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“Epilogue” (The Japanese version of this appears in the translation of *The People’s Emperor* published by Iwanami Bunko in 2009. For more information on the Iwanami edition, see <http://www.iwanami.co.jp/.BOOKS/60/9/6002140.html>.)

There have been many developments relating to the imperial house since the original, English-language version of this book was published in November 2001, and even since the first Japanese version was published in December 2003. These developments include, but are not limited to, the birth of Princess Aiko, several public remarks by Emperor Akihito with important symbolic resonance, the enlargement of Empress Michiko’s already significant public role, the mental breakdown of Crown Princess Masako, a movement to revise the Imperial House Law to permit female *tennō*, and the birth of Prince Hisahito which postponed, rather than solved, the so-called heir problem. This Epilogue will update my study of the monarchy in postwar Japan through November 2008.

For most of the postwar period, the symbolic essence (*shōchōsei*) of the imperial house proceeded on two parallel fronts, that of the emperor and his household, and that of the crown prince and his household. In the coming years, the household of Prince Akishino and Princess Kiko, who are raising the heir apparent (Prince Hisahito), will likely provide a third parallel front. This is one of the more significant developments, one whose contours will become more evident in conjunction with Prince Hisahito’s development and education.

It is important to understand that although the Constitution of Japan limits the monarchy to a symbolic role, it is precisely this symbolic role that provides the imperial house with social influence. Imperial family members make use of this social influence to support certain causes. This is true not only of Japan’s imperial house, but also of other symbolic monarchies, including that of Britain. When the late Princess Diana removed her glove before shaking hands with an AIDS patient in the late 1980s, she symbolically called for an end to the discrimination directed at AIDS patients in the early years of the epidemic.

It has been twenty years since Emperor Akihito ascended to the throne, but there is little doubt that he and Empress Michiko had an agenda in mind before Akihito succeeded his father, Emperor Hirohito, in 1989. Thus Emperor Akihito has put his stamp on the monarchy and Japan not only with his informal style (when he is ready to make a prepared statement, he simply retrieves it from his pocket rather than having a courtier present it to him, as was customary under Hirohito), but also through the pursuit of this agenda in conjunction with Empress Michiko.

In broad terms, the imperial couple’s agenda includes the following two, often overlapping goals: (1) to integrate those individuals at the margins of Japanese society into the mainstream; and (2) to bring closure to the postwar era. Empress Michiko also has become a prominent supporter of children’s literature, and her significant public role, including her first solo trip abroad, serves to lay the necessary groundwork for a woman to ascend to the throne someday in the future. This is true even though the movement to revise the Imperial House Law to permit female *tennō* has been sidelined for the moment.

What does it mean to say that the imperial couple seeks to integrate those at the margins of Japanese society into the mainstream? Long before they became emperor and

empress, Akihito and Michiko lent imperial prestige to individuals who face 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. At the time, handicapped individuals in Japan were typically encouraged to play sports only for rehabilitation.

According to former Grand Chamberlain Watanabe Makoto (1936–), Akihito quickly embraced a different view, namely that “handicapped individuals should play sports for the same reason that everyone else plays them.”¹ Today social values have evolved to the point that such an interpretation seems natural, but it is no exaggeration to say that a common view of the handicapped in 1964 was that they should be hidden. There are degrees of marginalization, and no doubt the handicapped in Japan continue to face many challenges, but they are far less marginalized than they used to be, and imperial prestige played a role in this process.

In 1999, the Imperial Household Agency published a book titled *Michi* to commemorate Emperor Akihito’s tenth year on the throne.² Needless to say, it is an uncritical examination of the monarchy, but it is also very useful in understanding the agenda of the present emperor and empress. One of the points that stands out is how often the imperial couple lends their support to social welfare issues, whether by visiting hospitals or by making statements at conferences devoted to improving the lives of the most disadvantaged.

Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko have reached out to marginalized groups ranging from individuals residing in geographically remote islands to individuals with Hansen disease who, until recently, were kept isolated for no medical reason. Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko encourage society-wide tolerance for differences by showing tolerance themselves. They are, to a considerable extent, the “social welfare imperial couple.”

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 the mainstream. In contrast, the present emperor and empress have worked to “compress the margins of Japanese society” by integrating as much as possible previously marginalized groups into mainstream society.

In late 2002 and into 2003, Emperor Akihito played a worthwhile role in the area of social welfare even while dealing with a life-threatening illness. Immediately after having been diagnosed with prostate cancer in December 2002, the emperor asked his doctors to make this information public. Doctors also promptly disclosed details of the subsequent operation to remove the cancer. Emperor Akihito’s openness about his own battle with

¹ Grand Chamberlain Watanabe generously answered various questions about the contemporary monarchy during a two-hour discussion we had in his office on 26 August 2002.

² Kunaichō. *Michi: tennō heika gosokui jūnen kinen kirokushū*. Nihon hōsō shuppankai, 1999.

prostate cancer drew important attention to this health issue that affects many men. With early diagnosis, a high percentage of men who develop prostate cancer can be cured.³ The emperor's frankness about his own condition may have encouraged men in Japan to seek appropriate early testing for and treatment of this disease.

The imperial couple works to lend their prestige to areas of Japan that are geographically marginalized. Emperor Akihito has long taken a particular interest in spiritually integrating Okinawa, which both for geographic and historical reasons remains the most estranged of the forty-seven prefectures, more fully into the national community. This has been demonstrated by the repeated visits that he has made to that prefecture, and the interest he has shown in Okinawan culture. The emperor's interest in Okinawa is also related to his effort to bring closure to the postwar era.

An estimated 160,000 Okinawan civilians lost their lives during the Battle of Okinawa, including some at the hands of the Japanese Imperial Military. The Imperial Military's killing of Okinawan civilians is a particularly difficult historical chapter for patriotic Japanese to accept because this fundamentally challenges the notion of a unified national community. Furthermore, there is credible evidence that Emperor Hirohito played an active role in arranging for the United States to maintain control of Okinawa after the rest of Japan regained independence in 1952. Thus, Emperor Akihito's task in Okinawa (which reverted to Japanese sovereignty in 1972) is possibly as great as that of soothing memories of Japanese aggression in neighboring countries, a goal he has pursued by issuing frank statements acknowledging Japan's responsibility.

Yet by far the most intriguing public remark with symbolic resonance that Emperor Akihito has made since ascending to the throne was his comment, during his annual birthday question and answer session with reporters on 23 December 2001, that he felt a "certain kinship with Korea." Emperor Akihito went on to explain his feeling as resulting from the fact that the mother of Emperor Kammu (736–806) was Korean.⁴ It was also notable that Emperor Akihito, after stressing the many cultural contributions that Koreans have made to Japan, remarked: "It is regrettable however that Japan's exchanges with Korea have not all been of this kind. This is something that we should never forget."

³ Dr. Tomasz Beer, a researcher of prostate cancer on the faculty at the Oregon Health & Science University in Portland, Oregon, provided me with a short briefing on prostate cancer in a 21 August 2003 e-mail message. In the case of the United States, arguably the most important example of a public figure drawing attention to prostate cancer was the case of Andy Grove, CEO of Intel, who wrote a story titled "Taking on Prostate Cancer" that was featured in the 13 May 1996 issue of *Fortune*.

⁴ The complete text of the press conference at which the emperor made these remarks is available at the Imperial House Agency's website: <http://www.kunaicho.go.jp/kisyakaiken/kisyakaiken-h13.html> (accessed 22 August 2003). I am grateful to Fukushima Mutsuo of Kyōdō News for bringing the web link to my attention, and also for providing a copy of the official English-language translation of the press conference.

Katō Mari (19), a Japanese college student interviewed in 2002, summed up the meaning of the emperor's remark about Emperor Kammu's mixed lineage: "I was surprised by what the Emperor said. It means that the imperial line is not purely Japanese."

When one remembers that the egregious Japanese mistreatment of Koreans (including the sexual enslavement of Korean women) during the colonial period (1910–45) resulted in part from Japanese views of themselves as an exalted race and of Koreans (and other Asians) as lower beings, the significance of the emperor's remarks becomes clearer. Indeed, South Korean Foreign Minister Han Seung-soo very publicly praised Emperor Akihito's remarks as an important step forward in relations between the two countries.

Palace officials were unwilling to talk on the record about what Emperor Akihito was trying to accomplish with his remark, even insisting that there was no particular agenda. "Emperor Akihito is a very scientific man, and he was simply acknowledging what he considers to be a historical fact," remarked one leading palace official. The reason for their hesitancy is simple, and informs us about an important aspect of the Japanese monarchy.

Although public opinion polls have consistently shown eighty percent support for retention of the monarchy, on a daily basis most Japanese do not pay much attention to the imperial house. But there are some Japanese for whom the monarchy is a daily concern, namely the emperorist far right, as best exemplified by the Association of Shinto Shrines. The Association of Shinto Shrines, when it comes to matters related to the imperial house and to Shinto in general, is a classic example of what political scientists term an "intense minority." Although the Association of Shinto Shrines is itself hardly monolithic and certainly does not represent the views of Japanese overall, the intensity with which it pays attention to and reacts to all developments related to the imperial house provides it with influence (or at least self-proclaimed influence) that is disproportionate to its size.

Although there can be considerable tension between the imperial house (including the Imperial Household Agency) and an organization such as the Association of Shinto Shrines, the palace prefers not to alienate its staunchest supporters. And blood matters to the far right, especially the notion that there is a pure Japanese race. The far right (and many other Japanese, for that matter) still argue that membership in the national community, at least full membership, should be reserved for members of the "Japanese race."

However, the notion that the emperor simply spontaneously pointed out that there is Korean blood in the imperial line is farfetched. The emperor made his comment during a so-called question and answer session with reporters, but one must understand that reporters submit questions for their meetings with the emperor (and other imperial family members) in advance. Emperor Akihito's comment resulted from careful preparation. And there is little question that the remark served to undermine those in Japan who privilege race.

The emperor's remark, I would argue, contradicts definitions of Japanese citizenship that are based on race. Was not Emperor Akihito suggesting that one need not be racially Japanese in order to be an equal member of the national community, and indeed that there is no such thing as a "pure" Japanese race? Japan is slowly but surely becoming more pluralistic racially and culturally, and now would be an especially appropriate time for Emperor Akihito and other imperial family members to contribute to the demolition of

nonsensical racial myths. It is time for the Japanese to move beyond racial definitions of citizenship. After all, not only are more and more “foreigners” making Japan their home as it and the rest of the world globalizes, but large-scale immigration into Japan may also turn out to be the only solution to that country’s demographic time bomb (Japan has a rapidly aging population and a low birthrate).

Through his remark, Emperor Akihito could not have made it clearer that he wants to do his part to improve Japanese-Korean relations.⁵ It is well known that Emperor Akihito has long wanted to visit Korea, and since ascending to the throne he has received several invitations from South Korean presidents. Still, a visit by the imperial couple to Korea looks unlikely at this point, especially since the emperor and empress are getting on in years. Of course, in the late twentieth century, the notion that the Japanese prime minister would soon visit North Korea would have seemed far more unlikely, and yet Prime Minister Koizumi visited Pyongyang on 17 September 2002.

It is ironic that although the far right appoints itself as the guardian of the throne’s dignity, Emperor Akihito has on several occasions through “symbolic” statements aligned himself with positions that blatantly contradict the far rightist world view. It is the far right that insists that the prescription for Japan’s present ills is a heavy dose of nationalism, but it is by no means clear that Emperor Akihito concurs with that stance.

For example, at the 28 October 2004 imperial garden party, Emperor Akihito seemed to condemn the Tokyo Board of Education’s policy of requiring students and teachers to sing the national anthem and to stand for the flag-raising. When Tokyo Board of Education member Yonenaga Kunio proudly informed the emperor that he had helped push through the flag and anthem requirements, Akihito bluntly retorted, “It is desirable that (such activity) is not compulsory” (強制でないことが望ましい). The exchange was caught on film and subsequently broadcast widely. Palace officials and even Prime Minister Koizumi insisted that the emperor’s remarks were apolitical, but was there really any doubt that Emperor Akihito was aligning himself with opponents of Tokyo Governor Ishihara Shintarō’s policy of making displays of patriotism in Tokyo’s public schools compulsory?

I believe that Japan owed its neighbors apologies for its wartime and also colonial-era actions (just for the record, I also think that the United States owes some apologies for past actions) and I also reject Governor Ishihara’s policy of making displays of patriotism in public schools compulsory. However, anyone who respects the Constitution of Japan should consider whether as a result of these statements the emperor’s position as symbol has

⁵ There have been other acts by imperial family members that suggest a pattern of working to improve relations between Japan and the Korean peninsula. Although much was made of the fact that Emperor Akihito did not attend the opening match of the World Cup on 31 May 2002, Prince Takamado and his wife Princess Hisako sat alongside President Kim Dae-jung at the event. They were the first members of Japan’s royal family to visit Korea since the end of World War II.

Another example was the 17 March 2003 attendance by Prince Akishino, Princess Kiko, and their two daughters of a showing in Tokyo of the South Korean blockbuster film *The Way Home*. The Korean Cultural Service sponsored the film showing.

been stretched in ways that clearly overlap with politics. Can, for example, an apology to a neighboring country by the national symbol be apolitical? In practice, it is impossible to maintain perfectly the neutrality of a national symbol that walks and talks, but the ideal of neutrality should be strived for all the same. Consistent maintenance of the firewall between the emperor and politics protects both the left and the right from unfair political use of the emperor.

Issues of neutrality aside, the imperial couple's efforts to bring closure to the postwar and to compress the margins of Japanese society are distinct features of the Heisei era, as is Empress Michiko's burgeoning public role, most notably as a spokesman for children's literature. The showing of a videotaped speech by Empress Michiko about her experiences of reading books during her childhood at the 1998 meeting of the International Board on Books for Young People held in New Delhi, India symbolized the fact that she has come to play more of a public role than any empress in modern Japanese history. This role was augmented by her address at the 2002 meeting of the International Board on Books for Young People in Basel, Switzerland marking the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of this organization. Empress Michiko is a product of her generation (she majored in English literature, an especially appropriate major for an aspiring housewife at the time) to be sure, and no doubt her focus on children's literature leaves certain Japanese feminists uninspired. However, her prominent public role is significant for many reasons, including its link to the so-called heir problem.

The heir problem will lurk just below the surface until it is resolved. There is only one male, Prince Hisahito, among the current generation of imperial children. Thus, legally there is only one heir to the throne after the generation of princes that includes Crown Prince Naruhito. One heir is better than none, the situation that Japan faced when the Diet seemed ready to revise the Imperial House Law to allow for female *tennō*, but for reasons elaborated below, the birth of Prince Hisahito did not provide a long-term solution to the heir-problem.

During the period between the birth of Princess Aiko on 1 December 2001 and the birth of Prince Hisahito on 6 September 2006, there were signs that the palace was preparing for the possibility of a female *tennō*. Discussion of whether women should be allowed to sit on the throne took an interesting turn in January 2002 when the then-90-year old Princess Kikuko (widow of Prince Takamatsu, one of the late Emperor Hirohito's brothers) published a short article in the women's magazine *Fujin kōron* suggesting that lawmakers study how to change the Imperial Household Law to permit for reigning empresses.⁶ It is unusual for imperial family members to publish anything that intersects with politics, and analysts could not help wondering if the article represented the first salvo in a palace-orchestrated campaign to lay the groundwork for Princess Aiko to ascend to the throne rather than simply the independent efforts of an elderly lady.

Whatever the origins of the article, Princess Kikuko did manage to introduce the key elements of the debate. Most importantly, she invoked Japan's eight reigning empresses of

⁶ Takamatsu no miya hi Kikuko. "Medetasa o nan ni tatoemu," *Fujin kōron* no. 1099 (22 January 2002): 134–35.

the past. Female *tennō* have been exceptions to the rule—if one puts aside the legendary sovereigns there have been approximately one hundred monarchs of whom fewer than ten percent have been women. It is worth noting here that some Japanese feminists are guilty of playing loose and easy with history when they claim, in order to justify a reigning empress in the present, that Japan has a long and rich tradition of female *tennō*. Nonetheless, this thread of tradition is clearly useful in justifying a reigning empress in the future.

The decision to send Empress Michiko abroad without her husband not only elevated her public role, but also called into question the notion that only men are fit to serve as Japan's national symbol. Crown Prince Naruhito's emergence as a spokesman for a new model of fatherhood in Japan was also significant. During a February 2003 press conference, the crown prince remarked, "Through giving the princess a bath, taking her for walks or giving her baby food, I myself feel a strong bond with my child."

He further commented, "The help of fathers in raising children whenever possible not only lightens the burden on mothers, but it is also a very good way for fathers to strengthen their relationship with their children." The fact that the crown prince appears to be a hands-on father, even if we did not see images of him changing diapers, serves to blur strict definitions of gender. Many studies of gender focus exclusively on the formation of female gender roles, but male gender roles are also a social construction.

Over the long term, it is impossible to sustain a male-only lineage without a system of concubines or a system of collateral families eligible to provide an heir, or both of these back ups. Only approximately half of all Japanese emperors were born to what today would be considered the "empress." The others, including, most recently, Emperor Taishō, were born to concubines. The simple genetic fact is that in order to sustain a male line, one needs many children, either by one wife, or as was the case historically in Japan, through concubines as well.

If one flips a coin, it is not uncommon to have the coin land on "heads" (here, indicating a girl) several times in a row. Of course, the more total times that one flips a coin, the likelihood increases that the percentage of "tails" (a boy) and "heads" will even out. However, the number of imperial children is likely to remain limited for two reasons. First, even assuming that an imperial princess could bear, say, ten children, it would contradict the middle class image of the imperial family for a princess to have so many children. After all, the norm in Japan, where children are considered a luxury, is one or two. Second, the imperial concubine system was abolished during the Occupation. Do not look for a restoration of the concubine system. Grand Chamberlain Watanabe stressed in an interview, "It is inconceivable that anytime in the near future the Emperor will have more than one wife."⁷

There is little question that the lack of sex scandals has been instrumental in maintaining the popularity of the Japanese royal house in the postwar era, and yet it is worth bearing in mind that the very concept of monogamy is alien to imperial tradition. I have heard Japanese who are well versed in history joke that in order to restore tradition to the

⁷ Discussion with Grand Chamberlain Watanabe, 26 August 2002.

imperial house (and also to potentially remedy the heir problem) it will be necessary to restore the ladies-in-waiting system at the palace. The reality of the situation, however, is that the restoration of the ladies-in-waiting system at the palace is about as likely as the restoration of Japan's *bakufu* (the ancient regime overthrown at the time of the Imperial Restoration in 1868) so a solution must be found elsewhere. Monogamy is now a central tenet of imperial marriages.

The sensible long-term solution to the heir problem, and perhaps the only solution if the imperial line is to continue since sometime down the road finding a male heir with royal lineage might well require taking extreme measures, is to permit women to ascend to the throne. There are two problems regarding a reigning empress. First, there is the question of whether a Japanese princess in line for the throne would be able to find a husband willing to play the "supporting role." If not, then once again the monarch could face a crisis over the lack of an heir. Princess Sayako's 2005 wedding did not alleviate concerns in this area because she is not in line for the throne and moreover legally she lost her royal status upon marriage.

European royal houses have a long tradition of inter-marriage, but Japan's royal house has no such tradition. The Japanese royal house maintains friendly relations with the Thai royal house, but it is unlikely that a Japanese princess in line for the throne will find a husband in a second or third Thai prince. If in the future an imperial princess were to marry a Thai prince, or any imperial prince or princess were to marry a foreigner, what would be wrong with that? Such a union could symbolize the globalization of Japan. Still, such a marriage seems unlikely for the moment.

Right-wing supporters of the monarchy object to reigning empresses for a reason different from those who worry that a princess in line for the throne would not be able to find a spouse. Right-wing supporters of the throne (frankly, this viewpoint is not limited simply to the right-wing, although it is voiced most intensely by representatives to the right of Japan's political spectrum) insist that if the imperial line passes down through a woman the supposedly unbroken imperial line (*bansai ikkei*) said to date from precisely 11 February 660 B.C. will be broken.

But Japan has had empresses in the past, so why the fuss about the possibility of a reigning empress in the future among individuals who cling dearly to the vacuous notion of an unbroken imperial line? The answer to this question is that none of the previous eight reigning empresses bore children who succeeded to the throne. The worst-case scenario of all for rightist guardians of Japan's national identity would be a reigning empress with a foreign husband who produced a mixed-race daughter who then ascended to the throne.

History suggests, however, that the die-hard supporters of the throne can accommodate shifting definitions of the monarchy and would fall into line and support, for example, a reigning empress if necessary. In spite of the fact that several empirical studies have shown that the vast majority of imperial traditions are not only modern (in other words, they were established after the Meiji Restoration of 1868) but also that many imperial practices assumed to be distinctly Japanese were in fact borrowed from European monarchies, conservatives in Japan continue to trumpet the throne as the essence of a timeless Japanese culture.

And yet conservative definitions of what constitutes a “true” Japanese tradition change over time. For the first two decades of the postwar era, the far right indicted the Occupation-era reform of the emperor’s position from national sovereign to symbol as an affront to Japanese tradition. But the far right eventually concluded, after their efforts to return sovereignty to the emperor had failed, that the emperor’s postwar position as a symbol in fact represented a return to the “true” Japanese tradition of emperors playing a symbolic role outside of politics, as had been the case for most of the imperial line’s history. The point is that the romantic, nationalistic far right, never strong on logic, will live with reigning empresses if that is the only way to preserve this nationalistic symbol. Indeed, sometime in the future one would not be surprised to hear the far right invoking the traditionality of empresses, or perhaps even the traditionality of mixed-race emperors and empresses (Emperor Kammu would provide a useful thread of tradition here).

The commission appointed by the Diet to study how the Imperial House Law might be changed to allow for female *tennō* investigated various scenarios. For example, if Japan were to permit reigning empresses, would the first-born child of the crown prince and crown princess be designated heir, even in the case of a set of girl-boy twins where the girl is born only minutes earlier than her brother? Such a change would represent a ringing endorsement of gender equality. Or would it be better to alter the law to allow only grudgingly for a reigning empress as a last resort, with the imperial line reverting to a male by the next generation if possible?

The reestablishment of the concubine system seems the most unlikely of scenarios, but could adoption emerge as a possible mechanism for providing future heirs? Will it be necessary to reestablish collateral families to ensure the availability of a male heir (or perhaps of any sort of heir) in the future? One wonders how the Japanese public, which is enamored with the concept of equality, would react to the extending of hereditary privileges to families beyond the narrow circle that presently constitutes the imperial house.

The commission’s work may yet prove relevant. Young Prince Hisahito is likely blissfully unaware of the incredible burden that he carries on his shoulders. Down the road, it will be entirely up to him and his future wife to produce a male heir. In many ways, Prince Hisahito symbolizes the fragility of an imperial dynasty limited to males but without the mechanisms in place, concubines and a large pool of collateral families, necessary to ensure male heirs over the long run. There is a structural imperfection in the present imperial system. Unless this system is reformed, sooner or later Japan will face another heir problem.

But does Japan need a monarchy in the twenty-first century? Japan, unlike some nation-states, does not have strong linguistic or cultural divisions, and at this point in time it does not even have fundamental ideological divisions. If Japan no longer needs the monarchy to serve as a strong unifying center, as it did during the Meiji era (1868–1912) when peasants were transformed into Japanese citizens, what useful role could the monarchy play in the future?

If Japan is going to have a monarchy, it might as well have one that symbolizes gender equality. A hereditary monarchy itself contradicts the principle of equality, but if the royal house is to continue to exist then to permit women to sit on the throne represents a

statement in favor of gender equality. It would also be helpful for Japan to have an imperial house that lends it prestige to worthwhile social causes all the more.

Since Emperor Akihito turned 75 on 23 December 2008, it is reasonable to expect that he and the empress will continue to support causes that have long interested them rather than shift their attention to new issues. Today there are Japanese who still worship the throne, others who disdain it, and a large majority who are favorably inclined toward it with varying degrees of attachment. For more than four decades after Japan's defeat in 1945, the monarchy remained paralyzed by Emperor Hirohito's association with the war. As the twentieth year of the Heisei reign draws to a close, however, it is important to recognize not only that the monarchy under Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko differs dramatically from the monarchy of wartime Japan, but also that in many significant ways it is a departure from the postwar version of the monarchy under Emperor Hirohito and Empress Nagako.

Twenty years into his reign, Emperor Akihito has so evidently left his imprint on the monarchy that it is worth recalling how surprised some commentators were to learn that the new emperor was more than a symbolic automaton. As the result of the campaign spearheaded initially by the American occupying forces (SCAP) and thereafter by the palace to absolve Emperor Hirohito of war responsibility by portraying the late emperor as devoid of volition, by 1989 many people had come to accept the adage that emperors were no more than stage props.

However, acts by Emperor Akihito ranging from his ringing endorsement of the Postwar Constitution immediately after becoming emperor to his comment about feeling "kinship with Korea" have reminded observers that individual emperors, while obviously subject to manipulation, can still shape the throne in significant ways. Emperor Akihito has emerged in subtle but definite ways as a spokesman for tolerance, for a balanced memory of the nation's past, and for internationalism over national chauvinism.

How will the middle-aged generation of imperial princes and princesses shape the imperial house in the coming decades? Crown Prince Naruhito and Crown Princess Masako in particular will define the causes that receive imperial backing during much of the first half of the twenty-first century, just as the young royal family members of Europe's surviving monarchies will do in their countries.⁸ Each of modern Japan's long-reigning emperors and, for that matter, empresses have put their particular stamp on the throne,⁹ and there is no reason to think that the cases of Naruhito and Masako will be different.

⁸ For an introductory but thoughtful look at the challenges that young European royal family members face in giving meaning to their roles in the twenty-first century, see "To Be Young and Royal," *Vanity Fair* (September 2003): 399–458.

⁹ Donald Keene's recent biography of Emperor Meiji has shown how Japan's first modern emperor played a significant role even in shaping certain political decisions during his reign. See Keene, *Meiji Tennō* (Shinchōsha, 2001). Hara Takeshi's biography of Emperor Taishō has provided a revisionary interpretation of this emperor often derided as feeble. For example, unlike his father, Emperor Meiji, Emperor Taishō was a devoted father. Hara also argues that it was Emperor Taishō who effectively did away with the system of concubines

With the birth of Prince Hisahito, Prince Akishino and Princess Kiko have suddenly been catapulted into prominence. Princess Kiko represents the “Good wife, wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbo*) model of womanhood that conservatives in Japan prefer, and they are probably relieved that she is raising the future heir. As parents to the heir, the symbolic essence (*shōchōsei*) of Prince Akishino and Princess Kiko has suddenly taken on much more importance.

Curiously and problematically for the imperial house, however, the symbolic essence (*shōchōsei*) of Crown Prince Naruhito, Crown Princess Masako, Prince Akishino, and Princess Kiko remains largely inchoate at the time that I write this in November 2008. In the case of the crown prince and crown princess, there is little question that their symbolic contours have been considerably delayed from taking shape as a result of so-called heir problem that dominated the first stage of their marriage.

Not only does the middle-aged generation of imperial princes and princess lack clearly defined symbolic causes, but they also have been involved in unsavory public spats. In 2004, Japanese were witness to feuding within the imperial house spilling into the public domain contemporaneously in a way that represented something of a rupture with past practices.

The combination of his wife’s mental breakdown and the confusion regarding Princess Aiko’s future were likely two of several factors that explain Crown Prince Naruhito’s blunt remarks during his press conference in May 2004 before leaving, solo, to attend royal weddings in Denmark and Spain. I interpreted the Crown Prince’s remarks as an indictment of the notion that Crown Princess Masako’s primary duty was 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.

The fact that Crown Prince Naruhito’s May 2004 remarks continued to reverberate for months thereafter was evidenced at Prince Akishino’s press conference on the occasion of his 39th birthday later that year. Prince Akishino voiced regret that his older brother, without first conferring with the emperor, lashed out at still unspecified individuals for denying Crown Princess Masako’s personality. Prince Akishino elaborated, “I am not sure whether what I want to do should be the same as what my public duties should be.” The latter remark came across as a rebuke of the Crown Prince and especially of the Crown Princess for whining about limited opportunities to travel abroad.

If a television journalist seeking sound bites asked a hundred average Japanese, “Do you think that the Imperial Household Agency should allow the imperial family members more freedom?”, I suspect that a large majority would answer along the lines of, “Yes, definitely!” Bashing the Imperial Household Agency for over-regulating the royal family members’ lives is a fashionable postwar pastime in Japan.

and established an imperial precedent of monogamous marriage. See Hara, *Taishō Tennō* (Asahi shimbun, 2000).

But do the Japanese people really want royal family members to do as they please while enjoying a privileged lifestyle financed by tax money? Prince Akishino's remark reflected an interpretation held by many people inside the palace, namely that the reason that many Japanese support the throne to a greater or lesser extent is that they view royal family members as unselfish individuals who, although they are denied a host of simple pleasures such as the freedom to take casual strolls in the neighborhood, nonetheless faithfully carry out their duties on behalf of the people and the country. The Imperial Household Agency definitely wants royal family members to be perceived as putting duty before happiness.

There is grave concern in the palace that imperial family members, with the Crown Prince and especially the Crown Princess being the most likely candidates recently, be interpreted as selfish. But what are reasonable duties for a Crown Princess? After all, even if one puts aside the issue that the present Crown Princess would like to play a diplomatic role rather than simply to serve as a womb, one must remember that plain biological luck plays an important role in determining whether procreation takes place. Thus, the requirement that only males ascend to the throne provides the Crown Princess with a potentially unanswerable duty.

Even Emperor Akihito referenced Crown Prince Naruhito's blunt public comments in a manner that seemed to rebuke the crown prince and crown princess for coming across as overly interested in aligning public duties with personal desires, but the situation is actually more complex. During his 23 December 2004 press conference, Emperor Akihito also stressed, "The Empress and I have learned during the long years since our marriage that new official duties would have very little meaning if they did not reflect individual hopes and interests...."

The fact is that imperial family members *do* shape the nature of their public duties to a considerable extent, as Akihito did in 1964 when he adopted the Paralympics as one of his causes. There is no question that Naruhito and Masako will exert their will in defining their public roles, in adopting certain causes for example, in the coming years. One wonders whether, in order to make room for new official duties deemed appropriate for representing a nation whose population is diversifying racially, culturally, and religiously, the crown prince and crown princess will consider terminating some existing official duties, including the performance of some of the numerous Shinto rituals (*saisbi*) that fill the emperor's schedule. Such a step would no doubt infuriate traditionalists, but might be in tune with a Japan that is increasingly multicultural.

Some women have been disappointed that the Harvard- and Oxford-educated Masako, who gave up a career as an elite diplomat to marry the crown prince, has not been able to reform the palace in any noticeable way since her marriage in 1993. These hopes were largely misplaced, however, because structurally a crown princess (and a crown prince for that matter), with the exception of one area (raising the heir to the throne, which seems to have been denied Masako), has very little power within the palace.

At this point, Crown Princess Masako's symbolic essence, whether she is perceived as a pitiful victim of the Imperial Household Agency, or as an egoist more interested in fulfilling her private needs rather than her public duties, is hardly the sort of image that projects the positive societal role that the imperial house sees itself as playing. One wonders

if Crown Princess Masako were willing to become an advocate for people with mental illness to seek appropriate professional treatment, in other words to adopt as one of her symbolic causes the destruction of the taboos that continue to make it difficult for individuals in Japan with mental illness to see help, whether there would be great resistance to this from the Imperial Household Agency.

It is true that Crown Princess Masako need not wait to become empress to use her position to make significant statements about various issues that relate to, for example, gender equality. The next time a Japanese schoolgirl wins a significant prize related to math and science, the crown princess could attend the awards ceremony, thus lending imperial legitimacy to the notion that it is appropriate for girls to excel in math and science rather than in just the arts. She could also attend professional women's luncheons from time to time to lend legitimacy to the notion that women can have careers outside the home. Along the same lines, the Crown Prince could expand upon the one interesting aspect of his symbolic essence at present, his role as a hands-on father, to encourage more men to take seriously their role as fathers.

The crown prince and princess could also employ their prestige far more actively on behalf of sufferers of discrimination, those who continue, for one reason or another, to live on the margins of Japanese society. What follows are only a few of many possible examples, but the crown prince and princess (and other imperial family members) could reach out more actively to all Japanese citizens who, historically, have suffered discrimination and forced assimilation because they did not fit simple definitions of what it meant to be Japanese. This would include people of Ainu descent, and individuals who immigrated (or who were forcibly brought) from Korea as well as their descendants.

I suggest caution in drawing conclusions about the influence of Crown Prince Naruhito and Crown Princess Masako on the palace. The story, for the most part, remains to be written, as does the story of what new twists might emerge in the way that Prince Akishino and Princess Kiko raise the heir to the throne. Naruhito and Masako probably still have somewhere between three and four decades to adopt various symbolic causes and to put their personal stamp on the imperial house, and Prince Akishino and Princess Kiko have the next two decades or so to shape the heir.

Since finishing *Kokumin no tennō*, I have devoted most of my time to teaching, building up the Center for Japanese Studies at Portland State University, and also to completing a book project titled "Mid-Century Modernity in Japan: The 2600th Anniversary Celebrations of the Empire of Japan, 1940" (Columbia University Weatherhead East Asian Institute Monograph Series, forthcoming). However, I also have continued to provide commentary on the contemporary Japanese imperial house, and I am frequently asked my "position" about the monarchy.

Personally, I am neutral about Japan's monarchy, a stance that pleases neither opponents nor supporters of the throne, but which also at times seems to be an advantage in analyzing the evolution of the imperial house. I would not be bothered if the monarchy were abolished tomorrow, but am unconvinced that terminating it would solve many problems. To those who believe that abolishing it would eliminate nationalism and strike a fatal blow to the far right, I would respond that far right nationalists would no doubt invent

a new national symbol and would continue to champion nationalistic policies with surprisingly little long-term disruption.

Consider the example of France in this area. France has a vibrant far right even though today almost all no far rightists are committed to restoring France's monarchy. When Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the far rightist National Front political party, needed a potent symbol for his anti-immigration platform, he embraced Joan of Arc (1412–1431) for her role in driving foreigners (British) out of France. Surely Japanese nationalists, too, could devise a new rallying symbol if the necessity arose, so abolishing the monarchy is hardly the solution to reigning in Japanese nationalism, which in comparative terms has been restrained for most of the postwar era.

In simple terms, I believe that so long as Japan continues to have a monarchy, which it could just as easily do without, royal family members might as well perform useful societal roles, in particular by lending their prestige to the most vulnerable members of society.

November 2008 Portland, Oregon