. After the early Meiji years, though, this popular medium came to focus more on reporting on the emperor's activities and lost its unique humor and teasing tone in the process. In terms of the imperial image, because photographs could not be taken without permission and were tightly controlled, they suggested the possibility for exercising dominance over the people by issuing a single picture. The shift in symbolic politics away from imperial tours to the issuance of *goshin'ei* correlates with the advancement of the very real dominance of the emperor-system nation.

The phrasing of the congratulatory speech and newspaper article quoted earlier provides a typical example of the sort of language used to support the emperor system. In both cases, the content is irrelevant; the ritualistic style of the language is what is important. One might say that the incantation-like style is itself an ideology. The content did not show the deepest level of lived experience of the people of the time, nor did it convey what politicians and jurists at the apex of society thought about the emperor. But their effect was sufficient in itself. All that was required was a language to swirl on society's surface and establish a pattern for the depiction of ritualistic politics.

In what sort of space did the people live? In the early Meiji years, folk beliefs were much more deeply rooted and vital than faith in the emperor, and the majority of people were poor and far removed from the privilege of being issued a *goshin'ei* portrait. It is extremely difficult to grasp the entirety of this space, which was experienced in a more or less unconscious way. It was not capable of being written down like an ideology or a policy, because it subsumed the natural environment and emotions that lay latent in the old, historic strata of the body. Demotic strata of this kind were obstacles not just to the modernization drive but also to the expansion of the emperor system. In addition to revising the lunar calendar and making public holidays statutory, the Meiji government tried to suppress any folk festivals that survived at the local level on the grounds that they were barbarous. While the people did not completely abandon their old customs, the state's enforcement of emperor worship and its suppression of old folkways were two sides of the same coin, together constituting the politics that integrated the people into the emperor-system nation.

Even a geographer like Shiga Shigetaka recognized that,

functioning as a “great biological principle,” what one might call the accumulation of layers of unconscious experiences, such as the environment, customs, and sensory experience, forged the ethnic characteristics of the Japanese to some extent, and in his role as an armchair politician, Shiga termed these *kokusui*, or “national characteristics.” This *kokusui* was neither science nor the experiences of the people. It was a political ideology.

After Japan emerged from a long period of isolationism, it was Western European modernity that was the most powerful factor in removing the walls that had kept Japan isolated for so long and in opening Japan to other countries, in bringing the age of feudalism to an end, in giving birth to a nation (albeit one that was in a state of absolute immaturity), in developing the education system, in organizing the army, and in putting the country through the whole experience of “civilization and enlightenment” [*bunmei kaika*]. Gradually, Western dress started to spread, replacing traditional costumes, new buildings dotted the landscape, and railways started to operate. Even if the spaces in which people led their lives did not yet change in qualitative terms, they did start to change in terms of what was visible within them.

At some point, a new and unfamiliar gaze, one that was different from that which had formed *nishiki-e* woodblock prints, came into being. Nonetheless, it took several decades for the photograph to wholly displace the *nishiki-e*-based tradition. The wholly surface-layer phenomenon of a shift from the *nishiki-e* gaze to the photographic gaze ultimately provoked a landslide-like change, as big as it was slow, in the deepest layers of experience. While still holding on to their old physical and mental realities, the people had to start living within a new space. Following the impromptu commemorative photograph of the emperor that was taken at one place on one of his imperial visits, the move to taking official portrait photographs of him presaged a change away from such spaces.

At the start of the Meiji Restoration, the strategy for visualizing the emperor was still a classical one, meaning that when it encountered the gaze that was peculiar to modernity, it began to change. The political techniques that functionalized this gaze fully exploited photography as a new symbolic language for the antimodern aim of deifying the emperor.

2. THREE DIFFERENT PHOTOGRAPHS

WHAT WAS MOST strikingly novel about the emperor being photographed was the fact that photographs showed the emperor as a mortal being, a man who lived and died. In *nishiki-e* woodblock prints, he is an immortal protagonist. Yet his being a living being was an undeniable facet of the emperor. Which is why the photographs cannot but express the time when they were taken. The emperor matures and ages, and he changes year by year.

But there are not many portrait photographs of Emperor Meiji. As discussed earlier, three are generally known: the 1872 photograph in traditional court dress, the 1873 photograph in Western costume, and the 1888 portrait that usually comes to mind when people think of Emperor Meiji. *Record of Emperor Meiji* mentions a photograph of the emperor as a heroic figure on horseback, and there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that other photographs were taken. A number of scholars have revealed that the photograph of the emperor on horseback was the work of Yokoyama Matsusaburō and was exhibited at the 1873 Vienna World's Fair. There may also be other pictures that never made it into the public eye. Further, there is in circulation a photograph of the emperor in profile in later life. It, however, was taken at the imperial field headquarters during large-scale military exercises by someone in the General Staff Office's photography department with the emperor's tacit approval, but without drawing notice. This photograph was produced by trimming and altering the orientation of the original image, in which the emperor was looking down. Since

neither of these can properly be called portrait photographs, there is no need to discuss them.

Here it is enough for us to consider the three portrait photographs of 1872, 1873, and 1888.

In the early Meiji years, it was not customary for anyone to have their photograph taken frequently. Even so, for the emperor—the symbol of the nation—not to be photographed for such a long time seems odd. In the intervening time, the once-young emperor grew older, cultivated his leaderly character, and accumulated experience in his official role as emperor, with his appearance changing as a consequence. This leads us to wonder whether the gulf between the real, living emperor and the emperor in the photographs ever became so wide that it caused awkwardness. Sure enough, certain inconveniences did result.

The person who felt the keenest need for a new photograph and felt most anxious was not the emperor but Imperial Household Minister Hijikata Hisamoto. In the section on 1888 *Record of Emperor Meiji* notes:

The emperor does not like having his photograph taken. The *goshin'ei* we now have, starting with the one where he is wearing the old-style French army uniform, were all taken over ten years ago and are not suitable for presenting to foreign royalty and honored guests. The minister [Hijikata] and other officials are put in a difficult spot every time they receive a request.

To probe why the emperor disliked being photographed is a meaningless exercise. The important thing we learn from this account is that, indeed, no official portrait photograph was taken of the emperor after 1873. In that year, he had been obliged to have his picture taken, probably because a photograph of him in Western clothes that put him on par with Western Europe was more desirable than the existing one, with the emperor in traditional court dress.

In subsequent years, until 1888, he wore many different uniforms, as noted earlier, but the change in his appearance was never as great as from 1872 to 1873. The truth, I imagine, is that with no pressing

necessity for a photograph, it was postponed until, before anyone realized it, more than a decade had passed.

One possible reason the emperor was not photographed was that Uchida Kuichi, the Imperial Household Ministry's official photographer, who had been running a flourishing business, died in 1875, at the young age of thirty-one. After that, Suzuki Shin'ichi and Maruki Riyō worked as photographers for the Imperial Household Ministry.

The emperor's close aides felt they could no longer use such an old photograph and that to do so would be a discourtesy when exchanging photographs for diplomatic purposes. Regardless, a new photograph was completed in 1888. It is a dignified portrait of the emperor in the prime of life wearing a military uniform.

It was precisely at this time that the structure of the emperor-system started to develop a strong foundation based upon the establishment of the Meiji Constitution. In June 1888, Itō Hirobumi made a speech to the Privy Council in which he expounded his philosophy with regard to establishing the Constitution. He spoke about wanting to build a modern nation by positioning the national polity [*kokutai*] as the prerequisite for the Constitution, with "one imperial family as the axis of our nation."

Political theorist Maruyama Masao has this to say about Itō's speech on the imperial family as the national axis:

When the confrontation between the disciplined ordering of national life that resulted directly from opening the country and the undisciplined inflow of European thought reached this point, it became necessary to solve the problem by making the very core of national order into a spiritual axis as well.⁷

Maruyama alerts us to the fact that an effort was made to counterbalance the political and cultural fissures provoked by Japan's modernization by focusing instead on the imperial family. That certainly determined Japan's destiny. But there is some ambiguity with respect to the view Itō (who was a sly old fox) himself took of the imperial family, and it is not possible to determine his real intent. His "imperial family as axis" theory can also be understood as a functionalist interpretation of the emperor. Which is why when

⁷ [Maruyama Masao, *Nihon no shisō* [Japanese thought] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 1961), 33.]

it came to establishing the legal position of the emperor in the Meiji Constitution, things were probably more troublesome and complicated than expected.

In the 1888 portrait, the emperor was quite clearly visualized as a head of state. Even more than the understanding of the emperor as the nation's axis in legal terms, this portrait foreshadowed the massive expansion of the emperor's symbolic function within the machinery of domination. Or rather, when it came to the Meiji Constitution, perhaps the questions of legal principle that determined the position of the imperial family were placed within a broad interpretation of the political function of the symbol. In this way, portrait photographs and their treatment gave birth to a form of politics that was invisible but far-reaching.

When you compare the three abovementioned portrait photographs, you find in them political history and three moments in the subject's lifetime; and in each, these are interlinked and difficult to disentangle.

In portraits, as a rule, physical characteristics express the age of the subject, the clothing expresses the subject's role in the social system, and the subject's bearing reveals the fullness of their experience. The photographs of the emperor are no exception in terms of their iconographic meaning. A comparison of the three portraits clearly shows that the emperor's visible image changed and its functions as a political icon developed over time.

In 1868, the first year of the Meiji era, British diplomat Ernest Satow had an audience with the emperor, who was still little more than a boy, at a temporary residence maintained during his imperial visit to Osaka. Satow describes in minute detail the appearance of the emperor, who was still living within a traditional world:

As the Mikado stood up, the upper part of his face, including the eyes, became hidden from view, but I saw the whole of it whenever he moved. His complexion was white, perhaps artificially so rendered, his mouth badly formed, what a doctor would call prognathous, but the general contour was good. His eyebrows were shaven off, and painted in an inch higher up. His costume consisted of a long black loose cape hanging

backward, a white upper garment or mantle and voluminous purple trousers.⁸

Compared with this, the appearance of the emperor had changed significantly even in the 1872 portrait photograph in traditional court dress. His eyebrows are no longer plucked because he had achieved his majority, so his face appears quite natural. Because of his clothing, he looks less like a young nobleman and more like a young monarch whose very body symbolizes the restoration of imperial rule. Satow's description of the emperor's appearance accords with the photograph.

The emperor's appearance had changed still further by the 1873 photograph one year later. First of all, he had begun to cultivate a light beard on his upper lip and his chin. The goal may have been to enhance his jawline, which Satow had commented on, but there is more to it than that. Sasaki Suguru, who in his essay "The Formation Process of the Emperor's Image" comments on that topic in great detail, says the following about the beard that the emperor grew at such a young age:

When you think about the traditions of Japanese society, where it was undeniably heretical for someone who had not yet achieved old age to grow a beard, the emperor's beard, like the beard of Ōkubo Toshimichi, indicated more than the influence of Western customs. You could, at the same time, argue that the beard had clear political considerations behind it and was a deliberate device to transform his image. In this way, the beard and the military costume became the emperor's trademarks and led to the establishment of the emperor's image as a soldier.⁹

This is likely a more accurate characterization of the emperor's beard, since it, like his clothing, was artificial and thus had ethnocultural significance.

That people in the political world often deliberately construct a "look" for themselves is widely recognized today. It is thus not surprising that shrewd political considerations gradually pushed the emperor's appearance toward an emperor-worthy dignity.

The emperor's look continued to change. And about fifteen

⁸ [Ernest Satow, *A Diplomat in Japan* (London: Seeley, Service & Co., 1921), 371.]

⁹ [Sasaki Suguru, "Tennōzō no keisei katei" [The formation process of the emperor's image], in *Kokumin bunka no keisei* [The formation of national culture], ed. Asukai Masamichi (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1984), 236.]

years later, in 1888, the emperor's portrait had been almost entirely transformed into an image of the ideal monarch. Once that had been attained, there really was no need for additional photographs. The image of the emperor as an ideal transcended historical time.

The guiding principle for portraits of leaders is that they should be formed within history while managing to also transcend history. Once a single portrait of the leader that overflows with vitality and is filled with majesty and kindness is created, no others are needed. No matter the country, the image of a leader is akin to a religious icon and has no obligation to record the stages of the leader's political life.

The people do not want to see a leader, whom they want to respect, lose vitality or decline physically. In ancient times, kings were murdered when their power diminished. You might even argue that the portrait of a leader is an iconification of the people's expectations and even a symbol birthed by the emotions of the people.

What might these emotions be?

In Meiji Japan, rather than being spontaneous, these emotions were aroused after the Restoration in part by the repeated application of political techniques. But then again, difficult as they are to define, the kinds of emotions that belong to our hoariest past—the kind that saw an outpouring at the imperial court in response to the controversial proposal that the emperor's portrait be printed on the new currency—may also require us to posit an unconscious world that resides, as it were, in the deep strata of history.

As historian Amino Yoshihiko points out in his intriguing article "Aberrant Forms of Royal Power," the permeation of the deep strata of Japanese society, along with the emperor system, by the magical powers that appeared with the outlandish behavior of Emperor Go-Daigo (r. 1318–1339) may still exist in latent memory. Does that mean that the structures of the Meiji state, through the adornments of State Shinto and widely adopted Confucian virtues, pulled these deep strata of history up to the surface and exploited them? I cannot declare this to be the case, but when we consider the extraordinary power of the rite of emperor worship established in the Meiji era, we probably should not overlook the covert correspondence of the emotions permeating deep historical strata and the symbolism of the emperor. Putting ordinary people to one side, at least the politicians and jurists who had

to develop a coherent narrative around the emperor must have felt a sense of discomfort as long as they were unable to fill the blank spaces in the cosmology that was also their own foundation.

3. THE JAPANESE BODY AS SEEN IN PHOTOGRAPHS

AS I HAVE already argued, portrait photographs are an iconification of a living body, and that person is, moreover, fixed by a portrait.

If we are to discuss the political science of portraits, then we will need also to analyze a little more carefully the body that is iconified in these photographs and to clarify what the body was in cultural terms at a time when the traditional world had just advanced into modernity. The body itself is already woven from the warp and woof of politics and culture. On top of that, once a portrait has been completed, there is an incongruence between the unchanging image and the living, changing model. The French philosopher Étienne Gilson¹⁰ claims that it is then the image that guarantees the model's actual existence, its attributes, and its value. In the case when only a single portrait remains, then for us, the person that resembles the portrait is the model. The face of Descartes that we all know is the face that Frans Hals gave him; but that is only true if the thing that this famous portrait painting expresses truly is him. Even if it is not actually him, Descartes is in no position to object. Gilson thus concludes that, as far as we are concerned, the Descartes in the painting is the model that Frans Hals reproduced. It is in this ambiguity, found in the relationship of every portrait and its model, that the possibility of politicizing the portrait is born. But with

¹⁰ [Taki presents Gilson's argument as a quotation and cites *Painting and Reality* (1957). There is no corresponding text or discussion in Gilson's book, so Taki may have presented an argument Gilson made elsewhere.]

all portraits we must distinguish between the attributes of the model and the attributes of the portrait's creation. The same holds true for the portraits of Emperor Meiji that we are currently discussing.

When we compare the three portrait photographs of Emperor Meiji, there are instances where not only are the attributes of the model and the model's time of life different, but so are the character of the photographs themselves. The expressed body cannot be separated from either of those things. The way the image is framed, the intricacy of detail, the placing of the shadows, the pose—all these clearly pertain not to the model but to the composition of the portrait. This can be considered the gaze of the photographer or of photography.

Any analysis of the photographs that Uchida Kuichi took of the emperor must address these two things. We must look at the political society of Japan mediated by a gaze that builds up an image, not by seeking to extract some quick and palpable political effect, but by descending to almost unconscious perception and the level of the body, and working from there.

As a rule, portrait photographs objectify the person. When that person strikes a pose or assumes a certain facial expression in front of the camera, the degree to which they artfully exaggerate the pose and the expression provides a clear, unprompted account of how that person wants to live their life. The portrait photographs of nineteenth-century Western Europe can generally be read in this way. When the subject has little experience of being photographed, they are unsure how to handle their body in front of the camera. Paradoxically, the resulting awkwardness can actually end up exposing the state of consciousness and of the body within that society.

The level of portrait photography in Japan and the state of the body were both at the latter stage during the early Meiji years.

The pioneers of photography in the last years of the shogunate were under pressure to master the camera and chemical processing, and their challenge was the very act of taking a photograph.

When the age of the early-stage photographers—Ueno Hikoma, Shimooka Renjō, Uchida Kuichi, Kitaniwa Tsukuba, and Yokoyama Matsusaburō—arrived, photography had already attained the practical level of capturing people and landscapes. Many photographers in addition to Uchida opened studios in Tokyo, and in the second decade

of the Meiji era (starting in 1877), even more photographers, such as Ezaki Reiji, Futami Asakuma, Suzuki Shin'ichi, Maruki Riyō, and Matsuzaki Shinji, became obviously successful in running their own studios.

Putting aside for a moment the genuinely flourishing photographic studios in Tokyo and taking instead Asakusa in this same period as an example, we find countless small-time photographers setting up shop and brazenly soliciting customers. These photographers ran the gamut from good to bad and represented one of the livelier aspects of civilization and enlightenment. According to *An Edo Chronology*,¹¹ the number of shops with a selection of photographs of landscapes, buildings, actors, prostitutes, and so forth gradually increased in 1872 and 1873.

Even though portrait photographs were in greatest demand in early Meiji Japan (the 1870s), the portraits taken by the photographers of the time remained at the simplest technical level. They are unquestionably jejune when compared with the skill of contemporary Western European portrait photographs. If we reflect that Nadar, the greatest French portrait photographer of the nineteenth century, was active from the late 1850s to the 1870s, then clearly the decisive difference in the technical level of photographic portraiture was the existence of a long history of painted portraiture.

When thinking, however, about the state of photography in the early Meiji era, perhaps we need to understand not just the techniques and modes of doing business of this great diversity of photographers but also the perceptions of the people who were photographed and who used the photographs. Although it seems strange now, in 1886, Matsuzaki Shinji published a booklet called *Dos and Don'ts for the Subject of a Photograph*, while in 1910 Harada Tanemichi published *How to Have Your Photograph Taken*.¹² Harada expresses regret that although there are many publications on photography, they all deal with the photographer's technique, while the awareness of photography in society as a whole had failed to develop and remained immature.

The content of these two publications is rather unsophisticated, but they do provide ample grounds to speculate that the average person was not yet psychologically ready to stand in front of a camera and that

¹¹ [*Bukō nenpyō* was first compiled by Saitō Gesshin in 1590, with annual segments added until 1873.]

¹² [*Shashin hitsuyō shakaku no kokoroe* and *Shashin ni utsuru kokoroe*, respectively.]

their bodies would lose their natural ease and freedom when placed before one.

In France and Great Britain, portrait photography had progressed to the point that a new category similar to painted portraiture came into being. The distinction that art historian Bernard Berenson made between an effigy and a portrait holds for photographs too.

13 [Bernard Berenson, *Aesthetics and History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1948), 218–19. Taki uses the term *shōzō* for effigy and *shōzōga* for portrait.]

The portrait is the rendering of an individual in terms of decoration, and of the individuality of the inner man as well as of his social standing. That is what Rembrandt, for instance, did supremely well, particularly in his last years. The effigy, on the other hand, aims at the social aspects of the subject, emphasizes the soldierliness of the soldier, the judiciousness of the judge, the clericality of the clergy, the self-importance of the business or professional man, the fashionableness of the woman of fashion, the clubableness of the clubman.¹³

Put another way, the portrait strips away superfluous background and props to focus on the subject itself, while an effigy uses the background and props as means of showing the subject to best advantage. Taken to the extreme, an effigy can become a portrait based on allegorical meaning. While Uchida's photographs of the emperor are not proper portraits, neither do they contain any of the trickery and exaggerated staging that can so clearly be seen in effigies. Nor do his portraits depict the emperor as a semidivine being or express any myth of youth. The emperor in the photographs does not seem to project any dignity; both his pose and his expression are stiff, and he comes across as a strong-willed youth.

It was, in sum, the simplest, most straightforward photography. Of course, Uchida adjusted his subject's posture before photographing him, and since anecdotal sources tell us that he shocked the courtiers by touching the emperor to adjust his pose, as a photographer he probably intended to pose him and to take a noble portrait. Ultimately, though, he produced a mere photograph, one that was neither good nor bad. Toward the end of the Meiji era, Japanese photographers may have started to talk about Nadar-esque or Rembrandt-style lighting, but they still did not understand the key technical points of portrait

photography. Conversely, however, that meant that they had a gaze that exposed the subject, enabling us to discover the fresh, living essence of the model. The freshness of the 1872 and 1873 photographs stems from this gaze.

The immaturity of early Meiji portrait photographs was not just a matter of the photographers' abilities. As photographers like Matsuzaki and Harada have pointed out, the living body of the photographic subject was another factor. In the early Meiji era, the bodies of most Japanese people appeared extremely clumsy in the eyes of Westerners, who were apparently struck by the fact that Japanese had not yet acquired modern customs. In *Around the World with General Grant*, John Russell Young, who accompanied former US president General Ulysses S. Grant on his 1879 visit to Japan, describes his impressions of an audience with Emperor Meiji. With an objective eye, Young minutely observes the emperor's way of carrying himself.¹⁴

¹⁴ [Taki notes in a parenthetical aside that he is quoting from the translation in the *Record of Emperor Meiji*. The passage contains numerous omissions when compared with Young's original. All omissions are indicated by ellipses. Only one of these is indicated in Taki's text: "the imperial group for statues. . . . The solemn etiquette."]

¹⁵ [John Russell Young, *Around the World with General Grant* (New York: American News, 1879), 528–30.]

The Emperor stood quite motionless, apparently unobservant or unconscious of the homage that was paid to him. He is a young man, with a slender figure, taller than the average Japanese, and of about the middle height according to our ideas. He has a striking face, with a mouth and lips that remind you something of the traditional mouth of the Hapsburg family. The forehead is full and narrow, the hair and the light mustache and beard intensely black. . . . The color of the hair darkens what otherwise might pass for a swarthy countenance at home. The face expressed no feeling whatever, and but for the dark, glowing eye, which was bent full upon the General, you might have taken the imperial group for statues. . . . The solemn etiquette that pervaded the audience chamber was peculiar . . . even the ceremony of to-day is so far in advance of anything of the kind ever known in Japan that it might be called a revolution.

His Imperial Majesty, for instance, as our group was formed, advanced and shook hands with General Grant. . . . The manner of the Emperor was constrained, almost awkward, the manner of a man doing a thing for the first time, and trying to do it as well as possible.¹⁵

Young's view of the emperor is, if anything, benign. While he acknowledges the emperor's refinement, his impression was one of a stiffness of manner, of awkwardness, and of a body that had not yet been made sufficiently modern (or Western European).

The way we deport ourselves—by which I mean how we walk and how we move when we work, how we greet people, and how we take rest—none of this is natural. It is quite clear that even something as simple as how we sit changes as a result of culture. The anthropologist Marcel Mauss called the culturally specific modes of carrying our bodies “techniques of the body.” As Mauss pointed out, the techniques of the body take different forms in different cultures. If I borrow Mauss's terminology, then Young's eyes registered an emperor who had not yet acquired modern techniques of the body. But what are modern techniques of the body?

In Western Europe, training to increase the utility of the body had been conducted by institutions such as schools, factories, and the army since the seventeenth century. Looked at historically, this was truly the body that capitalistic labor demanded. Modernity, through that new social system, retrained the body from the perspective of functional efficiency. Furthermore, just as with its clothing, Western Europe spread its techniques of the body throughout the world, so that its body truly seemed to be the universal body. The transmission of modern sports is a case in point.

The bodies of the Japanese did not yet have any affinity for that training. In *Japan Day by Day*, Edward S. Morse records his surprise when observing in Japanese cities the less than elegant manner in which people walked. This, too, comes from the fact that he was looking at the Japanese from a modern perspective on the body.

Without a doubt, modernity required a different kind of body.

In the essay “A Theory of Education: The Abilities of the Body,” published in 1879 in the first issue of *Proceedings of Tokyo Academy*, Mori Arinori, who became Japan's first minister of education in 1885, was clearly looking at the bodies of Japanese with the eyes of a Western European.¹⁶ His theory is not unproblematic, but it did demonstrate acute foresight in seeking to look at the life of a society from the perspective of the body's functional efficiency. According to

16 [Mori Arinori, “Kyōikuron: Shintai no nōryoku,” *Tokyo gakushi kiji* 1, no. 1 (1879). Reprinted in Ōkubo Toshiaki, *Mori Arinori zenshū* [Collected writings of Mori Arinori], vol. 2 (Tokyo: Senbundo Shoten, 1972), 134–38.]

him, a proper education comes from the combination of three things: intellectual, moral, and physical education. He says:

In my view the most deficient aspect of our people is in the area of the physical faculties of the body, the originary and most important of those three faculties. This is something I sincerely hope everyone will understand. Apart from those activities which have been essential for the maintenance of life, such as agriculture and manufacture, there has been little care taken with regard to maintaining health in general. Consequently, when we observe the physical condition of our people we find that, with the possible exception of the warrior class, they are in a lamentably weak state.¹⁷

¹⁷ [Mori, “Kyōikuron,” 134. Translation adapted from Alistair Swale, *The Political Thought of Mori Arinori: A Study of Meiji Conservatism* (London: Routledge, 2013), 104.]

¹⁸ Mori, “Kyōikuron,” 135.

Mori claims that the Japanese are slothful and rather dislike physical movement, which he attributes to environment, clothing, diet, and housing. He goes on:

That aversion to movement comes from habituation, and their backs and loins are bent, making them like hunchbacks whose knees and legs are bent like a bow, rendering them unable to grow straight.¹⁸

Mori expresses concern about how lacking in beauty and how untrained Japanese bodies are. His real aim was to introduce military drills in schools.

Certainly, the traditional body, which Mori criticized, was a concrete expression of the state of Japanese society, in which capitalistic production was yet undeveloped. And certainly bodies suitable for modern etiquette come into being through bourgeois society’s training of the body. Looking at any of the portrait photographs of the early Meiji years—the same is true for photographs taken in Europe as well—one feels the gracelessness of the subjects, because one can sense the lack of definition around the joints and the lack of any training for capitalist labor. Moreover, photographers lacked any consideration for making the body look attractive.

The portrait photograph of 1873, taken after new rules requiring



fig. 4

Takahashi Yuichi, *Portrait of Emperor Meiji* (1880). Courtesy of the Imperial Household Agency.

Western clothing were implemented at the imperial court, definitely had at its core an aspiration toward a magnificent military figure of the future who would stand on equal footing with the monarchs of modern Western European nations.

In his photograph, Uchida was able to express that aspiration only imperfectly. He photographed the emperor leaning back in a chair. The fact that this pose does nothing for a person's dignity was well known in Western European court culture. And while his legs are relaxed and spread apart, his upper body is awkward and stiff. Since Uchida did not understand the techniques of making an effigy-like portrait photograph and therefore did not understand the symbolic meaning that royal portraits possessed, Uchida's early photographs of the emperor were far from being a symbol of the nation.

By contrast, Takahashi Yuichi's oil painting (fig. 4), which quotes this photograph at second remove, has awakened to the aspiration to retain, at minimum, the emperor's dignity. Yet there was still a considerable gap in the photographs and paintings of the time between the possibilities of expressing meaning and the knowledge of how to do so. In one of his writings Takahashi, who had studied a little of the history of Western painting, stated that the portrait is identical to the fleshly body; in other words, he regarded the portrait and the model to a surprising degree as one and the same. Given that Takahashi felt the culmination of realism was identification with the model, did he try to put that aspiration into practice with his portrait of the emperor, which was, after all, no routine piece of work?

Such feelings may explain why Takahashi had wanted to paint the emperor's portrait even before this. As I have mentioned, Takahashi's previous request to copy the Ugolini portrait of the emperor had been denied. Yet in February 1879, this time at the invitation of the Senate, he was commissioned to paint a portrait of the emperor. (On the same occasion, Goseda Yoshimatsu got to paint the empress and Araki Kanpo, the empress dowager.)

In 1874, Ugolini had painted a seated portrait based on a trimmed version of Uchida's 1873 photograph. In 1878, the Italian artist painted a second picture, this time a three-quarter view standing portrait, once again based on Uchida's picture. Referring to this 1878 work, Takahashi Yuichi, who was a realist, produced a portrait of the emperor

that is startling in its detailed draftsmanship. Although primarily a copy of Ugolini's work, it is quite clear that Takahashi wanted to give the emperor a far more resolute look than he had in Uchida's original photograph.

The problem, however, is with the way the body is painted. We can assume that Takahashi intended to endow the painted body with all the dignity that the portrait of an emperor deserves. But the Ugolini portrait was awkward, and in copying that, all Takahashi could do was to reproduce the straight line of the body, with its upright posture, in a rather mechanical way. In this respect, it seems he had not yet mastered the form of royal portrait painting, and the verisimilitude and the symbolism visible in *Salmon* (c. 1877)¹⁹ is not on display here. The body, it appears, was still a weak area for the Japanese.

Uchida's 1872 and 1873 photographs were both full-length portraits. They differ emphatically in the pose and the clothing, yet Uchida's gaze was the same in both. The gaze was, really, mechanical and nothing more. Uchida did not have the necessary rhetoric to transform his subjects for symbolic reasons. Which is why, conversely, the subject was so exposed.

By contrast, in the 1888 portrait, while the model is indisputably older and is a more mature emperor, that is not the whole story. The framing of the image is different and the pose is different, and there is an altogether different gaze from the first two portrait photographs. This is not just a matter of the emperor as a model; something has changed in the composition of the photograph and in the gaze that forms the icon. A gaze that idealizes the emperor was at work, one might say. And that gaze was political.

19 [Executed in a long, narrow format reminiscent of a hanging scroll, Takahashi's oil-on-paper depiction of a partially filleted salmon suspended by a rope is considered a breakthrough in the adoption of Western oil painting techniques in Japan. The work is in the collection of the University Art Museum, Tokyo University of the Arts.]

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 no shōzō* [The emperor's portrait]
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