JAPAN UNDERWENT a historic transition when Emperor Naruhito, 59, formally took up his post on May 1st, 2019—a day after the abdication of his father, Emperor Akihito, at the age of 85. Former Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko stepped down on April 30th in a brief and simple ceremony, after three decades in their roles. At his ascension to the Chrysanthemum Throne, Emperor Naruhito pledged always to think of the people of Japan and fulfill his duties as “the symbol of state and the unity of the people” in accordance with the country’s 1947 constitution. Wearing a tailcoat and several large medals at his first address, he said: “I sincerely hope for the happiness of the people and further progress of the country, and for world peace.”

The Imperial House of Japan is the world’s oldest continuous monarchy, and Naruhito is the 126th emperor in a line stretching back to the country’s founding by the legendary Emperor Jimmu, whose ascension is traditionally dated to 660 BC. Akihito’s three-decade reign is known in Japan as the era of “Heisei”, or “achieving peace”. Naruhito’s new era has been named “Reiwa”, which translates roughly as “good fortune” or “auspicious peace or harmony”.

Therefore, it feels auspicious to lead this July-August 2019 issue with three stimulating articles on Japanese art from distinguished collections: Peter Janssen of the Samurai Art Museum in Berlin; Hedda and Lutz Franz, collectors of Japanese inro and other lacquer art, Chinese snuff bottles and modern Chinese paintings; and Roger Yorke, a collector, dealer and researcher of Japanese kimonos, gift cloths and Buddhist altar cloths. The articles, by Barbara Harding, Oliver Moss and Roger Yorke, present very fine and rare Japanese arms and armour, Japanese lacquer inro, and Japanese kimonos. As there has been a growing interest in high-quality Japanese art, I am confident that our knowledgeable readers will find the articles educational.

The magazine also includes articles by renowned curators, professors and Asian art specialists. For South and Southeast Asian art, we feature late 12th century thangkas by Newari artists for Tibetan patrons (Steven M. Kossak); kantha embroidered textiles of Bengal (Courtenay Compton McGowen); and weights of India (Rick J. Willis). For Chinese art, we have Song dynasty Yaozhou ceramics (Rose Kerr); and paintings by two masters, Zhang Daqian (Chang Dai-chien, 1899–1983) (John Seed) and Ren Bonian (1840–1895) (Josh Yu). Finally,
from Korea we have a fascinating article about men’s indoor headwear in the Chosŏn dynasty (Jin-Sook Yang and Hyeon-Jin Jo). I am also very pleased to publish an informative interview with Anthony du Boulay (Colin Sheaf), and a thoughtful book review of China without Dragons: Rare Pieces from Oriental Ceramic Society Members (Peter Y.K. Lam).

Anthony du Boulay was on good form at the launch of his new book, The Duberly Collection of Chinese Art at Winchester College, held at Bonhams New Bond Street, London, on May 19th, 2019. The Winchester College collection of Chinese ceramics was donated by the Duberly family in memory of their son, James, a former pupil killed during the Second World War (1939–1945). Assembled between 1947 and 1970, it includes ceramics from the Tang to Qing dynasties and items made from jade, lacquer, ivory and bronze. Many of the objects are decorated with traditional Chinese symbols and the figures of immortals, sages and scholars. The highlights of the Duberly Collection include a Tang dynasty horse and tomb official, celadon stonewares from the Song dynasty, and some exceptionally fine examples of early Ming porcelain.

Other strengths of the collection are figures from the Kangxi period and Qing dynasty ceramics decorated with coloured enamels.

Celebrating the 120th birthday of Zhang Daqian, a memorial exhibition with curated events was held at Silicon Valley Asian Art Center in Santa Clara, California. On May 19th, 2019, a lecture and documentary film about Zhang Daqian was presented by Weimin Zhang, a professor of cinema at San Francisco State University, as well as an award-winning filmmaker, director and photographer. On June 2nd, John Seed gave a fascinating lecture about Zhang Daqian and Modernism. In attendance was the artist’s daughter, Zhang Xirui, who wrote a couplet for the exhibition: “Ganoderma and orchid (outstanding offspring) on an auspicious day brightens the generational grace, cherry-apple (brothers) in the spring breeze revitalises the family fame.”

I am also delighted to announce that Daisy Yiyou Wang has been appointed to the position of Deputy Director, Curatorial and Programming for the Hong Kong Palace Museum (HKPM). Dr Wang will be responsible for the HKPM’s research, collections, exhibitions, publications, learning and engagement functions in support of the museum’s overarching mission and strategic planning. A scholar of Ming and Qing court painting and decorative art, Chinese contemporary art, and the history of collecting Chinese art, she most recently co-curated with Jan Stuart the major exhibition, “Empresses of China’s Forbidden City” (see the three articles in the January-February 2019 issue). Dr Louis Ng Chi-ka is Museum Director of the HKPM, scheduled to open in 2022.

I hope that the contents of this Japanese-highlighted issue will resonate with our readers, demonstrating that there is continuity between Asia’s modern culture and its traditional heritage. We are proud to be able to show the continuity of past to present in a comprehensive and scholarly, yet enjoyable, manner.