

Opinions of Japanese Public on Imperial Family

Dr. Hideya KAWANISHI, Associate Professor, Nagoya University Graduate School of Humanities

Introduction

- August 2016 Message from the Emperor

Ever since my accession to the throne, I have carried out the acts of the Emperor in matters of state, and at the same time I have spent my days searching for and contemplating on what is the desirable role of the Emperor, who is designated to be the symbol of the State by the Constitution of Japan. As one who has inherited a long tradition, I have always felt a deep sense of responsibility to protect this tradition. At the same time, in a nation and in a world which are constantly changing, I have continued to think to this day about how the Japanese Imperial Family can put its traditions to good use in the present age and be an active and inherent part of society, responding to the expectations of the people.

→The symbolic activities of the Emperor are something “searched for”

The relationship with society and people’s expectations are factors in this search

“Symbol” as written in the Constitution of Japan

- Significance as concession

Japanese side wanting to keep authority: Using the authority of the imperial system to unite the populace
GHQ wanting to appeal to international audience: Necessity to indicate in writing that “change” has occurred

=Both sides win

Appeal with change in writing/preserve diversity of interpretations

- Acts in matters of state and official acts

Limited acts in matters of state related to issue of war responsibility

Official acts maintain authority as emperor

→Accumulation since Occupation System which reflects will of the Emperor Increase in recent years

	Emperor	Hirohito		Akihito	
	Age	57	82	57	82
	Official Acts	448	334	512	529
Ceremonies of Appointment/Decoration	13	18	13	18	
Audiences	25	95	74	78	
Audiences with Foreign Officials	31	44	77	61	
Luncheons and Dinners	28	26	29	24	
Tea	3	4	26	57	
Domestic Trips	125	42	88	128	
Foreign Visits	0	0	44	10	
Audiences with Volunteers	126	44	65	54	
Other	97	71	96	99	

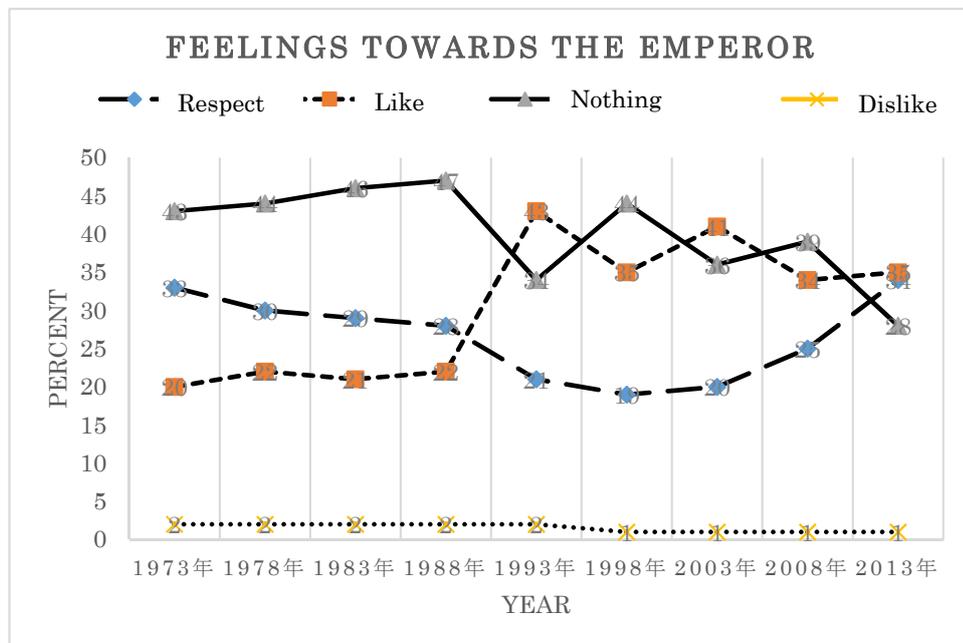
Source: Materials released by the Advisory Council on Easing the Burden of the Official Duties and Public Activities of His Majesty the Emperor

The Emperor and Imperial Family since World War II

- Promoting “human emperor”: Joint effort with mass media→relation with war not eliminated
- Marriages of princesses: Kazuko (Takatsukasa), Princess Taka, 1950
Atsuko (Ikeda), Princess Yori, 1951
Female members of imperial family receive attention, seem closer to people
- Popularity of Crown Prince Akihito: Compatibility with “reborn Japan”
Taught about constitutional monarchy by Shinzo Koizumi
- “Micchi boom” (November 1958)
Hopes for “commonness,” compatibility with new media→one kind of complete form of the symbolic emperor system
Consistent with philosophy of Constitution of Japan

Acceptance and Stagnation of “Symbol”

- Arguments for revision of Constitution of Japan by conservative political parties
→Unsuccessful: The word “symbol” has been accepted: However, used like “head of state”=“symbolic head of state” (Kenzo Takayanagi)



Source: NHK public opinion surveys

- Gradual decline in popularity of crown prince and princess
Takaya Kodama (journalist) Undependability/“Formulaic” crown prince
→Begin searching for what role as “symbol” should be
Visit welfare facilities, focus on Okinawa, “imperial family diplomacy,” war remembrance efforts
- May 26, 1986 response to *Yomiuri Shimbun*
The Emperor is not standing in a position to affect politics, but in a traditional, spiritual position to share the pain and joy of the people. This position is demonstrated through the spirit of the sutras copied by emperors since Emperor Saga to pray for the peace of the people when faced with epidemics or starvation, or in the postscript to sutras copied by Emperor Go-Nara: “As parent to the people, I lack virtue. It pains me greatly.”

“Heisei Style” Imperial System

- Continue efforts from when he was crown prince→media focus increases
 - Emphasis on an “open imperial family” at first
 - Opposition from the right wing in the “Michiko bashing” that occurred in 1993
- Changes in society: From growing prosperity in Showa to social inequality in Heisei
 - By actively “unifying” people, the Emperor works to ensure none fall through the cracks
 - =Factor in expanding the number of official acts→abdicate to avoid decrease
 - Approval as seen in *Asahi Shimbun* survey
- Emperor’s perception of himself (November 12, 2009 press conference on 20th anniversary of succession)
 - In these 20 years up to today, I have considered the long history of emperors, thought of being above the people, and searched for the desirable role of the Emperor as a symbol. I have never particularly thought about being a symbol of Heisei as mentioned in the question.
 - The Emperor’s belief that he is not special, harmony with constitutional monarchy, discrepancy with the right wing

Conclusion

- System changing in response to society and time period
 - Official acts will continue to increase→who will perform these acts?
- Continuing focus since WWII on female members of imperial family
 - History of using this focus to gain support
- Being close to populace and interacting with them→the “reverse course” is not possible

end