General Information

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Description

The reigning Emperor of Japan for 62 years dies. The nation goes into mourning while his heir, Akihito, ascends to the throne.

Keywords

Japan, Emperor, Imperial System, Hirohito, Akihito, Tokyo, Kyoto, Showa, Achievement of Peace, Enlightened Peace, Coronation, Authoritarian, Protest

Citation

MLA
Japan Mourns the Death of Emperor Hirohito

GARRICK UTLEY, anchor:

It’s not often that you can point to a specific day and say ‘this was the beginning of a new era.’ Today in Japan you could; it was the first day of the reign of Emperor Akihito. He is Japan’s 125th emperor, he succeeds his father Hirohito and in the eyes of the Japanese that officially means a new era has begun. What will it mean? Here’s Keith Miller in Tokyo.

KEITH MILLER reporting:

It was the first day of a new era in Japan, but many people spent it grieving over the death of Emperor Hirohito. There was a rush to record condolences in the Imperial Registry. Inside the Palace, the Imperial Family conducted a nightlong vigil beside the Emperor’s body. This morning, the Japanese Cabinet approved February 24 as the date for the state funeral; in the meantime the country is in mourning. In Kyoto, the ancient capital, and all across the country, millions of people paid their respects. The expressions of sorrow showed the magnitude of their loss and revealed the emotions of a people known more for their restraint.

Mr. MASAYA MIYOSHI (President, Federation of Economic Organization): Mature Japanese have lived, you know, turbulent decades with the emperor. And the emperor, the late emperor to us was like a big father.

MILLER: Shops stayed open, but storefront decorations were removed. Department stores draped window displays to honor the world’s longest reigning monarch, before his death Saturday at the age of 87. Some industries slowed production in tribute but printing plants were working overtime to meet the demand of a new reign, since today is the first day of the first year of Heisei, which means the achievement of peace. It also ends the era of Showa, Hirohito’s reign, meaning enlightened peace. Calendars, postage stamps and official seals must be changed to reflect the new era and the date of its inception.

The new Emperor Akihito is Japan’s 125th Emperor, but his coronation will not take place for a year to allow the nation to pay respect to his father. Japanese television devoted hours of programming to introduce the new emperor and his family. He is being presented as a thoroughly modern monarch and
many predict Akihito will symbolize a new and more compassionate Japan.

Prof. KUNIKO INOGUCHI (Sophia University): I think Japanese society will become more liberal, more accessible to foreigners as well, and it will be less hierarchical, less authoritarian, more democratic.

MILLER: A few people tested that theory today by staging a demonstration denouncing Japan’s Imperial System. Leftists claim the late emperor was responsible for Japan’s involvement in the Second World War. But many young people appeared indifferent to the passing of the emperor; to many of them, he was a remote symbol of the past with no real power and with little influence over the way they lived. School children are learning how to draw the new characters for the new era; the elderly sketch the palace preserving at least for them, the end of what they consider their era. It has been 62 years since Japan buried its last emperor, and officials say the funeral for Hirohito will be an elaborate ceremony befitting the country’s imperial tradition that dates back some 2,000 years. Keith Miller, NBC News, Tokyo.