

2019/10/16 Foreign Press Center

Imperial Succession Ceremonies—Matching the Times in Passing on Traditions

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Provisional translation by FPCJ

1. Ceremonies of the Imperial Succession

① Taiirei-Seiden-no-gi (Ceremony of Abdication at the State Hall)

Emperor Akihito announces his abdication (speech) Imperial Regalia at his side

② Kenji-to-Shokei-no-gi (Ceremony for Inheriting the Imperial Regalia and Seals)

The Imperial Regalia, symbol of the emperor, are inherited by the new emperor

③ Sokui-go-Choken-no-gi (First Audience after the Accession to the Throne)

Emperor Naruhito announces his enthronement (speech) Imperial Regalia at his side

④ **Sokuirei-Seiden-no-gi (Ceremony of Enthronement at the State Hall)**

Declare the enthronement to the country and the world at large

⑤ Shukuga-Onretsu-no-gi (Imperial Procession after Enthronement)

Parade: Display the enthronement to the public

⑥ Kyoen-no-gi (Court Banquets)

⑦ Daijosai

Harvest ceremony by the new emperor, offering new rice to the gods, eating it with the gods, and praying for good harvests and national stability

⑧ Rikkoshi-Senmei-no-gi (Ceremony for Proclamation of Crown Prince)

Announce that Fumihito has become crown prince



2. What Issues Were There with the Imperial Succession Ceremonies?

- Abdication of Emperor Akihito due to old age

The modern Imperial Household Law did not anticipate abdication

When the previous emperor died, the next emperor was enthroned

→ The first abdication while the previous emperor was alive in 200 years

- The Committee for the State Ceremonies of the Abdication of His Majesty the Emperor and the Enthronement of His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince mainly discussed ceremonies related to the abdication

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- The Taiirei-Seiden-no-gi was newly established

The other ceremonies were already debated during the previous succession, and so as a rule were not debated this time. However, the economic situation is significantly different from then, and simplifying the banquets were considered.

@Ceremonies for the Succession

① **Tairei-Seiden-no-gi (Ceremony of Abdication at the State Hall)**

Previous emperor announces his abdication (speech) Imperial Regalia at his side

- Historically, it was “joi” instead of “taii” (讓 jo=transfer, 退 tai=leave)

The previous emperor would designate a new emperor, and transfer power to them.

- The changing of symbolic emperors is regulated by the Constitution of Japan and the special legislation regarding the Imperial Household Law.

It is not an act of the emperor's will to transfer power.

- Although the official terminology is taii, some media insist on using joi.

② **Kenji-to-Shokei-no-gi (Ceremony for Inheriting the Imperial Regalia and Seals)**

The Imperial Regalia, symbol of the emperor, are inherited by the new emperor

- Eliminating the image of the Imperial Regalia being “passed on”

The Imperial Regalia are moving in accordance with the Constitution of Japan and the special legislation regarding the Imperial Household Law.

③ **Sokui-go-Choken-no-gi (First Audience after the Accession to the Throne)**

New emperor announces his enthronement (speech) Imperial Regalia at his side

@Ceremonies by the New Emperor

④ Sokuirei-Seiden-no-gi

Declare the enthronement to the country and the world at large: Speech by the emperor, congratulations from prime minister, three cheers

⑤ Shukuga-Onretsuo-no-gi

Parade: Display the enthronement to the public

⑥ Kyoen-no-gi

➤ ⑤⑥ were made after WWII to gain public understanding and for diplomatic effect.

⑦ Daijosai

Harvest ceremony by the new emperor, offering new rice to the gods, eating it with the gods, and praying for good harvests and national stability

- Due to the religious meaning of these ceremonies, they are being held as “public activities” instead of “official duties.”
- For the Heisei ceremonies, there was opposition from the perspective of separation of church and state and concerns about terrorist attacks by extremists
 - ⇒The Imperial Palace East Gardens were shut down and protective tents used while building the Daijokyu
- This time, construction can be seen, with explanatory panels installed.
- Seeking public understanding for large amounts of public funds being used.
 - Originally a simple ceremony using natural materials as they were, but it is expensive to replicate it in the modern age.
- A succession in a peaceful, celebratory mood



Daijokyu construction site

3. Historical Changes to Imperial Succession Ceremonies

- ▶ 7th-8th Century: No defined succession ceremonies
Competition between emperor and nobles, with emperor's status still uncertain.
In politically unstable times, position of emperor was empty or temporarily filled by a woman.
- ▶ 9th Century+ (Heian period, with Kyoto as the capital)
Senso (accession) and enthronement were separated, and developed as ceremonies.
Senso: Equivalent to ② and ③, inherit the position of emperor...before WWII,
there was Senso-go-Choken-no-gi
Enthronement: ④ Announce the enthronement to the world after proper preparations
“The position of emperor must not be empty even a single day”...No blanks permitted
Emperor's status and relationship with nobility stabilized.
- ▶ 11th Century+ (Medieval period)
Beginning of *insei* (rule by the retired emperor after abdication)
Succession through abdication became standard:
An abdication ceremony similar to ① was established
⇒Planned imperial successions and flexible politics became possible.

- ▶ 12th Century+ (Simultaneous administrations)

Buke (warrior class/samurai) administration: *Bakufu* (shogunate)

Kuge (aristocracy) administration: *Chotei*, including the emperor

Decline of emperor's status/strained finances/received aid from *buke*

⇒ Ceremonies reduced in scale, simplified, and have changed interpretations

- ▶ 15th Century+ (Sengoku period, a time of war throughout Japan)

Funding could not be acquired, making abdication and enthronement ceremonies difficult to carry out

Daijosai was discontinued

- ▶ 16th Century+ (From war to unification, then Edo period)

The Tokugawa Bakufu had guardianship over the emperor, supported enthronement ceremonies

Daijosai had been discontinued for over 200 years⇒ Restored in 1687

With the rise of *kokugaku* (academic study of Japanese philosophy and culture), interest in traditional Japanese ceremonies grew.

- ▶ Relationship with the public: Unofficial audience watched ceremonies.

Some say tickets were sold during the Edo period.



With changes in the status of the emperor, succession ceremonies declined, were discontinued, or restored

4. Changes to Enthronement Ceremonies

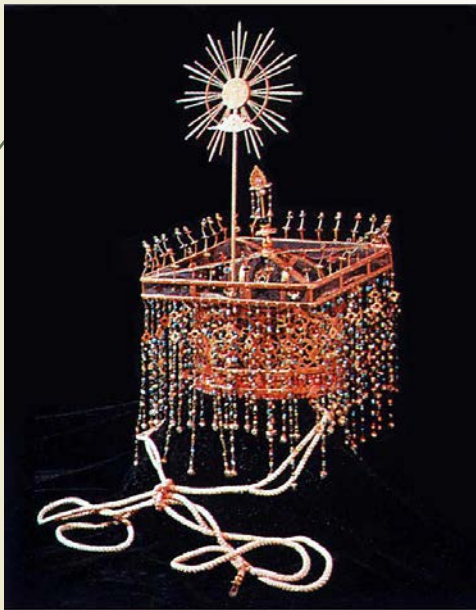
Enthronement of Emperor Reigen (1663) (Folding screen set of enthronement of Emperor Reigen and abdication of Emperor Gosai)



- ▶ Enthronement ceremonies made from the 9th century on were based on China's Tang dynasty.
- ▶ By emulating Tang, the more developed nation at the time, Japan demonstrated that it was also a civilized country.
- ▶ The emperor's outfit was called *konben-junisho*

A Chinese-style crown and robes, with 12 patterns indicating royal authority on the robes (such as the sun, moon, and dragons)

- ▶ While normal ceremonies and clothes were unified in a Japanese style, the Tang style remained in the enthronement ceremony only.



Crown and robes from Emperor Komei (enthroned 1846)



Emperor approaching throne (Diorama)

- From Emperor Meiji on (enthroned 1868), emperors have worn Japanese-style clothes.

Korozen-no-goho

- The venue also changed from Tang-style to Japanese.
- 1909 Tokyokurei established

Law regulating the succession ceremonies

- For Emperor Taisho's enthronement (1915), a *michodai* was set up...but the empress was pregnant and did not attend the ceremony
- For Emperor Hirohito's enthronement (1928), news was reported over the radio. Directly reporting on the procession and ceremonies was not allowed.
- Emperor Akihito (1990): First enthronement of a symbolic emperor. Changes made to avoid violating the Constitution and other laws. Moved from Kyoto to Tokyo. Debate over imperial ceremonies now possible, and information made available.

Possibility of terrorism by extremists, issues with separation of church and state.

Parade and banquets arranged considering relationship with Japanese people and international society.



Emperor Akihito during
enthronement ceremony

5. The Emperor System and Tradition

- ▶ System continued for 126 emperors...Significant political ups and downs.
- ▶ From the 12th century, the emperor has not been the sole political power, with either the shogunate or modern political system as well. The emperor system has been unstable more than not.
- ▶ Since the 9th century, ceremonies with the emperor were established
 - ⇒ Passed down while flexibly interpreting the principles to match actual conditions. Knowledge, technology, and past examples related to the ceremonies were collected and passed down.
- ▶ For this change, a past example of abdication from hundreds of years ago was used as reference.
 - ⇒ The world of imperial ceremonies is beyond time and space. Examples from yesterday, 300 years ago, and 700 years ago are all of equal value, and can be combined as necessary.
- ▶ Succession of the imperial family and continued existence of the imperial system is the core of the tradition, and there is no element of it that cannot be changed in order to protect it.