

Conclusion Expected in Fall on Female Successor to Imperial Throne

Photo: REUTERS • SUN

A newly established government panel is expected to reach a conclusion this fall on whether to revise the Imperial House Law in order to allow female members of the Imperial family to ascend the Chrysanthemum Throne. Meanwhile, the engagement of Princess Sayako – popularly known as Princess Nori and Emperor Akihito's only daughter – to Kuroda Yoshiaki, a Tokyo metropolitan government employee, was officially announced last December. The wedding will take place sometime this fall. The marriage will be the first in 45 years for a female member of an Emperor's immediate family. This fall is expected to mark “the season of female Imperial family members.”



Princess Sayako and her fiancé Kuroda Yoshiaki, at a press conference regarding their engagement

The Constitution of Japan stipulates that the Imperial Throne shall be dynastic and succeeded to in accordance with the Imperial House Law passed by the Diet. The law allows only male heirs to ascend the Imperial Throne but no male heirs have been born to the Imperial family for almost 40 years since Prince Akishino, the second son of the Emperor, was born in 1965. Of the 22 Imperial family members, only six male members have the right to ascend the throne, raising public concerns about the future of the Imperial family. To respond to such concerns, the government has set up a private advisory panel for the prime minister to discuss a possible revision of the Imperial House Law.

Among those countries which maintain a dynasty, female monarchs have been staying on the throne for more than 50 years in Britain and for about 30 years in Denmark. Sweden, Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands have allowed female heirs to ascend the throne as a result of reforms of royal family-related laws in the latter half of the 20th century. In Asia, Thailand amended its Constitution in 1978 to permit female

members of the royal family to ascend the throne.

Recent public opinion polls show the majority of Japanese are in favor of a female successor. Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro also expressed willingness to sup-

port female ascension, saying: “Japan had female monarchs in the past. I believe the public will support it.”

The debate is expected to heat up this fall when Princess Sayako and Kuroda are to get married.

COMING UP

“Japanese Content” will be the theme of the next issue. Japanese movies, music, animations and computer games are widely seen as “cool,” and have an increasing share of the global market. The Japanese government is now treating the content sector as a core business industry. However, the sector faces a number of special challenges such as training creators and protecting intellectual property rights. JAPAN SPOTLIGHT will analyze this growth sector and will also look at some proposed strategies for nurturing and protecting creative content.

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