

Theme for the New Year's Poetry Reading(2024) :WA (HARMONY)

His Majesty the Emperor

Seeing the smiles of the people
I meet during my many journeys
Throughout the country
Fills my heart with peace

(Background of the poem)

Their Imperial Majesties the Emperor and the Empress have visited almost every prefecture in Japan, including the period when they were the Crown Prince and Princess. (His Majesty the Emperor has visited all 47 prefectures. Her Majesty the Empress has visited 45 prefectures including 2 prefectures visited online.) Since the beginning of the Reiwa period, Their Majesties the Emperor and the Empress together have visited 28 prefectures including online visits.

During each visit, Their Majesties were delighted to receive a warm welcome from the local people. His Majesty the Emperor composed this poem expressing his feeling of peace when he saw the smiles of the people they met in every place.

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Her Majesty the Empress

How moved I was to read
My daughter's deep feelings for peace
After her first visit
To Hiroshima

(Background of the poem)

Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko, the daughter of Their Imperial Majesties the Emperor and the Empress, visited Hiroshima for the first time when she participated in her school trip in May during her third year in junior high school. In Hiroshima, Princess Aiko visited the Atomic Bomb Dome and the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and, realising how important peace is, her wish for peace grew deeper. She wrote about this experience and expressed her deep feelings for peace in her composition upon graduation from Gakushuin Girls' Junior High School.

As Their Imperial Majesties the Emperor and the Empress always wish for peace and hope that sentiments toward the importance of peace be inherited by the next generation and beyond, they were touched by Princess Aiko's graduation composition. Her Majesty the Empress composed this poem to express such warm feelings.

His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino

Reflected on the surface
of Lake Towada in the early morning,
the autumn leaves
on the surrounding trees
whose colors have emerged.

(Background of the poem)

In the autumn, forty-some years ago, His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akishino paid a visit to the Tohoku Region. On that occasion he took an early morning walk by Lake Towada, enjoying the sight of the limpid waters of the lake and the crimson foliage on the nearby trees. The Crown Prince has written about that scenery in the above poem.

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Her Imperial Highness Crown Princess Akishino

The atmosphere in the stadium softened
when the children called out,
with enthusiastic cheers,
to the athletes assembled in Kagoshima.

(Background of the poem)

Last October Their Imperial Highnesses Crown Prince and Crown Princess Akishino visited Kagoshima Prefecture to attend the “National Sports Festival for People with a Disability.” During the opening ceremony, held under a fine clear autumn sky, the local children in the stadium stands called out the name of each prefecture and municipality as the teams passed in front of them and shouted “kibaiyanse”, the word in Kagoshima dialect for “gambatte,” the Japanese term of encouragement. The children greeted the athletes with enthusiastic cheering, accompanied by the sounds and the visual movements of the brightly colored stick balloons they waved. The Crown Princess wrote the above poem as she recalled how the mood in the stadium softened at the sight of the children cheering.

Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko

Surviving centuries of hardship
The words of Waka poems
Touch my heart today

(Background of the poem)

Her Imperial Highness Princess Aiko composed this Waka poem to express her fascination with old Waka poetry. She entered the Department of Japanese Language and Literature in the Faculty of Letters at Gakushuin University in April 2020, and became a fourth year student last April. Princess Aiko has been impressed to learn in her studies that Waka poems composed between the 10th and 13th centuries have survived nearly one thousand years even through some turbulent times, and have been passed on to contemporary people.