

Japan's Unusual Royal Family



Emperor Hirohito visits home for war orphans.

By JAY GLUCK

LONG AGO MOST of the gods who walked the earth either exiled themselves atop mountains, met tragic ends, or simply became men. Somehow, one of them held out until 15 years ago when the last of the celestial emperors, the "manifest god" Hirohito, left his walled Olympus in Tokyo to address his war-weary worshippers on Aug. 15, 1945.

Almost no one outside the Imperial Court or the innermost government circle knew his voice. Now the entire nation heard their god-emperor ask that all "endure the unendurable" and surrender.

The new "man" was created on April 29, 1946, his 45th birthday. He publicly renounced his divinity. Photographs of the Imperial family at home, dressed and acting like an ordinary, but Westernized, family were released to the press.

The public came to know the Emperor as a man who prefers occidental food, can't eat piping-hot food, is an accomplished marine biologist with several discoveries to his credit, prefers a beat-up Panama hat and shorts for a romp in the woods.

They saw the Empress Nagako as a plump, maternal figure who changed over from kimono to the more practical and cheaper Western-style dress—and whose dressmaker was New York-trained.

Hirohito's birthday on Saturday was a national bank holiday. It was his 60th, considered especially auspicious because now he has rounded out the complete life cycle of the 12 zodiacal beasts multiplied by the five elements.

But the former god is still only the "symbol of state." Neither the throne nor the man in it has any power. Japanese over 50 years old may idolize him, especially the rural populace who keep a waiting list of volunteers to clean the palace grounds,

but there is a younger core of antagonism—the war widows and veterans of the brutal army.

Yet students in Japan today are generally less anti-emperor than a decade ago when they forcibly barred his visit to a national university. They tolerate the emperor system but fear that Hirohito or the next emperor may once more become the unwilling tool of greedy men.

The personalities of Crown Prince Akihito and his bride may decide their future. Princess Michiko was chosen with care—both by the court chamberlain and by the Prince, who made the final choice.

Crown Princess Michiko's dowry was reportedly tremendous. Her father is the largest miller in Japan, and she probably has more real wealth than the Prince, whose family has only modest means and allowances compared with European crowned heads. After the birth of the Imperial infant, the price of flour, the "poor man's food," rose. To many, the increase was "to pay the Imperial dowry."

Suga, Prince Akihito's sister, is a disc jockey.



The royal family's eyes are on young Prince Hiro. L. to R., the Empress, Crown Prince and Princess, the Emperor, Prince Yoshi.

As the emperor celebrates his 60th birthday, he is no longer a god—just the father of a family that has learned a new way of life

Michiko has made little outward impression upon the serious male students of Japan. But then, no girl is supposed to. Her impact is on the young women. At public Imperial appearances, waiting crowds (which before the war could not look upon the deities) consist more and more of young wives holding their tots up to see, indoctrinating them early with an affection for the Imperial family.

PRINCE AKIHITO's youngest sister, Suga, is an asset. She is dynamic, intelligent, and photogenic—traits not notable in the family. Since only the Emperor, his sons, and unmarried daughters may now hold titles, Suga is a "commoner," married to the "commoner" scion of a once-noble house almost as ancient as her own. She conducts a popular disc-jockey program and is considered a well-bred beatnik. She is much different from her older sisters, the modest ex-princess housewives Teru, Taka, and Yori. They are rarely heard of today, although Yori established the democratic pattern a decade ago by working in a department store.

The only other prince is Yoshi, popularly known as "Martian" because of his outsized head. He will become a marine biologist like his father.

Akihito and Michiko are rearing their child, Prince Hiro, in their own way. Hiro's nursery adjoins their bedroom in their modest new "palace"—actually a medium-sized mansion bereft of courtyards. Their stylish Tokyo residential district has many Americans and Europeans, some of whom live more palatially.

As the Emperor celebrates his 60th birthday, he can look back with satisfaction on the trying years since he abdicated as a "god." He has maintained his tottering throne and has shown his children how to live in a new and confused world—an accomplishment any father would be proud of.

COVER:

Wading waist-high in a sea of golden daffodils, this little silken-haired charmer, captured by photographer Doris Pinney, contemplates the wonder of buds in bloom.

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