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The 20th Broadyard Workshop

The Reiwa Era:

Past and Present of the Japanese Emperor System

June 10, 2019

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Academic Bulletin

Moderator's introduction to the workshop

In May this year, the abdication of Emperor Akihito and the dawning of the Reiwa era not only sparked considerable reaction in Japanese society but also captured the attention of the whole world. After Emperor Akihito took the initiative to abdicate, the Abe administration actively supported it by rapidly approving a special-case bill and energetically playing up the drama of abdication and accession. Clearly, the emperor, or *tenno*, and the emperor system continue to have a strong influence in the social and even political fields in Japan. Meanwhile, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the LDP-led government hope to take advantage of the emperor's authority to increase their ruling legitimacy and achieve political goals. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct an academic discussion on the historical evolution of the emperor system; the emperor system and Japanese culture; Japanese national characteristics and the emperor system; and the social, political, and diplomatic functions of the emperor system.

The workshop brought together more than ten experts and scholars in the field of Japanese research at home and abroad. Everyone put forward their own views on the above issues. Prof. Misa Manabe, former chief research officer at the Japanese Imperial Household Agency and current associate professor at Atomi University, said that the public has started to attach more importance to the monarchical "functions" instead of monarchical "bloodlines." The authority of the emperor comes not from history, but from his own personal character and conduct, which signifies that the emperor system has entered a period of instability. Prof. Ikuyo Matsumoto from Yokohama City University explained that the emperor's orthodoxy often undergoes historical changes. In the pre-modern period, the

sacrifice reflected this. These days, the legitimacy of the emperor proceeded from the State Shintō ideology and the Constitution of the Empire of Japan, whereas contemporary legitimacy relies on the Constitution of Japan.

Some scholars opine that considering the post-war political process in Japan, the emperor still exerts great influence in the political arena. In addition to the emperor himself, conservative politicians and their ruling parties also play a role. For example, two enthronement speeches, “Protection of the Constitution” from the previous Emperor Akihito and “Compliance with the Constitution” from the current Emperor Naruhito, reflect the intention of the Abe regime to amend the constitution.

After all the speeches and discussions, the attendees concluded that the emperor still had influence over the political process and even the decision-making process in Japan; the emperor is loved by the Japanese people; and the relationship between China and Japan could be promoted smoothly through the emperor, such as inviting the emperor to visit China.

Generally speaking, the Abe regime, through public communication, dramatically drew attention to the specific process of abdication and accession, including the announcement of the reign title, which strengthened the influence of the emperor and the emperor system in Japanese society. More importantly, Abe hoped to draw support from the authority of the emperor to stabilize the regime and to achieve his political goal of amending the constitution.

Wang Xinsheng

June 16, 2019

The 20th Broadyard Workshop

The Reiwa Era:

Past and Present of the Japanese Emperor System

June 10, 2019

This workshop was initiated by Prof. Wang Xinsheng at the Department of History of Peking University (PKU), which invited experts and scholars from more than 10 domestic and foreign universities and research institutions, such as PKU, Nankai University, Shanghai International Studies University, the Institute of Japanese Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), Atomi University, and Hosei University.

Prof. Qian Chengdan, director of the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS), first extended a welcome to the participants in his speech and introduced the academic exchanges and talent training of the institute. He said that due to Chinese history, many Chinese people usually misunderstand the Japanese emperor and the emperor system, but in fact the Japanese emperor system is different from the Chinese emperor system. Therefore, this workshop aims to promote communication between China and Japan and enhance mutual understanding and trust through discussions on the Japanese *tenno* system at the opening of the Reiwa era. Prof. Wang Xinsheng said that although the Japanese emperors are quite similar to their Chinese counterparts, they are very different in nature, which was not only reflected by the political and social reality in Japan, but also in the specific methods of political

operation. Therefore, one must understand the emperor system before understanding Japan.

Prof. Misa Manabe, former chief research officer at the Japanese Imperial Household Agency and current associate professor at Atomi University, spoke first, on the theme “The Emperor and Japanese Society after World War II.” Manabe said that according to the first article of the Constitution of Japan, “The emperor is a symbol of the Japanese nation and the Japanese people as a whole, and this status is based on the will of all Japanese people with sovereignty.” Therefore, if the emperor loses national support, he loses his current status. Meanwhile, the second article stipulates that “the royal family is hereditary and the succession is according to the Imperial Household Law of the congressional resolution.” Like Japan’s other laws, the Imperial Household Law was formulated by the post-war parliament (the Diet of Japan), but the authority to modify the Imperial Household Law belongs to the people. Therefore, in general, unlike emperors before World War II, nowadays the legitimacy of the emperor is based on the support of Japan’s people.

As the emperor during World War II, the status of the Showa Emperor is worth considering. The legitimacy of the Showa Emperor, or Hirohito, was based on the Meiji Constitution. He served as Japanese monarch under the Meiji Constitution. He issued an imperial edict to start the war, and issued another to end the war. In the early post-war period, although the new constitution emphasized that the emperor was based on the support of the Japanese people, most Japanese uncritically supported the monarchy until the 1970s. According

to a public opinion survey in 1973, at that time, Japanese people no longer viewed the emperor system as an indispensable and uncritically accepted part of society.

The Showa Emperor's acceptance of the Constitution of Japan is also noteworthy. It can be seen from an interview with the Showa Emperor in 1975 that he believed that he has complied with both the Meiji and current constitutions of Japan.

In terms of this attitude, it is hard to see how the status of the so-called emperor was accepted by Japan's people, and it is also difficult to believe that the Showa Emperor had a strong desire to actively meet national expectations or to be a good "symbolic emperor."

Unlike Emperor Showa, Emperor Akihito was keenly aware of the importance of national support for the emperor, and realized that the emperor must accept the demands of the people. Therefore, Emperor Akihito began to consciously explore the proper behavior of "a symbolic emperor." He comforted the distressed, and gave condolences to the victims of earthquakes, volcanoes, typhoons and so on. This attitude of the emperor made the general public more respectful.

The reason why the emperor of the Heisei era tried to explore the proper behavior of "a symbolic emperor" was because of the post-war national criticism and straightforward opinions against the imperial house. The opinions were publicly expressed through newspapers and magazines, and affected Emperor Akihito when he was a prince. However, this was not the case when Emperor Showa was the crown prince. All in all, the exploration of the ideal behavior of the emperor of the Heisei

era was finally accepted by most Japanese people, but in fact this is largely due to the personal conduct of Emperor Akihito rather than the establishment of a system.

In light of the controversy over whether Japan could have a female emperor, we can see that public support for the emperor began to change from valuing “bloodlines” to “functions.” In other words, if the emperor takes an action different from national expectations, it will lead to resentment from the people, which may even result in overthrowing the royal family. This situation indicates that the Constitution of Japan has begun to play a role in both name and reality. It also means that the emperor and the royal family have truly entered a grim era where they are always exposed to public gaze. In addition, this also reflects a change in the emperor system, in which an emperor’s authority does not come from history, but is based on the personal conduct of the emperor, thus bringing the emperor system into an unstable era.

Prof. Ikuyo Matsumoto from Yokohama City University delivered a speech titled “The Legitimacy and the Accession Ceremony of Japanese Emperors in the Middle Ages.” Based on the accession ceremony of Japanese emperors in the Middle Ages, Matsumoto examined how the Japanese emperor gained its orthodox nature and its connection with East Asian Buddhism. In most cases, the orthodoxy was proved by the blood relationship between the emperor and Amaterasu-ōmikami, the ancestral deity of the Imperial Family, but the evidence of this orthodoxy has undergone historical changes. In the pre-modern period, the sacrifice reflected this. These days, the legitimacy of the emperor proceeds from the State Shintō ideology and the Constitution of

the Empire of Japan, whereas contemporary legitimacy relies on the Constitution of Japan. It is in this historical alteration in accession ceremonies that the basis of the legitimacy of the emperor can be examined.

The accession ceremony of the emperor is stipulated by the articles in *Sensojyo* of *The Order of the God* and the contents of the *Daijyosaijyo* (*The Big Sacrifice*). According to this, the accession consists of the enthronement ceremony (including the ascending rite) and the sacrifice. Starting from the Emperor Kanmu, who took the throne in 781, inheriting three artifacts from the previous emperor was called the “ascending rite.” The public succession to the throne was called “accession.” These were held on different days. The ceremonial form of the enthronement ceremony was said to imitate China’s New Year’s Day pilgrimage, following the ceremonial model from the Tang Dynasty of wearing *conbenjiunishyo* (“the full dress of twelve ornaments”). Although *conbenjiunishyo* is closely related to the traditional Chinese belief of “heaven as destiny,” the orthodoxy of the emperor’s domination over this land is based on the myth that Amaterasu-ōmikami is the ancestral deity of the Imperial Family. Therefore, in the enthronement ceremony, the emperor wore “the full dress of twelve ornaments” to strengthen his authority, rather than believing in the concept of “heaven as destiny.” On the other hand, the “big sacrifice” (the first sacrifice held in the first year of the emperor’s reign) is also an extremely important part of the emperor’s accession ceremony. In this sacrifice festival, the emperor will hold a so-called “*shinzenkyoshin*” ceremony where he sacrifices unhusked rice

(millet) for Amaterasu-ōmikami, together with other presents (fish, shells, fruits, etc.) collected from across the country. After that, the emperor will smell the food, seemingly with Amaterasu-ōmikami, thus confirming that he was the “grandson” who deems Amaterasu-ōmikami as his ancestor.

The accession ceremony was closely related to the international order of East Asia at that time. The ceremony was established as a system at the end of the 7th century to the 8th century during Tenmu and Jito dynasties. It was in this period that the *ritsuryō* state centered on the emperor began to take form, and the centralization of the emperor was developed. At the same time, Japan became aware of the China-centered state order in East Asia, and developed its national consciousness through its contacts with China. After that, it sought to form its own state. Amid this process, Buddhism was used for both political and diplomatic ends in the East Asian world. Therefore, with the formation of the *ritsuryō* state, Japan created its “National Buddhism” with the intention of “protecting the country.” The idea of protecting the country and the guardianship of the king in Buddhism enhanced the authority of the emperor system and strengthened the connection between the emperor and Buddhism, which in turn led to the idea that the emperor became a Buddha. Therefore, the succession ceremony after the 10th century gradually became institutionally stable. The orthodoxy of the throne is guaranteed by the blood relationship between Amaterasu-ōmikami and the emperor. The ideology surrounding the ancestral god is the pillar of imperial politics, so the will of the emperor cannot be denied, even if he does not have political

power. As the ancestral god, Amaterasu-ōmikami has been interpreted as Mahāvairocana since the 11th century, showing the increasingly strong influence of Buddhism. Buddhist rituals like *abhiseca* emerged in subsequent enthronement ceremonies. Monks' explanations of these rituals formed the concept of the Accession Law. The Middle Ages big sacrifice ceremonies for the emperor also changed. By practicing *abhiseca* in the enthronement ceremony, the emperor was believed to obtain the human body of the Amaterasu-ōmikami and the local Mahāvairocana. As the local Buddha of Amaterasu-ōmikami, the emperor participated in this affair. He was not only the inheritor of Ninigi no Mikoto, but also the human body of both Amaterasu-ōmikami and the local Mahāvairocana. All in all, under the influence of Buddhist concepts and the endorsement of royalty, the accession ceremony and the big sacrifice enable the emperor to become a Buddha, equipped with the dual orthodoxy of mythology and Buddhism.

In a shift, the ceremony of Emperor Meiji not only eliminated Buddhist concepts and Chinese factors, but also originated the idea of placing a globe in the venue, denoting that Japanese territory laid out on the sphere was inherited by the emperor. This awareness based on real geography is completely different from the Buddhist worldview formed in the Middle Ages.

Reviewing the development of the emperor's accession ceremony, we can find that due to historical changes, each era has a different orthodoxy and conceptual foundation. First of all, Amaterasu-ōmikami, the ancestral god, functioned as a local

Buddha. Then in the Middle Ages, the emperor was transformed into both a god and a Buddha. This concept was completely abandoned in modern era.

Zhang Jianli, a research fellow at the Institute of Japanese Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, analyzed the changes in Japan's attitudes toward their emperors after the war. He said that the Japanese people's feelings for the emperor system and the emperor are an important factor in their identity construction.

Japanese support for the emperor system and the people's sense of closeness to him underwent changes throughout history. For example, after World War II, Japanese support for the emperor system was mainly based on their functional needs for him, a sense of closeness to him and the people's feelings about his personal conduct. The approval rate for the emperor system has always been high, but Japanese closeness with their emperor varied in different periods. For example, the public felt much closer to Emperor Akihito and the current Emperor Naruhito, compared with their intimacy with Emperor Showa. In addition, the sense of closeness also varies according to a person's age. As people grow older, they become more affectionate toward the emperor. In particular, those 70 and over pay high respect to the emperor, indicating that the notion of "the emperor as a god" remains in some segments of the population. However, it is too simple to suppose that young people are indifferent to the emperor. Though many don't think much about the relationship between their lives and the emperor when they are young, as they grow older, they will naturally connect with the emperor when

considering their identity. For that reason, their feelings for the emperor become entirely different, and this change is exactly the process by which Japanese build their own identity.

Zhang Jianli opined that this emotional change is mainly because the emperor of the Showa era issued the Humanity Declaration, indicating that he is not a god but a person, after which Emperor Akihito and Emperor Naruhito both married civilians and further broke the traditional public understanding of the emperor's divinity. In addition, Emperor Akihito and his empress extended their regards to the disaster-stricken Japanese in an approachable way, which further narrowed the distance between the emperor and his people and increased their intimacy. In addition, when he was the crown prince, Emperor Naruhito and his empress had the intention to draw closer to the ordinary people and break the sense of aloofness. Based on this, generations of Japanese have undergone changes in their own identity and emotions toward the monarchy.

Li Zhuo, a professor at the Institute of Japanese Studies at Nankai University, focused on the development and revision of the Imperial Household Law. She pointed out that the Imperial Household Law has a major impact on the Japanese emperor system and the royal family. Bound by the Imperial Household Law, the lack of successors to the Japanese throne is becoming more and more serious, which is partly due to the trend of a shrinking population due to a low birthrate in Japan recent years, and to the restrictions on the royal family and the regulations on the royal women stipulated by the Imperial Household Law.

The Imperial Household Law is a statute in Japanese law centered on imperial succession. Although the current Imperial Household Law was formulated in 1947 according to the Constitution of Japan, to a large extent, it referred to The Imperial Household Law formulated in the Meiji period. The reason why the Imperial Household Law was made in Meiji period is that there were no regulations on Japanese imperial succession before that.

After the investigation and discussion by the Meiji reformers, the Imperial Household Law established the rule that the throne should be inherited by men in the royal family, women should be excluded and abdication should be denied. Since then, the Japanese royal family has been institutionally guaranteed, and confusion over imperial succession no longer exists. However, the rules excluding women and denying abdication also brought problems to the development of the emperor system, which made it difficult for Emperor Akihito to abdicate and creates difficulties for royal succession in the future.

A new post-war Imperial Household Law was issued on January 6, 1947, and the Constitution of Japan was put into effect on May 3 of the same year. The Imperial Household Law, which had previously stood in parity with the Constitution of the Empire of Japan, became a subordinate law of the Constitution of Japan. This reflected that not only was the autonomy of the royal family denied, but also the number of people in the royal household was reduced. For example, the number of royal family members before World War II, 51, was reduced to only 15 by 1947, and was only 18 by 2019. Although post-war Imperial Household

Law deleted a lot of content associated with militarism, which was a great step at that time, it is still a successor to the Imperial Household Law from the Meiji period, which inevitably caused a disjoint with the new era. On the other hand, with the Japanese royal family facing a lack of successors, the Imperial Household Law's insistence on the provisions of male inheritance has been widely criticized by the outside world.

With respect to the revisions of the Imperial Household Law, Li Zhuo believes that although the current accession of Emperor Naruhito and the birth of Prince Hisahito have alleviated a series of problems faced by the royal family, they have not fundamentally solved the problem of a lack of successors. The Constitution of Japan stipulates that a revision of the Imperial Household Law must be completed by parliament, but there is no pressure at home or abroad to push the government and politicians to revise it. This means the appearance of a Japanese female emperor maybe delayed into the indefinite future.

Prof. Song Chengyou at the Department of History at Peking University gave a presentation entitled "Between Tradition and Modernity: Inheritance and Variation of the Three Concepts of Shinto." He elaborated on the *tenno* ideology from the perspective of Shinto.

Shinto can be summarized as "the Three Concepts of Shinto." These are the Shinkoku Concept (land of god), the Koukuni Concept (land of the emperor) and the Takekuni Concept (land of military power). The Shinkoku Concept has two meanings: the land of Japan was created by God, and Japan is

always protected by God. The prominence of the Shinkoku Concept lasted from the Heian Period to the Edo Period, with continuous development. The Koukuni Concept is derived from the Shinkoku Concept. It mainly emphasizes two points. The first is monarchical authority. The emperor's power comes from the Amaterasu-ōmikami. The second is that the emperor's family rules forever.

These viewpoints are mainly from *Nihon Shoki*, Edo classics and later Mitogaku and other economic and social classics. In general, the Shinkoku Concept is based on the world of gods, and the Koukuni Concept is based on the human world. The Takekuni Concept is also an important foundational basis for Japan. According to *Nihon Shoki*, it is said that Izanaki (the father god of Japan) and Izanami (the mother god of Japan, Izanaki's sister) used the Amenonuboko (a sacred spear) to explore the sea, and the dripping sea water became the first land of Japan, thus indicating that Japan maintains the country by means of military power. Corresponding to the three concepts of Shinto are three artifacts. The mirror is the symbol of the Amaterasu-ōmikami, which represents wisdom. Jade is the symbol of the emperor, which represents virtue. The sword is the symbol of force. The formation of *tenno* ideology is closely related to the Three Concepts of Shinto.

According to historical records, during the Yamatai Period, Himiko, the queen at that time, could communicate with ghosts and delude the public, which means she ruled the country with supernatural discourse. Although Shinto was not completely formed at that time, this shows that there was already a political need to deify the kingship. After that, Emperor Tenmu, Emperor

Jito and Emperor Monmu continued to strengthen ancient emperor system by further deifying the emperor. The emperor system went on to thrive until modern times, and the Three Concepts of Shinto can be seen in the Imperial Rescript on Education, Imperial Rescript on Military Men and Japan's constitution, emphasizing that Japan is a country ruled by the emperor and established with military force.

The post-war democratic reform is closely related to a variation and continuation of the Three Concepts of Shinto. The post-war democratic reforms did not totally repudiate the results of the Meiji Restoration. Instead, the reforms reaffirmed the spirit of "widely holding meetings and dealing with state affairs by public discussion" during the Meiji Restoration, and further removed the ideological and divine aspects of the *tenno* state system in the Constitution of the Empire of Japan. Thus, the emperor became symbolic, in a change from his pre-war monopoly on power.

At the same time, the Three Concepts of Shinto also mutated, which was expressed mainly in three aspects. First, the emperor continued to rule according to a vague expression, which treated the legend of Emperor Jimmu as a fact. Second, sacred rituals with Shinto meanings were still adopted during changes to the throne to deify the new emperor. Third, a faint correlation between artifacts and emperors still existed.

In Song Chengyou's opinion, because the transmission of Shinto thought continues, the Three Concepts of Shinto and the emperor system are inseparable from each other. First, the new constitution retains the emperor and emperor system, thus leaving the basis for the survival of Shinto concepts. Second, the

existence of various shrines serves as a home for Shinto spirits, such as the Yasukuni Shrine. Although religion was divorced from government after World War II, the Three Concepts of Shinto has also mutated accordingly and continues to exist as a symbolic representation of the emperor system's ideology.

In addition, Japan's national characteristics and mentality are also important. Shinto is a key to the Japanese national soul.

Japanese social life is inseparable from Shinto concepts, which are still active in many fields of contemporary Japanese society. Japanese pray for the gods on many important occasions, like the launch of economic activities of large enterprises, and the entrance examinations and marriage ceremonies of ordinary people. These daily behaviors have invisibly deepened Shinto ideology. Especially since the 1990s, with the expansion of "new nationalism" and "new democracy," Shinto has received powerful support.

Gong Na, an associate research fellow at the Institute of Japanese Studies at the Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences, gave a speech titled "From Contemporary Emperor System to the Symbolic Emperor System." She said that Japan restored imperial power through the Meiji Restoration and established contemporary emperor system. After World War II, Japan established national sovereignty, and the emperor became a symbol based on national support. Although imperial power was limited under the symbolic emperor system, the tradition of emperor system continued despite the break. The support of the Japanese people for the emperor continued.

At the time of making the Constitution of the Empire of Japan, in order to prevent the emperor from being involved in

politics, Japan did not let the emperor take charge. Instead, an extremely complex Meiji constitution system was designed. The Meiji constitutional system basically operated smoothly during the Meiji period, because the leading figures of Meiji Restoration were still alive, and because of the personal charm of Emperor Meiji. As a result, even after party politics emerged, it was still possible to control the political situation through cooperation.

After World War I, radical changes in the political and economic environment in Japan and abroad threw emperor system into an unprecedented predicament. First, the emperor system faced difficulties within the political realm. After World War I, many empires ruled by monarchs collapsed. The Emperor Taisho could not govern. Therefore, Tatsukichi Minobe proposed his Emperor Organ concept, which said the emperor was only an “organ of the state” as defined through the constitutional structure, rather than a sacred power beyond the state itself. Second, the government and the military competed for power. Third, with the changes in the world after World War I, the value of the royal family gradually declined. Fourth, the social situation during the reign of Emperor Hirohito was very bad. The Great Kanto Earthquake and a series of assassinations caused the people to question the emperor.

In order to cope with these crises, the emperor system had to make corresponding changes. First, the theory of the state system changed in logical structure by replacing single nationality theory with mixed nationality theory. It was to advocate national assimilation in colonies. Second, discussion of the theory of the state system became taboo and its connotation became increasingly narrower. In the end, the theory of the state system

was used by extremist forces with its focus shifted from ideological theory to a tool to repel dissidents.

The second is the reshaping of imperial power and the strengthening of the emperor system. The image of the royal family changed. They tried to win the support of the people through propaganda to change public opinion. The emperor system was also integrated with democracy, which provided legitimacy for people to participate in politics while strengthening the emperor's authority.

The divine aspect of the emperor was restored. From January 1928, Japan held a year-long celebration of the enthronement of Emperor Hirohito. Using propaganda, Hirohito successfully built an image of a new emperor with leadership qualities. He was seen as a divine person and a parent of all the people.

Third, a change took place involving the emperor system and the Japanese military. The emperor took a laissez-faire attitude toward the military's expansion of power, and tried to avoid being involved. Therefore, in the framework of emperor system at that time, the military achieved political power through indirect rule by legal means during the Showa period.

The fourth change was the establishment of the imperial conference, or Gozen Kaigi. After Japan launched its all-out war of aggression against China, with the emergence of the imperial conference, contemporary emperor system to a certain extent broke through the constraints of the Meiji Constitution.

Although contemporary emperor system was changing, some aspects remained unchanged. First of all, Japan's understanding of adhering to the emperor system never wavered.

Democratic movements targeted feudalism and aristocrats, not the emperor system itself. Second, the system in which the emperor does not directly rule never changed. It is in this context the contemporary emperor system eventually became an autocracy and then collapsed.

After World War II, Japan established national sovereignty and the emperor became a symbol based on national support, but the tradition of the emperor system continued despite this change. This was mainly manifested in three aspects.

First, during the construction of symbolic emperor system, Emperor Showa guarded the emperor system itself, as American post-war rule over Japan changed from direct to indirect.

Second, the Japanese government made great efforts to preserve the *tenno* system, theory and public support. As a result, the existence of the emperor system was based on the national will.

Third, through the influence of actions and public opinion, the image of the emperor and the royal family gradually changed. Emperor Showa's image changed from a majestic, paternal authority and a mysterious emperor to a non-religious emperor who can be related to by ordinary people.

Fourth, there was a shift from absolute emperor system to popular emperor system. The turning point of this process was the marriage of Crown Prince Akihito and the civilian Shōda Michiko in 1959. This moment marked the start of the public enthusiasm characterized by popular emperor system.

Although the emperor system has a tendency to break down at the system level, there are some aspects that have remained strong. First, the emperor continues to play an important role in

political diplomacy. Second, the authority of the emperor continues to be recognized by the people. For example, hundreds of thousands of people spontaneously gather around the palace to participate in celebrations every year. Third, the culture of the emperor system continues and penetrates various aspects of Japanese people's daily life.

In short, the emperor system has played an important role both as a political system and a cultural system in modern times. Today, Emperor Akihito's abdication has broken the rules in place since the Meiji Period, forming a new development in the emperor system. Emperor Naruhito, who was born and grew up after the war, has no ties to the earlier divine monarchy. This may portend more radical changes in the Japanese royal family's actions.

Wang Min, a professor at the Institute of International Japanese Studies at Hosei University, analyzed developments in Sino-Japanese relations after the new emperor took throne.

To many Japanese people, the arrival of the Reiwa era felt like welcoming the New Year. Since the new emperor took the throne, he has been praised in Japanese civil society, and in both Japanese and foreign media reports. The royal family is now more transparent to the public. For example, photos of the emperor and his daughter have appeared in the media many times, which never happened before. This also shows that the current royal family has gradually walked down from a sacred and unreachable high place, to the level of the public. This would be impossible without the support of the Abe government and the permission of the Imperial Household Agency. It also reflects that Japan has felt the need to change with the times.

Alongside this “Reiwa revolution,” Sino-Japanese relations have also witnessed a new look. The emperor and the empress met with the outgoing Chinese ambassador to Japan and his wife, and later accepted the new ambassador’s credentials in a gorgeous carriage, which was rare in the past. From this perspective, China’s position has risen in the Sino-Japanese relations in Reiwaera, and China is very important in the worldview of Emperor Naruhito.

Wang Min opined that in the future, Emperor Naruhito’s attention to China will involve many aspects, one of which is related to the history of water transportation. Japan has suffered from floods since ancient times, and the urgency of water control and the damage caused by floods have made Japan’s emperors view harnessing rivers and lakes as an important task. The emperor best known for controlling flooding, Emperor Keitai, took China’s Yu the Great as his idol. There is a huge portrait of Yu the Great in the Emperor’s Office at the Kyoto Imperial Palace. Since 1641, 38 emperors have worked there. They shouldered important responsibilities and missions and are supposed to solve difficulties for the people, like Yu the Great.

In Japan, there are more than 140 relics related to Yu the Great. They are located from Hokkaido to Okinawa and can be seen all over Japan. From this perspective, the Chinese dream is linked to the Japanese dream.

Wang Min said that after the new emperor took the throne, he inherited the peaceful ideas of Emperor Akihito and shouldered a major responsibility. It is believed that he would inherit the career of his father and carry out a new “revolution” to promote the friendship between China and Japan for generations.

Prof. Wang Xinsheng at the Department of History at Peking University gave a presentation titled “The Political Influence of Emperor Showa after World War II.” He believes that after the war, Emperor Showa did not try to exert sovereign power as a head of state, as stipulated by the constitution. However, while staying away from actual political processes, the emperor still exerted influence in many ways, including internal reports and imperial consulting. This was partly because of Emperor Showa himself, but more due influence from conservative politicians and the ruling party.

Article 3 of the post-war Constitution of Japan stipulated that “all acts of the emperor concerning state affairs must have the recommendations and recognition of the cabinet, and the cabinet should bear its responsibility.” But in fact, Emperor Showa still exerted a large political influence after the war, mainly through internal reports and imperial consulting. Internal reports are submitted to the emperor by the prime minister and his cabinet. Imperial consulting refers to the emperor’s personal questions to officials. In the early post-war period, Emperor Showa learned about the situation at home and abroad from the cabinet in these two ways.

In the early post-war period, reformists hoped to accelerate the implementation of the symbolic emperor system. The most prominent proponent was Hitoshi Ashida. Ashida believed that for the royal family and Japan as a whole, after the implementation of the new constitution, the emperor’s excessive involvement in political and diplomatic affairs may not be a good thing. To this end, he proposed many measures, including

abolishing internal reports and changing the grand chamberlain, but was met with strong opposition from the emperor.

On July 22, 1947, Ashida wrote in his diary that during the internal report that day, the emperor's imperial consulting took up to 30 minutes, involving issues such as the US-Soviet confrontation and the Cold War. Although Ashida was a firm promoter of symbolic emperor system, his political career was very short. Later, a conservative representative, Shigeru Yoshida, organized a cabinet. Yoshida advocated constitutional monarchy and believed that the promotion of national integration centered on the emperor was in line with the spirit of the Japanese Constitution. After taking office, he resumed internal reports for all cabinet members.

Eisaku Sato is another representative of conservative politicians. He was Japan's longest-serving prime minister to date. During his administration, he constantly promoted constitutional monarchy in Japan, continued to do internal reports with cabinet members and took advantage of imperial consulting to get the emperor to say things that benefited the conservative party. Sato consciously promoted this interaction with the emperor and built an image of friendship between the emperor and the cabinet. Some commentators believe that during Sato's ruling period, the situation of an emperor-cabinet friendship not only laid the foundation for constitutional monarchy, but also became the spiritual core of conservative politics.

In 1973, Keikichi Masuhara, the then Defense Agency chief, reported on defense issues to the emperor in internal reports, and the emperor expressed his opinions. Masuhara revealed this to the media, which triggered a great uproar in the Japanese parliament.

After that, the content of internal reports and imperial consulting was no longer open to the public, and emperors also became very cautious in expressing their opinions on the prime minister's internal report. Until the death of Emperor Showa, internal reports and imperial consulting always existed. Although the system stipulates that the emperor should not participate in politics, conservative politicians still intend to use the emperor to achieve their political goals in real political life.

The emperor's abdication and the replacement of the new emperor's reign title this year also reflected this problem. The Abe government convened a group of professionals to think about the reign title the new emperor hoped to use. After displaying the new reign title, a special press conference was held to explain the meaning of Reiwa, emphasizing that the reign title was to support the sense of unity of the spirit of the Japanese people.

In addition, some of the words in the new emperor's lexicon are different from the previous emperor. For example, in his attitude toward the constitution, Emperor Akihito used the word "defense," and Emperor Naruhito used "compliance." It is speculated that the cabinet intended to amend the constitution when drafting the speech. In summary, it can be seen that conservative politicians hope to use the influence of the emperor through political power to achieve their political goals. Therefore, although Japan adopted a symbolic emperor system, the political influence of the emperor will be utilized in the process of real politics.

Hu Peng, a research fellow at the Institute of Japanese Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, analyzed the

Japanese emperor system from the perspective of Japanese women in wartime. She opined that in modern times, Japanese women have been influenced by both tradition and modernity. In the early years of Meiji era, Japanese women, affected by progressive thoughts from the West, accepted the idea of freedom and democracy, universal love and happiness, and equality between men and women. At the same time, traditional factors, such as the patriarchal system, the modern emperor system, the “perfect-wife-and-mother” doctrine, and nationalism restricted Japanese women’s thoughts and behaviors, leading to Japanese women’s groups assisting the war effort.

Japanese women’s thinking and lives were mainly regulated by the Japanese emperor system and the patriarchal system. Japanese people who accepted the education of the emperor system before the war could not treat their country and neighbors equally, and believed that other nations must obey Japan. The thoughts of the Japanese emperor system gradually spread in Japanese society and became the highest standard of action for Japanese people at that time. The patriarchal system was a traditional constraint in the long feudal eras of both China and Japan. Fathers relied on their absolute power to rule their family members, which formed a social ruling structure. In Japan, the relationship between the emperor and the people is similar to the father-son relationship. Therefore, during wartime, the preaching of Japanese militarism from officials toward the people normalized the aggression and glamorized the reasons for the aggression, so that the people would obey.

Since the Meiji era, Japanese rulers have attached great importance to the emperor system education. In 1890, the Meiji

Emperor promulgated the *Imperial Rescript on Education*, which had a profound influence on the thoughts of the people, especially children. It became the highest standard of Japanese national morality. The *Imperial Rescript on Education* was distributed to every Japanese school, along with a portrait of the emperor. When students and teachers go to school and leave school every day, they must bow to the portrait. In the event of an emergency such as a fire or flood, they must protect the safety of the portrait. In some ceremonies, they need to salute the portrait, shout hooray of their emperor, read the *Imperial Rescript on Education*, and sing the national anthem.

After the promulgation of *Imperial Rescript on Education*, self-cultivation classes in primary schools were highly valued. In 1891, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology announced standards for primary school self-cultivation textbooks. Many of them are about loyalty, friendship, kindness and respect. The purpose was to cultivate loyal and patriotic children. The national textbooks implemented in 1904 included content about social progress, such as financial credit and freedom. However, the textbooks were criticized. In response, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology began to revise the national textbook in 1908. Articles on bourgeois ideas were deleted, and were replaced by topics such as the “essence of the state,” “unity of loyalty and filial piety,” and “the legacy of the emperors.” In the 1920s, ideological education supporting the emperor system was basically completely in place in the education system.

Pre-war primary education was a very important part of Japanese national education. The number of primary school

graduates continued to increase, with the proportion of female graduates also increasing. The education imposed under the emperor system has some controlling effect on the ideas of the people, especially on the ideology and behavior of Japanese women. The empress was treated like the mother of the country in women's magazines and women's education at that time, requiring women to respect the royal family and strengthening the national sentiment. In addition, the establishment of official women's groups also related to the emperor system. It mobilized the enthusiasm of women, and called on them to contribute to the country.

The emperor system seriously distorted humanity and destroyed Japanese women's souls. It directly led to serious deviations in Japanese nationals' self-awareness and their understanding of Asia. Under the influence of the emperor system, no one doubted the justice of the war launched by the emperor. They took sacrificing for the emperor for granted.

Tian Qingli, a research fellow at the Northeast Asian Studies Center of Tianjin Foreign Studies University, gave a presentation titled "The Main Characteristics of the Emperor System in the Heisei Era." He opined that the emperor system of the Heisei era is in an important historical stage that connects the Showa era and the Reiwa era. The Heisei era inherited from the former royal family the practice of doing private rituals in the Imperial Palace, accepting reports and teaching, and carrying out "royal diplomacy." At the same time, the emperor system in the Heisei era also had many innovations, such as expanding the boundaries of "public activities," proactively proposing abdication, and using the mass media to express their feelings.

By analyzing the characteristics of the emperor system in the Heisei era, we can find several perspectives on observing the emperor system.

The first perspective is based on comparative analysis. Emperor Showa and Emperor Akihito are under the same Japanese Constitution, but there is a clear distinction between the performance of their roles and public activities. Emperor Showa came to power in line with the prewar theocratic emperor system, embodying mystery and authority. Emperor Akihito paid more attention to action, and reflected an emphasis on popularity and secularity. The evolution from a modern theocratic emperor system to the post-war emperor system experienced a flow “from theocracy to kingship to human rights,” and its turning point was the “declaration of humanity” (*ningensengen*) issued by Emperor Showa.

Emperor Akihito is the core figure in the transition from kingship to human rights. After the March 11 Japan earthquake, he went to the disaster area to express his condolences and gave a speech on television. These actions played an important role in boosting the confidence of the Japanese people and increased cohesion and a sense of unity. In addition, the frequency of public activities by Emperor Akihito increased significantly compared with the Showa era. The activities were mainly meetings and tea parties. Emperor Akihito tried to create opportunities to meet, talk and shake hands with the people as much as possible to establish a close bond with the people and further achieve the goal of realizing the integration of the “nation state.”

The second perspective is based on historical analysis. Emperor Showa once said that he worshipped Emperor Meiji,

while Emperor Akihito said that he worshipped Emperor Saga and Emperor Go-Nara. Emperor Saga was the 52nd emperor of Japan. He was good at calligraphy and poetry. Emperor Go-Nara was the 105th emperor of Japan. He was quite compassionate, and would pray for the health of the people in the event of plague, flood and famine. In 1984, when Akihito (the then-prince) met with reporters, he said that the emperors in the history who were always concerned about the sufferings of the people are his examples. The emperor system advocated by [then Prince] Akihito is far from the political tradition and provides a historical basis for the “non-political” and “close-to-the-people” characteristics that the symbolic emperor system should have. After ascending to the throne, Emperor Akihito profoundly introspected about the cruelty of war and the preciousness of peace. He learned his humanistic aspirations from the ancient emperor system and added vitality into the symbolic emperor system.

The third perspective is based on an international view. From marrying Empress Michiko to the international vision that he later possessed, his openness and humanism highlighted the characteristics of “popularity” and “secularity” of the symbolic emperor system in the Heisei era. This move toward internationalization was closely related to the trend of post-war Japan’s democracy and the maturity of the general public. It is also a manifestation of the Japanese emperor system’s development in the changing world. Emperor Akihito took account of both tradition and modernity, not only preserving the traditions of the Showa era, such as private rituals in the

Imperial Palace, but also seeking innovation and breakthroughs as well as interacting with the media.

The atmosphere of the Japanese royal family has also been influenced by international royal families, including the British royal family. The new emperor, Naruhito, said that he hopes to earnestly perform his duties by always being close to the people and sharing their happiness and sorrow.

Generally speaking, the “Heisei Style” is mainly manifested in reflecting on history, cherishing peace, being close to the people, advocating human rights, having an international vision, making innovations, and so on.

Prof. Wu Xinbo at Shanghai International Studies University analyzed the logical relationship between the emperor and Japan’s national development.

Amid historical changes, with the division and combination of authority and power, Japan has formed its own unique “historical structure,” that is, a cyclical alternating between a single structure and a dual structure.

The single structure occurs infrequently in Japanese society. Whenever a crisis approaches, Japan will be highly united.

The dual structure is the norm in Japanese history. Once the external crisis is successfully resolved, internal separatist forces will rise up and bring Japan back to the dual structure. In the 2,000 plus years of Japanese history, the period of a single structure political state was less than 400 years. Most of its history had a dual structure state under pressure from separatist forces.

This periodic alternation can be seen from the Taika Reforms to the full resurgence of the clan politics, the Meiji

Restoration, and the separation of the post-war emperor's authority and power.

Japan's "reconstruction of the country" was a highly unified political process. From the cyclical evolution of the historical structure, it is not difficult to find that there is a hidden internal logical relationship between the emperor and Japan's "national reconstruction." That is, each of Japan's transitions from a single structure to a dual structure political state was done under the leadership of the emperor. To realize the rebuilding of the country, the emperor must step out of the palace and enter the center of the political arena to achieve a high degree of unity between authority and power.

The above peculiar phenomenon mainly stems from the relationship between the emperor and Japan's social structure. Ancient Japan was composed of countless clan tribes, and the emperor, as the "living god," was the leader of the largest clan tribe that integrated the clan tribes all over the islands. From the perspective of sociology, clan tribes, as basic units of society, have basically the same internal structure regardless of their size. These organizations can be freely combined, forming a layered series of alliances which can extend to the shogunate level and finally reach the emperor. Thus, clan society, with its strong tendency to split and appear to be scattered, shows its unique transformation pattern: It can be as large as covering all the islands to form a single-structure political community headed by the emperor; and can also be as small as factions of parties in different states on the islands.

When the islands experience internal and external crises, society will, consciously or unconsciously, demand a return to a

single structure and establish a greater community. At this time, the role of political leaders will be reduced, and the role of traditional power will be strengthened, so that the emperor will change from being constrained to being elevated. Therefore, whenever Japan transformed from a dual structure state to a highly unified single structure country, various political forces will eventually return to tradition, moving closer to the emperor and resorting to the emperor's power to achieve the goal of rebuilding of the country in order to get rid of internal and external crises, and seek new development.

The Japanese-style “nation-state identity” model strengthens the inner relationship between the emperor and “national rebuilding.” Although Yamato people account for more than 99.5 percent of Japan's total population, the concept of the nation was only formed in modern Japan. Before the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese islanders were fragmented by the geographical environment and the *bakuhau* system. At that time, the Japanese had a “consciousness of the country” narrowly based on blood and geography. Japan's recognition of the nation-state was to achieve the recreation and self-improvement of modern national consciousness through the strong worship, recognition and obedience to the highest clan gods and clan leaders, and then to achieve the final recognition of the country through a unified national identity.

After the war, the US forcibly rebuilt Japan by demolishing the “constitutional monarchy” established since modern times and implementing a political system of “separation of powers” in legislation, administration, and judiciary. The US also forced the emperor to withdraw from the center of political power, only

allowing it to exist as a cultural symbol of the Japanese nation. Japan has returned to the traditional dual structure in which authority and power are separated. In order to establish the global liberal order, the West has positioned Japan in the special status of semi-sovereignty and partial power by establishing the so-called “peace constitution.” The emperor’s forced abdication led to the Japanese people becoming increasingly indifferent to their sense of identity and belonging to the “nation.” It was difficult for them to generate a heartfelt love and loyalty to the “nation.” People retreated to seeing the country as merely a place to live.

With the gradual recovery and awakening of the consciousness of a great power, Japanese politicians began to be dissatisfied with the post-war transformation and arrangement forced by the West. They tried to amend the constitution and “recreate Japan” in their own way. Japan’s post-war national reconstruction has experienced four important periods to date: the period when Nakasone Yasuhiro proposed post-war conservative politics; when Ichiro Ozawa proposed the “normal nation” concept; the period when Junichiro Koizumi engaged in strongman politics; and the Shinzo Abe period when the “beautiful country” concept was put forward.

Japanese politicians know that the process of national rebuilding means the high integration of power and authority. Without the participation of the emperor, it would be impossible to create a “beautiful Japan” that is recognized and loved by the people. To this end, the Japanese politicians all secretly expressed their favor toward and complimented the emperor in the process of advancing the country’s rebuilding. In July 2016, NHK

broadcast the news that the emperor retired. On August 8, Emperor Akihito made a televised speech, indicating his personal will to abdicate. The Japanese government quickly accepted the decision of the emperor. After nearly three years of intensive preparation, Prince Naruhito ascended to the throne to become the new emperor on May 1, 2019.

Wu Xinbo opined that Japan's unique "historical structure," "social structure" and the Japanese-style "nation-state identity" models profoundly stipulate the inherent logical relationship between the emperor and "national reconstruction." History has repeatedly proved that Japan's "national reconstruction" cannot be realized in the absence of the emperor. Japan is experiencing "national reconstruction" for a third time. Does Emperor Naruhito's ascension mean the process is entering the new era, which has changed from quantitative to qualitative?

Tang Yongliang, a research fellow at the Institute of Japanese Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, analyzed the impact of the shift between old and new emperors on Japanese society. He opined that although the post-war emperor's function has been weakened in political and religious aspects, we cannot deny the influence of the Japanese emperor and the royal family on Japanese society.

First, after the war, Japanese overall had a lower interest in politics. A 2014 survey showed that when asked about the impact of ordinary people on the country's politics, 20.5% of the respondents indicated that they had a very large impact, compared with 40% in 1973. When asked what kind of political system they prefer, the number of respondents who chose to "wait and see" increased from 41% in 1973 to 80.3%. It can be

seen that the Japanese people are skeptical about the impact of personal behavior on politics, and are not optimistic about the current political system. In addition, in the context of education, Japanese society is increasingly diversified, and few events can trigger attention from all of Japanese society. The influence of Emperor Akihito's abdication and the opening of the Reiwa era on Japanese society is undoubtedly unprecedented, which also reflects that the emperor and the royal family still have great influence in Japan.

Second, although the role of the emperor in politics is greatly restricted by the constitution, the important role played by the emperor in many fields cannot be ignored. For example, the emperor participates in private rituals in the Imperial Palace. In addition, with the support of the government, exchanges between the royal family and other heads of foreign countries also contribute to Japanese diplomacy.

Compared with the diplomacy of politicians, the diplomacy of the royal family is continuous and can maintain long-term interactions with foreign countries. This characteristic cannot be ignored. More importantly, when Japan encounters big crises, the highest governing body that plays the role of saving the nation is the emperor. Therefore, a view goes that adhering to the emperor system means maintaining security, and is indispensable for the survival of the Japanese nation.

Tang Yongliang pointed out that although the emperor and the royal family still have great influence in Japanese society, they will face some stability problems in the future. For example, as the symbol of authority, is the emperor capable of blocking the Japanese government from amending the constitution? And will

the stability of the dual-structure of the country be affected? Another example is the revision of the royal model. The revision of the royal model this time may become a breakthrough in solving the problem of royal inheritance in the future. But it is also accompanied by two major risks. One is the subtlety of the relationship between the previous emperor and present emperor, and the other is that if abdication becomes a normal situation, it will affect the stability of the royal succession.

During the discussion session, experts and the audience shared their insights on topics related to the emperor system and had an in-depth discussion.

Song Chengyou: What was the relationship between the emperor and Japanese society after the war? What are the differences between Emperor Showa and Emperor Akihito? What is the difference between Emperor Akihito and Emperor Naruhito?

Misa Manabe: There was no difference between Emperor Showa and Emperor Akihito in obeying the Constitution. Relatively, Emperor Showa strictly obeyed the requirements of the government, but was not much concerned with the demands of the people. By contrast, Emperor Akihito tried very hard to pay attention to the needs of the people. After the war, Japan implemented the symbolic emperor system, and Emperor Akihito was gradually recognized by Japanese society and the public for his personal charm. On the other hand, the Japanese people also gained the freedom to express their opinions on people around the emperor, such as the empress or other royal family members. The opinions can be both positive and negative. From this

perspective, the first article of the Japanese Constitution after the war did take root in Japanese society.

Li Zhuo: Do you really think that there will be a female emperor in Japan?

Misa Manabe: I emphasized in my speech that a female emperor is very likely to appear, but it is hard to say whether a matriarchal emperor can appear. The father of the female emperor was also the emperor. This has a precedent in history.

However, it is hard to say whether the female descendants of the female emperor can still be the emperor. There are many problems to jump from the idea of a “female emperor” to a “matriarchal emperor.” Young people in Japan don’t quite distinguish between a female empress and a matriarchal emperor. Many people may see a female emperor like the queen of the British royal family and then think that it is not bad to have a matriarchal royal family in Japan. But some people would prefer to abolish the emperor system rather than have a matriarchal emperor system.

Audience: The new emperor’s reign of “Reiwa” was selected from Japanese classics. For the first time, it is not selected from Chinese classics. Will it always be selected from Japanese classics in the future? Japan admires China’s classics very much, but now many people are appealing for separation from Chinese classical culture, intentionally creating cultural contradictions between the two sides. How do you view this issue?

Wang Min: Reiwa is indeed from the Japanese classics, but it was written in Chinese, which means that it still belongs to the Chinese cultural circle. Therefore, I don’t think we can treat it as

simply separating from Chinese culture. We must look at this issue from a broader perspective. In addition, in Japan, the intensity of learning Chinese characters at school has increased in recent years.

Prof. Wang Xinsheng summarized the meeting, saying that the views expressed by experts and scholars on the Japanese emperor system have led to a better understanding of the status of the emperor, and thus to understand Japanese society and the country. The presentations talked about the role of the emperor in Japanese society in terms of politics, society, history, and so on, but it is a pity that no economic aspects were touched upon. There are still many topics about emperor worth discussing. With the further study of the emperor and Japan's politics, economy, and society, he believes that we will create more concepts and our own methods of discussion.