

## **Imperial Female Family Branches Could Cause Troubles**

Yoshiko Sakurai

Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's Cabinet has launched a panel to consider allowing princesses to create imperial family branches after they marry. The Cabinet reportedly plans to promote this idea to reduce the burden on Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko in their advanced ages. But it does not lead to any solution to problems facing the imperial family and Japan. Rather, it could lead the imperial succession to switch from the "male line" to the "female line." I am concerned that such idea could cause troubles in the future.

### **Possible switch of the line of succession**

Japan's imperial succession problem as the family's greatest crisis has been solved for the immediate future since Prince Hisahito was born as the first son of Prince Akishino five years ago. Crown Prince Naruhito is first in line to the throne, followed by his younger brother Prince Akishino and Prince Hisahito. The imperial succession is bound to remain stable for several decades thanks to the three princes.

The present crisis represents the possibility that there could be no imperial family member to support Prince Hisahito if all young princesses in the family marry commoners and leave the family. They include the Akishino family's Princess Mako who has turned 20. In the absence of supporters within the imperial family, Prince Hisahito could be forced to conduct as the emperor all of at least 20 key annual imperial rites and official works by himself that are now carried out by multiple imperial family members led by the Emperor and Empress. He alone would have to shoulder nearly 2,700-year-old imperial tradition. Such absolute loneliness could seriously weaken the foundation of the imperial family.

Therefore, none may oppose any plan to increase imperial family members. Even if any such plan is expected to easily gain support from the Japanese people, however, the creation of imperial family branches led by princesses for that purpose may nullify the male line of imperial succession that has been secured for the immediate future. The male line of succession does not necessarily mean an emperor has to be a male but means an emperor's father has to be traced back to a former emperor. Children born from a marriage between a princess and a man outside the imperial family belong to the female line, meaning their mother can be traced back to an emperor, whether they are girls or boys. If any of such children assumes the throne, the imperial succession will switch from the male line to the female line.

### **Adoption of former family members**

Based on Japan's long history and deep civilization, we are responsible for considering how to increase the number of imperial family members while maintaining the true nature of the family. We must now learn the way from Emperor Akihito as well as his father, the late Emperor Hirohito.

The late Emperor Hirohito's first four children were girls. On March 26, 1931, after his fourth child Princess Atsuko was born, the Emperor asked elder statesman Kinmochi Saionji to consider whether the Imperial Household Law could be revised to introduce an adopted-child system into the imperial family.

Meanwhile, when a panel of experts was recommending the acceptance of the female line of imperial succession under then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko presumably requested Princess Akishino to make efforts to give birth to a prince.

Not only I but also many others wish to make best efforts to keep the long-standing tradition of Japan's imperial family. The solution may not be the creation of imperial family branches led by princesses but the introduction of a system allowing former imperial family members in the male line to be adopted into imperial family branches including those of the late Princes Chichibu and Takamatsu, brothers of the late Emperor Hirohito, which have been lost in the absence of any child adoption system for the imperial family.

*Yoshiko Sakurai is President, Japan Institute for National Fundamentals.*