

Meaning of Imperial Succession Ceremonies

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1. What Are the Imperial Succession Ceremonies?

- The set of ceremonies involved in passing on the position of emperor to the crown prince or other imperial heir
- Not specified in any laws
- Formerly, these ceremonies were codified in the 1909 Tokyokurei [Regulations Governing Accession to the Throne], but this law was abolished. There is no mention of them in the current Imperial Household Law.
- When the current emperor was enthroned, the ceremonies were carried out based on the Tokyokurei

2. Process of Ceremonies

- There are 3 stages to the imperial succession
- First, the Senso-shiki, in which the Three Sacred Treasures are passed on as proof of imperial status
- The Sokui-shiki, in which the emperor notifies others of his accession
- The Daijosai, in which the emperor thanks the gods for bountiful harvests
- Of these, the Senso-shiki are what are now referred to as the “imperial succession ceremonies”

*The Sokui-shiki are ceremonies to inform others that a new emperor has been enthroned, and not ceremonies for the enthronement itself

- For the first time, the Taiirei-Seiden-no-Gi will be performed before the imperial succession

*Until now, the succession has generally been carried out after the former emperor passes away. This will be the first time in modern Japanese history that an emperor has abdicated.

3. What Ceremonies Are There?

- Four ceremonies are carried out for the imperial succession
- Kenji-to-Shokei-no-Gi, Koreiden-Shinden-ni-Kijitsu-Hokoku-no-Gi, Kashikodokoro-no-Gi, and Sokui-go-Choken-no-Gi
- In the Kenji-to-Shokei-no-Gi, two of the Three Sacred Treasures that are proof of imperial authority are passed on from the former emperor, the sword Amenomurakumo-no-Tsurugi and the jewel Yasakani-no-Magatama. The Privy Seal of Japan, used for official functions, and other items are also given to the new emperor at this time.
- In the Koreiden-Shinden-ni-Kijitsu-Hokoku-no-Gi, the new emperor reports his enthronement at the Koreiden, which enshrines the spirits of former emperors, and at the Shinden, which enshrines various gods
- In the Kashikodokoro-no-Gi, the new emperor takes possession of the third Sacred Treasure, the mirror Yata-no-Kagami, at Kashikodokoro, where Amaterasu-omikami, the ancestor goddess of the imperial family, is enshrined. Through inheriting all of the Three Sacred Treasures with this ceremony, the new emperor's status becomes official.
- In the Sokui-go-Choken-no-Gi, the new emperor speaks to the prime minister and citizen representatives for the first time

4. Other Ceremonies Held After the Imperial Succession

- These are the main ceremonies held after the imperial succession ceremonies:
- Kijitsu-Hokoku-no-Gi, Chokushi-Hakken-no-Gi, Sokuirei-Tojitsu-Kashikodokoro-Omae-no-Gi, and Koreiden-Shinden-ni-Hokoku-no-Gi
- Sokuirei-Seiden-no-Gi, Shukuga-Onretsu-no-Gi (parade), Kyoen-no-Gi (banquets), visiting sites such as Jimmu-Tenno-Ryo [Tomb of Emperor Jimmu]
- The ceremonies involved in the abdication and enthronement to be carried out as national functions are the nine listed below:
- Taiirei-Seiden-no-Gi (ceremony for abdication)
- Kenji-to-Shokei-no-Gi, Sokui-go-Choken-no-Gi, Sokuirei-Seiden-no-Gi, Shukuga-Onretsu-no-Gi, Kyoen-no-Gi (ceremonies for enthronement)
- Rikkoshi-Senmei-no-Gi, Kyoen-no-Gi, Kyuchu-Kyoen-no-Gi (ceremonies for the new crown prince)

5. What Issues Are There?

- Considering the role of the imperial family in a new age. There is debate over whether it is appropriate to just follow past examples for everything. Various policies have not yet been decided.

<Issues Involving the Ceremonies>

- What form should the abdication ceremony for the emperor take?
- What should the dates be for the abdication of the emperor and enthronement of the crown prince?
- Are female members of the imperial family not allowed at the Kenji-to-Shokei-no-Gi?
- Is the current form of the Sokuirei-Seiden-no-Gi, including the three cheers of “Banzai!”, appropriate for a democratic nation?
- Is the scale of the Kyoen-no-Gi appropriate? (Banquets lasted for three days for the previous enthronement)
- Is using public funds for the Daijosai, a Shinto ceremony, not an issue from the perspective of separation of church and state?

<Issues Involving the Crown Prince>

- The current crown prince’s younger brother, Prince Akishino, will take the title of “koshi,” instead of “kotaishi.” What should his position be with this title?

6. What Should Be Reported, and How?

- The meaning of the ceremonies is hard to understand→ Most Japanese people do not understand them either
- Some ceremonies are not open to the public
- The separation between national affairs and the activities of the imperial family is unclear
- There is public debate underway about what role the emperor should play
- Historically, the emperor’s role was to pray for the peace of the people and for successful harvests
- This opportunity should be taken to reconsider the role of the imperial family and make it fit the modern age, including issues with female members of the imperial family