

RESOURCE PAPER - 24



**INDO-JAPAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY**

# Architects of Modern Japan

by  
**Suguna Ramamoorthy**



**Heisei Era - Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko**



**Emperor Akihito with Prime Minister Narendra Modi**

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## PREFACE

Japan and India have a great bond. We both share a great history and are peace loving countries and our relations from time immemorial have been very cordial. Significant milestones have been achieved in the last four years and there is a tremendous potential for greater cooperation and development !

The coming together of Japan and India will not only enhance economic prosperity but will also establish peace in the Asian continent. The Heisei Emperor has always desired for 'global peace' and so I am sure will be with the Reiwa Emperor !

I am extremely happy that at this historic moment Secretary-General Ms. Suguna Ramamoorthy has come up with the Resource Paper 'Architects of Modern Japan'. I am reminded of the Indian Kings and the Queens of the past who have carved a niche for themselves in administration and politics. I always believe that while Japan and India sharing many commonalities, their cooperation will set a new direction for countries to follow.

I take this opportunity to place on record our grateful thanks to Heisei Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko for considering India 'very special'. Our hearty congratulations to the Reiwa Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako and wish the royal couple greater success in the new era and also continued partnership.

May 2019

**N. Kumar**  
President IJCCI

# Architects of Modern Japan

## Introduction

Japan is called ‘The Land of the Rising Sun’; the Emperor of Japan, the Head of the Imperial Family, is the Head of the country. Historically, he is the highest authority of the Shinto religion. According to Japanese mythology, the Emperor (Tennō meaning ‘Heavenly Sovereign’) and the Imperial Family are said to be the direct descendents of the Sun Goddess ‘Amaterasu’. The Emperor is the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people. The Emperor of Japan is the only Head of the State in the world with the title “Emperor”. The Imperial House is the oldest monarchical house in existence in the world. Emperor Jimmu is considered to be the first Emperor of Japan - 660 BC, and down the line there are as many as 125 Emperors, till April 2019. Emperor’s Birthday (Tennō Tanjōbi) is a national holiday in Japan and the Japanese diplomatic missions across the world celebrate the Emperor’s birthday every year, as Emperor is regarded as the symbol of Japan. The contributions made by the Emperors of ‘Modern Japan’ are immeasurable. This Resource Paper is an attempt to pay a small tribute to them.

## **Meiji Era (‘enlightened rule’) October 1868 - July 1912**

Although there were a number of Emperors before Emperor Mutsuhito (Meiji), it was Emperor Meiji who first brought in a revolution in transforming feudal Japan into one of the great powers of the modern world. Some of the important events that occurred during Meiji period worth mentioning: restored practical Imperial rule; adoption of Cabinet system of Govt. (1885); the opening of DIET (1890); first Industrial Revolution in Japan; built railroads, improved roads, and inaugurated a land reform program

to prepare the country for further development. It inaugurated a new Western-based education system for all young people; sent thousands of students to the United States and the Europe; hired more than 3,000 Westerners to teach modern science, mathematics, technology, and foreign languages in Japan; set up a powerful army and a navy base etc. The First Sino-Japanese War (July 1894 - April 1895) was fought over influence in Korea - an unbroken success by Japanese land and naval forces.

### **Taishō Era ('great justice') July 1912 - December 1926**

Then came Yoshihito's rule, son of Emperor Mutsuhito, representing a continuation of Japan's rise on the international scene and liberalism at home. Politically, the country moved towards broader representational government. After participating in World War I on the side of the Allies, Japan's international standing was enhanced on top of her gaining the South Pacific colonies of Germany. The Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 killed over a hundred thousand Japanese, severely challenged the country, but nonetheless, Japan's growth as a new empire was not checked. Towards the end of the Taishō Period, extreme nationalism took root in Japan, leading to increased antagonism towards western powers and regional neighbors. An economic depression at the end of Taishō period caused much suffering.

### **Shōwa Era ('period of enlightened harmony') Dec. 1926 -Jan. 1989**

After the demise of Emperor Yoshihito, Hirohito took over as Emperor, the longest ruling Emperor in Japanese history. During the early Shōwa period ultra-nationalism was particularly strong in the Japanese Imperial Army and Japanese Imperial Navy, to the point that the Imperial Army in 1931 independently decided to invade Manchuria - without orders from the Emperor or his government. With much of the populace and the armed forces

radicalized, Emperor Hirohito and his government felt compelled to move towards authoritarian rule in order to maintain some control over Japan. Motivated by militarism and ultra-nationalism, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations in 1931. In 1937 it launched an invasion on China, the second Sino-Japanese war. Japan needed rice, oil, iron ore, and other commodities to continue its fight to conquer China, and hence invaded the Philippines, French Indochina, Malaysia and Indonesia. It is a historically significant period. The world war II shook the world with its horrid tentacles. After suffering terrible devastation in Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombings by the American forces, Emperor Hirohito finally announced the surrender of Japan to the allies. Emperor Hirohito regretted terribly for participating in the wars.

After the end of war, many of the wartime companies and much of the technology used during the war were converted to peaceful economic development. Japanese private companies expanded quickly and fearlessly. They borrowed massive amounts from banks and took on large debts. The private companies developed rapidly and merged so as to compete more effectively against Detroit's Big Three. Toyota, Nissan, Isuzu, Toyo Kogyo (Mazda), and Mitsubishi all decided to produce full lines. An upstart motorcycle company founded by Honda Soichiro entered the auto market in 1963 with a great long-run success. In 1953, two young mavericks, Morita Akio and Ibuka Masaru, struggled for months and ventured into the making of transistors. Beginning with the radio in the 1950s, their infant company, Sony, soon emerged as the global leader in quality, an innovation in consumer electronics goods.

Nationalism and the desire to catch up with the West persisted after World War II, but the efforts were focused on economic and industrial goals. Machine gun factories were converted to make sewing machines and optical weapon factories produced cameras and binoculars. The great devastation of the Japanese

economy during the war and the need to rebuild it from scratch often led to the introduction of new technology and new management styles which gave these companies a chance to update and upgrade themselves. Their changes were met with a friendly international environment of free trade, cheap technology and cheap raw materials. The Shōwa era is considered to be very important as it had stood a tough time and the necessity to build a ‘new modern Japan’ was mandatory.

### **Heisei Era (‘achieving peace’) January 1989 - April 2019**

Peace loving, simple-living Prince Tsugu, eldest son, and the fifth child was born to Emperor Hirohito and Empress Nagako on December 23, 1933, later to be known as Emperor Akihito, was initially taught by private tutors, and later moved to the Gakushuin University. His education was broadened to include training in the English language and in Western culture. He took up Marine biology as a field of endeavour. Popular scientific journals such as ‘Japanese Journal of Icythyology’ and ‘Gene’ had published several papers written by Emperor Akihito.

Emperor Akihito got married to Michiko Shōda, the daughter of a milling company owner in 1959. The couple have three children - sons named Naruhito and Fumihito, and a daughter named Sayako Kuroda. Though he is blessed with a few grandchildren, Emperor Akihito and the rest of the nation were particularly excited about the birth of grandson Hisahito (2006), the first boy born in the royal family after a long period of 41 years.

### **How Emperor Akihito redefined the role of Emperor**

“I will always be one with the people and uphold the Constitution”, the young Emperor’s words were warmly welcomed by citizens of Japan at the ceremonial function of his ascension to the throne on 12th November 1990, attended by the

Kings and the Queens and the Presidents and the Prime Ministers from all over the world. He said he would always consider the happiness of the Japanese and make sure the emperorship was suited to modern Japan. During his 30-year reign, he defied monarchical norms, drawing both criticism and praise, leaving behind a legacy of modernity and compassion.

When Emperor Akihito ascended the Chrysanthemum Throne, Japan's imperial dynasty was in a crisis. After Japan's defeat in World War II, the Japanese emperor was no longer considered a divine, god-like figure. Looking for change, Emperor Akihito tried to emulate the constitutional monarchy in Great Britain, tutored and risen to instill foreign ideals, married outside the imperial circle. Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko Shōda's three children were brought up by themselves in their palace, contrary to the tradition, they were sent to Oxford for higher university education.

Emperor Akihito did not, as was then the fashion, wear military uniform nor did he have any direct involvement in the war. He was completely untainted by Japan's military past. In Japanese history, warrior emperors are an exception and not the rule - Emperor Akihito proved this in letter and spirit. On the contrary, having grown up with memories of war and post-war hardships and austerity, he played a decisive role in the period of high economic growth.

### **Emperor Akihito is unique**

Three decades of Heisei era - an era named in the hopes of "achieving peace", has come to an end. Fittingly, it was an era in which Japan enjoyed a period of continuous peace - and yet it was also marked by economic stagnation and disaster. In such a time of both peace and tumult, one of the most indelible images that

captured Emperor Akihito's role may be of him kneeling on the floor of an evacuation center with his wife, Empress Michiko, surrounded by victims.

Indeed, as the symbol of the state, the Emperor has carved out a role as a unifying figure during times of national tragedy, as well as a healer of wounds in other countries that were ravaged during World War II. As much as this image as a unifying and peaceful figure may be taken for granted, it is a role that he carved out for himself - one that should not go underappreciated considering that the definition of "symbol of the state" (as the position of Emperor is described in the Constitution) has been an elusive one.

"The symbolic Imperial system is actually quite difficult to define precisely, because it is very open to interpretation", says Prof. Hideya Kawanishi, an expert on the Imperial family. Emperor Akihito focused on developing a more intimate relationship with the people of Japan. He shed the god-like image that the Imperial family had held onto through myths, maintaining that emperors were direct descendants of the sun goddess 'Amaterasu Omikami'. Scholars claim that his marriage with Empress Michiko who had no aristocratic background played a significant part in bringing the then Crown Prince Akihito "down from the clouds". Soon after joining the Imperial family she would be seen kneeling and talking to members of the public - a way of communicating that Emperor Akihito himself began to adopt. Emblematic of this, Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko knelt among and mingled with disaster victims at temporary evacuation sites whenever natural calamities took their toll on the nation. This was in stark contrast with previous emperors, who would visit those who were marginalized but conduct their "inspections" standing. They may as well be called "the social welfare

Imperial Couple”, said Kenneth Ruoff, a history professor and an expert on the Japanese Imperial system. They have very actively tried to compress the margins of society and worked to bring various disadvantaged groups into the mainstream. Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko visited evacuation centers and disaster areas following the Tohoku earthquake of 2011 for seven consecutive weeks, from the end of that March to early May. Over the years and decades, they have visited all 14 health sanatoriums for leprosy patients around Japan and far-flung islands that faced decreasing population. The Imperial Couple are popular because they brought unity in an era of division and discordance.

The Emperor has said during a news conference in 1981 that there are four dates in the calendar considered by him as ‘utmost important’ in Japan: when the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the days World War II ended in Okinawa and mainland Japan. In a break from tradition, he also visited Okinawa as Crown Prince in 1975 - the first time that a member of the Imperial family had set foot in the prefecture since World War II to pay his respects in the wake of the devastation caused by the war. He followed this with another visit in April 1993 - this time a first by a reigning emperor.

“Emperor Akihito personally experienced devastation that the war brought to Japan, and understood the kind of damage the war and imperialism inflicted on other countries”, observes a historian. This was something he felt incredibly strong, combined with the fact that during his reign there were still large numbers of Japanese alive who had suffered personally in the war. Despite resistance from conservative critics, Emperor Akihito offered an apology during a banquet for South Korean President Roh Tae Woo when he was on a state visit to Japan in

1990, saying “I cannot help but feel the deepest remorse, thinking of the pain your people suffered during the sorrowful years brought about by my country”, Also, during a state visit to China in 1992, he expressed his ‘deepest sorrow’ that “There was an unfortunate time during which my country caused great pain and suffering”.

As far as the economy is concerned, the Heisei era was not a bright one. At the beginning of the Heisei Era, seven Japanese companies were among the world’s top 10 firms in terms of aggregate market value. In 2018, the world’s top 10 firms were dominated by American and Chinese firms, only a couple of Japanese companies found place in the top world 50 companies. But, there was a tremendous improvement in the digital life of the Japanese. As of 2000, only about 30 percent of Japan’s population used the internet but over the last 10 years the infrastructure was established in all municipalities nationwide with high-speed internet access. Further, Japan is the first country in the world to fully convert to digital terrestrial TV broadcasting. Also, the rapid urban development programme was a remarkable success in the Heisei era. Tokyo was redeveloped as an attractive mega-city that features compact cities and Tokyo is now placed third - only after London and New York.

### **Emperor Akihito’s relations with India**

As Crown Prince he visited India in December 1960 with Crown Princess Michiko, the first ever visit of the Imperial family to India . In 2013, the royal couple visited Delhi and Chennai and interacted fondly. At a banquet hosted in honour of the Emperor and Empress at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Emperor fondly recalled his maiden visit to India in 1960 “We were received with

the most gracious hospitality by their Excellencies the then President Rajendra Prasad, Vice President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. I fondly recall the warm welcome we received from the people everywhere we went on our journey around the country, including the Delhi citizens' welcome event at Red Fort organized by the then Prime Minister Nehru”.

“As a student, the Empress had encountered Glimpses of World History, a book written by Prime Minister Nehru in the form of letters addressed to his daughter Indira, and I am sure the Empress still cherishes the memories of the various occasions in the course of our visit when Prime Minister Nehru joined us”. The emperor recalled how in the 6th century, Buddhism originated in India and was introduced to Japan. He said, “In the eighth century, the Indian monk Bodhisena travelled to Japan all the way from India, presided as the officiating priest at the eye-opening ceremony of the statue of the Great Buddha in Nara, in the presence of Empress Koken, Ex-Emperor Shomu and Empress Dowager Komyo. The brush which was used in the ceremony to paint the eyes of the Great Buddha is preserved to this day as a treasure at the Shosoin Repository”. He also fondly recalled the visit Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore paid to Japan before World War II and remembered, how in their previous visit, they had visited the Tagore House in Kolkatta. “I thank the Indian Parliament for paying tribute to Japan's atomic bomb victims in August every year and hope the current visit will help to further deepen the mutual understanding between the peoples of our two countries and further strengthen our bond of trust and friendship”, he said during an emotional address. Emperor Akihito’s relations with India is considered ‘very special’. He believed in working closely with India

not only for the good of Japan and India but for the good of Asia at large.

The Indo-Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry considers itself highly privileged. The Founder Member and Former Chairman Dr. N. Krishnaswami (late) is the recipient of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan's Decoration twice - in 1993 and 2000 - for his outstanding contributions to the promotion of India-Japan relations. When the Emperor visited Chennai in 2013, Dr. Krishnaswami had the privilege of meeting the Emperor who said, "I am very happy that you are doing a great service. Continue to build India-Japan relations", and this was recalled quite often by Dr. Krishnaswami until his last days in 2018.

With all humility, I recall my pleasant meeting with His Majesty Emperor Akihito at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo during my maiden visit to Japan in 1996. It was really a great moment for me when he shook hands and spent a few minutes talking about India and Tamilnadu, and with his soft and gentle voice remarked "You are coming from God's country". Again in 2013 when I had an opportunity to greet the Emperor and Empress in Chennai, I recalled my first meeting with him at the Imperial Palace. Emperor Akihito responded by saying "Good - strengthening Japan-India relations for over 15 years! Keep up the spirit". The words of the Emperor still linger in my ears.

### **Heisei Emperor's last New year's address**

On January 02, 2019, the royal palace was flanked by people when Emperor and Empress made a public appearance and wished the people. True to the spirit, "It gives me deep comfort that the Heisei Era is coming to an end, free of war in Japan. I'm sincerely glad to celebrate the new year together with you under the clear sky. I pray for peace and happiness of the people of our

country and the world”. It is said to be an emotional address, and thousands of Japanese bid a tearful farewell .

### **Reiwa Era (‘beautiful harmony’) May 2019**

Emperor Naruhito, born on February 23, 1960, son of royal couple Emperor Akihito and Michiko, a History graduate from Gakushuin University and an Oxford University graduate, married to Masako more than 25 years ago, became the Emperor and Empress of the Reiwa Era on May 01, 2019.

Emperor Naruhito was presented with the sacred imperial treasures of a sword and a jewel, as well as the seal of state and his personal imperial seal, at a solemn ceremony in the Room of Pine in the Imperial Palace. He swore to “Act according to the Constitution, while always turning my thoughts to the people and standing with them”. Emperor Naruhito also said he would “reflect deeply on the course” taken by his popular father who was seen as having brought the world’s oldest monarchy closer to the people, especially during natural disasters. “When I think about the important responsibility I have assumed, I am filled with a sense of solemnity”, said Emperor Naruhito.

“I want to devote myself to the happiness of the people, so I will make efforts to that end while gaining more experience”, says Empress Masako, born on Dec. 09, 1963, as the eldest daughter of then-diplomat Hisashi Owada, a former vice foreign minister and judge at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, who spent her early childhood in Moscow and New York. After returning to Japan, she had school education in Tokyo. She majored in international economics at Harvard and studied politics in the University of Tokyo's Faculty of Law before passing the Japanese Foreign Ministry's entrance exam in 1986, worked in London as a probationary diplomat at the Japanese Embassy and studied at the

University of Oxford's Balliol College for two years. Fluent in English, French and German, she engaged in negotiations to resolve Japan - U.S. trade disputes. After returning to Japan she married the then Crown Prince Naruhito in 1993. Princess Toshi is the only daughter of the royal couple.

**Conclusion:**

Japan has undergone tremendous transformation in the last 150 years. The Emperors have made significant contributions in the making of 'Modern Japan'. The Emperors have been reiterating peace and harmony for Japan and the world. This Resource Paper is only an attempt to highlight a few of their contributions.

It is believed that there is going to be a revolution in artificial intelligence in this new era. Today, Japan is confronted with a number of issues such as increase in aging population, de-population, security concern, economic challenges etc. It is hoped that the resilient and patriotic Japanese will face the challenges boldly and successfully.

Indo-Japan relations during the Heisei Era was quite historic. It is our earnest desire that the Reiwa Era will take Japan-India relations to newer and greater heights.

*Long live Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako.*

*Long live Heisei Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko.*

*Long live Japan-India relations.*





**Reiwa Era - Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako**



**Emperor Naruhito greets public for the first time after succession**



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