

Exhibition Guide
**Introduction to
Japanese Court Culture**



Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan, is where the emperor resided for approximately 1100 years, from the Heian period (794–1185) until the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The Kyoto Imperial Palace was not only home to the sovereign but also a place that created, propagated, and nurtured Japanese customs while incorporating new cultural objects and trends from abroad.

This exhibition is being held in Kyoto, a place closely related to the imperial family, in commemoration of the enthronement of His Majesty the Emperor.

We hope the exhibition and this guide will give you a sense of the court culture cultivated and maintained at the Imperial Palace.



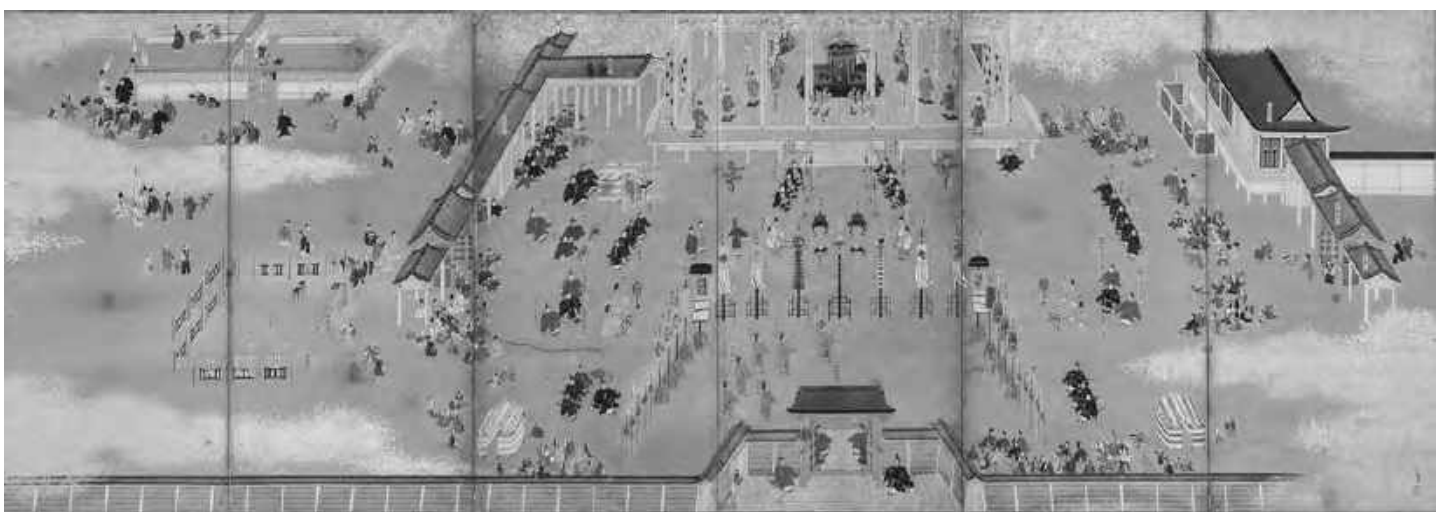
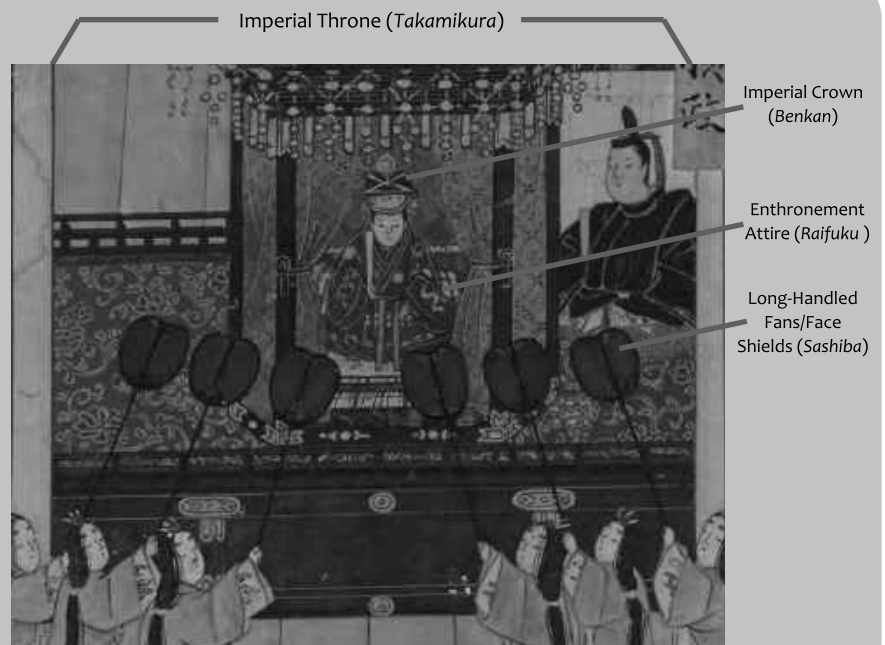
What is "Enthronement"?

"Enthronement" (*sokui*) is the accession to the throne of a new emperor. After this accession has taken place, there are a number of "enthronement ceremonies" in which the accession is formally reported to the people and various parties. The specific ceremonies conducted for an enthronement have changed over time, the greatest of which took place with the enthronement of the Emperor Meiji. Unlike the recent Reiwa enthronement ceremonies, imperial accessions during the Edo period were conducted in the Kyoto Imperial Palace. We get a sense of those enthronements from the screens *Enthronement of Emperor Reigen (1654–1732, r. 1663–1687)* and *Abdication of Emperor Go-Sai (1637–1685, r. 1654–1663)*, on view Nov. 3–23.

The right screen from this pair depicts the enthronement of Emperor Reigen in 1663. The buildings, ritual implements, and people are labeled, giving us a detailed sense of how the ritual was performed and who participated.

Emperor Reigen Seated on the Imperial Throne (*Takamikura*) in the *Shishinden*

- The climax of the enthronement is when the fan-shaped face shields (*sashiba*) are pulled away, revealing the new emperor.
- No other enthronement screen so clearly depicts the face of the emperor. The emperor at the time was only ten years old and appears quite innocent.
- The emperor wears an imperial crown (*benkan*) of gilded metal decorated with jewels and wears red enthronement attire (*raifuku*). Both show Chinese influence.



Enthronement of Emperor Reigen (1654–1732, r. 1663–1687) and *Abdication of Emperor Go-Sai (1637–1685, r. 1654–1663)* (right screen) By Kano Einō (1631–1697)
Edo period, 17th century Kyoto National Museum (on view Nov. 3–23)

Commoners Watching the Ceremonies

In the Edo period, the people were able to watch the enthronement of an emperor.

Look for actual enthronement attire (*raifuku*) and an actual imperial crown (*benkan*) from the Edo period on view in the galleries!



Chinese Characters (*Kanji*) and Japanese Phonetic Characters (*Kana*)

The culture of the Japanese court is a *mélange* of Chinese and Japanese elements. Both cultures were valued, and they were often shown side by side or combined. The emperor, who wore costumes and engaged in cultural practices reflecting both Japanese and Chinese influences, served as a role model for the people.

The eighth-century poetry anthology *Man'yōshū* helps us to understand the relationship between written Chinese and Japanese.

The *Man'yōshū* is an eighth-century poetry anthology compiled at the end of the Nara period. At that time, the Japanese vernacular language was written using only Chinese characters (*kanji*). These characters were often used not for their meaning but for their phonetic sounds.

The earliest *Man'yōshū* manuscript is lost, but some very early copies still survive. This exhibition features the oldest of them, the "Katsura no Miya Version" and the second oldest "Indigo-Dyed Paper Version" (below, on view Oct. 10–Nov. 1). Both are from the Heian period.

Man'yōgana (Phonetic Kanji)

* あし *ashi*
 の [no]
 や *ya*
 の *no*
 う *u*
 な *na*
 ひ *hi*
 を *otome*
 と *め*
 の *no*
 葦屋之宇奈比處女之

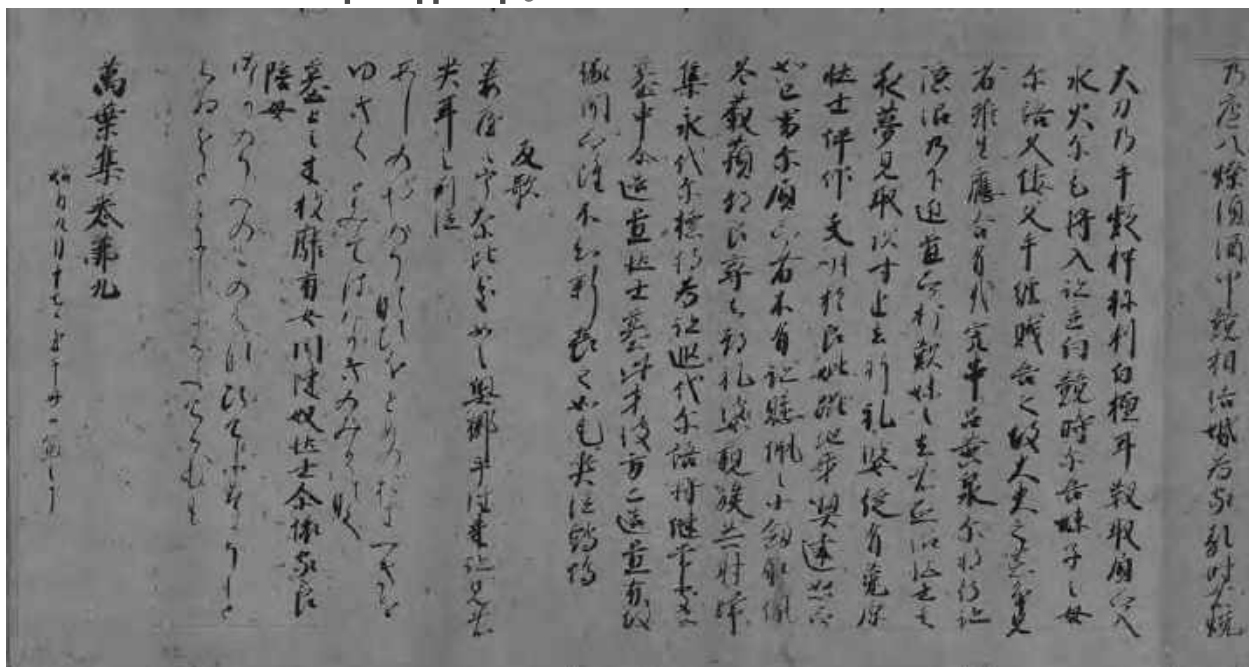
This Japanese poem is written with *kanji*. The meaning of the Chinese characters is irrelevant; instead, each character is used to represent a sound. These *Man'yōgana* Chinese characters were gradually abbreviated into the phonetic Japanese *hiragana* and *katakana* we know today.

*In *Ashinoya, the Maiden of Unai...*

Same Japanese poem written in phonetic Japanese characters (*hiragana*)

Japanese poem written partially in phonetic Chinese characters (*Man'yōgana*).

The name comes from the light blue indigo-dyed paper.



At the end of the scroll is written: "Begun on the 17th day of the 9th month and finished on the 20th day." This tells us that the entire scroll, over ten meters long, was copied in just four days!

By the Heian period, they did not know how to read this part of the Nara-period text, so it does not include any phonetic transcription following the *kanji*.

National Treasure
 Fragment of *Man'yōshū* (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves), Vol. 9, *Ranshi* (Indigo-Dyed Paper) Version
 Attributed to Fujiwara no Korefusa (1030–1096)
 Heian period, 11th century
 Kyoto National Museum

The name of the current Japanese reign era, *Reiwa*, is derived from characters in the *Man'yōshū*!



Life in the Heian Period Court

The Higiyōsha (Empress Consort's Quarters) is one of the halls of the Imperial Palace. It was also called the Fujitsubo (Wisteria Courtyard) because it faces onto an inner garden planted with wisteria. In the famous novel *The Tale of Genji*, written in the Heian period, the main character Hikaru Genji's longtime love interest Fujitsubo no Miya lived in this hall. This Higiyōsha was also the residence of the novel's author, Murasaki Shikibu (dates unknown), and the empress she served, Fujiwara no Shōshi (988–1074).

Scenes from *The Tale of Genji*: "A Molted Cicada Shell" (*Utsusemi*)
Painting by Tosa Mitsuyoshi (1539–1613) and Chōjirō (dates unknown)
Calligraphy by Emperor Go-Yōzei (1571–1617, r. 1586–1611) and others
Momoyama period, 17th century
First of four albums
Kyoto National Museum



The lifestyle of Heian period aristocrats

The History of the Higiyōsha

During the Heian period, the Higiyōsha was the residence of the empress consorts. It was also the venue for ceremonies including the Judai no Gi, at which a court woman is espoused to become empress consort.

This hall later disappeared, but it was rebuilt especially for the purpose of holding ceremonies in 1794, during the latter half of the Edo period, following Heian period prototypes. This grew out of the revivalist trend in Japanese scholarship at the time and an interest in reproducing classical buildings and rituals. The Higiyōsha burned down once again, but it was rebuilt in 1855 and has survived to the present day.

This exhibition features furnishings from the Edo-period Higiyōsha, giving us a glimpse into the elusive, now lost lifestyle and rituals of the Kyoto Imperial Palace's Higiyōsha.



Furnishings for the Higiyōsha (Empress Consort's Quarters):
Pillows and Double-Shelf Cabinet with Cranes Grasping Pine Branches; Double Shelf with Cranes Grasping Pine Branches; Mirror Box Stand and Mirror Box with Cranes Grasping Pine Branches; Arm Rest
Edo period, dated 1794/1855
Tokyo National Museum

The works introduced in this guide are all exhibited on the 1st floor of the exhibition!



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