

Sukisaiden Sacred Rice

The numerous ceremonies that accompany a Japanese emperor's ascension to the throne are complex and intricate. Among the most significant is the Daijosai, a solemn Shinto thanksgiving rite in which the emperor offers newly harvested rice and other items to his imperial ancestors and the deities of heaven and earth, thereby ensuring that the gods look kindly upon the new reign. Since the seventh century, the rice used in the Daijosai has come from two fields, one each in the eastern and western parts of the country. The selection of these two fields is determined through a turtle-shell divination rite that indicates the general direction in which each field is to be located in relation to the capital. In 1914, upon the coronation of Emperor Taisho (1879–1926), the oracle bones pointed to Kagawa, where a field in what is now the town of Ayagawa was chosen to provide the sacred rice from western Japan.

The imperial rice was planted in May 1915 in preparation for the Daijosai, held in November of the same year. The elaborate planting ceremony, in which the local people wore colorful costumes, performed a dance, and sang a song written for the occasion, has been reenacted in Ayagawa every June since 1986. This Sukisaiden Festival takes place next to the paddies where the Daijosai rice was grown in 1915 and is performed by local schoolchildren, including students from a school founded to commemorate the great honor the court bestowed upon Ayagawa more than a century ago. The Sukisaiden Memorial Museum, about 15 minutes on foot from the rice paddies, offers a comprehensive description of the events of 1914 and 1915.