

JAPAN IN THE HEISEI ERA (1989–2019)

Multidisciplinary Perspectives

EDITED BY NORIKO MURAI,
JEFF KINGSTON, AND TINA BURRETT



Japan in the Heisei Era (1989–2019)

Japan in the Heisei Era (1989–2019) provides a retrospective and multidisciplinary account of a society in flux. Featuring analyses from leading scholars around the globe, this textbook examines the evolving contexts of Japan throughout the Heisei era and how longstanding verities and values have been called into question. Asking what this holds for Japan's future relations with the world and within its own communities, chapters delve beneath the layers of a complex and increasingly diverse society, exploring topics including simmering ethno-nationalism economic torpor, political stagnation, and cultural dynamics.

Features of this textbook include:

- Analysis of key social issues ranging from immigration, civil society, press freedom, politics, labour and the economy, to diversity, the marginalisation of women, Shinto, and Aum Shinrikyo
- Evaluation of the legacy of Emperor Akihito on war memory, the imperial institution, art, regional relations, and constitutional revision
- Multidisciplinary insights from both the social sciences and humanities
- Rich illustrations for visual analysis of developments in contemporary Japanese literature, film, art, and pop culture

Providing students with dynamic analyses of how contemporary Japanese society continues to transform, this textbook is essential reading for students of Japanese Studies, including Japanese culture, society, history, and politics.

Noriko Murai is an Associate Professor of Art History at Sophia University, where she teaches modern and contemporary Japanese art and visual culture. Her publication in English includes *Journeys East: Isabella Stewart Gardner and Asia* (2009) and *Inventing Asia: American Perspectives Around 1900* (2014).

Jeff Kingston is a Professor of History and Director of Asian Studies at Temple University, Japan. He is the author and editor of a dozen books on contemporary Japan and Asia including *Japan's Quiet Transformation* (2004), *Contemporary Japan* (2011), and *Critical Issues in Contemporary Japan* (2014).

Tina Burrett is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Sophia University. She is the co-editor of *Press Freedom in Contemporary Asia* (2020) and the author of *Television and Presidential Power in Putin's Russia* (2013).



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Japan in the Heisei Era (1989–2019)

Multidisciplinary Perspectives

**Edited by Noriko Murai,
Jeff Kingston, Tina Burrett**

Cover image: Kimura Ryōko, Kiku no ōjisama (The Prince of Chrysanthemum), 2020.
22.0 × 27.3 cm. Ink, mineral pigments, gold on silk. Photo: Yoshikuni Kimura.

First published 2022

by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2022 selection and editorial matter, Noriko Murai, Jeff Kingston, Tina Burrett;
individual chapters, the contributors

The right of Noriko Murai, Jeff Kingston, Tina Burrett to be identified as the
authors of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters, has
been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and
Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised
in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or
hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information
storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered
trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to
infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-0-367-22165-2 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-367-22167-6 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-27357-5 (ebk)

DOI: [10.4324/9780429273575](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429273575)

Typeset in Bembo

by KnowledgeWorks Global Ltd.

Contents

<i>List of figures and tables</i>	viii
<i>List of contributors (listed alphabetically) and short bios</i>	xi
<i>Foreword: Where is Heisei?</i>	xiv
FRANZISKA SERAPHIM	
<i>Introduction</i>	xxi
NORIKO MURAI	
PART 1	
Symbol emperor	1
1 The people's imperial couple	3
KENNETH J. RUOFF	
2 Contemporary <i>goshin'ei</i>: The Emperor, art, and the anus	14
MAKI KANEKO	
PART 2	
Government and politics	31
3 The rightward shift of Japanese politics: Interest, reform, and identity	33
KOICHI NAKANO	
4 Prime ministers, power and leadership in Heisei Japan	44
TINA BURRETT	
5 Heisei Okinawa: What changed?	57
ALEXIS DUDDEN	
6 The fight for open government in the Heisei era	69
LAWRENCE REPETA	

PART 3

Civil society 83

7 Civil society and neoliberalism: Heisei's historic convergence 85

SIMON AVENELL

8 Still half free: The Japanese media in the Heisei era 99

DAVID MCNEILL AND AKIRA TANAKA

PART 4

Economy and work 111

9 The Heisei economy: Explaining the lost decades 113

RICHARD KATZ

10 Precaritization of work in Japan 127

MACHIKO OSAWA AND JEFF KINGSTON

**11 Japan's immigration in the Heisei era: Population, policy,
and the ethno-nationalist dilemma** 140

GRACIA LIU-FARRER

PART 5

Diversity 153

12 Women's leadership and gender equality 155

MARI MIURA

**13 Preserving the status quo: Japan's laws and policies on ethnic
and sexual minorities** 166

TIN TIN HTUN

**14 From tiramisù to #MeToo: Triangulations of sex, gender,
and sexuality in Heisei Japan** 180

JENNIFER ROBERTSON

PART 6

Religion 193

15 Shinto during the Heisei era 195

HELEN HARDACRE

**16 The life and death of a Heisei religious movement: What the Aum
Shinrikyō affair revealed about Japanese society** 206

MARK R. MULLINS

PART 7	
Cool Japan?	219
17 Heisei high architecture as soft power	221
ALICE Y. TSENG	
18 The <i>Evangelion</i> boom: On the explosion of fan markets and lifestyles in Heisei Japan	234
PATRICK W. GALBRAITH	
19 The genealogy of <i>kawaii</i>	245
NORIKO MURAI	
PART 8	
Multivoiced narratives	259
20 A false peace: Literature in the age of Heisei	261
MATTHEW C. STRECHER	
21 Cinema's uneasy social critique: The Heisei era onscreen	272
KYOKO HIRANO	
PART 9	
History and memory	285
22 Heisei historiography: Academic history and public commemoration in Japan, 1990–2020	287
SVEN SAALER	
23 Implicated photographs: Wartime <i>postmemory</i> and the <i>photographic unconsciousness</i> in the Heisei era	299
AYELET ZOHAR	
24 The loss of nostalgia, not the nostalgia of loss: Or, what happens in Heisei stays in Heisei	316
DAVID LEHENY	
25 The tumultuous finale: 2009–2019	328
JEFF KINGSTON	
<i>Index</i>	343

List of figures and tables

Figures

2.1	Kimura Ryōko, <i>Kiku no ōjisama</i> (The Prince of Chrysanthemum), 2020. 22.0 × 27.3 cm. Ink, mineral pigments, gold on silk	15
2.2	Kimura Ryōko, <i>Kikufuku-zu</i> (Happy Chrysanthemum), 2009. 33.0 × 36.0 cm. Intaglio. Printed by KIDO Press, Inc	16
2.3	Kimura Ryōko, <i>Kikufuku-zu Reiwa</i> (Happy Chrysanthemum Reiwa), 2020. 53.0 × 109.0 cm. Colour, ink on paper	17
2.4	Detail of <i>Kikufuku-zu Reiwa</i> (Happy Chrysanthemum Reiwa), 2020. 35.0 × 21.0 cm. Colour, ink on paper	18
2.5	Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko at a shelter in Shimabara, 10 July 1991	19
2.6	Koizumi Meirō, <i>Air #1</i> , 2016. Oil on printed canvas, air	20
2.7	Interior view of <i>Tenran bijutsu: Art with Emperor</i> , Kyoto venue	24
2.8	Interior view of <i>Tenran bijutsu: Art with Emperor</i> , Tokyo venue	24
2.9	Okamoto Mitsuhiro, <i>Hyōgen no jiyū no tsukue 2</i> (Freedom of Expression Table 2), 2020. Bronze, bird cage and mirror	26
2.10	Kimura Ryōko, <i>Kikufuku-zu</i> (Happy Chrysanthemum), 2005. 7.5 × 35.0 cm. Ink, mineral pigments on paper	27
5.1	Cement trucks en route to Henoko construction site	58
5.2	‘The Battle Isn’t Over’ 23 June 2018	66
6.1	AICJ Chairperson Miki Yukiko appears at Tokyo District Court with Japan Civil Liberties Union attorneys Komachiya Ikuko and Fujiwara Ieyasu in January 2004	78
7.1	Number of appearances of ‘NPO’ and ‘Volunteer’ in Japan’s three major dailies	86
7.2	Areas of activity of 51,260 specified nonprofit activities corporations on 31 March 2020 (multiple responses)	90
7.3	Rates of volunteering in Japan	91
7.4	Number of volunteers and volunteer groups registered with Shakyō offices	92
7.5	Concrete initiatives for community renewal	95
9.1	Stop-go growth	114
9.2	Bad bank loans hit 20% of GDP	115
9.3	Productivity only source of GDP growth	116
9.4	A fifth of bank loans charges less than 0.25%	121

10.1	Proportion of workforce employed as nonregular workers 1984–2019	128
10.2a	Trend of number of regular and nonregular workers, age 15–24, 1988–2019	130
10.2b	Number of regular and nonregular workers, age 55–64 and 60 and 65 and over	131
11.1	Foreign residents population trend (1989–2018)	141
11.2	Top nationalities of foreign Residents (1988–2018)	141
13.1	National Ainu Museum (Upopoy in Ainu) Main Building in Shiraoi, Hokkaido. Open to the Public since July 2020	168
13.2	The Memorial Site for Ainu Remains (Decorated with Motifs of Ainu Grave Markers)	169
14.1	<i>Oyaji-gyaru</i> in an HP Deskjet 500J advertisement from 1990 (photo by author, source unknown). A translation of the copy reads as follows: ‘Unbelievable!’ (American female workers reading headlines about OLs.) ‘so, Japanese OLs work from 9 to 5. They don’t care if there’s an earthquake, or if company productivity falls, or if there’s a terrorist act, or if the boss needs help, but at 5 p.m. sharp they leave the office.’ ‘And, what’s more, they have a hard schedule to keep after 5 p.m.’	181
14.2	<i>Train Man (Densha otoko)</i> film poster (2005)	184
14.3	Rainbow pride parade banner: Diversity and Inclusion (2017)	185
17.1	Itō Toyō, National Stadium, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, completed in 2009	225
17.2	SANAA, Grace Farms, New Canaan, CT, United States, completed in 2015	226
17.3	Ban Shigeru, installation view of the exhibition ‘Shigeru Ban: A Paper Arch,’ at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 26 April through 1 August, 2000. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY	230
19.1	Cover of <i>Geijutsu shinchō</i> (September 2011)	246
19.2	<i>Purikyua (Pretty Cure)</i> Notebook, 2021. From the Author’s Collection	252
19.3a and 19.3b	Cover of <i>CanCam</i> (January 2006) and a Glossy Page Featuring Ebihara Yuri. © Shōgakkan	254
21.1	An Aum Shinrikyō follower and his neighbours. © A2 Production Committee	276
21.2	The protagonist soldier at war in the Philippines. © Shinya Tsukamoto/Kaijyu Theater	281
23.1	Enari Tsuneo, from: <i>Japan and Its Forgotten War Shōwa (Shōwashi no katachi)</i> , (2011). Digital photography, sizes vary. © Enari Tsuneo	303
23.2	Dokuyama Bontarō, frames from: <i>Time Goes By</i> (2017) Single-Channel Video Installation, 24:58 min, and <i>My Anthem</i> (2019) Single-Channel Video Installation, 17:46 min. © Dokuyama Bontarō, Installation. Photo: Morita Kenji	304
23.3	Fujii Hikaru, <i>Mujō (The Heartless)</i> (2019). Five Channel Video Projection, in Loop. Created for the 4th Aichi Triennale, 2019. © Fujii Hikaru	306
23.4	Ōura Nobuyuki, <i>Enkin o kakaete (Holding Perspectives)</i> No. 1 (1982–3). Silk Screen Printing on Paper, Yosuke Akiba, Publishers 21st Century, Inc., Publisher; Okabe Print Studio, Printer; Print House OM, Printer II, 1982–3, Screen Print, Lithograph, 77 × 57.4 cm. © Ōura Nobuyuki	307

23.5	Ōura Nobuyuki, <i>Enkin o kakaete (Holding Perspectives) No. 4 (1982–3)</i> . Silk Screen Printing on Paper, Yosuke Akiba, Publishers 21st Century, Inc., Publisher; Okabe Print Studio, Printer; Print House OM, Printer II, 1982–1983, Screen Print, Lithograph, 77 × 57.4 cm. © Ōura Nobuyuki	308
23.6	Ōura Nobuyuki, still frames from the Video <i>Holding Perspectives, Part II</i> , 2019. Single-Channel Video Projection, 20 min. © Ōura Nobuyuki	309
23.7	Ishikawa Mao, <i>The Great Ryūkyū Photographic Scroll, Part 2</i> , 2015. 100 × 126 cm.	309
23.8	Ishikawa Mao, <i>The Great Ryūkyū Photographic Great Scroll, Part 4</i> , 2017. 100 × 126 cm.	310
23.9	Ishikawa Mao, <i>The Great Ryūkyū Photographic Great Scroll, Part 3</i> , 2016. 100 × 126 cm.	311
25.1	Crushed sea wall in Touni, Miyagi Prefecture (Credit: Jeff Kingston 2011)	330
25.2	Ghost town–Yonomori, Fukushima (Credit: C.E.J. Simons, 2021)	330
25.3	Tokyo Olympic Stadium (Credit: Jeff Kingston 2020)	333
25.4	Comfort women statue in Seoul (Credit: Jeff Kingston)	338

Table

16.1	Timeline of Aum-related events in the Heisei Era (1989–2019)	207
------	--	-----

List of contributors (listed alphabetically) and short bios

Simon Avenell is a Professor at the Australian National University, specializing in modern Japanese history, civil society, and intellectual history. His publications include *Making Japanese Citizens* (2010), *Transnational Japan in the Global Environmental Movement* (2017), and *Asia and Postwar Japan: Deimperialization, Civic Activism, and National Identity* (2022).

Tina Burrett is Associate Professor of Political Science at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Sophia University. She is the co-editor of *Press Freedom in Contemporary Asia* (2020) and the author of *Television and Presidential Power in Putin's Russia* (2013).

Alexis Dudden is a Professor of History at the University of Connecticut, where she teaches modern Japanese, Korean, and international history. She publishes regularly in print and online media and is currently at the Wilson Center in Washington, DC, completing her project, *The Open and Closing of Japan, 1850–2020*.

Patrick W. Galbraith is an Associate Professor in the School of International Communication at Senshū University in Tokyo. His recent publications include *Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan* (2019), *Erotic Comics in Japan: An Introduction to Eromanga* (2020) and *The Ethics of Affect: Lines and Life in a Tokyo Neighborhood* (2021).

Helen Hardacre is Reischauer Institute Professor of Japanese Religions and Society, Harvard University. She is the founding director of the Reischauer Institute Research Project on Constitutional Revision in Japan. Her recent publications include *Shinto, A History* (2016), and *Constitutional Revision and Civic Activism in Japan* (lead editor and contributor, 2021).

Kyoko Hirano, the former film curator of the Japan Society in New York, received her PhD in Cinema Studies from New York University and has taught in the United States, Japan, and Europe. Her publications include *Mr. Smith Goes To Tokyo*, *Manhattan no Kurosawa*, and *Nihon no Eiga-shi*.

Maki Kaneko is an Associate Professor in the Kress Foundation Department of Art History at the University of Kansas. Her publications include *Mirroring the Japanese Empire: The Male Figure in Yoga Painting, 1930–1950* (2015) and *Modern & Contemporary East Asian Art*, Spencer Museum of Art's Register VIII, no. 5 (2019).

Richard Katz is the New York correspondent for *Weekly Toyo Keizai*, a leading business magazine and, for two decades, was Editor of *The Oriental Economist Report*. He is currently writing a book on the societal changes in Japan that could revitalize

the economy. His first two books were *Japan: The System That Soured* and *Japanese Phoenix*.

Jeff Kingston is a Professor of History and Director of Asian Studies at Temple University, Japan. He is the author and editor of a dozen books on contemporary Japan and Asia including *Japan's Quiet Transformation* (2004), *Contemporary Japan* (2011), and *Critical Issues in Contemporary Japan* (2014).

David Leheny (PhD, Government, Cornell 1998) is a Professor in Waseda University's Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies, having previously taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Princeton University. He is the author of several books, most recently *Empire of Hope: The Sentimental Politics of Japanese Decline* (2018).

Gracia Liu-Farrer is a Professor of sociology at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies at Waseda University. Her research examines immigration into Japan and the global mobility of students and professional migrants. She is the author of *Immigrant Japan: Mobility and Belonging in an Ethno-Nationalist Society* (2020).

David McNeill is a Professor of Communications and English at the University of the Sacred Heart, Tokyo. He was previously a correspondent for *The Independent*, *The Economist* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and is co-author of *Strong in the Rain*, about the 2011 Tohoku disaster. He is currently writing a Japanese book called *Confessions of a Foreign Correspondent*.

Mari Miura is a Professor of Political Science, Faculty of Law, Sophia University. She is the author of *Welfare Through Work: Conservative Ideas, Partisan Dynamics, and Social Protection in Japan* (2012), *Making Our Voices Heard—Revival of Representative Democracy* (in Japanese, 2015), and is the editor of *Japan's Women Representatives* (in Japanese, 2016). She received her PhD from the University of California at Berkeley.

Mark R. Mullins is Professor of Japanese Studies and Director of the Japan Studies Centre at the University of Auckland. He has published widely on the role of religion in modern societies, including most recently *Yasukuni Fundamentalism: Japanese Religions and the Politics of Restoration* (2021).

Noriko Murai is an Associate Professor of Art History at Sophia University, where she teaches modern and contemporary Japanese art and visual culture. Her publication in English includes *Journeys East: Isabella Stewart Gardner and Asia* (2009) and *Inventing Asia: American Perspectives Around 1900* (2014).

Koichi Nakano is a Professor of Political Science at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Sophia University. His publication includes *Party Politics and Decentralization in Japan and France: When the Opposition Governs* (2010). His recent research focuses on the politics of constitutional amendment and authoritarian legality in Japan.

Machiko Osawa is Professor Emeritus and a researcher at the Research Institute for Women and Careers at Japan Women's University. She is the author of several books including *What's Holding Back Japanese Women* (Tokyo Keizai, 2015), *Women and Work in the 21st Century* (2018) and *Why There Are so Few Women Managers in the Japanese Workplace* (2019).

Lawrence Repeta has served as a lawyer, business executive, and law professor in Japan and the United States. He has written widely on Japanese law, especially related to

constitutional rights and transparency in government. He is a member of the Japan Civil Liberties Union and the Washington State Bar Association.

Jennifer Robertson is Professor Emerita of Anthropology and the History of Art at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She is also an Affiliate Professor of Anthropology and Japan Studies at the University of Washington, Seattle. A recent book is *Robo Sapiens Japonicus: Robots, Gender, Family, and the Japanese Nation* (2018). For more background information and downloadable articles, please see <https://professorjenniferrobertson.com>.

Kenneth J. Ruoff is a Professor of History at Portland State University. The Japanese translation of his first book, *The People's Emperor*, was awarded the Osaragi Jirō Prize for Commentary, Japan's equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize. His study was recently reissued in updated form and with a new title, *Japan's Imperial House in the Postwar Era, 1945–2019*.

Sven Saaler is a Professor of Modern Japanese History at Sophia University. He is author/editor of *Men in Metal* (2020), the *Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese History* (2018), *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History* (2011), *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History* (2007), and *Politics, Memory and Public Opinion* (2005).

Franziska Seraphim teaches modern Japanese history in global context at Boston College. She is the author of *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945–2005* (Harvard, 2006) and currently works on a legal geography of the Allied war crimes programme globally and comparatively.

Matthew C. Strecher is a Professor of Japanese Literature at Sophia University. In addition to numerous books and articles on Murakami Haruki, he has published articles on Japanese literary history, 'poison women', and literary journalism in Japan. When he's not busy professing things, he enjoys kayaking and composing music.

Akira Tanaka is a doctoral student in interdisciplinary information studies at the University of Tokyo and works as a JSPS research fellowship for young scientists. He will publish 'Taking a Break from News: A Five-nation Study of News Avoidance in the Digital Era' as a co-author in *Digital Journalism*.

Tin Tin Htun is a part-time lecturer in Japan. Her publications include 'social Identities of Minority Others in Japan: Listening to the Narratives of Ainu, Buraku, and Zainichi Koreans in Japan' (2012) and 'Reproductive Rights in Japan: Where Do Women Stand?' in *Critical Issues in Contemporary Japan* (2019).

Alice Y. Tseng is a Professor of History of Art and Architecture at Boston University. Her research focuses on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Japan, and she is the author of *Modern Kyoto: Building for Ceremony and Commemoration, 1868–1940* and *The Imperial Museums of Meiji Japan: Architecture and the Art of the Nation*.

Ayelet Zohar is a Senior Lecturer at the Art History Department, Tel Aviv University. Zohar was guest editor for *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, Vol. 31 (2019), a special issue on 'Photography in the Heisei Era (1989–2019).' Currently, Zohar is completing a manuscript on war memory in contemporary Japanese video art.

Foreword

Where is Heisei?

Franziska Seraphim

Some of us remember intellectual historian Sebastian Conrad's (1999) essay on early postwar Japanese historiography cleverly entitled 'What Time is Japan?' (Conrad 1999). Analyzing the interpretive strategies of Marxist-modernist historians such as Ōtsuka Hisao writing in the 1940s and 1950s, Conrad found an eagerness to integrate Japanese historiography into an allegedly world-historical sense of the past, in which Japan was not a different place but merely at a different stage on a universal path to modernity. This 'temporalization of space' of course dovetailed nicely with Japan's integration into the American global empire that set the (geo)political parameters of Japan's 'postwar.' Almost half a century later, as the Shōwa Emperor departed, Japan's synchronicity with the advanced post-industrialized world was obvious enough. But in the following three decades, coinciding with the Heisei Emperor's reign, older questions of Japan's *place* in the world, territorially and geopolitically, as well as other forms and scales of *location* within Japan itself, re-emerged in ever more complex ways. Our preoccupation with describing and assessing the meaning of the temporal framework 'Heisei' can just as well be turned to investigating these three decades from a spatial perspective. After all, we frame 'contemporary Japan'—the designation many of us give to our teaching of this time period—just as often as 'global Japan', which is no less vague yet emphasizes the spatial relations that came to the fore when the Cold War macro-divisions of the world faded after 1991 and were gradually replaced by a multitude of divisions called 'globalization.' Therefore, I ask: 'where is Heisei?'

Japanese have long mapped power relationships geographically; that is certainly not an exclusively modern or postmodern phenomenon. And one only needs to consider the vigour with which civic society mobilized place-based grievances and rights claims in the 1950s and 1960s, or the residents' movements of the 1970s and neoliberal constructions of local identity in the 1980s, to recognize how important 'space and place' is in Japanese public life. The 'where' of Heisei, in contrast, concerns the unusually intense public grappling with the way in which Japan's multi-scalar relocation after the war had produced a system that no longer served at the end of the century, now interpreted from various and opposite directions as probably never having served in the first place. Japan's postwar system had, of course, always been subject to criticism and debate, but perhaps never before from all directions at once, not least because it was failing to deliver the *reliable progress* it had come to be predicated upon. Even if that progress was once envisioned by modernist historians as a temporal catching-up with those to which Japan compared itself, power had come to be measured more in spatial terms as widening circles of access to economic, political, or social capital, all now subsumed under the 'global.' In this respect, Hirohito's death in 1989 and the 50th anniversary of

‘postwar’ in 1995 provided meaningful temporal markers at a time when new spatial constraints *and* opportunities appeared that put a question mark behind the postwar project as a whole.

At the most concrete level, this involved territorial boundaries, and it is no coincidence that constitutional revisionism wove itself through the three decades of Heisei like a red thread. For the postwar constitution and relations with the United States, which essentially authored it in 1946, set the structural parameters of Japan’s geopolitical place on a regional and global map that was being redrawn by Japan’s closest neighbours and even its allies. The 1990–1991 Gulf War and the United States demand that Japan’s Self-Defence Forces join UN Peacekeeping Operations in the Middle East and Asia brought new urgency to old questions about the interpretation of Article 9, which forbids Japan to maintain military forces, let alone deploy them abroad. Even if the Cold War technically had not ended in Northeast Asia, America’s post-Cold War place as a largely unrivalled military world power thrust Japan, courtesy of its alliance, onto a global military stage right at a time when China and South Korea were redrawing the global trade map in their favour, entitling China to a greater geopolitical clout in the region than Japan had been able to assume under the US–Japan alliance system. In other words, from various angles, interpreted positively by some and negatively by others, Japanese felt ‘being remapped’ once again, this time not in the wake of military defeat but of economic success.

What ensued was a time ‘when finished business became unfinished’, to quote another great essay title (Cribb 2015). As it turned out, the US-brokered postwar settlement had rested on the acquiescence of those whose lands had been most impacted by modern Japan’s nation–empire but were themselves mired in conflict. Indeed, when President Nixon’s visit to Beijing allowed Japan to begin normalizing its relations with Communist China in 1972, Premier Zhou Enlai said that now was not the time to discuss outstanding issues. Heisei is best located in relation to the many unsolved ‘issues’ that kept popping up to suggest that even if the war had long been over, repercussions from Japan’s empire were not. Heretofore unrecognized and uncompensated victims of the empire’s spatial demands made their voices heard; first, foremost Korean sex slaves shipped all around the wartime empire and forced labourers transported from the Asian mainland to Japan’s mines and factories. Meanwhile, the Ainu pressed for recognition of the Japanese annexation of Hokkaido as settler colonialism and their ethnicity as an indigenous people, and they sent the first Ainu representative to the Diet. Okinawans, too, appropriated global discourses of indigeneity to contest Japanese policies that allowed American military bases to continue polluting and victimizing land and people. For Japanese on the liberal left who had long fostered transnational or global alliances to see such ‘unfinished business’ addressed on the official level, Heisei brought welcome recognition, solidarity, and hope for long-overdue justice.

Obviously, ‘unfinished business’ could just as well be weaponized for conflict at a time of a shifting regional and global political geography. And that weaponization won out on different fronts, both driving and being driven by the right-wing shift in politics described by Nakano Koichi in this volume. Some of the formerly shelved issues concerned territorial boundaries, specifically islands, in the waters around Japan shared with China, South Korea, and Russia, involving the very powers that were just then making new geopolitical claims (new since 1945) via old (pre-1900) territorial ones. By the same token, Japanese nationalists saw in this a long-awaited opportunity to rehabilitate a prewar sense of nation that had been ‘contaminated’ by foreign intervention

through the postwar settlements. Japanese government actions, such as the arrest of a Chinese fishing boat captain for ramming a Japanese coastguard ship in disputed waters in the East China Sea, were seen as provocations by China and handled in kind, leading to an escalating political and potentially military crisis since 2010. Prime Minister Noda Yoshihide's decision to purchase three of the uninhabited Senkaku islands from their private Japanese owners in 2012 and the proceeding 'defence' of the islands by navy patrols was further interpreted as a hostile act by Beijing. Geographically closest to Taiwan, this part of the East China Sea had been incorporated into the Japanese empire with Taiwan's colonization and after 1945 had been administered by the US military as part of its occupation of Okinawa. It became part of Okinawa Prefecture in 1972 when Japan regained administrative control over the islands making up the Ryukyu chain (Dudden 2019). It did not help that in addition to the overlapping territorial legacies of the prewar Japanese as well as postwar American empires, Taiwan also asserted its claim to the rocks vis-à-vis its Communist rival.

If, as Deng Xiaoping had suggested on a state visit to Tokyo in 1978 (echoing Zhou Enlai in 1972), these issues should await wiser leaders in the future, that 'wisdom' became more elusive when the long post-World War II international process of legally enclosing the seas, heretofore the last 'commons' of the global community, culminated in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) in 1994. Originally and significantly pushed by the United States, whose 'pointillist empire' (Immerwahr 2019) relied on a global network of military bases to which small islands in the oceans were key, regions around the globe have more recently realized the potentiality of resource exploitation on the sea beds and the likelihood of competition and conflict over this last frontier of development (Jones 2016). As Alexis Dudden explains, the combination of the UNCLOS regime's setting of legal mechanisms for claiming nationally exclusive control over resources in the oceans and its decision to leave questions of sovereignty to be worked out case by case on the basis of historical precedent has not only reopened formerly 'shelved' territorial issues in East Asia but imbued them with new political capital (its potential economic capital has so far not materialized) (Dudden 2019). A literal sea change in the global geographical conception of space in the early 1990s, legalized via the tools of global governance, thus played into the hands of rising nationalist politics in Japan as it did in China and Korea, heightening the intersection of history, geography, and more specifically national, regional, and global time in potent ways.

The more immediate mechanism in Japan, however, has always been its postwar constitution—and more precisely Article 9—at once a reflection on Japan's imperialist past, a reflection of US power and vision in the immediate postwar years, and a contract that has bound Japan's national space for three-quarters of a century. It is hardly a coincidence that Heisei has become almost synonymous with constitutional revisionism, revived in the early 1990s with the Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) bill, seriously put on the national agenda by prime minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō at the end of the decade, and dominating the politics of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) under Abe Shinzō for the rest of Heisei. Insofar as the end of Heisei and the end of Abe's tenure as prime minister will eventually be seen as more or less synchronous, and if constitutional revision gets overridden by more important concerns in the coming years, as has so often been the case, 'Heisei constitutional revisionism' may indeed become a term. At its core remains the lingering question of the ideational place of the constitution in the life of the nation in terms of original authorship and amendment, whether to 'correct'

the origins or to ‘update’ it to fit current circumstances or both. As Soeya Yoshihide argues, Heisei-era efforts to assert constitutional revision in order to get out from under US dominance rendered the same results it had in the postwar Shōwa era, namely a further entrenchment of the Japanese-US alliance regime. In this sense, the constitutional debate did not claim a new place for Heisei (Soeya 2021).

Seen through a spatial lens, I would summarize (and necessarily simplify) the debate in this way: scrapping Article 9, the ‘peace clause’, is an ambition of the nationalist right to make Japan’s territory negotiable again seen as the inherent right of a nation-state. Beyond the territory of physical geography, however, constitutional revisionists are clearly looking to the ideational terrain of a foreign-authored document they deem incompatible with Japan’s indigenous political structure. The ‘unfinished business’ here is wiping off the stain of defeat in World War II. Indeed, rewriting the constitution’s preamble and Article 1 on the Emperor is as crucial to the Abe-led revisionists as is Article 9. Those who fight to retain Article 9, in contrast, as well as the majority of the Japanese people, have long embraced the constitution for liberating them from having to renegotiate the landscape of territorial borders and civil rights as a good that came out of the carnage of the war. And then there are revisionists who locate themselves and their country first and foremost on a terrain that is truly non-negotiable: the earth. Adding specific environmental clauses while keeping Article 9 in place in this view would urgently update the constitution to speak to the needs of our shared planet. As part of a collection of ‘Citizen Opinions Presented to the Lower House Constitutional Research Committee’, the Director of the Institute for an Environmental Civilization Katō Saburō, wrote, ‘I think the constitution of Japan is splendid in principle. However, it is unfortunate that politicians and experts did not include an environmental clause. The inclusion of environmental provisions in the constitution will be a major step forward from the bias of “economic expansion” into a society with dual goals of “economic quality” and “environmental preservation”’ (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). While this might be a small aspect of ‘Heisei constitutional revisionism’, one can only hope it becomes the centre piece of a future ‘Reiwa constitutionalism.’

Along these lines, the string of disasters that befell Japan in the first and last decades of Heisei produced perhaps the most enduring place-based sense in the local, national, as well as global imagination of Japan in the past three decades. The 1995 disasters had distinct geographical origins and qualities: the geological geography of earthquakes that devastated the Kobe area in January, claiming over 5,000 lives and crippling Kobe’s new international port facilities; the urban geography of Tokyo centred on its vital subway system, which was the target of a terrorist gas attack by an apocalyptic cult in March (see Mullins [Chapter 16](#)); and the military geography of US basing in Okinawa, where the gang-rape of a 12-year-old local girl by 3 GIs caused the largest ever anti-base protest movement that September, and forced governments to renegotiate the Status-of-Forces Agreement between the United States military and Japan. None of these disaster geographies was new, of course, but as Simon Avenell explains in more detail in this volume, each revealed a level of inefficient response if not indeed systemic negligence on the part of the central government—in contrast to the ability of local volunteers to organize rescue efforts—that undermined a good deal of trust in the political map of disaster management. The 1995 Hanshin earthquake destroyed the myth of Japan well-prepared for a large natural disaster. Investigations into the sarin gas attack revealed grave negligence on the part of national police to thoroughly investigate prior incidents of a similar nature. And the protests in Okinawa confronted

the central government over its enduring collusion with the US military's practice of handling GI criminality themselves rather than handing offenders over to local courts, which resulted in the perpetuation of both crimes and injustice. In other words, geographically located disasters had a way of exposing and to an extent, even redrawing the national *political* landscape of rights and responsibilities in terms of state–society—or central–local—relations, if more along neoliberal than social-liberal lines.

The 'triple disaster' at the beginning of the last Heisei decade can only be grasped as a multi-scalar event, whose origins and impacts are measured on levels from local to global. The Great East Japan earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi reactors beginning on 11 March 2011, laid much of Japan's Pacific coast north of Tokyo to waste, first by the tsunami's physical destruction and then by radiation contamination. Towns such as Kamaishi, Miyako, Kesenuma, Ishinomaki, Higashimatsushima, Shiogama, or Kitaibaraki anchored the physical geography of the destruction, indeed disappearance, of the natural and human landscape and thousands of lives from the tsunami, a geography of personal and community loss and mourning. The acute 'coming into public consciousness' of specific localities via the media happens after every natural disaster, a sense of connection born out of a combination of the need for coordinated emergency relief and the mediated emotions of empathy and sensationalism that make these places 'real' for a moment. And just as predictable is the opposite development, the making of a sense of disconnect when the wider, longer-term ramifications beyond the personal and local implicate systemic relationships on the national level in ways that require uncomfortable changes to the status quo. Over the following decade, the tsunami-devastated northeast, which had long had a peripheral economic status to the metropolises of central and western Japan, acquired a whole range of separateness or 'otherness' as well as new forms of governmental and cultural mitigation. At the heart of this were human displacement in the disaster area and the uneven effects on different groups of people that come with it, including social discrimination and neglect. The political decision made in the immediate aftermath of the disaster to renew Tokyo's failed Olympic bid—reconceived in terms of 'creative reconstruction'—promised to bring funds and positive visibility to as well as a new integration with the area northeast of Tokyo. Instead, it looked increasingly like a savvy move to rescue major development projects in Tokyo from their derailment by the Triple Disaster, rather than building the northeast back better (Tamaki 2019).

Meanwhile, the nuclear catastrophe on the Fukushima coast developed its own geography. Over the weeks, months, and years following the explosion and meltdown of three reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant after the tsunami had disabled its power supply and cooling, the incessant mapping of radiation measurements and evacuation zones opened a Pandora's box of governmental misinformation, corporate irresponsibility, regional inequality, food insecurity, and hot debates over energy regimes on all levels from local to global. Unlike the localized tsunami geography of loss and displacement that can more easily be turned into that of hope and reconstruction as is so often the case after natural disasters, 'Fukushima' tapped a major artery, not only of unfinished business but of an unravelling business model, namely the technological, political, economic and ecological relations on which our unsatiating energy needs depend. That the business model—from domestic corporatism to the geopolitics of extractivist capitalism—did not, in fact, unravel and was not even substantially reformed in the last Heisei decade, despite the largest popular protest movement since the 1960s, belies the depth of the climate-cum-energy crisis that the 2011 disaster

highlighted globally. The revelation of systemic collusion between Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) and the bureaucracy was conducive to an initial domestication of the crisis and paved the way for the second and ever more conservative and authoritarian Abe administration. It reversed the 2011 moratorium on all domestic production of nuclear energy and brought Japan's nuclear power plants online again, one by one, without substantive change and against the wishes of many Japanese citizens. Concurrently, Abe sought to reposition Japan geopolitically by seeking closer relations with gas-rich Russia and the Arab oil regions.

But the Fukushima Daiichi catastrophe hit at a time when the environmental doom caused by climate change and (nuclear) waste pollution was encompassing the globe as a whole. It is therefore not surprising that Japan's 2011 experience quickly grew tentacles that reached around the globe by way of practical connection and comparison, as well as perceived concepts and context. The 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident served as the most important point of reference against which the evolving 'Fukushima' crisis was measured, both in understanding the scale of the meltdown and the long-term challenges of the clean-up. The world nuclear science community mobilized to study and weigh in on this evolving catastrophe, the internet and social media serving as a conduit of connection on all levels. And it provided new avenues to connect local experience with global expertise and sources of information in ways that could cut out, circumvent, and certainly critique the central Japanese government and its desperate efforts to hold on to control at the expense of transparency. Meanwhile, countries around the world who depended on energy from nuclear power plants went through similar motions of testing the technological soundness, corporate-political responsibility, and popular support of their respective nuclear energy regimes—or, as in Japan, limiting transparency on these issues as pre-emptive damage-control.

Global 'Fukushima' clearly played out differently around the world according to specific local and national situations, as the German 2020 documentary *Nuclear Forever* effectively explores. France, which gets more than 77 per cent of its energy from nuclear power plants, covered the tsunami disaster more intensely than Japan's nuclear disaster and moved to update some of its plants technologically but otherwise kept popular anti-nuclearism in check. Germany, in contrast, which only depended on nuclear energy for 22 per cent of its energy needs, moved aggressively to phase out its nuclear power plants altogether, a savvy political move that won the government brownie points among the largely anti-nuclear population at home and made Germany look like a visionary, progressive leader abroad (Wiliarty 2013). But in contrast to Chernobyl three decades earlier, the keen perception of climate change and our collective responsibility to make radical adjustments to our energy production placed the various national and local discourses about the dangers of nuclear power plants into a much larger and indeed shared context: the ability to think long-term rather than short-term—to invest in and shift over to cleaner and less risky energy sources rather than focus on solving immediate energy needs—turned out to be very much unequally 'located.'

So, where was Heisei? There is no question that Japan's place in the world mattered, but we must recognize that the way in which the importance of place is measured was itself in flux. If the economic measuring stick of the exuberant growth of the 1980s is surrendered, then Heisei Japan never got 'lost' but instead repositioned itself, for better or worse, on a geopolitically, demographically, and ecologically shifting terrain. This was hardly unique to Japan. But did Heisei develop new cartographies conducive to clarifying this repositioning? The national register, if anything, gained in importance, from

territorial borders and foreign policy to the constitution, as finished business pertaining to the postwar re-emerged as unfinished. But the perceived inability of the central government to effectively manage local crises and mitigate global ones did produce a host of new non-governmental spaces or spatial relationships, from local (volunteer) organizing to global knowledge production. Rather than claiming that Heisei brought Japan into the global, I suggest that the importance of place in the three Heisei decades revealed how global Japan has always already been, both in terms of internal diversity and external connectivity. And yet, the sense of crisis, or at least maladjustment, both of central governance and international relations kept the 'nation' Japan in sharp relief.

Bibliography

- Conrad, S. (1999) 'What time is Japan? Problems of comparative (intercultural) historiography', *History and Theory*, 38 (1): 67–83.
- Council on Foreign Relations (2021) 'Constitutional change in Japan: public attitudes on revision.' Online. Available HTTP: <<https://www.cfr.org/japan-constitution/public-attitudes-on-revision>> (accessed 9 April 2021).
- Cribb, R. (2015) 'How finished business became unfinished: legal, moral and political dimensions of the Class 'B' and 'C' War Crimes Trials in Asia and the Pacific', in C. Twomey and E. Koh (eds.) *The Pacific War: Aftermaths, Remembrance and Culture*, 91–109. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Dudden, A. (2019) 'Japanese territorial disputes and the legacy of empire', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, 29 July. Online. Available HTTP: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.309>> (accessed 9 April 2021).
- Immerwahr, D. (2019) *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Jones, R. (2016) *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move*, London: Verso, [Chapter 5](#).
- Soeya, Y. (2021) 'Constitutional revision going astray: Article 9 and security policy', in H. Hardacre, K. Komamura, T. S. George, and F. Seraphim (eds.) *Japanese Constitutional Revisionism and Civic Activism*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Tamaki, T. (2019) 'The Olympics and Japanese national identity: multi-layered otherness in Tokyo 2016 and 2020', *Contemporary Japan*, 31(2): 197–214.
- Wiliarty, S. E. (2013) 'Nuclear power in Germany and France', *Polity* 45(2): 281–96.

Introduction

Noriko Murai

Tokyo Ueno Station: A Novel (JR Uenoeki Kōenguchi, 2014) by Yū Miri recounts the heartbreaking life story of an unnamed man, born in the same year as the now Emperor Emeritus Akihito (b. 1933; reigned 1989–2019). The protagonist's son was born on the same day as Akihito's eldest son, the present Emperor Naruhito, on 23 February 1960. In more ways than one, the life of the protagonist intersected with the life of Japan's imperial family and the national events they attended. But his life and that of Akihito could not have been more different. Born into a poor farming family in Yasawa Village in Fukushima Prefecture (today's Hamadōri, where the Fukushima Daiichi and Daini Nuclear Power Stations are located), the man left Fukushima and his family when his children were still young to become a migrant worker in Tokyo. Estranged from his family and the local community, the protagonist ends up homeless near Ueno train station, Tokyo's northern gateway that once welcomed many farmers' and fishermen' children from the nation's north during Japan's postwar economic boom years. The story is told from the perspective of the man as a ghost, reflecting on the last day of his life that he ended by jumping off a platform at Ueno onto the tracks of the Yamanote Line. Yū's narrative meanders through different moments, memories, and places marking the man's life. Though a fictional account, it is based on the novelist's interviews with homeless individuals in Ueno and her research in Minamisōma in Fukushima, one of the townships most affected by the 2011 nuclear accident, and where she has been living since 2015.

Yū's novel reminds us that the convergence of multiple factors—economic, historical, and political—leaves individuals like the protagonist in precarious circumstances. The story draws our gaze to more humbling realities that resonate with the gathering anxieties widespread in early twenty-first-century Japan. The power of Yū's writing to move the reader highlights how cultural forms can offer the most engaging means of expressing, interpreting, and comprehending the impact of larger social forces on individual lives. Above all, *Tokyo Ueno Station* calls attention to the duality of violence and invisibility that mediates the relationship between the emperor and the people in Japan to this day. Central to Yū's narrative is a visit to Ueno Park by Emperor Akihito and his wife Michiko, and the 'sanitising' of the area before their arrival that includes the police-enforced removal of the homeless and their makeshift shelters to avoid 'spoiling the royal view.' It is difficult to imagine a more emblematic setting than Ueno Park—the archetypal public space of modern Japan and a microcosm of the nation's official culture—to stage this brief encounter between the emperor and the nation's unnamed citizens. Yū lays bare the invisibility of the protagonist and his suffering against the

visibility of the emperor as the constitutionally rarefied symbol of the Japanese state and the unity of its people.

Unlike Yū's poignant novel, this volume does not aim to offer a phantasmagorical narrative weaving together the myriad threads that bind and crisscross the fabric of Japan's complex society. It does, however, recognize the need to make connections between and among issues, events, and ideas that are too often separated. The creative license makes it possible to connect the seemingly unrelated themes of homelessness, Fukushima and the emperor. The purpose of making such connections in fiction as in this volume is not to flatten out differences. On the contrary, the multiple points of convergence and overlap that we hope the reader will find between the chapters included in this volume tend to occur at junctions where opposing interests collide to reveal how the unity of 'Japan' as a place, state, society, culture, and concept is contested, subverted and reinforced.

Japan in the Heisei Era (1989–2019): Multidisciplinary Perspectives is a collection of essays that critically analyze various aspects of Japanese society and culture around the turn of the twenty-first century. It foregrounds the temporal framework of Heisei, the era name or *genjō* chosen for Akihito's reign. The volume poses 'Heisei' as a critical question, fully knowing that answers are manifold and possibly divided. The chapters are written concisely in an accessible language for general readers seeking a multidimensional overview of contemporary Japan within a single book. At the same time, the original insights brought by our expert contributors also offer something for specialist readers. In this respect, this book does not aim to serve as an introductory survey covering an 'expected' range of topics about 'Heisei Japan', with the principal intention of summarizing prevailing ideas and views. Familiar subjects will appear, ranging from Japan's long economic stagnation, the Aum Shinrikyō religious group and historical revisionism to anime and Hello Kitty. But observers and students of Japan will also find new interpretations of these familiar themes that we hope will spark future discussions.

The volume is multidisciplinary and conveys the diversity and differences of conceptual thinking, critical perspectives, and methodological approaches that shape the numerous fields of knowledge among our contributors coming from the humanities and social sciences. This collection includes essays written by specialists who work in anthropology, art history, economics, film studies, history, journalism, literature, political science, religion, and sociology. The knowledge about 'Japan' that emerges from this assemblage is thus inevitably and inherently heterogeneous, offering alternative ways to connect the familiar dots over a range of subjects, ideas, and perspectives.

The contributors to this volume also speak from different positions. Introductory volumes about Japan in English typically assume an 'outside' (non-Japanese) perspective and target an 'outsider' readership, ironically drawing an intellectual boundary that replicates the 'us' versus 'them' binarism of which Japanese society is often accused. While we certainly hope that this volume appeals to a non-Japanese-reading audience, it is not accurate to describe it as presented from an 'outside' perspective or for an 'outsider' reader. Many contributors speak from positions that are neither clearly 'outside' or 'inside' in relation to Japan. About half of our contributors are based in Japan and teach at Japanese universities, while others teach at universities in the United States and elsewhere. Our national origins also vary to include places in Asia, Europe, and North America. Moreover, the states that issue our passports are often not the places where we grew up, received our education, or live and work today. Our linguistic backgrounds also reflect this geo-cultural diversity. English is the native language for many of our

contributors, but for some, it is Japanese. And yet, for others, it is neither. Rarer still for large multi-authored volumes on Japan published in English, the majority of our contributors are women. Collectively, our profiles demonstrate the expanding circles of scholars whose research leads them to subjects related to Japan.

Our multidisciplinary perspectives are moreover designed to remind readers of the different images of ‘Heisei Japan’ in wide circulation. Contemporary Japan’s overseas reputation, as well as its domestic self-image, has long been divided between what may be crudely simplified as a ‘society in decline’ and a ‘culture in demand.’ Speaking about the image of decline, a prominent sociologist and public intellectual, Yoshimi Shun’ya, concludes that Japan has turned into a ‘museum of failures’ (*shippai no hakubutsukan*) in the thirty years of the Heisei era (Yoshimi 2019a: 249). Yoshimi is not the first to characterize Heisei so bleakly. In the past few decades, Heisei has also become synonymous with ‘lost’ (*ushinawareta*) (Noguchi 2019), ‘postponement’ (*sakinobashi*) (Oguma 2014: 13–97), and ‘inequality’ (*kakusa*) (Yamada 2004).

These verdicts come as no surprise to those who lived in or followed Japan over the past three decades. Yoshimi argues that the foundational pillars of postwar Japan—an increasing population, economic growth, and a stable society with a broad middle class—had all crumbled by the beginning of the twenty-first century (Yoshimi 2019a: 247). Added to the list of losses is Japan’s position as the dominant regional power in East Asia, where it has failed to strengthen diplomatic ties with China and South Korea, its most important neighbours. This estrangement owes much to Japan’s failure to come to terms with the misdeeds committed and the indignities inflicted during the Japanese Empire spanning 1895–1945. This ‘museum of failures’ inevitably also includes the nuclear meltdowns in Fukushima caused by the earthquake and tsunami that occurred on 11 March 2011 and the ongoing inability to contain radioactive contamination of the marine environment or make progress on decommissioning the stricken reactors. The cluster of failures must also include a poor record on gender equality and tackling other forms of discrimination based on nationality, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. The list can go on. In the early twenty-first century, fractured societies under stress are unfortunately not exceptional. Contemporary Japan produced specific failures and faces particular predicaments, but its problems are not all anomalous. Many are, in fact, regional, international, transnational, or global in origin, nature, symptoms, and ramifications, as detailed in the following chapters.

Despite Japan’s ‘lost decades’ narrative of decay, there has been an unprecedented expansion of overseas interest in Japanese culture. Appreciated beyond the mere novelty of exoticism, it is the consumable and familiar Japan—anime, karaoke, emojis or cuisine ranging from sushi to ramen—that has become ubiquitous in the world. Attracting international tourists has thus become a major government policy, and international tourism to Japan steadily increased during the Heisei era and surged dramatically from 2015 until the pandemic. As of 2019, most visitors came from other Asian nations; travellers from China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong alone made up 70 per cent of overseas visitors to Japan (Japan Tourism Agency 2020: 8). Ironically for a rapidly aging society, it has been the inventive and cool styles associated with Japan’s youth culture that have captivated global youth’s imagination and sparked significant appropriation. Such pop cultural forms have included both mainstream and subcultural, franchised and vernacular. The blurred distinction between production and consumption in the realm of culture, accelerated by the accessibility of digital applications and networks, also resulted in new social and cultural flows of mediation, participation, and

reception that have destabilized existing hierarchy, structures, and boundaries in Japan and beyond. It is undeniable that some aspects of Japanese culture are integral to global culture in the early twenty-first century.

Instead of pursuing a common theme, this volume considers these different subjects under the temporal framework of ‘Heisei.’ Heisei is the *gengō* or era name chosen for Akihito’s reign as Japan’s monarch (*tennō*) from 1989 to 2019. Despite being an important symbolic as well as bureaucratic system officially marking ‘Japanese’ time, *gengō* has not received sufficient attention in the existing English-language scholarship on modern Japan (for exceptions, see Saaler and Szpilman 2017: xx–xxi; Ruoff 2020: 169–70, 195–215). For many, unless discussing topics related to the emperor or the imperial institution, ‘Heisei’ is simply a term of convenience, a ready-made ‘period’ that encompasses all that happened in Japan during Akihito’s reign. Used in this manner, its function is to mark the era as chronologically distinct from what came before and after, as in ‘Shōwa Japan’ (1926–1989) and ‘Reiwa Japan’ (2019–present). Suzuki Hirohito points out that this practice of periodizing modern Japanese history according to *gengō* is largely a product of postwar historiography and was a way of making sense of the nation’s recent past in relation to its ‘present’ that was defined as the time ‘after’ Japan’s defeat in WWII (Suzuki 2017). For some of the contributors in this volume, this may indeed have been their take on *gengō*. Such historiographical periodization in the case of Heisei also happens to make some sense, if only by coincidence. Emperor Akihito’s reign of Heisei began in 1989 upon the death of his father, Emperor Hirohito. Coincidentally, 1989 was also the year the Cold War ended, and for Japan, it also represented the zenith of its economic power when an asset bubble in stocks and land spiraled upward until it abruptly collapsed. It has thus been easy to read momentous historical breaks into the year 1989. As for the end of Heisei in 2019 with Akihito’s unusual abdication, it is a year that will be remembered as the time just before the global pandemic that has indelibly defined the nascent Reiwa era.

This volume asks the reader, however, to reflect on the idea of ‘Heisei’ beyond its common usage as a chronological shorthand. In his recent book provocatively titled *History without Chronology*, Stefan Tanaka asserts that ‘history must embrace the richness and variability of different times that exist throughout our lives.’ He cites the following quote by Michel de Certeau at the book’s opening: ‘Recast in the mould [sic] of a taxonomic ordering of things, chronology becomes the alibi of time, a way of making use of time without reflecting on it’ (Tanaka 2019: 1). We have come to register time largely according to the Gregorian calendar and ‘without reflecting on it’, as Tanaka warns us. But in reality, all of us experience time in multiple and heterogeneous ways, giving it and ourselves bespoke alibis. Non-Christian religious calendars, for instance, mark and keep ‘time’ differently from the ubiquitous Gregorian calendar (commonly called the ‘Western calendar’ or *seireki* in Japanese). As individuals, we also mark our own time in relation to personal life-defining events. Within the space of this volume, the reader will also find references to multiple temporal frameworks aside from the Gregorian calendar and the *gengō*, such as ‘before and after the bursting of the economic bubble’, ‘before and after the Equal Employment Act’, ‘before and after Fukushima’, or even ‘before and after Murakami Haruki.’ These different times and their coexistence also remind us that the function of ‘time’ is not just to mark before/after but also to draw inside/outside and to establish arcs of meaning and connections over time. Those bound together under the same temporal order form a sense of community based on their shared exposure to and inclusion in that time, while others are inevitably excluded

from it or have their own experiences and perspectives that subvert notions of a shared time or community.

We thus ask, what kind of *time* does *gengō* produce, and more specifically, what kind of time did Heisei produce? What is the significance of approaching Japan through the place-bound temporal framework of *gengō*, the distinctly Japanese year-counting order, the authority of which is historically and symbolically derived from the emperor? What gets foregrounded and gains visibility by adopting such a perspective, and what recedes into the background?

It is beyond the scope of this introduction and the intention of this volume to engage in a sustained discussion of the *gengō* system in Japan today. At the same time, just as with other institutions, the temporal institution of *gengō* changed considerably during Akihito's reign, and a few words of explanation are in order. Japan is the only state in the region still using *nengō* (Ch. *nianhao*) as an official year-counting system, legalized as *gengō* that institutionalized the 'one reign name per monarch' (*issei ichigen*) policy in the late nineteenth century (Tokoro 1988: 248–9). During Akihito's reign, *gengō* decreased in relevance as an actual year-counting system in response to globalization and to the increasing digitization of information. For many Japanese, the *gengō* system overall and the transition of eras are of little consequence. But it would be hasty to conclude that the cultural value of *gengō* as a symbol of the nation—and mediated by the person of the emperor himself—faded utterly during Akihito's reign. The recent festivities surrounding the imperial succession from Akihito to Naruhito were experienced as a temporal transition of the nation from 'Heisei' to 'Reiwa.' Many of these festivities might have been casually consumed as commercial 'events', such as by eating *soba* noodles on the last day of Heisei as if it were New Year's Eve, in the absence of any precedents to observe the emperor's abdication as a national event. Suzuki Hirohito nonetheless points out that such commodification of *gengō* should be remembered as yet another 'soft' expression of contemporary cultural nationalism in Japan, a 'Cool Japan' campaign domestically launched to celebrate the uniqueness of Japanese culture and tradition (Suzuki 2019: 56–8).

The modern *gengō* system was designed to solidify the authority of the emperor as the patriarchal state sovereign by making inseparable the person of the emperor and the time of his reign. It is important to remember that this system did not disappear after Japan's defeat in 1945, despite a debate in the National Diet in 1950 over discontinuing this practice (Ruoff 2020: 196–8). From 1945 until 1979, when the current Era Name Law (*Gengōho*) was passed, *gengō* was, in fact, without official legal status as a year-counting system of the Japanese state. As a custom, however, its usage continued, and in many areas of Japanese life, *gengō* remained the more common method of counting years than the Gregorian calendar until the late twentieth century. As Kenneth Ruoff points out, the legalization of *gengō* in 1979 was part of the far-right project that had previously succeeded in re-establishing *Kigensetsu* as National Foundation Day in 1966 (Ruoff 2020: 169). These were just a warm-up to the legalization of *Hinomaru* and *Kimigayo* as the respective national flag and anthem in 1999, with the ultimate goal of revising the pacifist principles of Article 9, along with other parts of the current constitution (Tsuboi 201808: 7).

In today's Japan, *gengō* can be defined administratively as a form of temporal control that is exercised over individuals and institutions and which arises exclusively in their relation to the authority exerted by the Japanese state. Under the 1979 Era Name Law, the monarch no longer has the ritual prerogative to initiate and name a 'new time'

over his dominion, as was the case in the past. It is actually the cabinet that decides and issues the new *gengō* upon the enthronement of a new emperor. Although the symbolic authority of *gengō* continues to reside with the imperial institution, the administrative authority resides with the cabinet. This dual structure of the emperor and the cabinet mutually endorsing one another's authority through the *gengō* institution gets to the core of the symbol emperor system (*shōchō tennōsei*) that Ruoff has aptly characterized as a 'constitutional symbolic monarchy under popular sovereignty' (Ruoff 2020: 93). Heisei was the first *gengō* that ran its full course under the current law.

By the end of the twentieth century, however, the Japanese sense of time became more synchronized with events and movements taking place outside Japan. Keeping track of time within the distinctly 'Japanese' system of *gengō* became less practical. Many vividly recall the year of the 3/11 earthquake as 2011, but how many of us can instantly recall which year of Heisei it was? Digitization of information further accelerated the declining use of the *gengō* system that is not purely numerical and inconveniently requires the input of two Chinese characters. The random date of reign changes creates huge impracticalities when recording information by date into any computer system, such as the shift that took place between 30 April and 1 May 2019 (the first date being the last day of Heisei 31 and the second being the first day of Reiwa 1). From 15 March 2019, Japanese drivers' licenses also finally began to co-display the date of expiration according to the Gregorian and *gengō* year. These facts of everyday life in Japan show that *gengō* continues to be used as the year-counting system of the nation, but almost exclusively in bureaucratic and official contexts. It has also become evident that the younger one is, the more indifferent to and unfamiliar one is with the *gengō* system. To the chagrin of conservative supporters of the emperor system, even Princess Mako (b. 1991) told the press in 2017 that she met her fiancé Komuro Kei in 2012, not Heisei 24.

If *gengō* is losing its practical function as an actual year-counting system, how is this impacting the imperial institution that authenticates its authority? The characteristics of Akihito's reign are discussed in detail by Kenneth Ruoff and others in this volume. Here, it suffices to state that Akihito's most decisive intervention in Heisei was to *end* it. Although the system ostensibly leaves no room for the emperor to exercise control over his *gengō*, Akihito's abdication altered this essential aspect of the modern Japanese *gengō* institution and possibly the historiographical imagination that it induced.

With respect to Akihito's unexpected assertion of authority over Heisei, it is not just the fact of his abdication, but also the way in which it was brought about that requires our attention. Under the current constitution and Imperial Household Law, the emperor cannot initiate his own abdication, with such matters decided by the Diet. Akihito thus relied on public support to nudge the reluctant Prime Minister Abe Shinzō and his conservative cabinet to pass a law that enabled him to retire. More importantly, perhaps, Akihito's abdication took place despite the concerns voiced by a number of scholars over the constitutionality of his national address that essentially, if not ineffably, urged political action (Yoshida et al. 2017: 244–6; Watanabe 2021).

As mentioned in a number of chapters in this volume, Akihito and his wife Michiko came to garner widespread respect and favourable feelings among much of the Japanese population, including less conservative segments of society. Their popularity was a hard-won result of their carefully orchestrated media appearances that put on display their 'affective labour' (*kanjō rōdō*) (Ōtsuka 2019). This culminated in 82-year-old Akihito declaring in his videotaped address to the Japanese people, aired on 8 August 2016, that it was 'a great blessing' to 'carry out the most important duties of the emperor, [which

is] to always think of the [Japanese] people (*kokumin*) and pray for the people, with deep respect and love for the people' (The Imperial Household Agency 2016; for a critical analysis of this *okotoba* address, see Hara 2019: 11–67). The positive nationwide evaluation of the Heisei imperial couple led even intellectuals such as Yoshimi Shun'ya, who saw only failure in the political, economic, and social history of Heisei, to find 'hope' (*kibō*) in Akihito (Yoshimi 2019b: 38–9).

Akihito concluded his August 2016 national address with an appeal for the Japanese people to understand his thoughts (*kimochi*). Although 'kimochi' is translated as 'thoughts' in the official English translation of the address, *kimochi* can also be translated as 'feelings.' *Kimochi* transcends rational thought and is about empathy and expressions of those deeply felt emotions that defy verbalization. Akihito, therefore, did not explicitly state that he wished to retire, but this personal desire was implicit in his message. Such mobilization of empathy—his '*okimochi* politics', if you will—may be emblematic of the kind of socialization that became prevalent in the Heisei era. It is popularly known as 'to read the atmosphere (*kūki o yomu*)', which means one's ability to detect the unspoken expectation or consensus that governs a particular social situation. At one level, cultivation of such socio-emotional intelligence may foster one's ability to empathize with others, but in practice, it has more often produced a culture that avoids confrontation and reifies the amorphous majority 'feel.'

The feeling of national salvation—an alternative narrative of Heisei that Yoshimi admits he found in Akihito—is available only to those who feel included in this affective temporal empire that *gengō* conjures. The tragedy of the unnamed man in Yū Miri's novel was thus his exclusion from such a spectacle of national unity. And as for the ethnic Zainichi Koreans like Yū Miri herself, it is not uncommon to feel disconnected from *gengō* (Han 2014: 468). After all, the prayers of Akihito were for *Nihon kokumin* or Japanese nationals, a group excluding non-Japanese nationals living in Japan, no matter how deeply rooted.

'Heisei' should thus be approached as a concept that allows us to hone our critical ability to detect the various pressures that work to contain 'Japan', the boundary of which has always been porous and contested. The question of 'time' in Heisei thereby also relates to the spatial politics of inclusion and exclusion. Franziska Seraphim's foreword hence opens up a broad spatial view onto 'Heisei' and places Japan in the shifting and layered terrains from local politics to territorial disputes and to ecological policies. Thereafter, the 25 chapters in this volume are organized thematically into nine subsections.

Part 1 examines the subject that in many ways lies at the heart of Heisei: the symbol emperor. Kenneth Ruoff characterizes the essence of Akihito and Michiko, 'the people's imperial couple', and how this relates to the evolving definition of what it means to be Japanese. Maki Kaneko examines the elusive nature of 'Heisei-style' emperor-hood and its potentially queer affect through a discussion of the 2020 exhibition that critically displayed the relationship between art and the symbol emperor system.

Part 2 provides four interrelated perspectives on government and politics, dissecting the compounding problems that have impacted the nation. Koichi Nakano points out that the national political centre of gravity shifted from interest distribution to the neoliberal obsession with reform and then swung right to the reactionary politics of identity. Tina Burrett discusses the changing role and expectations of the Japanese prime minister and observes the absence of effective political leadership as well as the irony of reforms that were intended to strengthen but instead impeded democratic

accountability. Alexis Dudden offers a refracted view of the Japanese state in the Heisei era through the lens of Okinawa, a place that continues to bear the heaviest burdens of the Pacific War and its aftermath. Dudden examines not only the continued presence of the US military but also the increasing militarization of the area by the Japanese state. Lawrence Repeta recounts the struggles of civilians and activist groups to promote information disclosure by national government agencies that is vital to public interest and accountability.

Part 3 continues the discussion of civics and presents two incisive analyses that critique the compromised state of civil society in early twenty-first-century Japan. Simon Avenell discusses how citizen-led and state-led initiatives converged to produce neoliberal depoliticization where democratic values have been exchanged for the rhetoric of self-responsibility and self-help. David McNeill and Tanaka Akira raise concerns over the declining freedom of expression exercised by the media in response to the changing patterns of information consumption and in reaction to intimidation by the conservative state and politicians.

Part 4 includes three report cards on Heisei Japan's record on the economy and work, two areas that defined Japan's claims to world dominance at the beginning of the Heisei era. Richard Katz summarizes how the Japanese economy tumbled and why it has failed to rebound; it remains to be seen if any of the remedies that he offers will be realized. Machiko Osawa and Jeff Kingston detail the chilling consequences of labour market deregulation on workers in Japan, resulting in the 'precaritization' of work that has increased risk and undermined the well-being and prospects for women and the young. Gracia Liu-Farrer argues that the reality of Japan's increasing reliance on immigrant labour has not been matched by commensurate policies based on the principles of inclusion and diversity, problems she attributes to Japanese ethno-nationalism.

The three chapters in **Part 5** point out that Japanese society has yet to fully apply the principle of diversity as an integral value. Mari Miura focuses on gender equality and women's limited role in leadership, noting significant improvements in the 1990s that petered out in the 2000s. Tin Tin Htun observes that the government's laws and policies affecting the four different minority groups of Ainu, Zainichi Koreans, Buraku, and sexual minorities reveal a similar pattern wherein laws and policies are intended to promote Japan's standing in the international community instead of protecting minority rights. She concludes that the enacted measures characteristically privilege the majority and maintain an imagined Japan that is homogenous and heteronormative. Jennifer Robertson further investigates the persistence of heterosexism by triangulating the intersectional politics of sex, gender, and sexuality.

Modern Japan is often described as non-religious, but the two chapters in **Part 6** complicate this received notion. Helen Hardacre discusses the evolving identity of Shinto, with emphasis on shrine Shinto, and examines its position on the imperial household, the politics of the powerful Association of Shinto Shrines, as well as the media and popular cultural representations that shape the public perception of 'Shinto.' Mark Mullins focuses on the fringe religion group Aum Shinrikyō, and the terrorist acts by its adherents that defined Japan's apocalyptic moment in the 1990s, profoundly transforming the social, political and cultural landscape of the nation into one that many have since come to recognize as distinctly 'Heisei.'

Part 7 presents insights into three different registers of culture that have attracted extensive international attention as 'representative' of contemporary Japanese culture. Alice Tseng offers a provocative comparison between the perceived characteristics of

Akihito's reign and those of architecture by high-profiled designers such as SANAA and Ban Shigeru in search for a 'Heisei' zeitgeist. Patrick Galbraith revisits the epoch-defining significance of Gainax' *Neon Genesis Evangelion* in the formation of the *otaku* subculture of manga/anime fans, which has become a transnational phenomenon. He explains how the affective economics that the *Evangelion* boom unleashed reshaped the relationships with and between fans and characters. The largely male *otaku* subculture is sometimes conflated with the neo-Orientalist vision of Japan as a land inhabited by impossibly *kawaii* or cute Japanese schoolgirls. Noriko Murai returns the subject of *kawaii* to Japanese women themselves and argues that the fundamentally minor and paraesthetic quality of *kawaii* and its normative appeal aestheticize the state of subordination.

Part 8 analyses the diversification and multiplication of subjects, voices, and strategies of story-telling after the fall of the grand narrative that constituted the modern 'Japanese' tradition. Matthew Strecher points out the resilience of Japanese-language literature in the Heisei era that evolved in the absence of homogeneity, in defiance of uniformity, and after the death of 'pure literature.' Kyoko Hirano shows how independent films, despite financial setbacks, managed to produce meaningful social critiques by pursuing alternative viewpoints and unfamiliar stories that resist and subvert the values of mainstream society and media.

One major function of 'Heisei' was to historicize and commemorate the era that came before it: 'Shōwa.' Part 9 thus reflects on the various modes and the fraught processes through which the recent past was transformed into 'history.' The rise of right-wing historical revisionism has received considerable attention in and outside Japan, but Sven Saaler asserts the importance of contextualizing this loud discourse in relation to the competing and more judicious narratives offered by professional historians, museum displays, and even by Akihito. Ayelet Zohar examines contemporary photographic and video works that re-enact moments of the Asia-Pacific War; such delayed representations of the past bring to the fore the unconscious aspect of war memory that was long suppressed. David Leheny discusses the distinctly Heisei origin of the commodified 'Shōwa nostalgia', which drastically shifted the collective imagination of 'Shōwa' from its largely negative association with the war—a vision that was dominant during the actual Shōwa era after 1945—to a celebratory evocation of national resilience and growth in the postwar period. The discursive power of *gengō* renders itself to cultural imagination, commercial opportunities, and political manipulations over the fabrication of national narratives that position the present in relation to the past. In this respect, the critical question that one must ask is not only 'what kind of time *did* "Heisei" produce?', but also 'what kind of time *will* "Heisei" produce?'

The future histories of 'Heisei Japan' will be a major discursive undertaking of the Reiwa era. The book concludes with a chapter by Jeff Kingston that broaches this very subject, providing a panoramic view of disasters, unrealized opportunities, and unfinished business that include Fukushima, Japan's regional diplomacy, and militarization. These developments in the tumultuous final decade of Heisei generate a riptide of legacies that shape the ongoing present and loom over the imminent future.

Acknowledgements

This project originated in the roundtable 'Heisei Becomes History: The Relevance of the Imperial Reign Calendrical System in Twenty-First-Century Japan' held at the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) 2019 conference in Denver. Participating were

Noriko Murai, Franziska Seraphim, Jordan Smith, and Alice Tseng. Jeff Kingston then proposed to create a volume that would offer a multidisciplinary evaluation of contemporary Japan, soliciting contributions from leading experts from a wide range of fields. Tina Burrett joined the team during the critical phase of editing. We are grateful for the hard work of our contributors during this trying time of pandemic and appreciate the sacrifices they made to meet a tight schedule.

The Collaborative Research Project Unit at the Institute of Comparative Culture (ICC), Sophia University titled ‘Heisei Becomes History: Critical Reflections on a Period and Periodization’ (Murai as the lead investigator, with Tina Burrett, Michio Hayashi, Shion Kono, Koichi Nakano, Sven Saaler, David Slater and Matthew Strecher as members, 2019–2021) provided generous funding that facilitated the research and manuscript preparation for this volume. We also thank Asako Katsura and especially Sunny Mizushima for their invaluable editorial help. Finally, we appreciate the patience and support from the entire editorial team at Routledge, especially Stephanie Rodgers for commissioning the project and Emily Pickthall for shepherding the manuscript through the publication process.

Bibliography

- Han, T. (2014) ‘Gaikokujin—hōsetsugata shakai o henai kajōgata shakai de okiteiru koto’, in E. Oguma (ed.) *Heiseishi (zōho shinpan)*, Tokyo: Kawase Shobō Shinsha, 467–97.
- Hara, T. (2019) *Heisei no shūen—taii to tennō-kōgō*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- The Imperial Household Agency (2016) ‘Message from His Majesty The Emperor’, 8 August. Online. Available HTTP: <<https://www.kunaicho.go.jp/page/okotoba/detailEn/12#41>> (accessed 27 April 2021).
- Japan Tourism Agency (2020) ‘Reiwa gannendo kankō no jōkyō Reiwa ninendo kankō shisaku yōshi.’ Online. Available HTTP: <<https://www.mlit.go.jp/kankochō/content/001348280.pdf>> (accessed 27 April 2021).
- Noguchi, Y. (2019) *Heisei wa naze shippai shitanoka (‘ushinawareta 30nen’ no bunseki)*, Tokyo: Gentōsha.
- Oguma, E. (ed.) (2014) *Heiseishi (zōho shinpan)*, Tokyo: Kawase Shobō Shinsha.
- Ōtsuka, E. (2019) *Kanjō tennōron*, Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.
- Ruoff, K. J. (2020) *Japan’s Imperial House in the Postwar Era, 1945–2019*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Asia Center.
- Saaler, S. and Szpilman, C.W.A. (2017) *Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese History*, London: Routledge.
- Suzuki, H. (2017) ‘Gengō’ to sengo Nihon, Tokyo: Seidosha.
- (2019) “‘Tennō = gengō = jidai’ no hōkai: jidai kataru imi toinaoshi o’, *Journalism*, 347: 56–64.
- Tanaka, S. (2019) *History without Chronology*, Amherst, MA: Lever Press.
- Tokoro, I. (1988) *Nengō no rekishi—gengō seido no shiteki kenkyū*, Tokyo: Yūzankaku Shuppan.
- Tsuboi, H. (2018) ‘Boku ga gengō o tsukawanai riyū’, *Nichibunken*, 60: 4–9.
- Watanabe, O. (2021) ‘Heisei’ no tennō to gendaishi, Tokyo: Junpōsha.
- Yamada, M. (2004) *Kibō kakusa shakai—‘makegumi’ no zetsubōkan ga Nihon o hikiyaku*, Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.
- Yoshida, Y., Sebata, H., and Kawanishi, H. (2017) *Heisei no tennōsei to wa nanika—seido to kojim no hazama de*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Yoshimi, S. (2019a) *Heisei jidai*, Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.
- (ed.) (2019b) *Heiseishi kōgi*, Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.

PART 1

Symbol emperor



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

1 The people's imperial couple

Kenneth J. Ruoff

A close relationship between the imperial house and the people is a product of the Heisei era (1989–2019). During his three-decade reign, Emperor Akihito (b. 1933), the first emperor enthroned under the postwar constitution that defines the emperor as the ‘symbol of the state and of the unity of the people, deriving his position from the will of the people with whom resides sovereign power,’ pursued an active role for the ‘symbol emperor,’ becoming close to the people.

The Heisei-era monarchy represented the thorough realization of the concept of the ‘people’s emperor’ (Ruoff 2001, 2020; Kobayashi and Ruoff 2019). I should also explicitly reference the ‘people’s empress’ as well, so important was Empress Michiko to the Heisei monarchy. It is the Constitution of Japan that provides the framework for the people’s emperor. In the postwar era, the basic survival of the monarchy became a question that was open to debate, along the lines of, ‘shall the imperial house be maintained?’ The fact that the Japanese people enjoy popular sovereignty means, in constitutional terms, that the future of the monarchy depends on the people wanting to maintain the imperial house. For this reason, the imperial house must keep its finger on the pulse of the public and also operate in a way that is in tune with the wishes of the people.

For a period in 2004, the public had a window into the complex calculations among imperial family members that normally go on behind closed doors in reference to balancing their personal hopes and aspirations with the public duties expected of them. It is worth outlining this drama because it sheds light on the basic function of a symbolic monarchy. The drama began when, under the strain of his wife’s mental breakdown and the confusion regarding Princess Aiko’s (b. 2001) future (would the law be changed so she could ascend to the throne?), then-Crown Prince Naruhito bluntly remarked during his press conference in May 2004 before leaving, solo, to attend royal weddings in Denmark and Spain, ‘There were developments that denied Masako’s career as well as her personality’(Imperial Household Agency 2004a).

At the time, I interpreted Naruhito’s remarks as an indictment of the notion that then-Crown Princess Masako’s primary duty was to serve as a womb to produce a male heir, and also as a call for action to change the law to permit Princess Aiko to ascend to the throne. But in a broader sense, this incident, which soon embroiled other members of the imperial family, spoke to the question of what does it mean for imperial family members to dutifully serve the nation? The fact that Naruhito’s May 2004 remarks continued to reverberate for months thereafter was evidenced at Prince Akishino’s press conference on the occasion of his birthday (30 November) later in 2004.

Akishino remarked that:

Identifying what is official work is also a very difficult matter, I think. Naturally, we, members of the Imperial Household, are expected to perform a variety of duties of an official nature In my view, official duties are rather passive in nature. We're going to hold this or that event, people say, and they ask us to attend them. If we think a given event is very valuable, then we accept the request as required. Personally, that's how I understand the process, and that's how I have been going about my responsibilities.

(Imperial Household Agency 2004b)

Akishino's comments reflected the interpretation held by many people inside the palace. The Imperial Household Agency definitely wants royal family members to be perceived as putting duty before happiness, or at the very least as not putting personal happiness before duty.

Later that year, Akihito, during the annual press conference marking his birthday (23 December), referenced Naruhito's blunt public comments. Without defending his oldest son's remarks, Akihito offered a critically important interpretation of public duties carried out by imperial family members that sought to reconcile interpretations offered by his two sons:

Since the Crown Prince's statement in May, there has also been much discussion about the Crown Prince and Crown Princess' official duties. I think that the statement made by Prince Akishino that 'official duties are passive in nature' and the statement by the Crown Prince about 'new official duties in step with a particular era' are not necessarily contradictory in nature. The Empress and I have learned during the long years since our marriage that new official duties would have very little real meaning if they did not reflect individual hopes or interests, and, at the same time, official duties could newly emerge in the course of diligently carrying out the duties of one's assignment.

(Imperial Household Agency 2004c)

This comment was a reminder that each emperor and empress put their particular stamp on the throne, a central point of this chapter.

One of the best ways to understand the concept of the people's emperor is to examine dissent against it from the right, the sort of bashing that has taken place throughout the postwar era. Consider Etō Jun's (1932–1999) bitter attack at the time of the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995. Reacting to images of how the imperial couple had consoled victims of the disaster, Etō fumed in an essay in *Bungei shunjū* (1995):

It is not necessary (for the imperial couple) to kneel down. It is not necessary (for the imperial couple) to be at the same line of sight as the victims. If one views it from the perspective of the emperor having a special position according to the constitution, then it would make no difference if they stood. It would be fine if they were on top of a horse or in a car (for the visit). There is no necessity whatsoever for the imperial couple to try to be loved by the people.

The 'people's emperor' so loathed by elements of the right-wing, but celebrated by an overwhelming majority of the population, saw its full fruition under Akihito and

Michiko. So much has the 'people's emperor' developed these past decades that as abdication approached in early 2019, for many Japanese, the Heisei monarchy seemed 'natural,' in other words, it almost seemed to many that the monarchy had always operated in this fashion. This assumption was challenged only by the deluge of television programming and print media coverage at the time of the abdication that outlined antecedents to the Heisei monarchy, including historical accounts of the sacrosanct throne under the Meiji Constitution.

The Heisei agenda

What, then, was the symbolic essence of Akihito and Michiko? It was characterized by five themes which sometimes overlap: (1) an unabashed support of the postwar system; (2) efforts to compress the margins of society by reaching out to the most vulnerable members of society, and also by extending a hand to others marginalized by geography and other factors; (3) efforts to bring closure to the postwar era by trying to heal the festering wounds of the war and of the imperial era in a more general sense; (4) demonstrations of pride in the best that Japan has to offer, but a pride in Japan tempered with a cosmopolitanism that clashed with simplistic nationalism, including in reference to views of Japan's history; and (5) the unusually active and important role played by Michiko.

In terms of the imperial couple's embrace of the postwar system, one can begin with the fact that the basic style of Akihito was more informal than that of his father. When he was ready to make a prepared statement, he simply retrieved it from his pocket rather than having a chamberlain present it to him, as was customary under Hirohito (b. 1901; r. 1926–89). Additionally, the Heisei imperial couple narrowed the distance between themselves and the people to the extent that images of Michiko hugging victims of natural disasters were widely cited as iconic, precisely the sort of informality and closeness to the people that results in fits of rage among far-right critics of the postwar democratic system.

Akihito also made numerous public statements in support of the postwar system, leaving little doubt as to how thoroughly he was aligned with it. In 1987, during the regular press conference on the occasion of his birthday, then-Crown Prince Akihito spoke in support of free speech: 'When all is said and done freedom of expression is crucial' (Yamashita 2017: 34). Although circumstances did not allow Akihito to play the sort of heroic, hands-on role of steering his country from a dictatorial to a democratic system of government as King Juan Carlos (b. 1938; r. 1975–2014) did for Spain during the late 1970s and early 1980s, Japan's emperor nonetheless made clear his resolute support for democracy and for peace. For many Japanese, the definition of democracy actually includes peace, a formula specific to postwar Japan.

Akihito began his reign with a ringing pledge to carry out his duties in accordance with the postwar constitution, and also specifically referenced peace and social welfare (Yamashita 2017: 36). It is sometimes said that the pre-1945 emperor system was laden with ideology, but it is not as though the Heisei monarchy has been free of ideology. It may seem natural, almost invisible, but a complex web of ideology underlays the postwar democratic system, no less so than the ideology that was linked to the imperial system (1868–1945). Not only did Akihito and Michiko learn how to 'operate' within the postwar democratic system, but during the Heisei era they made clear their fervent support of the values, of the ideology, inherent in this system.

What does it mean to say that the Heisei imperial couple sought to compress the margins of Japanese society? Throughout the modern era (1868–present), imperial family

members have sponsored charitable causes on behalf of the disadvantaged. However, previously this sponsorship typically took the form of, for example, helping to provide facilities that kept those suffering from such and such condition comfortable but in a setting isolated from mainstream society. In contrast, Akihito and Michiko worked to integrate as much as possible previously marginalized groups into mainstream society. The definition of marginalized is multifold, ranging from those who suffered discrimination because of physical handicaps to those who might feel marginalized for geographic or for historical reasons.

Long before they became emperor and empress, Akihito and Michiko lent imperial prestige to individuals who faced particular challenges in their daily lives. When the Paralympics were first held in Japan, in the aftermath of the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics, then-Crown Prince Akihito adopted them as one of his causes. Decades later, on the tenth anniversary of his enthronement, Emperor Akihito stressed:

I think that it is very important work to reach out to individuals with disabilities and the elderly, as well as individuals who have suffered natural disasters, as well as to individuals working on behalf of such people.

(Yamashita 2017: 88)

Ogawa Eiichi, President of the Japanese Federation of Organizations of Disabled Individuals (est. 1958), credited Akihito and Michiko with having been one of the few constant sources of support for this organization's initiatives in his speech at the ceremony to mark the 20th anniversary of Akihito's accession to the throne.

Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko also reached out regularly to areas of Japan that are geographically marginalized (e.g. remote islands) through their visits. Here it is important to understand that as some monarchies have evolved in the modern era away from ruling to reigning within a democratic polity, their functions have changed, too. According to the historian of Great Britain David Cannadine, a term that describes well the contemporary British royal family is 'peripatetic.' He stresses how this is a contemporary development:

But the practice whereby, on any given weekday, many members of the royal family will be found undertaking public duties in towns and cities across the length and breadth of the country is a relatively recent development ...

(Cannadine 2008: 52)

Peripatetic is a term that also could be used to describe Akihito and Michiko, and Japan's imperial family in general. In his opening address at the ceremony to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Akihito's accession to the throne, parliamentarian Hiranuma Takeo (b. 1939) noted with precise statistics just how peripatetic Akihito had been:

Up until Heisei 19 (2008) His Majesty has made 180 regional visits, including to each of the forty-seven prefectures, and including remote islands he has visited 514 cities, towns, and villages, and has been welcomed by 7,700,000 people. He is the first emperor to have visited all the country's prefectures.

(Houshuku 2012)

Emperor Akihito long took a particular interest in spiritually integrating Okinawa, which both for geographic and historical reasons was the most estranged of the

47 prefectures during the postwar era, more fully into the national community. This was demonstrated by the repeated visits that he and Michiko made to that prefecture since its reversion from American military occupation to Japan in 1972, and the interest they showed in Okinawan culture. In March 2018, Akihito and Michiko completed their 11th and final trip to Okinawa. Close observers of these visits point out that it was not just the number of visits, but rather the insistence of Akihito and Michiko during each of the visits to go to the sites of the most intense battles during the Battle of Okinawa (1945), and to take an interest in the accounts of survivors, that left such an impression. Akihito's interest in Okinawa was also related to his effort to bring closure to the postwar, a topic discussed below.

Akihito and Michiko also took on the (new) role of chief consolers and encouragers of compatriots who suddenly found their lives turned upside down as the result of natural disasters. In the early years of the Heisei era, postdisaster visits by Akihito and Michiko resulted in scenes that evidenced just how committed the new emperor and empress were to mix with the people on as equal terms as possible. For example, in 1991 they knelt on a gymnasium floor to engage in conversation with displaced victims of the eruption of Mt Unzen. The imperial-couple-as-consoler-and-as-encourager-after-disasters has become so routinized, so seemingly traditional, that it is difficult to imagine how Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako could abruptly break with this 'tradition' during the Reiwa era (2019–).

For most Japanese, the frequent use of the term postwar (*senjo*) is so customary that most individuals presumably do not pause to think how curious it is that, three-quarters of a century after the end of the war, the term remains so commonly used in Japan. Whether it is appropriate to think of Japan today as still in the postwar era is in the eye of the beholder, but there is some meaning to the fact that the term remains so commonplace. When Akihito ascended to the throne, he seemed hopeful of soothing lingering wounds that were legacies of the imperial era (1868–1945), and thereby helping to bring closure to the postwar era. Evaluating his record in this area is not without difficulty, in no small part because there was only so much that Akihito (or any single individual) could do to heal divisions between, for example, Japan and Korea.

But Akihito nonetheless endeavoured to address troubling legacies of the imperial era. Only 16 months into his reign, he issued what up to that point was the most forthright apology by any official representative of Japan to the Republic of Korea for the colonial era, to visiting President Roh Tae Woo (b. 1932; president, 1988–1993). This was the earliest explicit indication of Akihito's intent to confront head on various painful legacies, both domestic and international, related to Japan's imperial era. Such efforts by Akihito became a major theme of the Heisei era. By all accounts, it was Akihito himself who insisted that this be a major component of his public duties. During a September 1992 visit to China, Emperor Akihito issued a forthright apology to the Chinese people. The efforts of Akihito and Michiko to address the wounds of the imperial era and the war with countries other than China and Korea, as well as on the domestic front, were arguably more successful, for few would say that Japan's relations with Korea and China are better than when Akihito took the throne in 1989 in spite of his efforts.

As with so many aspects of the Heisei monarchy, the imperial couple's repeated examples of praying for the war dead and generally seeking to heal the wounds of the war became so customary that after 30 years they, too, came to seem 'traditional.' It is thus especially important to point out that Hirohito never made similar efforts in this

area. It was in 1995 that it became especially clear just how much importance Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko placed on remembering those (including noncombatants) who were victimized by the war. During this fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, Akihito and Michiko took a tour that brought them to Nagasaki, Okinawa, Hiroshima, and the memorial in Tokyo that commemorates victims of the conventional air raids, praying at each place for the war dead. Additionally, that year at the annual ceremony held on 15 August to commemorate the war dead, for the first time Emperor Akihito specifically expressed his hope, in his short remarks, that such a tragedy would not be repeated.

Efforts by Akihito and Michiko to honour the war dead and to console the bereaved also took them beyond Japan, to Saipan in 2005 and Palau in 2015. We now know that Akihito was thinking about abdication years before his August 2016 televised address to the nation in which he announced his desire to retire. Akihito must have sensed during these past five years or so that his especially active years on the throne were drawing to an end. This fact, perhaps combined with societal and political developments around him, seemed to stiffen his resolve to pay his respects to the war dead whenever possible and also to remind the living of the horrors of war. This latter theme included reminding his countrymen that Japan bore particular responsibility for having caused so much of the suffering, an interpretation of the past that put him at odds with much of the political right.

In 2015, Akihito seemed to 'up his game' in drawing attention to the suffering caused by the war. In April that year, he and Michiko made their second overseas trip to honour the war dead (from all sides), to Palau. Then, at the annual 15 August ceremony to commemorate the war dead that year, Akihito adopted stronger wording for his ritualistic statement, wording that he repeated at subsequent ceremonies held on 15 August (the key new phrase is italicized):

Reflecting on our past and bearing in mind the feelings of *deep remorse* over the last war, I earnestly hope that the ravages of war will never be repeated. Together with all of our people, I now pay my heartfelt tribute to all those who lost their lives in the war, both on the battlefields and elsewhere, and pray for world peace and for the continuing development of our country.

(Imperial Household Agency 2015a)

Any doubt that by 2015 Akihito was gravely concerned that memories of the horrors of the war were fading from the consciousness of Japanese citizens was erased when he made the following remark during his annual birthday press conference that year:

With each passing year, we will have more and more Japanese who have never experienced war, but I believe having thorough knowledge about the last war and deepening our thoughts about the war is most important for the future of Japan (Imperial Household Agency 2015b).

Tellingly, Akihito finished his reign without once having visited the Yasukuni Shrine, thus following the precedent of his father. Hirohito made it clear to his advisors that he considered the 1978 decision by the chief priest of Yasukuni to enshrine Class-A war criminals a mistake. In signing the San Francisco Peace Treaty (1951), Japan pledged to accept the verdict of the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal. Hirohito expressed his displeasure by making no further visits there. At the time I write, it has been nearly a half century