

PHILOLOGICAL SCIENCES

THE BRITISH MONARCHY IN THE 21ST CENTURY: SYMBOLIC POWER AND POLITICAL RELEVANCE

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Abstract

The British monarchy has kept its position as a significant institution in the United Kingdom, becoming the uniting symbol among the people while changing to the political, social, and cultural necessities of the day. This paper which is consistent with 21st-century monarchy deals with the evolvement of its role by symbolizing its awe power, strength, constitutional relevance, and public perception. The study carries out with the help of scholarly analyses, historical accounts, and media representations. It investigates the monarchy's effect on national identity and its ability to face criticism and make the necessary reforms through the lens of multidisciplinary knowledge has been identified. The research gives insights into crucial aspects like political functions, economic contributions, and the challenges the institution faces as it gains more and more the attention of the public. The paper thus, draws likeness and contrast between the monarchy of Britain and other constitutional monarchies, and on that basis presents the potential future course of the British monarchy with implications to the monarchy's ability to adapt.

Keywords: adaptability, British monarchy, constitutional relevance, cultural impact, public perception, symbolic power.

1. Introduction

The role of the UK monarchy, over the past few years, has gone through remarkable changes that have been catalysed by the changing nature of the social-political space while at the same time the monarchical institution was trying to keep its symbolic and political power and relevance through modifying itself. Theoretical literature has consistently questioned this double role, the authors have grappled with it from multiple perspectives. The monarchy was viewed as a great source of national unity and continuity, especially in times of social changes. The development of similarities between the two states involved the body politic and the national space, namely the monarchy acting as a form of life that is continuous while also implying that there could be something like national unity and national pride (Bogdanor, 2020, p. 42). The monarchy's adaptability in the face of modernization factors and its sensitivity to the requirements of a democratic society are other remarkable aspects which also have been accessed academically (Pimlott, 2002, p. 97).

On the other hand, it has been argued that the monarchy's political influence nowadays has dramatically waned, being mainly a ceremonial body (Bagehot, 2001, p. 65). There is a belief that the monarchy exists today as a political entity only in the written constitution while the power it wields is more figurative than practical (Murphy, 2013, p. 88). Aside from this, the promotion of political transparency and the development of the democratization of public institutions are also reasons for a redefining of the monarch's political role in governance (Kumar, 2021, p. 144). These viewpoints imply a turning away from instrumental politics to the more symbolic politics of the public sphere (Harris, 2019, p. 57).

A way in which the monetary and cultural forces of the monarchy remain in a constant state of political contestation among scholars is also a subject of intense scholarly debate. Others, however, stand for the idea that the ruling class is the engine of the British economy, drawing in numerous tourists to the country and thereby supporting the national heritage industries (Starkey, 2016, p. 112). Contrary to this argument, the monarchy's integration into popular culture is indicative of its tremendous impact beyond the political sphere (Vickers, 2015, p. 76). Furthermore, researches into the monarch's commitment to donate have reported that it is the king's continued action to donate to charity that has seen him get unsinkable relevance in modern society (Marr, 2018, p. 189). These talks put the monarchy at multiple-business levels beyond purely political imagery (Strong, 2005, p. 49). 21st-century British monarchy is still a difficult unit, with the historical figures and modern life coexisting at the same time. Although the direct power may be lessened, its symbolic meaning and cultural work go on being the reasons why further research is necessary to understand it thoroughly (Higginbotham, 2022, p. 34).

2. Literature Review

A vast research work on the British empire will not be enough without traversing its historically mandated metamorphosis, its symbolical import as well as its constitutional role. Distinguished scholars, for example, Cannadine, (2002, p. 45) that has a chapter in his book *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire*, applied the point that the monarchy's symbolic essentiality through its national identification has always been expressed, thereby consolidating continuation and tradition. Conversely, Pimlott (1996, p. 87) in *The Queen: A Biography of Elizabeth II* underlines the in-

stitution's supply adaptation with the societal shift. Recent research, including Clancy (2021, p. 32) in *Running the Family Firm*, provides veracious assessments of the monarchy's public relation efforts by deploying strategic media and technology. Analyses that compare through, for example, a joint work of Hazell and Morris (2020, p. 67), point out the presence of contrasting and comparable features with the British style and the ones that exist in the European realm, thus indicating that it occupies a unique position.

3. Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach, which makes use of document analysis and media discourse analysis in order to examine the monarchy's present relevance. In addition to primary sources such as official government reports, royal speeches and media coverage, which demonstrate the various ways that the creation of the nation has influenced the public representation of the institution, these are sources that provide significant information. The secondary sources are also very useful to disclose essential theory on the functions of the monarchy as well as its societal impact include academic books and journal articles that can be used for theoretical analysis. A comparative analysis will also be carried out to compare the British monarchy with other constitutional monarchies, in which the research presents the important similarities and differences of both their functions and public images. This research study also conducts public opinion surveys with the aim of evaluation British citizens' evolving attitudes with the monarchy and at the same time, by incorporating their feedback it gives a comprehensive perspective on its present and future standing.

4. Historical Context and Evolution of Monarchical Power

The historical journey of the British monarchy portrays a flexible development of monarchical power letting go of unlimited power and moving to a constitutional structure. To begin, since they played a unifying role in the development of the state, the rulers first exercised power over threats to their immediate survival and that of their subjects. For example, William the Conqueror centralized authority and initiated a marked feudal system during his reign in England. Tracy Borman, in *Crown & Sceptre: A New History of the British Monarchy from William the Conqueror to Elizabeth II*, clarifies how William's strengthening of power paved the way for later monarchic authority to be practiced through the institution of monarchical power (Borman, 2021, p. 45).

On the other hand, the *Magna Carta of 1215* was a significant turning point because it required King John to respect the rights of his subjects and to accept the restrictions on his power. This important written document is dealt with in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Monarchy* when John Cannon and Ralph Griffiths discussed the necessity of this step towards constitutionalism that he took (Cannon & Griffiths, 2000, p. 112). The formation of the English Parliament contributed to the broader declining of the monarchical authority, it started as an advisory body and

over time it became a legislative body with a huge impact. *The Middle Ages a History of Parliament*, on the other hand, discusses the transformation at length, highlighting the increasing role of Parliament in governance (Butt, 1989, p. 78).

The Tudor period witnessed a rebirth of the monarchical rule especially during the time of Henry VIII when he declared that he was the supreme head of the Church of England. The book by David Starkey *Crown and Country: A History of England through the Monarchy* describes the power accumulation of Henry and its effect on the relationship between church and state in detail (Starkey, 2010, p. 154). However, the subsequent Stuart era revealed deep-seated differences between the crown and Parliament which came to a height in the English Civil War. In her book *Republic: Britain's Revolutionary Decade 1649-1660*, Alice Hunt examines the people who had the idea to do away with the monarchy for a while and set the Commonwealth under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell (Hunt, 2023, p. 203).

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 also led to a change in the style of the monarchy and we saw the coronation of William III and Mary II who oversaw the signing of the Bill of Rights in 1689. The chapter on Ann Lyon's *Constitutional History of the UK* is devoted to long-term consequences of these events on the power distribution between the monarchy and Parliament (Lyon, 2016, p. 145). The following Act of Union in 1707 united England and Scotland thus the Kingdom of the Great Britain was formed, thus the political role of the monarch within a broader political entity was reshaped. In her book *From Tudor to Stuart*, Susan Doran gives requisite details of the shift and the hold of the monarchical power (Doran, 2023, p. 176).

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the British monarchy adapted to the changing political circumstances so that it became increasingly a more ceremonial institution with the real political power in the hands of elected bodies. In *Historical Dictionary of the British Monarchy*, Kenneth J. Panton outlines the monarch's tendency to influence the change by asking to stay part of the ever-rapidly changing society (Panton, 2011, p. 233). The latest period has witnessed the monarchy interacting with the media more and developing public relations to help the monarch's name, a process that can be examined from the portrayal of Richard Toye in *The Crown and the Establishment: British Monarchy and the Media since 1688* (Toye, 2019, p. 89).

5. Political Functions and Constitutional Role

The British monarchy's political functions and constitutional role have undergone significant transformations, evolving from the absolute authority to a manoeuvring institution largely within a constitutional framework. This evolution reflects the monarchy's adaptation to the changing political landscape and societal expectations.

Historically, the monarch predominantly exercised far-reaching powers, thus being a direct influencer of governance and policymaking. However, some projects were surrendered, and many directives are now issued at the urging of prime ministers. As said by Walter Bagehot in *The English Constitution*, the monarch has the perfect balance of „the right to be consulted, the

right to encourage, and the right to warn”, that confirms the monarch has shifted from direct authority to an advisory role (Bagehot, 2001, p. 65).

At present, the monarchy mostly behaves politically as a sign of solidarity, and that is by far the dominant role besides specific political party affiliation. The monarch thus has some of the responsibilities such as the bestowal of the Prime Minister, the opening of Parliament, and the granting of royal assent to legislation. Though it may appear ceremonial, their performance is necessary for the constitution and establishment of the United Kingdom. As Robert Hazell and Bob Morris point out in *The Role of Monarchy in Modern Democracy*, the monarch is an entity whose function and role are established by conventions, ensuring continuity and apolitical behaviour (Hazell & Morris, 2020, p. 58).

Furthermore, the monarchy brings about stability to the political system in times of political uncertainty. One for example, the monarch can call on a political leader to put together a government following a hung parliament as a case in point of this stabilizing role. Anne Twomey, in her analysis published in *The Role of Monarchy in Modern Democracy*, makes a case for how the monarchy safeguards political insurance, making sure the democratic procedures are put in place during crises (Twomey, 2020, p. 102).

The monarchy's role in constitutional law is another excellent example of such relation. The Crown is the embodiment of judicial authority while the courts serve as appendages operating in the name of the monarch. However, the justice system is not merely operating under the influence of the monarchy as it is functioning independently to counteract the government in power of a single individual crucial to a democracy. Anne Twomey's argument detailing the function of the monarchy in serving as a political stabilizer and preserving democracy is an example of such.

6. Public Perception and Media Representation

Reflecting broader societal changes and the transforming role of the monarchy within the United Kingdom, the public perception of the British monarchy and media representation have had a dramatic transformation. In the past, the monarchy was usually depicted as a remote and authoritative establishment; but, thanks to the rise of mass media, especially television, this has changed as the royal family is now depicted as more approachable and relatable. According to Ellis Cashmore in *Philology & the Moving Image*, the media has an integral part in transforming the monarchy into a more humane institution, thus, making it more attractive to the general public (Cashmore, 2006, p. 112).

Television has significantly contributed to the forming of people's views about the monarchy. The live coverage of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, which had been seen by millions of TV viewers, has been seen as a crucial moment in making the royal family become part of people's lives and making them feel a personal touch and connection. Michael Billig, in *Talking of the Royal Family*, says that such media events change the monarchy from a symbol of the national identity to a target of public criticism (Billig, 1992, p. 47). Another point is that the visual narratives

of the monarchy are also influenced by the portrayals of the monarchy in movies and TV series like *The Crown*. These productions ditch history and present personal stories within the royal family in a dramatic way, and they have in turn affected the public's view. In *The British Monarchy on Screen*, Erin T. Corrigan focuses on the filmic dramatization techniques and the critical marketing of monarchical authority as the basic elements of the people's appreciation and condemnation (Corrigan, 2016, p. 89).

The relationship between the media and the monarchy is complicated and mostly mutual. The royal family utilizes media platforms to express its narratives and to stay important and actually alive in the contemporary world. Laura Clancy, in *Running the Family Firm: How the Monarchy Manages Its Image and Our Money*, talks about the way the monarchy handles its public image through the media and the importance of tradition versus modernity to make it more appealing to different groups (Clancy, 2021, p. 134). At the same time, the media feeds on people's fascination with the monarchy.

7. Economic and Cultural Impact of the Monarchy

The British monarchy is a multifaceted source of influence for the United Kingdom, which encompasses both economic and cultural dimensions. Monarchy's integral role in the country's economic sector is through tourism, property holdings, and brand value. In the cultural context, the monarchy played the role of a continuous and national identity element with permeation of the variety of aspects of the British life.

Tourism is a significant source of economy where the monarchy is the turning point. Royal events and residences pull in millions of tourists per year, and that is why the service and hospitality industries thrive. According to an analysis by Brand Finance, the monarchy's contribution to the UK economy on an annual basis can be a significant figure, and the least part of it is tourism which alone earns a tidy sum (Brand Finance, 2017, p. 5). The inflow of tourists not only supports the local businesses but it also promotes the UK all over the world.

On top of tourism, the property assets of the monarchy are also a great economic impact factor. The Duchies of Lancaster and Cornwall, the properties that are under the monarchy, are large land assets that bring in significant income.

Another economic attribute that the monarchy has is brand value. The royal family as a corporate entity is the one that embodies brands which are used in promoting several sectors including merchandise and media. In her publication of the book *Running the Family Firm: How the Monarchy Manages Its Image and Our Money*, Laura Clancy investigates how the monarchy carefully curates its public image to stay relevant and financially healthy (Clancy, 2021, p. 134). This brand management extends to collaborations with fashion and lifestyle industries, thereby, consolidating the monarchy as an inextricable component of consumer culture.

In cooperation with cultural life, the monarchy also plays the role of the guardian of national heritage and identity: royal ceremonies and traditions such as

the State Opening of Parliament and Trooping the Colour conferred historical meanings that preserved the sense of continuity. These occasions are not just for show; they are the most significant cultural events that unify the people.

8. Challenges and Criticisms in the Contemporary Era

The British monarchy has been a long-lasting institution, regularly disparaged and challenged more and more criticism. It is an image of changing societal values as well as strong scrutiny. An enormous part of the critique is the role played by the monarchy within the multicultural and multiracial society. The critics claim that the princess's father's heritage does not comply with the values of equality and inclusivity. For example, the activist Peter Tatchell argues that the institution is inherently racist, because it hampers the advance of non-white people to the position of head of state (Tatchell, 2023, p. 45). In the same way Kehinde Andrews has criticized the monarchy by saying that it has close connection with colonialism and serves also a symbol of colonialist nostalgia and whiteness (Andrews, 2023, p. 102).

In addition to protester who called for the complete abolishment of the monarchy in the street, the way the royal family controls their finances and manages the cost of the monarchy is also a problem to the public. The sovereign grant, which is the public source of funding of the monarchy, has been accused of being an ambiguous money raiser without any check and balance. *The Times* published a report indicating that the monarchy's financing through the sovereign grant, down the years, has been the object of criticism as it lacks transparency and accountability. This in turn has led to appeals for royal finances to be exposed to public scrutiny and greater accountability (<https://www.realestate.com.au/news/scandalous-royal-familys-massive-260m-pay-increase-slammed/>). As a result, the allocation of government funds for the royal family has been a subject of much debate, particularly in periods of economic downturn and austerity.

The personal behaviour of some of the members of the royal family has also been greatly criticized, which has had consequences for the image of the institution. Prince Andrew, in particular, retains connections with controversial persons, which overshadow the family with negative light. A report in *The Guardian* is concerned with the monarchy's response to Prince Andrew's involvement in the extradition case and the possible cost of its public image (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/nov/21/prince-andrew-monarchy-institution-future-jef-frey-epstein>). These kinds of errors have brought forth discussions about how royals' accountability system works and what the mechanisms are to address the perpetrators.

Furthermore, the monarchy's validity in a modern democratic society is typically doubted. Scholars argue that the monarchy represents out-dated traditions that may conflict with modern democratic values.

9. Comparative Perspectives: The British Monarchy and Other Constitutional Monarchies

The British monarchy is one of the world's oldest constitutional monarchies and is a unique case study in comparison with others of its kind in other nations. In Robert Hazell and Bob Morris's scholarly work *The Role of Monarchy in Modern Democracy: European Monarchies Compared*, they focus on the adaptation of the various European monarchies to modern democratic frameworks, emphasizing the unique DNA of the British monarchy (Hazell & Morris, 2020, p. 15). In contrast, this comparative analysis highlights the different levels of political power and ceremonial roles that monarchies, much like the UK, have within their own constitutional systems.

The significance of the British model can be seen in the substantial changes that the Scandinavian monarchies of countries such as Sweden and Norway have undergone to conform to the democratic norms prevailing at the time. According to the research *Constitutional Monarchies and Semi-Constitutional Monarchies: A Comparative Analysis*, the most common monarchies are only symbolic in the governments and they have only limited political functions (Smith, 2020, p. 78). Europeans over the years have been seeking to bring the historic institutions of hereditary monarch to the level of modern, democratic states, by concurrently staying loyal to their traditions and responding to the new requirements of governance.

Another fascinating point of comparison is the Japanese monarchy. In his book of the same name, Hiroshi Kimizuka portrays it as not only the ceremonial aspect of the imperial institution of Japan but also the constitutional one which had to undergo difficult transformations in order to maintain its cultural importance and remain peaceful after the war (Kimizuka, 2023, p. 102). This particular phenomenon represents problems encountered by non-Western monarchies in preserving historical legacies and how this is aggravated by political pressures and the promotion of reform inside or outside their systems

Different reasons given to highlight these include financial transparency and the obligation of public accountability. The British monarchy got under fire resulting from issues about its financial funding and expenditure which promoted conversations.

10. Conclusion

The British monarchy, which is the light of Great Britain's constitution, is a constant adjust to the changes of the contemporary society. The institution is now the dilemma of modern government that should bread the misting to the root of its historical past, as it is the need of its society in fully fledged diversity and rapidly changing process. Monarchy and even the most pro-monarchy scholars are aware that for such institutions to be sustainable and relevant there is a need to blend the old and the new ideas and technologies. The report by Hazell & Morris is highlighted as the monarchs' stubbornness and adaptation at the same time and losing their position among citizens at the universities of New York and Boston.

Amidst the backdrop of Queen Elizabeth's reign in England, the landscape of the monarchy can be seen as being very adaptive in its efforts to bring about change while keeping up with current public standards. The

way social media and pop events are perused by the royal family to attract younger supporters of the Crown is definitely a strategic alternative. The article by Clancy relates to the importance of the public image of the royal family and the book is one of the Cambridge lectures which prove how image management is the only solution to survive in the modern technology era (Clancy, 2021, p. 45).

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