

## Research Trends in China on the Japanese Emperor System

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The abdication of Emperor Akihito and the accession of Emperor Naruhito have led to further research in China on the Japanese emperor system. Research within China on the emperor system is wide-ranging, covering the history and current status of abdications, the influence of Chinese culture on the emperor system and accession to the throne, Imperial Household diplomacy, and the emperor and China-Japan relations. This article will introduce research on the emperor system conducted by Chinese researchers in the period preceding and following the abdication and accession of the Heisei and Reiwa emperors respectively, and will then discuss recent research trends on the emperor system in China.

**Keywords:** abdication, emperor diplomacy, memorial visits

### Introduction

On August 8, 2016, Emperor Akihito 明仁 hinted at his intention to abdicate in a video message to the Japanese people, noting that he was no longer able to fulfill his duties as a symbolic figure-head due to age-related decline. In response, the government established and put into effect the “Law for Special Exception of the Imperial House Law concerning Abdication, etc. of the Emperor” in a Cabinet meeting. Following the “Law for Special Exception,” Emperor Akihito abdicated on April 30, 2019 (Heisei 平成 31), and Crown Prince Naruhito 徳仁 acceded to the throne the following day, May 1. The Heisei era ended, and a new era called Reiwa 令和 began.

Emperor Akihito’s abdication and Emperor Naruhito’s accession were covered by the media worldwide. China was no exception, and the mass media was quick to take up the news. Motivated by this news, research in China on the Japanese emperor system increased. For example, in late September 2019, the Beijing Center for Japanese Studies held a symposium titled “The Emperor System and Japan: In Relation to History, Politics, Society, and Culture.” This symposium was hosted jointly by the Beijing Center for Japanese Studies and the International Research Center for Japanese Studies. Some two dozen researchers gathered from countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, and Ukraine. They reported on and discussed the position and role of the emperor in Japanese history and modern society, based on the theme of the “emperor system and Japan,” from

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a variety of angles and perspectives, including mythology, history, cultural history, the history of thought, and sociology. To share the findings from the symposium both inside and outside of China, ten exemplary articles were selected for revision by their authors, after which they were compiled and published in January 2022 in the Beijing Center for Japanese Studies journal (*Ribenxue yanjiu* 日本学研究, vol. 32, January 2022, Guo Lianyou 郭连友, ed.).

Prior to this international symposium, six research articles related to the Emperor system had been published in the Institute of Japanese Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) 中国社会科学院日本研究所 in the journal *Riben xuekan* 日本学刊, in volumes 2, 3, and 5 in 2019 (March, May, and September 2019 respectively). The abovementioned research is wide-ranging and diverse, covering topics such as the history and current status of abdications, the influence of Chinese culture on the emperor system and imperial accession, Imperial Household diplomacy, and the emperor and China-Japan relations. This article will introduce research on the emperor system conducted by Chinese researchers in the period limited to that preceding and following the abdication and accession in 2019, and will then discuss recent trends in research on the emperor system in China.

## 1. Research on Abdication by the Emperor

On the whole, the mass media and research articles in China addressed the abdication with relative objectivity, while analyzing its significance. The words and actions of the emperor desiring to abdicate, even while facing the fact that abdication conflicted with Japan's Imperial Household Law (Kōshitsu Tenpan 皇室典範), were read by some journalists and researchers as the emperor urging reforms to the Imperial Household system.

For example, the 2016 *Jiancha fengyun* 检察风云 (vol. 20) contains an article on the legal and cultural dilemma of the abdication of the emperor of Japan. This work has a positive perception of the emperor steadfastly guarding the meaning and symbolism of abdication, stating,

The emperor declares in the video message that he does not accept the regency system, repeatedly using the phrase “symbol of the State” in regard to “the desirable role of the Emperor, who is designated to be the symbol of the State by the Constitution of Japan.” This degree of emphasis on the emperor's symbolism is meant to keep conservative forces from deifying the emperor once again, rejecting the return to a deified emperor of the kind that existed in prewar imperial Japan.<sup>1</sup>

He points out that deliberate abdication protects the symbolism of the emperor. According to the author's interpretation, the emperor is essentially considered to be a profession. Invariably handling the politics of one's position is also the essence of the modern civil servant system, a major departure from the feudalistic imperial system of rule. In this sense, Emperor Akihito is a politician with

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1 Mo Ban 墨阪, “Riben: Tianhuang ‘shengqian tuwei’ de falu yu wenhua zhilun” 日本：天皇“生前退位”的法律与文化之困 (The Legal and Cultural Difficulties of the Emperor's Abdication before His Death), *Jiancha fengyun* 2016, vol. 20, p. 53.

a very modern legal awareness, who has adapted to democratic trends. However, it is safe to say that the perception of the emperor as a “politician” is unequivocally a misunderstanding on the part of the author.

In connection with this, the article “Tianhuang tuiwei de lishi yu xianshi” 天皇退位的历史与现实 (The History and Current Status of Abdication by the Emperor) by Japanese history researcher Li Zhuo 李卓 (*Riben xuekan* 2019, vol. 2, pp. 1–26) states:

On this occasion, the progressive-minded Emperor Akihito’s statement of abdication is actually a call to reform the Imperial Household system, as a challenge to old customs. While the Law for Special Exception ultimately passed was prepared for Emperor Akihito alone, and does not extend to a fundamental amendment to the Imperial Household Law, it is, in short, the first step taken toward reforming the Imperial Household system. The realization of Emperor Akihito’s abdication will be a breakthrough for revising the Imperial Household Law, and may bring about discussion of such issues as the establishment of matrilineal branches of the imperial family, or even the possibility of female emperors. By incorporating modern norms into the Imperial Household system, the symbolic emperor system may come to have vitality for the first time. Perhaps this itself is the real purpose and meaning of Emperor Akihito’s request for abdication. (p. 24)

In this way, the author takes the emperor’s abdication to be connected to amendments to the Imperial Household system, and praises its innovative quality for leading to a breakthrough.

The emperor’s abdication is the first in the modern era, and above all else the first in the history of Japan’s constitutional government. Regarding the reality of abdications in history, Li has investigated the history of abdication by emperors from ancient to modern times based on this awareness of the issues.

According to Li, in the 1,222-year period from 645 to 1867, there were a total of eighty-seven emperors in Japan, excluding Northern Court emperors, of which fifty-eight abdicated during their lifetimes. In the history of Japan, the Imperial Household was a weak presence that was interfered with by all manner of forces, and abdication by the emperors was at one time normalized. The system of lifelong emperors was established in the Meiji 明治 era (1868–1912), and is thought to have begun after the Imperial Household Law was established with the aim of stabilizing the Imperial Household.

From ancient to modern times, there have been a number of reasons why an emperor would abdicate; according to Li, they can generally be summarized into four types: 1. In the primitive form of abdication, a female emperor would abdicate to her successor according to her own wishes; 2. Inability to continue official business due to health issues; 3. To ward off misfortune and pray for blessings after a natural disaster; and 4. The emperor himself was entering the Buddhist priesthood. Li thoroughly analyzes the situation and finds several factors behind these abdications: in terms of societal factors, there were no institutional restrictions on imperial succession; and in terms of political factors, strong powers interfered with imperial succession, the maternally related Fujiwara clan wielded arbitrary power, there were internal disputes in the imperial court during the period of cloistered rule, and later on the shogunate was significantly involved, among other

factors. Li's article contributes to the understanding of the history and the current status of Japan's emperor system, as well as the characteristics of modern Japanese political culture.

The following articles cover the meaning and influence of abdication by emperors: Tang Yongliang 唐永亮, "Riben tianhuang 'shengqian tuiwei' wenti de shenceng fenxi" 日本天皇“生前退位”问题的深层分析 (A Deeper Analysis of the "Abdication while Living" of the Emperor of Japan) (*Shijie zhishi* 世界知识 2016, vol. 17 [Sep. 1], pp. 65–67); Liu Jiangyong 刘江永 and Lin Xinyi 林心怡, "Cong Mingren dao Deren: Tianhuang yuanhe qiangdiao qi xiangzhengxing" 从明仁到德仁：天皇缘何强调其象征性 (Why Did the Emperors, from Akihito to Naruhito, Emphasize their Symbolic Nature?) (*Taipingyang xuebao* 太平洋学报 2020, vol. 1, pp. 36–49). These authors analyze the significance of Emperor Akihito and Emperor Naruhito's emphasis on the symbolic emperor system from the aspects of history, institutions, and abdication, and attempt to gain an understanding of Japanese politics as they transition through this event from the Heisei era to the Reiwa era. They then point out that the issue of amending Article 9 of the Constitution is related to the emperor system, drawing attention to the gravity of this issue.

While not directly related to abdication by the emperors, the article by Zhang Lin 章林, "Riben zhaiwang zhidu de shanbian yu gudai tianhuang zhi" 日本斋王制度的演变与古代天皇制 (The Transmutation of the Saiō System in Japan and the Ancient Emperor System) (*Journal of Beijing Union University* 北京联合大学学报, Humanities and Social Sciences Edition, 2020, vol. 2, pp. 48–54) is a study focused on the *saiō* 斋王 system (this refers to an unmarried imperial princess serving at an important shrine in place of the emperor) within the ancient emperor system, which was closely related to ensure the position of the crown prince. Zhang examines the formation, development, changes, and dissipation of the *saiō* system as an overriding ritual institution for preserving the ancient emperor system, revealing that the state of the *saiō* system indicates the status of changes in the ancient emperor system. According to Zhang, Emperor Tenmu 天武 (r. 673–686) established and restored the *saiō* system using the religious authority of ancestral gods in order to reinforce the legitimacy of his supreme rule. In the imperial succession disputes of the eighth and ninth centuries, the *saiō* system was an important measure for giving the crown prince an unshakable position, further rendering the management and administration of the system complete. The importance of the *saiō* system started to wane along with the decline of the emperor's power during the regency and cloistered rule periods until it eventually disappeared from the stage of history. Zhang's article is the latest discussion in the research on the ancient emperor system from the perspective of religious rituals.

## 2. Research on the Relationship between the Emperor System and Chinese Culture

In connection with the recent abdication by the emperor, and the subsequent accession, the relationship between Chinese culture and the formation of the ancient Japanese emperor system, royal authority, accession ceremonies, and other topics has garnered attention, leading to further research.

Cai Fenglin 蔡凤林's article "Dongyan lishishi yuxia de Riben tianhuangzhi xingcheng guocheng tanxi" 东亚历史视域下的日本天皇制形成过程探析 (The Process of Forming the Japanese Imperial System in the Context of East Asian History) (*Riben wenlun* 日本文论 2021,

vol. 1 [Aug. 1], pp. 1–20) takes a broad view of the relationship between Japan’s ancient emperor system and East Asia, especially the Korean Peninsula:

The main intrinsic factors through which the emperor system was formed were greater productivity in ancient Japanese society and the demand for domestic politics created thereby. The main external factor was the international environment of East Asia, which developed around issues on the Korean Peninsula. Ancient Japan continuously and consistently maintained a close relationship with the politics, economy, and culture of the East Asian mainland. The series of processes from the establishment of unified royal authority in ancient Japan to the construction of the Japanese nation under the *ritsuryō* 律令 codes, the development from royal to imperial authority, and the establishment of the emperor system reveal major influences from the development of political culture and changes in the political situation in ancient East Asia. The central tie was the path of civilization on the Korean Peninsula, and the Korean Peninsula itself was a principal driving force that hastened the birth of Japan’s emperor system. (p. 1)

Articles that examine the relationship between the ancient emperor system and Chinese culture include those of Liu Xiaofeng 刘晓峰, “Jianzuo dachangji de yishi jiegou yu wenhua de jiedu” 天皇践祚大尝祭的仪式结构与文化解读 (Interpretation of the Ritual Structure and Culture of the Senso Daijōsai Festival) (*Riben xuekan*, 2019, vol. 5); Pan Lei 潘蕾, “Riben gudai tianhuanzhi guojia de goujian yu chenwei sixiang” 日本古代天皇制国家的构建与讖纬思想 (The Construction of the Japanese Imperial State in Ancient Times and the Divination Ideology) (*Ribenxue yanjiu*, vol. 32, pp. 28–48); and Wang Xin 王鑫, “Tiangou yu huangquan” 天狗与皇权 (Tengu and Imperial Rights) (*Ribenxue yanjiu*, vol. 32, pp. 49–64).

Liu focuses on the religious ritual of the “accession Daijōsai 大尝祭” (first ceremonial offering of rice made by a new emperor), one of a series of accession rites considered to mark in particular the succession of the divinity of the emperor. The article uses a solid command of history, mythology, and folklore studies to examine how ancient Japanese emperors handed down divinity as “living gods.” Liu focuses on the most emblematic rites of the Daijōsai: Omi no Oyu 小忌御湯, Shinsen Shingu 神饌親供, and Matoko Oufusuma 真床追衾, arguing that of these three rites, the Omi no Oyu rite, in which the emperor dons a robe of feathers and bathes, is the key point of the ceremony. According to Liu, an ancient Japanese myth was used in the establishment of this rite; the article points out that an ancient Chinese sun god myth mentioned in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (*Shan hai jing* 山海經) and other works may also have been used as a reference. As the Omi no Oyu rite paved the way for the emperor to acquire the sacredness of the sun goddess, that rite imitated the myth of the “sun bathing in Tanggu 汤谷.” In other words, the sun returns to its most primeval state in order to regain power. Liu goes on to analyze the rite from the angle of temporal cycles, stating, “It appears as a ceremony that imitates the death and rebirth of the sun, with a backdrop of the sun’s cycle of old and new. ... The crux of all the Daijōsai rites is the death and rebirth of the ancient sun. ... Only after undergoing the ‘Omi no Oyu’ rite is the emperor endowed with sacred attributes” (p. 88).

Liu then examines the Daijōsai’s Shinsen Shingu and Matoko Oufusuma rites’ relationship to

Chinese culture. According to Liu, the most important condition of the Daijōsai rites is the use of specially-grown new rice plants, which is closely related to ancient Japanese beliefs in grain spirits. The new rice plants used in the Daijōsai are directly related to the cycle of temporal seasons, as rice is planted in spring and harvested in autumn. If the accession occurs before July, the Daijōsai rites are held in November of the same year, and if later, in November of the following year. The reason for this change is due to the boundary that exists between June and July. According to yin and yang ideology, the first half of the year from January to June is “yang,” while the second half from July to December is “yin.” If the new emperor accedes before July, the rice plant will have had plenty of exposure to yang-spirited sunlight, and the rice harvested can be well used in religious rites. If the accession occurs in July or later, that year’s yang-spirited sun will be in decline, and the rice harvested cannot be used in religious rites. Rice is cultivated, harvested, and made into a ritual product because it is sufficiently sacred. This property is closely related to the solar cycle. The rite of “communal dining” with the gods, using rice with sufficient yang energy, shows the relationship of the Daijōsai with the earth and with seasonal cycles. As we see here, Liu points out that the fundamental principles of the Daijōsai rites were prescribed by ancient Chinese yin and yang ideology.

Regarding the Matoko Oufusuma rite, Liu argues that it is influenced by the ancient royal accession rite known as Shouling Jiti 授灵继体, as mentioned in the “Guming 顾命” chapter, “Zhoushu 周书” volume, in *Shujing* 書經 (*Book of Documents*). This states, “Now that I have been appointed, I will return to the court with the royal drape hanging on the throne.” In other words, the king has died, but since his spirit is clinging to the garment, putting it on display is a way to inherit the king’s spirit. The quilted bedding of the Daijōsai Matoko Oufusuma is a memento of the deceased emperor, so the emperor’s spirit remains in it. It is conceivable that the Daijōsai rites are a superimposition of the “Niiname 新嘗” rite of new grains and the “Shouling Jiti” rite. Liu states that “the Daijōsai’s transfer of the spirit of the past emperor follows the thread of royal successions in China during the Western Zhou 西周 dynasty” (p. 93).

Through this analysis of the central rites of the *Daijōsai*, Liu concludes that the formation of all three rites was greatly influenced by ancient Chinese myths, traditions, and worldviews. Going beyond the confines of the theories of previous studies, this article deserves attention for deftly navigating varied historical materials and convincingly clarifying the influences of ancient Chinese myths, yin and yang ideology, religious rituals, and traditions on Daijōsai rites.

In addition to Liu Xiaofeng, the relationship between the ancient Japanese emperor system and Chinese culture is discussed in Pan Lei’s “Ribei gudai tianhuanzhi guojia de goujian yu chenwei sixiang.” This article reveals that well-preserved books on the *chenwei* 讖纬 (the prediction of good and bad fortune) ideology, which had been used by rulers for a time in order to foretell the rise and fall of royal authority in the Han 汉 dynasty (BC202–AD220) before being set aside by their successors, show that the ideology had also been exported to Japan and was in fact used by administrators there. The article then indicates that consequently, Chinese *chenwei* ideology influenced the construction of the ancient Japanese emperor system. Pan argues that there were four reasons for era changes in Japanese history: 1. Emperor abdication; 2. good omens; 3. natural disasters; and 4. revolutionary years, the first years of the sexagenary cycle, in other words the Year of the Wood Rat. Of these, Pan posits that three of them are related to Chinese *chenwei* ideology. Furthermore, Pan examines *Nihonkoku genzaisho mokuroku* 日本国見在書目録 (Japan National



Catalogue) and the *jingjizhi* 经籍誌 (bibliographical section) of *Suishu* 隋书, and finds that the former work contains fifteen types and ninety-five volumes of books of omens, surpassing the latter's eleven types and sixty-nine volumes. In addition, allusions to *chenwei* ideology can be found in the many citations of books of omens in the Chinese *Yiwen leiju* 艺文类聚 encyclopedia and in the *Nihonkoku genzaisho mokuroku*. Based on the fact that many of these sources were referenced when the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (720) was compiled, the article argues that *chenwei* ideology was transmitted to Japan at an early stage. Pan then uses the *Nihon shoki* and the *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀 (797) to show that *chenwei* ideology was incorporated into the building of the ancient Japanese emperor system, based on records of good omens, the establishment of the *ritsuryō* system, the investiture of the crown prince, reforms to the office and rank system, revisions of era names, and the establishment of official positions during the reign of Emperor Tenmu, as well as on the two major political achievements of Emperor Kanmu 桓武 (r. 781–806): the conquest of the Emishi 蝦夷 people, and the relocation of the capital.

In “Tiangou yu huangquan,” Wang Xin notes that the meteoric *tengu* 天狗, originally of China, was tied to rumors of natural disaster and the mandate of Heaven ideology and often provoked a revolutionary change of dynasty. Meanwhile, from its first transmission to Japan, the *tengu* in the “revolutionary” sense was severed from its relationship to royal authority. Later, the *tengu* developed uniquely within Japanese history: pranking farmers in the Heian period, and understood as a kind of phantom or monster that hindered Buddhist teachings and ascetic practices. In the Middle Ages and later, the *tengu* was endowed with divinity and transformed into a guardian deity due to the influence of various ideologies absorbed by Shugendō 修験道 (mountain asceticism), including the belief in vengeful ghosts, the belief in the spirits of deceased persons, Shinto-Buddhist syncretism, manifestation theory (the belief that Shinto gods are manifestations of buddhas), native Japanese mountain worship, and animism. Wang thus clarifies the differences in the relationship between *tengu* and royal authority in China and Japan.

### 3. Studies on the Prewar Emperor System

Various studies have addressed the emperor system in the prewar period. One representative article focusing on the concept of the emperor system and the origins and changes in its name is Chen Yue'e 陈月娥's “Ribei gongchandang guanyu ‘tianhuangzhi’ gainian xingcheng, shanbian yu renshi bianqian” 日本共产党关于“天皇制”的概念形成、嬗变与认识变迁 (The Formation, Transition, and Change of Understanding of the Japanese Communist Party's Concept of “Imperial System”) (*Riben xuekan*, 2019, vol. 5, pp. 96–115). Chen considers the concept of the emperor system to have been a result of the Japanese Communist Party originally invoking Marxist theory to deepen their understanding of the prewar Japanese national polity and political structure, stating that the concept is the result of the intense political conflict between the dissolution faction (a faction that asserted that the party should be disbanded) and the farmer-labor wing of the JCP. According to Chen's study, the JCP's calls to “overthrow the emperor system” after the Asia-Pacific War incited a fierce debate and introspection on the emperor system within Japanese society, with the phrase “emperor system” becoming a common political term in various circles of Japanese

society. However, the original concept of the “emperor system” was intentionally fragmented, and ultimately became the broad concept of “the Japanese state system that considers the emperor to be the person of paramount authority.” At the same time, the political situation inside and outside Japan changed, and while the JCP’s stance made an about-face from opposition to and denial of the emperor system to respect for the system, the abolition of the emperor system was not removed from its strategic goals. As a work by a Chinese researcher, Chen’s study may contribute to the ascertainment of the function and role of the emperor system and its future destination.

Other studies focus on the view of the emperor as an individual. Ge Rui 葛睿’s “Xicun Maoshu tianhuangguan de yanbian” 西村茂树天皇观的演变 (The Evolution of Nishimura Shigeki’s View on the Emperor) (*Ribenxue yanjiu*, vol. 32, pp. 100–114) examines Nishimura Shigeki 西村茂樹’s views of the emperor. In his book *Nihon dōtoku-ron* 日本道德論 (Theory of Japanese Morals), in the section on “The Construction of the National Character,” Nishimura claims that one of the duties of citizens is to venerate the Imperial Household and to live under its reign. Considering Nishimura’s high praise for the Imperial Rescript on Education (*kyōiku chokugo* 教育勅語), his image is one of unconditional reverence for the emperor. The author has doubts about this, and examines Nishimura’s *bakumatsu*-period petitions and public speeches as well as his statements on the emperor and the Imperial Household in *Hakuō shigen* 泊翁卮言, which was not published during his lifetime. Ge then revises the image of Nishimura’s conservative “Imperial Household respect” view of the emperor, and puts forth the bold theory that Nishimura considered the Imperial Household only play the role of consolidating popular sentiment along the lines of Western religions, recognizing that the system would ultimately disappear. This article is noteworthy as a study that raises questions about research on Nishimura’s conventional view of the emperor.

In “Bei Yihui de tianhuangguan: Cong ‘shendaoshi guoti’ dao ‘xiandai guoti’” 北一輝的天皇观：从“神道式国体”到“现代国体” (Kita Ikki’s View of the Emperor: From a “Shinto-Style National System” to a “Modern National System”) (*Ribenxue yanjiu*, vol. 32, pp. 115–130), Huang Shijun 黄世军 analyzes the substance and characteristics of Kita Ikki 北一輝’s views on the emperor. According to Huang, Kita primarily absorbed the tenets of the national polity theory and the theory of the emperor as an organ of government, while keeping a basis in constitutional commentary; he argued that national sovereignty was established by the Meiji Constitution. Kita’s view of the emperor criticized the “Shintoist national polity” while indicating the direction of the development of a “modern national polity.” Kita’s national sovereignty theory also included active demands of the state as subject, signifying that the agency of the “privileged” emperor and the people who composed the state would be eliminated and stripped away, reducing individuals to the status of mere tools for the state. Huang points out that as a representative of “the duality of imperialism,” Kita’s democratic socialist theories ultimately became an ideology for foreign expansion. As of now in China, Huang’s study features the latest findings on Kita’s views on the emperor.

#### 4. Assessment of Emperor Akihito (Imperial Household Diplomacy, China-Japan Relations, etc.)

Following Emperor Akihito’s abdication, a lot of research was conducted on the role he fulfilled while on the throne, particularly his accomplishments in Imperial Household diplomacy,



memorial visits, and the development of China-Japan relations. Qiu Huasheng 邱华盛 and Feng Shaokui 冯昭奎's "Lun Mingren tianhuang zai zhongri waijiaozhong de dute zuoyong jian ji yu Zhongguo kexuejia de Jiaowang" 论明仁天皇在中日外交中的独特作用兼及与中国科学家的交往 (The Unique Role of Emperor Akihito in Chinese-Japanese Diplomacy and His Engagement with Chinese Scientists) (*Riben xuekan* 2019, vol. 5, pp. 59–79) and Tian Qingli 田庆立's "Pingcheng shidai xiangzheng tianhuangzhi de gengxu ji gexin" 平成时代象征天皇制的赓续及革新 (The Internationalization and Innovation of the Emperor System in the Heisei Period) (*Riben xuekan* 2019, vol. 3, pp. 18–43) are some representative articles.

The writers above highly praise the Imperial Household diplomacy that Emperor Akihito had engaged in since his days as crown prince. Qiu and Feng hold that the emperor played the role of postwar mediator: through his visits to a total of sixty-six countries, the Imperial Household diplomacy implemented by Emperor Akihito was an important and unique component of postwar Japanese diplomacy. Although his political power was severely restricted, the emperor held an extremely important role in Japanese diplomacy, and worked to restore relations with formerly inimical countries. Qiu and Feng argue that as a symbol of the nation, Emperor Akihito actively developed this diplomacy and expanded the influence of the Imperial Household, while simultaneously contributing to the improvement of postwar Japan's international image and its soft power.

Qiu and Feng address the emperor's 1992 visit to China and point out that the significance of this visit was in its promotion of friendly relations between the peoples of both China and Japan, as well as in its direct perspective on history, in that it served as a model for future members of the imperial family. They highly praise the role that the emperor played in the development of China-Japan relations.

Tian Qingli also considers Emperor Akihito as characterized by his reconciliation of the psychological ill feelings that remained among enemy nations after the Second World War through his international goodwill diplomacy, and by the improvement of the overall image of the emperor, the Imperial Household, and Japan in the eyes of the international community. In relation to this, Tian also touches on the emperor's memorial visits, addressing the emperor's stance of reflecting on history and setting a high value on peace.

The article by Lu Yaodong 吕耀东 and Xie Ruochu 谢若初, "Riben tianhuang de weiling waijiao fanshi tanxi" 日本天皇慰灵外交范式探析 (A Paradigm Exploration of the Japanese Emperor's Consolation Diplomacy) (*Riben wenti yanjiu* 日本问题研究 2017, vol. 5), focuses on "memorial diplomacy" (*ireigaikō* 慰灵外交) as a part of Imperial Household diplomacy, with a detailed analysis of the timing, selection of destination countries, and style of the memorials. The writers summarize the characteristics of memorial diplomacy as follows: 1. The emperor's memorial diplomacy is a striking feature of Japanese political culture as a new model for Japan's foreign relations, and has become a unique political phenomenon of Japan's diplomatic performance in the modern international community; 2. every tenth anniversary of the end of the war, visits are held at roughly the same period as the commemoration of the worldwide victory of the war against fascism—along with its cyclical nature, this kind of diplomacy involves historical corrections toward the position of the aggressor countries of the war; 3. The destination countries for memorial visits comprise only a small fraction of the countries Japan invaded during the war, and are strategically limited to those that pragmatically ally or quasi-ally with Japan, and thus by nature are

selective and one-sided; 4. The memorial ceremonies are exceptional in that they take place at special locations such as monuments to the war dead, or places where the remains of soldiers have been recovered; 5. Memorial diplomacy, which is carried out by the emperor as a symbolic figure as decided by the current constitution and based on related resolutions of the Japanese government, has a representative and symbolic nature at the national level, whether viewed through a legal lens or an emotional one; 6. The objects of memorialization are selected not only for their relationship to the memorial location, but with subjective acknowledgment of the different perspectives involved, and in this way they are ambiguous; 7. In terms of positioning, this model of diplomacy expands Japan's overall foreign strategy, namely bilateral relations with target countries, while at the same time it is synchronistic to and moreover improve the international image of Japan as a "pacifist country;" 8. From the perspective of historical tradition, memorial diplomacy is founded on the religious functions that the emperor once had, and as the overseas development of domestic memorials, it has a succession-like and denotative nature; 9. This diplomacy is effective as to some extent it satisfies Japan's political appeal in regions where it conducts foreign relations, and at the same time it has a homogenous nature that responds to the activities of right-wing organizations.

The writers address the above characteristics while simultaneously pointing out the harmful effects of memorial diplomacy as follows: 1. It runs the risk of being used by right-wing political forces; 2. Since the objects and targets involved in memorial diplomacy are complex and sensitive, the nature of this diplomacy could be fundamentally reversed, as without strict limitations, it risks developing into a realistic problem that promotes the expansion of right-wing political forces and fosters the revival of an emperor-centered historiography of Japan, causing a deluge of historical revisionist trends of thought; 3. With the influence of Japan's foreign strategy and political trends such as domestic conservatism, memorial diplomacy is inevitably one-sided, directional, and politically-purposed; as such, it inevitably becomes a tool for reinforcing the country's pragmatic alliance with the U.S.

In addition to the above, Zhang Min 张敏's work presents an unsparing opinion of "emperor diplomacy." "Ribei zhanghou waijiao xinmoshi de mosuo yu goujian: ribei tianhuang waijiao 'fangmeifanshi'" 日本战后外交新模式的摸索与构建：日本天皇外交“访美范式” (Exploration and Construction of New Diplomacy Model of Post-war Japan: "Normal Forms of Visiting USA" of Japanese Tennō's Diplomacy) (*Riben wenti yanjiu* 2016, vol. 4, pp. 19–26) claims that this diplomacy and contrition about the war is no more than a highly secretive political technique that should be considered alarming.

## Conclusion

As shown above, Emperor Akihito's abdication and Emperor Naruhito's accession sparked a period of active research in China on the Japanese emperor system. This article has summarized and introduced these research trends and findings in China, particularly from Emperor Akihito's announcement of his intention to abdicate in August 2016, up to the present day.

Viewing the trends in this research over the past six years, a few characteristics stand out. First,

today's researchers have a solid command of primary sources, and their studies are relatively deep, objective, and convincing. Second, there are more studies being produced from the perspective of China-Japan comparative cultural theory than before. Third, it is now possible to conduct postwar emperor system studies in relative freedom, including with a critical point of view. Fourth, cooperation on research on the emperor system within academia internationally is increasing, and some of the results can now be shared due to publications in translation.<sup>2</sup>

The issue of Japan's emperor system is a key to understanding Japanese politics, society, culture, and history; this issue cannot be avoided in Japan studies. This is why the topic is gaining attention and studies are being conducted by researchers on Japan worldwide, including China. However, perhaps due to differences in understanding the issue, there has not yet been collaborative research on the emperor system, and current findings by researchers in each country cannot be shared promptly. In that sense, the International Symposium on the emperor system and Japan held at the Beijing Center for Japanese Studies in September 2019 and 2021 summer's "Age of Monarchy/Monarchy for Age" symposium held by the International Research Center for Japanese Studies at the 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the European Association for Japanese Studies were extremely significant. As a Chinese researcher, I hope for further cooperation and joint research on the emperor system by international scholars.

## 中国における天皇制研究の動向

郭 連友\*

明仁天皇の退位、新天皇の即位をきっかけにして、中国の天皇制研究が活発化してきている。中国の天皇制研究の内容をみると、天皇の生前退位の歴史と現状、天皇制や即位に見られる中国文化の影響、皇室外交、天皇と中日関係など多岐多様にわたっている。本稿では、天皇の生前退位と新天皇の即位前後という時期に限定して、中国の研究者による天皇制研究の代表的論文を紹介することで、中国における天皇制研究の最近の動向を明らかにする。

キーワード：天皇退位、天皇外交、慰霊訪問

2 *Ribenxue yanjiu*, volume 32, includes four articles by Japanese researchers: Isomae Jun'ichi 磯前順一, "Matsurarezaru kami no yukue: Shinwaka suru gendai Nihon" 祀られざる神の行方：神話化する現代日本 (The Whereabouts of Unworshipped Gods: Mythologizing Modern Japan); Satō Hiro'o 佐藤弘夫, "Arahitogami' e no michi: Kindai Tennō no shūkyōteki ken'i" 『現人神』への道：近代天皇の宗教的権威 (The Path to the Living God: The Modern Emperor's Religious Authority); Ogura Shigeji 小倉慈司, "Kodai no Tennō to jingi saishi" 古代の天皇と神祇祭祀 (Ancient Emperors and the Rituals of Gods of Heaven and Earth); and Sonehara Satoshi 曾根原理, "Hideyoshi, Ieyasu no shinkakuka to 'Tokugawa ōken-ron'" 秀吉・家康の神格化と『徳川王権論』 (The Deification of Hideyoshi and Ieyasu, and "Tokugawa Royal Authority Theory").

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