

Introduction

KUSUNOKI Ayako and MATSUGI Hiromi

This special issue of *Japanese Studies around the World*, titled “Age of Monarchy/Monarchy for Age: Revisiting Monarchy from a Comparative Perspective,” consists of eight articles and one column. It represents the fruits of an overseas symposium of the same title that the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) organized on August 26, 2021. The symposium was held online as part of the 16th International Conference of the European Association for Japanese Studies (EAJS) in collaboration with the Consortium for Global Japanese Studies who sponsored the second session of the symposium, the “EAJS next-generation workshop.”

The symposium and special issue were inspired by events in Japan over the last few years. In 2016, Emperor Akihito announced his intention to abdicate, and the following year a special law was enacted, allowing for succession during his lifetime. In 2019, when Crown Prince Naruhito acceded to the throne, the era changed from Heisei to Reiwa. The interest shown in these events clearly proves that the imperial system still wields the power to shape an age.

Human relationships are not sufficient for human survival. The stability of the social order inevitably necessitates power, but the deployment of power, through political, economic and social institutions and mechanisms, is also insufficient for human society. Within traditional notions of authority, what Fukuzawa Yukichi called the “inner order,” it is an extra-human being, transcendent or divine, that represents the public and enables the integration of the people. This generally takes the form of a monarchy, or the emperor system in Japan.

Recognition of this gives rise to a number of questions. What kind of presence did the emperor have in each period? How was the apparatus for asserting and claiming authority and transcendence established? What place was given to the emperor in the construction of the modern state? How did the state of kingship in Japan influence other nations that also tried to build a nation? And how were these monarchies and their regal power represented in art? The articles in this special issue of *Japanese Studies around the World* represent the contributions of researchers in different countries and academic fields, and collectively seek to tackle these questions from a variety of perspectives.