

# The “Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office Protocols” and Exploring Gender Power Relations at the Heian Court

『延喜式』第39巻「正親司」の史料的価値を英語圏に伝えるために  
ジェンダー的視点を取り入れて  
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## Introduction

Although scholarly trends today underscore the necessity of a global perspective in historical research, few cooperative projects on royal women have been undertaken by European and Asian specialists. To exchange questions and comparative perspectives to help understand each other’s long history of royal women, it is useful to examine primary sources that shed light on royal born ladies of different societies. Despite a relative absence in today’s Japanese history textbooks, royal women have played crucial roles in establishing the political power of new rulers, developing court culture, and maintaining the prestige of the royal family. In this regard, *The Protocols of the Engi Era* (*Engi shiki*, implemented in 967) is significant because it offers rare information from the Heian Period (794–1185) about heretofore overlooked royal members—princesses two to four generations removed from the heavenly sovereign (*tennō*). By translating and discussing the parts of *Engi shiki* accessible through English translation, we can stimulate useful comparative research questions about royal women across culture and time.

In this paper, I focus on a set of articles concerning the Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office (*Seishinshi* 正親司<sup>(1)</sup>). This section is particularly interesting because it helps us address the changing socio-economic standing of princesses while illuminating how male and female royal offspring were treated differently. By discussing the financial and political situations of these female relatives whose records have been less likely to survive than those of first-generation royal women, articles included in this section allow us to investigate differences among royal women as well as complex power relations between men and women at court.

## 1. An Overview of the Section Concerning the Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office

Before discussing how one can use this section for research, it is important to understand the basic function and organization of the Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office. The main role of the Office was to oversee the roster of royal offspring and distribute economic support in the form of cloth, clothing, metals, and farming tools. These resources could be used by the recipient or exchanged in the marketplace. For royal offspring who were too high in status to serve non-royals, yet not financially well-connected, such payments were a vital part of their livelihood. The Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office functioned under the Ministry of the Royal Household to oversee such offspring's allowances. Starting in the early eighth century, the Office functioned with four administrative staff—one director, one manager, one senior second-level manager, and one junior second-level manager—and eleven lower-grade staff comprised of ten functionaries and one laborer. In 796 it expanded to include an additional two clerks. This reflected the increasing number of royal offspring and consequentially, a proportional increase in paperwork.

The section on the Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office is located at the beginning of Chapter 39 of the *Engi shiki* and consists of only fourteen articles.<sup>(2)</sup> Despite its relatively small number of articles, the regulations for the Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office were nonetheless crucial for the court because it not only affected state budget planning but also significantly influenced royal members' economic and social standing. Most of the articles in this section discussed processes for regularly updating information about the royal offspring, such as their age, name, court rank, and religious devotion, so officials could effectively manage the roster. By mandating actual procedures for dispersing royal offspring's remunerations and seasonal clothing, these articles enhanced communication among different bureaus and offices. For example, the first four articles dealt with regulations for obtaining a full list of royal offspring who were supposed to receive remunerations and seasonal clothing.

The remaining articles concern various topics. As the number of people in the royal lineages increased, managing their numbers—and the corresponding remunerations—became important for the government's finances. Articles 6, 10, 11, and 12 state the requisite credentials for royal offspring to receive economic support from the court, while Articles 5, 7, and 13 provide concrete descriptions of such economic support, including specific material items, amounts to be disbursed, and ritualistic procedures to be followed when royal offspring receive them. In this vein, articles 8 through 10 contain regulations for royal offspring who attended seasonal events, such as royal banquets and Buddhist ceremonies. Articles 11 and 12 cover regulations for terminating economic support, such as death or undergoing a Buddhist tonsure. Here, it is important to note that certain articles (Articles 5, 6, 8, and 13) focus on female offspring only. Article 13, for instance, details regulations for land distributions to female royal offspring. The section ends with Article 14, which specifies how the Office should use

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surplus allocations.

## 2. How Can We Use This Section to Pose Research Questions in Women’s and Gender History?

Previous scholarship has made limited use of “Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office Protocols” despite its potential for raising research questions to advance women’s and gender history. For example, how did the sex of royal offspring affect the economic support they received from the court? What was the nature of power relations between male and female offspring of the royal family?

Children descended from the sovereign had different kinds of economic support from the government. Here, I would like to focus on certain kinds of economic support that was closely tied to gender disparity. One of them was a remuneration called *ōroku* (女王祿) that was granted only to female offspring two through four generations removed from the sovereign. The name of this remuneration is interesting in the way that its prefix signifying female (“*nyo*” or “*jo*” 女), is not pronounced. This reflects a pre-Heian situation that “*ō*” (王) had been a gender-neutral term. In the course of the Heian Period, however, “*ō*” seems to have increasingly been regarded as male, so it became more common to add the prefix denoting female to specify princesses.<sup>(3)</sup> The “Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office Protocols” includes two articles that specifically deal this remuneration. Article 5 delineates ritual procedures during which princesses received remunerations, and Article 6 addresses the number of female royals who received such remunerations. Interestingly, remunerations designated for princes are not mentioned at all in this section. Why, we wonder.

At a glance, Articles 5 and 6 seem to imply that the court privileged female offspring more than their male counterparts. Ironically, however, the remuneration system for princesses was established because these royal daughters faced difficulties in sustaining their economic and political circumstances in court society. Prior to the late eighth century, many princesses were able to serve as top court officials and led lower-ranking female officials in the Back Palace. Then, in the late eighth century, the number of such royal female officials declined, while more aristocratic women—powerful courtiers’ wives and daughters from other families—began taking high official posts. This change disadvantaged princesses economically and politically because they lost opportunities to hold official court posts, which would have allowed them to earn regular income and widen their human networks.

Another important issue related to a princess’s economic standing was her grants of seasonal clothing (*kōshin jifuku*). When the *ritsuryō* codes were first implemented at the turn of the eighth century, all royal offspring of thirteen years or older received seasonal clothing twice a year, regardless of their gender. The “Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office Protocols” contained several regulations regarding this clothing. Article 1, for instance, stated that “every year if a prince or princess reaches the age of twelve,<sup>(5)</sup> the Capital Office should report that information.”<sup>(6)</sup>

This procedure would allow officials to prepare in advance for those who would begin receiving

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seasonal clothing in the subsequent year. And according to Article 7, an individual would receive certain items based on their blood ties to the sovereign:

The seasonal clothing provided in spring and autumn to a prince or princess two generations removed should be the following: six rolls of silk (絹), 43.2 kilograms of silk yard (糸), eighteen rolls of hemp cloth (調布), and thirty hoes (鍬). In the case of a prince or princess four or more generations removed, follow the Laws on Remuneration (*Rokuryō*). On the first month of the twentieth day, create a record [of those who receive seasonal clothing that year] and send it to the Ministry of the Royal House. Do the same for autumn and winter <However, provide silk wadding (綿) instead of silk yard; and five hoes instead of two bars of iron.> Everybody [who is entitled to receive seasonal clothing] should go to the Ministry of the Treasury to receive it; sending an agent to receive it is not allowed.

It is important to note, however, that prior to the *Engi shiki* compilation, a significant modification was made to limit royal offspring who could receive this seasonal clothing. We know that from the *Commentary on the Administrative Code* (834), which prohibited royal offspring from receiving seasonal clothing if they had attained the fifth rank or higher. The same rule was applied to a royal offspring holding an official post equivalent to the sixth rank. The latter regulation had more negative effects on male offspring because if they held court posts, they could not receive the clothing. They had more opportunities to be appointed to official court posts than princesses in both the capital and provinces after the turn of the ninth century.<sup>(8)</sup>

This change in the *Commentary*, however, did not indicate growing economic power of princesses because holding official court positions brought more wealth. A royal offspring's seasonal clothing was of lesser value than the remunerations granted to the holders of the fifth rank or posts equivalent to the sixth rank. Based on this trend, we must wonder why female royals began receiving the aforementioned for-females-only compensation during the late eighth century.

To answer this question, it is important to remember that this was a time when the court began limiting the number of royal offspring who received seasonal clothing in order to curb budget deficits due to the ever increasing numbers of royals. The change also coincided with changes in the laws regarding marriage of princesses. According to the *ritsuryō codes*, only male royals were allowed to marry princesses, but the royal command issued in 793 permitted scions of the Fujiwara family who “successively helped the sovereign to govern” to marry princesses two generations removed from the sovereign.<sup>(10)</sup> Likewise, non-royal males with ministerial posts were allowed to marry princesses more than three generations removed from the throne.<sup>(11)</sup> Since children of a princess had no royal status if her husband was a non-royal, such a change weakened the role of princesses in transferring royal

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blood to the next generation.

Here, Yamashita Shin'ichirō suggests an ironic development of this era. He points out that the court strategically created the remuneration system for female offspring to strengthen the unity of princesses and their ties with the sovereign. Article 5, which describes the ritual procedures for remunerations to princesses, shows that during the ceremony princesses attended the ceremony together:

On the eighth day of the first month, provide princesses with remunerations. Have the office in charge<sup>(12)</sup> set up seats in the southern courtyard of the Shishinden (the reception hall in the royal palace), erect two ceremonial tents in front of the Anpukuden (Physicians' Hall), stack the remunerations at the south of a marker plate [for princesses to stand when they receive the remunerations in the southern courtyard], and arrange the facilities inside the Shishinden. When the sovereign arrives at the Shishinden, female chamberlains should lead in female officials and then all should take their seats. The officials of the [Royal Family Roster and Payroll] Office should escort the princesses and enter from the Gekka Gate. The princesses should take their seats under the ceremonial tents first <the seating order should be determined by their generations removed from the sovereign rather than their actual ages.> Then, the officials should move to the courtyard and take their seats as well. The manager [of the Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office]<sup>(13)</sup> should take up the roster, saying “the offspring of Titled Prince such and such.” Then princesses concerned should leave their seats [under the ceremonial tents] by responding in the affirmative and take their seats in the southern courtyard<sup>(14)</sup>. When everyone is seated, the manager takes up the roster and does a roll call. When a princess is called, she should respond in the affirmative, proceed to receive her remuneration, and then withdraw. The rest should follow suit. The amount of the remuneration given to each princess is two rolls of silk and 2.7 kilograms (six *ton*) of silk wadding <The remuneration amounts provided at the Feast of the First Fruits should be the same.>

We see here that the sovereign granted the princesses the same amount of remunerations regardless of how many generations they were removed or which court ranks they held. Nonetheless, each princess received “two rolls of silk and 2.7 kilograms of silk wadding,” which was of much less value than the aforementioned seasonal clothing. This suggests that the ceremony for distributing female offspring's remunerations had both economic and political significance. For the sovereign, the assembly of his female relatives mattered. It enhanced his visibility as a leader of the royal family and the esteem of his relatives. At the same time, the court defined the lesser standing of princesses within the royal family by decreasing their support in comparison to princes.

Indeed, princesses were losing opportunities to advance in court rank and post during mid Heian times, and some of them certainly faced economic difficulties<sup>(15)</sup>. It would be misleading to argue, how-

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ever, that the decline of the economic and political situation of princesses was a linear process. There were moments of ups and downs. Even though leading positions in the Back Palace became unavailable, other career paths for princesses still existed, and some princesses managed to find them. As *The Tale of Genji* suggests, women of royal birth worked as female attendants for noble households in the later Heian Period.<sup>(16)</sup> Some also served as Ise or Kamo Priestesses. Women of the Shirakawa royal branch, whose men held the director of the Council on Shrine Affairs as hereditary rank, also successively performed the important role of “curtain raising” or *kenchō* at the Royal Succession Rite. As Kuriyama Keiko argues, this shows that the Shirakawa royal women joined their men in developing hereditary positions at court. From these examples, we see that families needed their women’s participation to remain competitive and navigate through power struggles at court. *The Engi shiki* concerning the Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office indicates how the royal family structured and maintained itself by elaborating regulations that protected their female members’ socio-economic and political standing.

The important thing to remember, however, is that if we compare women and men of the same social, economic, and political standing at court in the Engi era, men tended to have more opportunities.<sup>(18)</sup> At the same time, studying these women’s history gives interesting perspectives on how less privileged individuals participated and gained livelihood in various ways. The section on the Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office offers a piece of evidence that should be further explored to understand strategies used by royal daughters who lived amidst ongoing disparity between men and women.

## Conclusion

*Engi shiki*, a ritual manual and de facto encyclopedia in mid-Heian courtier society, provides a wide range of topics including gender history, technology, material culture, and the applied sciences. It can serve as a catalyst to generate new questions that can incorporate other sources and transdisciplinary approaches, including topics like gender history. By using the section on the Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office as an example, I have argued that the *Engi shiki* is useful for investigating previously overlooked historical players and issues, such as gender relations at the Heian court. This section suggests the importance for the royal family to sustain the roles and socio-economic status of their women. Without royal women’s participation, the royal family and its highest authority, the *tennō*, could lose a competitive edge at court. This explains why princesses began receiving extra financial support when their economic and political prospects became increasingly bleak in mid-Heian times. But even in such a disadvantageous circumstance, some princesses were still able to find ways to survive and exert influence. We have much to learn from histories of under-represented groups, especially from their strategies for coping with adversary.

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As discussed above, however, remuneration for princesses did not mean economic superiority; rather it was rooted in the disparity of opportunities for male and female offspring of the royal family. Financial circumstances and career opportunities available to men and women is a research topic relevant to different societies in history. By developing an English translation of this short section of the *Engi shiki*, I would like to encourage researchers working in different fields to embark upon innovative collaborative projects that will respond to issues we still deal with today.

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#### Annotation

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(1)—— An English translation of the section concerning the Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office is not available, so I am currently translating it and plan to publish it in the following year as part of a multidisciplinary project on Japan’s Ancient Encyclopedia, *Engi shiki*, to invite specialists of different fields to advance collaborative research (広領域型基幹研究プロジェクト「古代の百科全書『延喜式』の多分野協働研究」). This project is supported by the National Institutes for Humanities. For the newest English translations of other sections, see *Engi-Shiki: Procedures of the Engi Era, Books I-V*, trans. Felicia Gressitt Bock (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970); *Engi-Shiki: Procedures of the Engi Era, Books VI-X*, trans. Felicia Gressitt Bock (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1972); Felicia Bock, *Classical Learning and Taoist Practices in Early Japan, with a Translation of Books XVI and XX of the Engi-Shiki* Occasional Paper no. 17 (Arizona: Center for Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 1985). Also for an analysis of past translations, see Yamaguchi Eri, “Overview of the Research on Engishiki Outside of Japan: Focusing on Translation of Engishiki,” *Bulletin of the National Museum of Japanese History* 218 (2019).

(2)—— To better understand the relatively small size of the section, for example, the following section concerning the procedures of the Palace Kitchen Office consists of sixty-three articles.

(3)—— For example, see Torao Toshiya, ed. *Yakuchū Nihon shiryō Engi shiki*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Shueisha, 2017), 476.

(4)—— Nishino Yukiko, “Kanmu chō to kōkyū: josei

jui ni yoru ichikōsatsu,” in Nagaokakyō kobunka ronsō, ed. Nakayama Shūichi sensei kiju kinen jigyōkai (Nagoya: Sansei Shuppan, 1997), 195-97; Okamura Sachiko, “Joōroku ni tsuite,” *Hisutoria* 144 (1994): 150-53; Ijūin Yōko, *Kodai no josei kanryō: nyokan no shusse · kekkon · intai* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2014), 218-27.

(5)—— In the Law on Personnel of the Yōryō Code, “prince” (王) and “princess” (女王) refer to the sovereign’s offspring two through four generations removed. (See the note in 『延喜式下』, 172).

(6)—— Here, the premodern East Asian way of counting age, in which a person should be one year old at birth and gain another year at the New Year, is used to count to age twelve.

(7)—— Yamashita Shin’ichirō claims this change had already occurred in the late eighth century. See Yamashita Shin’ichirō, *Nihon kodai no kokka to kyūyosei* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2012), 147-48.

(8)——As explained earlier, the number of princesses who held official court positions declined at the turn of the ninth century.

(9)—— Aiso Takashi, “Kōshin jifuku ni tsuite,” *Engishiki kenkyū*, no. 1 (1988); Yamashita Shin’ichirō, *Nihon kodai no kokka to kyūyosei*, 147.

(10)——See *Nihon kiriyaku*, the Hinoe Inu (丙戌) entry of the ninth month in *Eiryaku* 12 (793).

(11)—— Yasuda Masahiko, *Heian jidai kōshin no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1998), 26-48.

(12)——The office in charge is the Bureau of Housekeeping (掃部寮). See Torao Toshiya, *Yakuchū Nihon shiryō*

*Engi shiki*, 1046.

(13)—The Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office consists of three management levels—a director, a manager, and two second level managers.

(14)—According to Torao, the dialogue of the manager of the Royal Family Roster and Payroll Office is “the offspring of Titled Prince such and such and descendants of the same monarch, take your seats (某親王之後、即一祖之胤皆下座)。” It, however, seems more natural that the dialogue consists only of “某親王” and the latter part describes the princesses’ action. This view is also supported by the protocol offered by Shintōtaikei henshūkai, ed. *Shintōtaikei chōgi saishi hen 1: Gishiki · Dairishiki* (Tokyo: Shintōtaikei henshūkai 1980), 234. For Torao’s interpretation, see Torao Toshiya, *Yakuchū Nihon shiryō Engi shiki*, 476–79.

(15)—For example, *the Record of Miraculous Events in Japan (Nihon ryōiki)* depicts a princess in a reduced circumstance. Ijūin Yōko suggests princesses without

rank and post could fall in a financial challenge. See Ijūin Yōko, *Kodai no josei kanryō: Nyokan no shusse · Kekkon · Intai*, 116–22.

(16)—For example, names of certain characters, such as *Ō no myōbu*, were female attendants of royal birth.

(17)—Kuriyama Keiko, “Tenji shiron: sokui kenchō wo chūshin ni,” in *Josei kanryō no rekishi*, ed. Sōgō joseishi gakkai (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2013), 44–53.

(18)—To further explore this issue, the concept called “patriarchal equilibrium” is useful. An American medievalist, Judith Bennett, argues that if we compare men and women in the same socio-economic status, men often held slightly stronger authority (socio-politically and legally acknowledged rights) than women in the same group. Such a phenomenon has been witnessed in different societies across the globe over centuries. See Judith M. Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 4.

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