

Japan in the Heisei Era (1989–2019)

Multidisciplinary Perspectives

Edited by Noriko Murai, Jeff Kingston,
Tina Burrett

First published 2022

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

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

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

Introduction

(CC BY NC ND 4.0)

DOI: 10.4324/9780429273575-35

The funder for this chapter is Sophia University

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 *gengō* 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 hikiaku*, Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.
- Yoshida, Y., Sebata, H., and Kawanishi, H. (2017) *Heisei no tennōsei to wa nanika—seido to kojiri no hazama de*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Yoshimi, S. (2019a) *Heisei jidai*, Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.
- (ed.) (2019b) *Heiseishi kōgi*, Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.