

First Miss Japan, now Universe

Compiled from AP, Kyodo

MEXICO CITY — A 20-year-old dancer from Japan was crowned Miss Universe 2007 on Monday, marking only the second time her country has won the world beauty title.

Dressed in a black, red and purple Japanese-style gown, Riyo Mori nervously grabbed the hands of first runnerup, Natalia Guimaraes of Brazil, just before the winner was announced. Then she threw her hands up and covered her mouth, overcome with emotion.

But she composed herself enough to catch the diamond-and-pearl-studded headpiece, which was valued at \$ 250,000, as it slipped off her head when Miss Universe 2006 Zuleyka Rivera of Puerto Rico crowned her. Mori immediately put it back on.



Riyo Mori wears her new crown after being named Miss Universe 2007 in Mexico City on Monday. AP PHOTO

Born Dec. 24, 1986, Mori learned dancing at a Canadian ballet school and currently is a jazz dance instructor at her mother's dance school in the city of Shizuoka.

The first Japanese contestant to win the Miss Universe pageant was Akiko Kojima in 1959.

Last year, Kurara Chibana from Naha, Okinawa Prefecture, was the runnerup. In the 1953 contest, Kinuko Ito of Japan placed third.

Miss USA Rachel Smith, who slipped and fell to the floor during the evening gown competition and was jeered by the Mexican audience during the interview phase, was the contest's fourth runnerup.

Mori won the cheers of the Mexico City audience when she opened her interview by saying, "Hola, Mexico!"

"I learned how to always be happy, be patient and to be positive, and this is what I want to teach to the next generation," she said during the interview competition.

She wants to someday open an international dance school in Tokyo.

"Right now I am only 20 years old, so I'm really excited about what I'm going to be able to do at this age to benefit society," Mori said after winning.

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