The Emergence of Women Monarchs in Ancient Japan: 
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The purpose of this study is to reexamine the common notion at the base of arguments against women monarchs, such as "patrilinealism is Japan's tradition since antiquity" or "the ascension of women to the throne in Japan is exceptional." The present is in need of arguments on women monarchs that incorporate sexual difference and the structure of monarchical power. From the perspective of ancient history, this study reexamines the prerequisites of ascension by women, including factors such as age of ascension, talent, court management, economic strength, and the system privileging the first royal wife ("great royal wife") to the monarch.

Prior to the Ritsuryo polity, no difference existed between former and current royal wives. The highest in rank among such wives was granted the title of "great royal wife" (okisaki 大后). The later fact that without exception birth mothers to an enthroned monarch were posthumously titled okisaki 皇太后 does not reflect a shift towards the Nihonshoki of the Ritsuryo polity; the ascension of a birth child was a major factor in the maximization of power. As this reflects, with the ascension of one's birth son to the throne, a mother's royal title changed. The above calls into question the common notion that the invention of "great royal mother" 大御母 was an extension of "great royal wife" (first royal wife) in the period subsequent to Kojikiden.

At the same time, the rank of "great royal wife", like that of "great king" (daio 大王), was held until death, at which time a new "great royal wife" would be selected. If a former royal wife died, then the "great royal wife" would be chosen secondarily from among current wives. Given a birth son on the throne, the ranking of a "great royal wife" became clear. In the period subsequent to the court of Kinmei, the restricted identification of a birth mother and first child with a single bloodline resulted in the historical emergence of the notion of a royal family. Given a record of managing her court and the valued status within the royal family of "great royal wife" (the birth mother of the reigning monarch) and "royal grandmother" (sumemioya 皇祖母, the royal mother of a past monarch), and assuming her ability to govern was recognized by the aristocracy, such a woman could take priority over powerful but young first sons and royal brothers.

To conclude, the notion that women monarchs were "interim measures" has little foundation, while the concept of "troubled royal succession" says nothing more than that men were unable to ascend the throne. Neither is an argument about women monarchs that incorporates gender differences and the structure of royal power. The royal ascensions of the women Jito, Genmei, and Gensho were legitimated through edicts and codes on the same level as the ascensions of the men Kusakabe, Mommu, and Shomu. Any evaluation that emphasizes only patrilineal succession is one-dimensional.