

An Open Letter to Emperor Akihito: For establishing a genuine democracy in Japan

Yuki Tanaka

The original Japanese letter is [here](#).

This is the English translation of the original Japanese letter to Emperor Akihito written by Yuki Tanaka. The letter was sent to Emperor Akihito on January 6, 2019 under two names - Yuki Tanaka, as the representative of the annual conference of “August 6 Hiroshima Assembly for Peace,” and Kuno Naruaki, a committee member of the same conference.

* * *

At the New Year’s opening of the Imperial Palace on 2 January 1969, a Japanese war veteran named Okuzaki Kenzo (1920-2005) fired three pinballs from a slingshot aimed at Emperor Hirohito from 26.5 meters away. Hirohito was standing on the veranda and greeting about 15,000 visitors. All three pinballs hit the bottom of the veranda, missing Hirohito. Okuzaki took this bizarre action in order to be arrested so that he could pursue Hirohito’s war responsibility in the Japanese court system. In his trials, Okuzaki argued that Chapter 1 of Japan’s Constitution (“the emperor”) was unconstitutional. However, all the judges of the Tokyo District and High Courts, as well as the Supreme Court, ignored Okuzaki’s argument. As far as we know, Okuzaki is the only person in Japan’s modern history to legally challenge the constitutionality of the emperor system, and furthermore with compelling disputation. Yet, we do not endorse Okuzaki’s act of violence. Remembering Okuzaki’s unwavering effort to pursue the war responsibility of Emperor Hirohito and the

Japanese government, as well as his courageous legal challenge to the emperor system, we are writing the following letter to Emperor Akihito.

Happy New Year Akihito-san,

We are writing this letter to you, addressing you as a human being, rather than as Japan’s emperor. We therefore avoid using the title “emperor” as much as possible when referring to you or your late father. For the same reason, we refer to other members of your family by their names, without official royal titles.

Intrinsic Contradictions in Chapter 1 of Japan’s Constitution



August 8, 2016, Emperor Akihito announcing his desire to abdicate.

On 8 August 2016, when you publicly expressed

your desire to abdicate from the throne, you emphasized that you had been sincerely making efforts over the past twenty-eight years to fulfill the role of “the symbol of the State and of the unity of the People,” as defined by the constitution. During the press conference on 20 December 2018, three days before your eighty-fifth birthday, you again stressed your sincerity over many years of public performance as the emperor. We have no doubt about your sincerity in this regard, yet “sincerity” does not necessarily justify one’s actions.

As you are undoubtedly aware Article 14 of Japan’s constitution stipulates that “All of the people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin.” Yet, according to Article 1 of the current *Imperial Family Law*, only male successors can succeed to the Imperial throne. The Imperial Family Law clearly violates Article 14 of the constitution, openly discriminating against women. Among the modern democratic nations in the world, we presume that none except Japan allows the head of the state to openly discriminate against women by law, despite the constitutional guarantee of sexual equality. Furthermore, it is bewildering to note that hardly any politicians, constitutional scholars or citizens find this discrepancy between the constitution and law contradictory. In this sense, it can be said that the sexual discrimination represented in the emperor system and widespread sexual discrimination against women in Japanese society are mirror reflections of each other.

Article 2 of the constitution, as well as Articles 1 and 2 of the Imperial House Law, stipulate that your position as emperor is dynastic and hereditary. This means that only your family and descendants exclusively enjoy reverence by the people. This elevated status of your family also violates “equality in family origin” guaranteed by Article 14 of the constitution. Furthermore, as you are deemed a descendant

of “the pure Japanese and unbroken Imperial line from time immemorial,” consciously or unconsciously, certain groups of the Japanese population see your position as an ideological ground for justifying discrimination against foreigners, in particular the so-called “zainichi,” i.e. Koreans and Chinese living in Japan. The current increase of hate speech and vulgar demonstrations conducted by ultra-xenophobic organizations in Japan such as *Zaitoku-kai* (the Citizens Group That Will Not Forgive Special Privileges for Koreans in Japan) are, we believe, closely related to the fact that your ideological status widely and deeply impinges on national sentiment, albeit on an unconscious level.

You and your family attach great importance to Shintoism. Shinto was the official religion of Japan until 1946, yet the separation of government and religion was clearly defined by Article 20 of the new constitution, promulgated that year. Despite this clear-cut severance of Shinto and the state by the constitution, the Rites of Imperial Funeral of your father conducted in 1989, the Ceremonies of the Enthronement of the Emperor held for you in 1990, and many other royal ceremonies, have been conducted as Shinto rituals, each time spending an enormous amount of taxpayers’ money.



April 18 2019, Emperor Akihito visiting the Grand Shrine of Ise to report his upcoming abdication to the ancestral deities of the Imperial family enshrined there. He took with him two of the three *Sanshu no Jingi* (The Three Sacred Treasures of the Imperial Family) - the Imperial sword and jewel. No women were allowed to join this ceremony, not even Empress.

It is clear that the conduct of these Shinto ceremonies at taxpayers' expense was undoubtedly a grave violation of the constitution. It is now planned to hold grand Ceremonies of the Enthronement for your son, Naruhito-san, in November 2019, yet again at the expense of the national budget. Incidentally, the female members of the royal family are not allowed to be present at the *Kenji* - one of the Ceremonies of the Enthronement of the Emperor - for inheriting the sacred sword and jewels. This is another example of discrimination against women in the royal family.

As you see from these examples, no matter how sincerely you carry out the role of "the symbol of the State and of the unity of the People," as defined by Article 1 of the constitution, the problem is that your position as emperor is the main source of various types of discrimination and unconstitutional conduct. We wonder how you respond to this criticism.

Articles 6 and 7 stipulate that it is your duty to carry out various constitutional functions. But you have no right to refuse to conduct such official functions, nor do you have the freedom to express your personal opinions concerning such functions. This means that you have no freedoms and rights, which are guaranteed to all the people of Japan by Article 12 of the constitution. Article 13 states that "All of the people shall be respected as individuals," but this does not apply to you. You may contend

that many Japanese citizens truly respect you. You are surely *revered* to some extent as the emperor, but not *respected as an individual*. This is because most Japanese citizens hardly know you as an individual human being. It is not just you but your wife, Michiko-san, your two sons, Naruhito-san and Fumihito-san, their partners, Masako-san and Kiko-san, and your grandchildren, are all denied basic human rights if they remain in the royal family. Don't you think this state of affairs is contradictory to the constitution and therefore absurd?

Your existence as emperor is the source of discrimination against others. Simultaneously, you and your family are victims of discrimination in a unique sense. The fact that you are denied basic human rights means that you are not regarded as an ordinary human being. It is a strange phenomenon that you, the emperor who is generally esteemed as the highest and most noble person in the nation, fundamentally share characteristics with slaves, who could not be blessed with basic human rights. Given these facts, we believe that the position of emperor can be easily exploited by certain politicians for their own political ends.

Your Father's War Guilt

We truly sympathize with you. You were born in a difficult position. You and your family are caught in an untenable position for the sake of the nation, until the end of your lives. Yet, at the same time, we cannot sympathize with you and your family when we think of people in the Asia-Pacific region who were oppressed, discriminated against, assaulted and killed by the Japanese military forces under the banner of *Hakkō Ichiu* (Universal Brotherhood under the Rule of the Emperor). We also think of millions of Koreans and Taiwanese who endured harsh colonial rule and exploitation by the Japanese Empire, as well as millions of Japanese who were mobilized into the Asia-

Pacific War and forced to die for the Emperor. In other words, we cannot stop thinking of the people who became the victims of the Japanese emperor system since the beginning of the Meiji era in 1868.

In this regard, your father, Hirohito-san, committed grave crimes and was therefore responsible for causing tragedies to numerous people. Between September 1931 and August 1945, the Japanese Imperial Army and Navy Forces, under the Supreme-Commander, Emperor Hirohito, conducted extremely destructive battles against Chinese and the Allied forces in many parts of China, Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

In particular, Japanese military conduct in China was a war of aggression from the very beginning. It is said that the estimated number of Chinese victims was about 20 million. For example, in his 1941 reportage entitled “Scorched Earth,” the renowned American journalist, Edgar Snow described Japanese atrocities as “an orgy of rape, murder, looting and general debauchery which has nowhere been equaled in modern times.”

In addition to the massive numbers of Chinese victims, the following are the estimated number of other Asian fatalities of Japanese military violence in the fifteen year war: 1.5 million in India, 2 million in Vietnam, 100 thousand in Malaya and Singapore, 1.1 million in the Philippines, and 4 million in Indonesia. If we add losses of Pacific islanders, we can speculate that about 10 million people died as the result of the war that Japan conducted. We should not forget that 2.3 million Japanese soldiers and civilian employees (including about 50 thousand Koreans and Formosan Chinese) died in this war, and 60 per cent of this death toll was due to starvation and illness. The total Japanese death toll was about 3.1 million if we add the numbers of civilian victims of fire and atomic bombings conducted by U.S. forces, as well as civilians who died in Okinawa

and Manchuria in the last stages of the war. (The U.S. committed war crimes—crimes against humanity—by conducting indiscriminate fire and atomic bombings of Japanese cities and towns. In this letter, however, we are not going to discuss this issue in order to avoid getting sidetracked.)

□After the war, your father evaded his responsibility, claiming that military leaders acted against his will. Yet, when we read the war records compiled by the Defense Studies Military History Section of the Defense Agency National Institute, we find evidence that your father was deeply involved in drafting various war policies and making strategies through his “questionings to reports to the throne” and “advice to military leaders.” It is undeniable from the record of the wartime diary written by Marquis Kido Kōichi that your father played the decisive role in making the final decision to enter the war against the Allied nations in December 1941.

At the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal conducted after the war, under the political pressure of the U.S. occupation forces and the Japanese government, former Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki falsely testified that Emperor Hirohito “reluctantly” decided to enter the war because of the advice given by him, together with other officers of the High Command in charge of the war strategies. Yet it cannot be denied that your father signed the declaration of war even if *reluctantly*. In any case, it is a historic fact that he did sign as Supreme Commander of the Imperial Army and Navy. Thus it is indisputable that he was in a position of ultimate responsibility. In the end, twenty-eight former military and political leaders were prosecuted as A-class war criminals on your father’s birthday of 29 April 1946. Seven were executed on your birthday of 23 December 1948. In this way, the issue of war responsibility was deemed finalized and resolved simply by blaming only a handful of militarists and politicians who served your father.

However, it is also the fact that the war began as a result of your father's order and the war ended as a result of the order that your father issued. Consequently, as mentioned before, a few tens of millions of Asians and Pacific islanders as well as 3.1 million Japanese people lost their lives. In other words, the lives of this large number of people depended on your father's decision more than anything else. We would like to respect the grief of each victim – not only the dead, but also the survivors of Japanese exploitation such as forced laborers, sex slaves and POWs, survivors of the fire and atomic bombings, survivors of the military violence in Okinawa and Manchuria, and the like. This is because we tend to forget the great sorrow people experienced if we deal with the issue of war victims simply from the viewpoint of abstract numbers.

Incidentally, Akihito-san, do you know that Watanabe Kiyoshi (1925–1981) wrote an open letter addressed to your father in 1961? Watanabe-san was a sailor who was on board the battleship *Musashi*. *Musashi*, one of the largest battleships in the world, was sunk by U.S. forces in the Battle of Leyte Gulf on 24 October 1944. As a result, more than one thousand sailors lost their lives. In his letter, Watanabe-san wrote:

If you are an ordinary person and just think of the fact that so many people died as the result of the orders you issued, I imagine you would be extremely distressed in deep agony. I believe that is how an ordinary person naturally feels as a human being. Therefore, if one does not have such a natural feeling, I think that person is a heartless human being. I think that that person is a human being, yet simultaneously not really a human being, or some strange creature disguising himself with the name

of “human being.” I cannot think of you in any other way...

On January 1, 1946, you issued an imperial rescript ... and in it you denied that you were a god in human form... Despite that you had driven so many people into death during the war, (in this rescript) you emphasized “mutual trust and affection” between you and the people of the nation. Although I do not know how other people took those words of yours, I no longer believe such a barefaced lie. You could not deceive me any more. This New Year's rescript of 1946 did not show even a glimpse of sense of your responsibility.

The same can be said about the imperial rescript that you issued at the defeat of the war. In that rescript, you did not apologize at all and did not say even simple words like “I am sorry. I was responsible for the war.” You apologized neither to the people of your own nation nor to the people of China and Southeast Asia to whom you caused tremendous damage and heavy casualties. Indeed, you have not touched the issue of war responsibility in any of rescripts that you have so far issued since the end of the war.

We are not sure if your father read this letter, Akihito-san. If he did, we wonder how he felt about it.

The Problem of your Journeys to Console the Spirits of those Lost in World War II

Over the years you and your wife, Michiko-san,

traveled extensively in Japan and in the Pacific region to console the spirits of those lost in the war. We presume that was because you feel your father was accountable for miseries people suffered due to the war. As stated before, we acknowledge your sincerity. Yet, despite your sincerity, we think your war memorial visits have serious problems.

For example, in April 2015, shortly before you visited the island of Peleliu in the South Pacific nation of Palau, you issued a statement which included the following words.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, which brought fierce fighting to various parts of the Pacific Ocean, resulting in the loss of countless lives. Our thoughts go out to all those who went to the battlefields **to defend their countries**, never to return home.

A year before the end of the war, fierce battles were conducted in this region, and on many islands Japanese soldiers died as the result of suicidal attacks. Peleliu Island that we are going to visit is one of them, and in the battle on this island some 10,000 Japanese soldiers were killed and the U.S. also lost approximately 1,700 troops. We believe that **we must never forget** that those beautiful islands in the Pacific Ocean have **such a tragic history**.

(Emphasis added. Incidentally, it is more accurate to say that the number of U.S. dead is closer to 2,200, not 1,700.)

As you explained, large numbers of Japanese soldiers lost their lives on Pacific islands. On

the island of Guadalcanal, between August 1942 and February 1943, 20,860 of the 31,400 soldiers sent there perished. About 15,000 of this death toll were victims of starvation and tropical disease. From March 1943, 157,646 men were sent to East New Guinea. Only 10,724 survived. The mortality rate was 90 per cent; and, here too, many died due to starvation and tropical disease without engaging in battle.

In 1944, U.S. forces began a series of campaigns to capture Bougainville, Pohnapei, Truk, Guam, Saipan etc. On each island many Japanese soldiers as well as civilians were killed. On the island of Saipan, for example, more than 55,000 soldiers and civilians died: many of them committed suicide. The tragic and meaningless suicidal attacks like those carried out on the island of Peleliu were repeated in the battle of Iwo Jima Island between 19 February and 26 March 1945, resulting in more than 21,000 deaths (a mortality rate of 93 per cent). In Okinawa, about 100 thousand Japanese soldiers, as well as the same number of Okinawan civilians, perished between April and June 1945.

In the statement you made in April 2015, you described the dead soldiers with the following flowery words: “those who went to the battlefields to defend their countries, never to return home.” Many Japanese soldiers died in tropical jungles because of starvation and disease. Even those who managed to narrowly survive hunger and thirst were eventually forced to conduct suicidal attacks. Do you really think that those Japanese men died “to defend their country”? In your war memorial voyages, you have never addressed a fundamental question: Who was responsible for their deaths? Frankly speaking, those who “never returned” died wastefully for nothing. As the writer, Oda Makoto (1932–2007), used to say, their deaths were utter “*nanshi*” (deaths in agony). In other words the result of “miserable, meaningless plain slaughter.”

Furthermore, they were literally abandoned by their leaders, of whom your father was the primary leader. You and many politicians often say that Japan's prosperity after the war was built at the sacrifice of the victims of the war. We think such rhetoric is pure sophistry. Their "deaths in agony" were irrelevant to Japan's post-war prosperity. Their deaths were for nothing and utterly meaningless. That is why their deaths were so pitiful.

To "never forget such a tragic history," to remember those many "deaths in agony" and not to repeat the same mistake, we believe it is vital to ask why we made such a tragic history. We must ask who was responsible for such a tragic history? Yet in your speeches at the annual Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead on August 15 and at other similar memorials, reference to "the cause of and responsibility for the tragic history" has always been missing. Without referring to your father's responsibility your memorial journeys have contributed to obscuring his guilt; and, therefore, ultimately our national responsibility. In other words, your memorial voyages are nothing but political performances to cover up Japanese responsibility.

Moreover, the aim of your memorial voyages has always been to console the spirits of Japanese victims, not sufferers of the atrocities committed by Japanese troops. Occasionally you have referred to "war victims" of the Allied soldiers or of the Asia-Pacific nations using a very abstract expression, but your eyes have always been focused on the Japanese war dead. For example, on your memorial journey to Saipan in June 2005, you and your wife bowed deeply as you offered prayers in front of the so-called "Banzai Cliff," where many Japanese committed suicide, plunging into the sea. Immediately after this ceremony, you also visited the memorial of the Korean victims on the same island and paid your respects. Yet, your visit to the Korean memorial was initially not included in the schedule. According to a

press report, the original schedule was quickly changed after a group of Korean residents on Saipan demanded an apology from you and your wife. Although you did not offer any apologies, your visit to the memorial soothed their fury.

It can be concluded that your memorial journeys have contributed to strengthening Japanese "war victim" sentiment, but were never intended to create a sense of moral responsibility among the Japanese for the pain and sorrow of foreign victims of Japanese atrocities. In other words, your war memorial performance has never inspired the Japanese people to rectify our lack of collective responsibility, and to cultivate thoughts on the basic nature of war through comprehensive understanding of the inter-relationship between victims and perpetrators. Thus, the Japanese continue to reinforce a resilient sense of the ideologically biased "national value," that we were war victims, never perpetrators. It is therefore not surprising that most Japanese do not pay attention to the foreign victims of Japanese wartime brutality such as "forced laborers" and "military sex slaves." Because of this "national value," together with deep-rooted and widespread Japanese jingoism and xenophobia, even seventy-three years after the war, Japan is still unable to establish peaceful relationships with foreign nations, in particular Korea and China.

Indeed, we Japanese unconsciously feel obliged to hold and share this "sense of national value." Your authority as "the symbol of the State and of the unity of the People" has a distinctive function not only to create such a national value but also to make the people feel obligated for sustaining it without realizing that they are in fact compelled to do so. We are not sure how clearly you are aware of this unique phenomenon, but your performance as the symbol of the nation has a strong *political* function in practice to justify, defend and preserve the national value and policy of Japan.

As the emperor's performance hardly gives the people an impression of "political control," this function can be a useful tool for power holders or ruthless politicians who want to control the populace cunningly.

Article 3 of Chapter 1 of the constitution stipulates that "The Emperor shall perform only such acts in matters of state as are provided for in this Constitution and he shall not have powers related to government." This suggests that the emperor should have no political function. Yet, in actual fact, he has considerable influence over political and social ideas. We think you should be aware of this critical function of your position as emperor.

Political Factors in Your Constitutional Functions

Strictly speaking, your performance as the symbol of the nation must be limited to the seemingly depoliticized constitutional functions defined by Articles 3 to 7 of the constitution. Despite this lucid definition, various so-called "non-political activities" of the emperor, including "war memorial voyages," which are in fact outside this definition, have been sanctioned and openly carried out since the promulgation of the current constitution in 1946. Because such ostensibly "non-political activities" were sanctioned even before you ascended the throne, you must have thought that you also should fully utilize such activities as your duty of the symbol of the nation. Among such activities conducted under "the symbolic authority" of the nation, you found that the most effective performances to gain the people's trust were those of philanthropic (in your words) "activities to sit close to the people and to show my stance of sharing joys and sorrows with the people." You must have learned the value of philanthropic performance from your ancestors, in particular "motherly affection" as demonstrated thorough benefactions provided by the preceding

empresses.

Thus, together with Michiko-san, you have enthusiastically conducted what I call "the activities of parental-like affection" - war memorial journeys, meeting with families of the war dead, meeting with victims of various kinds of natural disasters, and visiting patients suffering from rare and serious illness. All such functions are unconstitutional in the strict sense.

You must be proud that you have strengthened and augmented the people's trust in the emperor and the royal family through such benevolent activities. However, contrary to your thought, we think your "symbolic authority" has been playing the decisive role in implicitly controlling people's ideas and will continue to do so into the future. We wonder if you know your "symbolic authority" plays an important political role in obscuring the cause of and responsibility for various current social and political problems, thus concealing them. In other words, your "symbolic authority" makes the people unable to critically analyze current social situations and to develop perspectives for reforming society.

In short, it makes people accept existing social conditions, and thereby conform to authority. This function is indeed a very astute and convenient tool for politicians, as the people are unaware that they are being manipulated. Furthermore, if one criticizes "the symbolic authority" of a "kindhearted and gentle" emperor, the individual is alienated by social pressure of conformity.

Let us explain how your "symbolic authority" works to deftly conceal social and political problems, and how "social pressure of conformity" also functions, with the following concrete example. Below is a press report from *Tokyo Shimbun* newspaper concerning your visit to Kawauchi village of Fukushima Prefecture in October 2012.

When the wind blew the water of the pressure hose that workers are using to clean off the radioactive particles on the roof, the water showered down onto the emperor and empress. But they did not really care at all. The emperor and empress kept eagerly asking questions such as “how high is the radiation dosage here?” and “Oh, then it is alright, isn’t it?” At that time, people from fifty households were living in temporary housing there. The emperor and empress talked to each of them, setting their eye levels at the same level of each person and asking them questions like “How are you? Are you alright?” Most of these people who returned to the village are old people, while young breadwinners still remain in places to which they were evacuated. One of the villagers, Mr. Endo, told the reporter “Some of us were deeply touched with their visit and shed tears. After Their Imperial Majesties’ visit, we were rejuvenated with a thought that we should do whatever we can do by ourselves.” (Tokyo Shimbun, 5 December 2017.)

You and your wife visited Kawauchi, a place located in one of the regions most badly affected by radiation from the No.1 Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant destroyed by the earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011. Your visit to Kawauchi took place during the so-called “radiation decontamination” widely conducted in Fukushima Prefecture a year and a half after the accident. There you asked the radiation specialist questions concerning the level of radiation, and responded to his explanation by saying “Oh then it is alright, isn’t it?” When you talked to the villagers, you

set your eye level at the same level as theirs, as if you had descended from heaven! The villagers were so moved by your kindhearted and caring words that they couldn’t stop shedding tears. Then they thought that, because they were truly honored by the tenderness of Their Imperial Majesties, they should not complain about their hardship and they should do as much as they can by themselves to improve their lives.

In this way your presence blurred the responsibilities of the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) and of other nuclear power companies for causing the nuclear disaster. Similarly, the responsibility of the Japanese government, which had been vigorously promoting the nuclear power industry with propaganda like “nuclear power is absolutely clean and safe,” was obscured. Moreover, the difference between the victims of the accident – farmers, fishermen and ordinary workers – and those responsible for causing the accident – rich CEOs of TEPCO and the powerful politicians behind them – was obscured. Additionally, a strong sense of “self-responsibility” – “we should do as much as we can by ourselves” – arose in the mind of the victims, which would eventually contribute to creating what I call “the illusion of unity,” i.e., the idea that we should all work together to solve the problem without asking who was responsible.

Japanese media repeatedly published articles praising you and your wife even five years after your visit to Fukushima without examining the political impact of your visit upon the populace. Anyone who might dare to criticize your “compassionate and caring visits” to the suffering people is likely to face severe social pressure to desist. We would like to know how you feel about that? Do you still believe that the emperor system supports democracy in Japan?

The Fundamental Contradiction of Chapter

1 to the Preamble and Article 9 of the Constitution

With the above-mentioned examples, we have tried to show that Chapter 1 of the constitution and its effective utilization are fundamentally incompatible with the spirit of Japan's "democratic constitution." Let us now explain in more detail how and why Chapter 1 is incompatible with other parts of the constitution, in particular the Preamble and Article 9.

In the first paragraph of the Preamble, it is said, "We, the Japanese people ... resolved that never again shall we be visited with the horrors of war through the action of government, do proclaim that sovereign power resides with the people and do firmly establish this Constitution."

□It is clear that Article 9 is also based on our experience of war and the recognition of our responsibility for the war Japan conducted between 1931 and 1945. In other words, the idea of pacifism - renunciation of war and demilitarization of Japan - articulated in Article 9 is closely intertwined with the basic philosophy of the constitution spelled out in the Preamble. We strongly believe therefore that we should consider the Preamble and Article 9 as one set of declarations. In this regard, we believe, the second and third paragraphs of the Preamble are particularly important.

We, the Japanese people, desire peace for all time and are deeply conscious of the high ideals controlling human relationship, and we have determined to preserve our security and existence, trusting in the justice and faith of the peace-loving peoples of the world. We desire to occupy an honored place in an international society striving for the preservation of peace, and the

banishment of tyranny and slavery, oppression and intolerance for all time from the earth. We recognize that all peoples of the world have the right to live in peace, free from fear and want.

We believe that no nation is responsible to itself alone, but that laws of political morality are universal; and that obedience to such laws is incumbent upon all nations who would sustain their own sovereignty and justify their sovereign relationship with other nations.

Japan was the nation that manipulated "tyranny and slavery, oppression and intolerance" under the militarism combined with the emperor system. In the Preamble we are therefore confirming our determination to not let our government conduct war again, clearly recognizing and deeply internalizing our responsibility for the indescribable war tragedies our nation created. Based on this determination, we are claiming that we would like to "occupy an honored place in an international society" by contributing to the world community establishing peaceful relationships between all peoples of the world. It also acknowledges that everyone has the right to live in peace.

In a way, the Preamble reconfirms not only the Japanese people's pacifist determination, but also our strong desire to be actively involved in constructing peaceful human relationships, based on the idea that everyone has the right to live in peace. In other words, it claims that peace is a matter of human rights, in particular the right to live in peace; peace is a matter of global and universal justice; and peace is a matter of international cooperation. In this sense, although it is the Preamble of a national constitution, it is quite unique in that it offers a perspective on the establishment of a *universal*

peace.

Therefore, it can be said that the Preamble, together with Article 9, contains the proposition of the illegality of any war in the world, and not just of Japanese war. As we have mentioned before, we believe this is the reason we should always treat the Preamble and Article 9 as one set of pronouncements. The Preamble, together with Article 9, is a comprehensive sketch map for a peaceful world.

Intriguingly, even though Chapter 1 (Articles 1 to 8) lies between the Preamble and Article 9, there is no explanation whatsoever of how the position of emperor, who was the Grand Marshall of the extremely brutal Imperial Forces until August 1945, had been reformed in accordance with “universal principle of mankind,” the principles of “the sovereignty of people,” or “universal laws of political morality,” which are all emphasized in the Preamble. In other words, the constitution provides no explanation how the seemingly “democratized” emperor’s position was to relate to “the sovereignty of people” and “pacifism.”

It is clear that the Preamble emphasizes “the sovereignty of people,” which is elaborated upon in Chapter 3 (Article 10 to 40), and “pacifism,” which is embodied in Chapter 2 (Article 9). It provides a basic philosophy of these two vital principles and expounds on them. Yet, the Preamble provides not a single word concerning the fundamental philosophical discussion in Chapter 1 “Emperor.” Don’t you think this is odd? Why does our constitution take such a strange form?

As mentioned earlier, all the principles emphasized in the Preamble concern *universal principles of human behavior*, which are beyond Japan’s national values and rules. On the contrary, until August 1945, the emperor system cruelly denied the sovereignty of the people, brutally violated many peoples’ right to

live in peace, and violently destroyed international cooperation.

After the war, the U.S. occupation forces under the command of General Douglas MacArthur and the U.S. government decided to make your father Hirohito-san immune from the war crimes tribunal and to politically utilize him to suppress the rapidly growing Communist movement in Japan, thereby controlling the Japanese populace. For this aim, the emperor system was depoliticized and preserved, presenting your father as an innocent and peaceful person. Even though it is claimed in the Preamble “We, the Japanese people ... resolved that never again shall we be visited with the horrors of war through the action of government,” the resolution was made without pursuing your father’s responsibility for the war. In addition, the emperor system is a uniquely Japanese system rooted in Shinto thought, which is contradictory to “the universal principle of mankind.” Therefore, it was not possible to discuss the principle of the emperor system side by side with “the universal principle of mankind” in the Preamble.

We hope you can now understand why it is natural that Chapter 1 of the constitution and its actual utilization are fundamentally incompatible with the spirit of Japan’s “democratic constitution.”

Abdication is not enough. You should become an ordinary citizen□

It is a general perception that the emperor system was “depoliticized” and “democratized” after the war, and that, as a result, it became “a constitutional and democratic monarchy.” Yet, no one in your family has ever admitted the war guilt and responsibility of Emperor Hirohito and apologized for it. The position of a “democratic emperor” is contradictory to basic human rights, freedoms and equality

guaranteed by the constitution; and the emperor himself openly and constantly violates the constitution by conducting Shinto religious rites and other ostensibly “non-political” performances.

Because the long-surviving traditional emperor ideology is still widespread and deeply imbedded in Japanese society, all these “undemocratic” aspects of the emperor system do not appear “undemocratic” to the public eye. Many people accept them as natural. This is partly because of one of the functions of the emperor ideology, which is to deify you. Do you still call this state of Japan “democratic”?

We believe that a genuine democracy cannot take root in Japanese society as long as the emperor system exists. We do not believe that Japan’s current state will improve even after you abdicate in April 2019. On the contrary, the situation will probably get worse as the highly jingoistic Abe government is expected to fully exploit a series of the grand ceremonies of the enthronement of the next emperor planned in November 2019 for their own political aims, in particular enhancing the Prime Minister’s authority. Abe will make your son, the new emperor and officially open the Tokyo Olympics next year to promote Japan’s national prestige. We also believe that Abe will make your son review the troops of the Self Defense Forces, taking every opportunity to enhance nationalism and to make the Japanese people accept a rapidly increasing military budget.

We understand it is difficult to abolish the emperor system for the sake of democracy under Japan’s current social conditions.

However, we are sure conditions will improve if you refuse to remain a Court noble, if you refuse to become *Jyōkō* (Ex-emperor: the literal meaning is “a noble person above the emperor”), and if you and your wife, Michiko-san, become ordinary citizens. Only if you admit your father’s war guilt and publicly apologize to war victims and the victimized nations, and express your joy to be an ordinary citizen endowed with basic human rights, can Japan become a place where people can live comfortably and peacefully.

Akihito-san, why don’t you cease to be a slave of the nation? Why not become an ordinary human being and share normal human emotions with us? Don’t you think it is important for you to become an ordinary human being and an ordinary citizen to establish genuine democracy in Japan?

Yours sincerely, □1 January 2019. □

Yuki Tanaka (Representative of “August 6 Hiroshima Assembly for Peace”) □

Kuno Naruaki, (Committee Member of “August 6 Hiroshima Assembly for Peace”)

The letter reproduced here drew on parts of Yuki Tanaka's forthcoming Japanese book, 検証「戦後民主主義」：わたしたちはなぜ戦争責任問題を解決できないのか (*Examination of Japan's Post-War Democracy: Why can't we solve the problem of war responsibility?*) The contents of the book are summarized at [this site](#).

Yuki Tanaka is an historian and political critic, and an editor of The Asia-Pacific Journal. He is the author of *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II* (Second edition) and *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation*. His publications include Yuki Tanaka, Tim McCormack and Gerry Simpson, eds., *Beyond Victor's Justice? The Tokyo War Crimes Trial Revisited* and Yuki

Tanaka and Marilyn Young, eds., *Bombing Civilians: A Twentieth Century History*. He has published many books and articles in Japanese including the book *Sora no Sensō-shi* (*A History of Aerial Warfare*).