

# 第4部 課題

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## 第18回 毎日パソコン入力コンクール 秋季大会

### 【課題】 第4部 英文B

With 1 year to go till Crown Prince's accession,  
time to consider era name

制限時間 5分

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Editorial: With 1 year to go till Crown Prince's accession, time to consider era name 

One year from today, on May 1, 2019, Crown Prince Naruhito will accede to the Chrysanthemum Throne, bringing an end to the Heisei era. 

When considering what era names mean to us, we must look back on history. 

With Japan's surrender in World War II, the Imperial House Law of 1889 and other laws that provided the legal grounds for era names was abolished. In response, the then Japanese Cabinet approved an era name bill that stipulated that a new era name would be instituted when the Imperial Throne was inherited. However, the Allied occupation forces in Japan led by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers -- commonly known in Japan as GHQ -- forced the Cabinet to retract the decision, out of concern that continuing to institute era names would be akin to recognizing the authority of the emperor. 

While the era name at the time, Showa, remained in use with no legal grounds, Jinja Honcho (Association of Shinto Shrines) and other religious entities began a movement to promote legislation on era names. 

Encouraged by such moves by religious organizations, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), led primarily by its hawkish members, took steps toward passing legislation that would make

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the implementation of era names official. In June of 1979, also known as the 54th year of the Showa era, the Era Name Act was passed following fierce debate in the Diet. 

According to a public opinion poll conducted by the Mainichi Shimbun in March 1979, three months before the law's passage, the era name Showa was deeply rooted in people's lives and nearly 90 percent of respondents wanted to continue the use of era names. When asked whether they used era names or the Gregorian year, 78 percent of respondents said the former, far more than the mere 4 percent who said they used the latter. Those who said they used era names half the time and Gregorian years the other half of the time stood at 16 percent. 

Meanwhile, however, only 21 percent of respondents agreed with passing legislation to ensure the continued existence of era names, and more than twice that figure, or 44 percent, said that the use of era names should continue as a tradition, as was the case at the time of the survey. 

The Japanese Communist Party and the then Japanese Socialist Party contended that legislating the use of era names not only violated the spirit of the constitutional principle that sovereignty resides with the people, but also that using era names was inconvenient in the age of internationalization, and argued for the sole use of Gregorian years. 

Around that time, a buzz was created by a novel titled "Gengo saiban" (Era name lawsuit), written by author Yo Sano. The protagonist of the story, who was born on the cusp of the Taisho

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and Showa eras, blacks out the era name written on their driver's license and writes the Gregorian year in its stead. The question that is being asked is whether such an act constitutes a crime. From the novel, one can sense a certain level of vigilance toward prewar nationalism and the problems inherent in the Imperial system. 📄

The era name system, which originated in ancient China, has its roots in the control that emperors wielded over "time" itself. It is unsurprising, then, that there arose concerns that legislating era names could legitimize the emperor's authority, creating momentum for a return to a state of affairs similar to that of prewar Japan. 📄

In reality, however, things did not pan out the way those worried about the legal stipulation of era names had expected. Few politicians drew parallels between the era name system and the prewar Imperial system, or made strong calls for the abolition of era names. 📄

This can be attributed to the fact that the relationship between the emperor and the Japanese public became increasingly unlikely to be affected by the dark memories of prewar Japan. The incumbent Emperor Akihito, who was the first to accede to the throne under the current Constitution, has shown respect for the sovereignty of the people and has committed himself to serving as a "symbol of the State and of the unity of the People," as stipulated by the supreme law. The people, in turn, respect the Emperor's approach to his role. 📄

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Times have changed, as well. Japan's participation and involvement in the international community has further promoted the simultaneous use of Gregorian years and Japanese era names. The inconvenience caused when trying to calculate the number of years, due to the era names having switched during a same Gregorian year, has led many to switch over to using Gregorian years. 

It is true, however, that era names, which have long been a part of Japanese culture, are still deeply ingrained in society. The mere mention of era names like "Showa" or "Heisei" allows the public to conjure up a shared sense for what those eras represent. 

It has become more common to use Gregorian years in everyday Japanese society, but as a general rule, government organizations employ era names when drawing up official documents. Even when indicating policy targets, era names -- such as the 40th year of the Heisei era or the 50th year of the Heisei era -- are used, even though neither will exist, since Emperor Akihito will abdicate in the 31st year of the Heisei era. There is no legal requirement for government offices to use era names instead of Gregorian years; the decision to use one or the other is left to the discretion of each administrative body. But the tradition of using era names in official documents has remained unchanged since the prewar era. 

Going forward, Japan must face up to long-term challenges such as its declining and ultra-aging population. In debating such

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long-term issues, it is much more logical to use Gregorian years, which display a continuity of time, instead of era names, which change every time the emperor does. The government should promote the practice of using both era names and Gregorian years on official documents. 

There is increasing interest in what the next era name will be. Initially, the government had planned to announce the next era name around this coming summer, in preparation for the switch. More recently, however, the government has been considering pushing back the announcement of the new era name until next February or later, due to concerns from conservatives within the LDP that announcing the new era name too far in advance would shift the public's interest from the sitting Emperor to the next one. 

Is such a concern, however, a strong enough rationale to delay the announcement? Considering how much of an impact a change in era name will have on the public's day-to-day lives, it's best that the new name be announced as soon as possible. 

Based on what we have learned from the past, how will we deal with the use of era names and Gregorian years? The answer to this question is closely intertwined with the form and nature of the coming future.

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