

# Empress Masako

## Early life and education<sup>[edit]</sup>

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Masako Owada (小和田雅子, *Owada Masako*) was born on 9 December 1963 at Toranomom Hospital in [Toranomom, Minato, Tokyo](#).<sup>[1]</sup> She is the eldest daughter of Yumiko Egashira (b. 1938) and [Hisashi Owada](#) (b. 1932), a senior [diplomat](#) and former president of the [International Court of Justice](#). She has two younger sisters, [twins](#).

Masako went to live in [Moscow](#) with her parents when she was two years old. At the age of five, Masako's family moved to [New York City](#), where she attended New York City public kindergarten.

In 1971, the Owadas returned to Japan, while Hisashi returned to the Foreign Ministry office.<sup>[6]</sup> Masako entered Futaba Gakuen, a private Roman Catholic girls' school in [Den-en-chōfu](#), Tokyo.

In 1979, her second year of [senior high school](#), Masako and her family moved to the [United States](#) and settled in the [Boston](#) suburb of [Belmont, Massachusetts](#), where her father became a guest professor of international law at [Harvard College](#)'s Centre for International Affairs.<sup>[10]</sup> In 1981, she graduated from [Belmont High School](#).

Masako enrolled in the Economics Department of [Harvard University/Radcliffe College](#) in 1981.

## Professional career<sup>[edit]</sup>

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After graduation Masako moved back to Japan, where for six months (April to October 1986) she studied law at the [University of Tokyo](#) to prepare for the [Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)'s entrance examination. Out of 800 applicants only 28 passed, Masako was one of them, along with two other women.

"She was assigned, first, to the Second International Organizations Division which deals with Japan's relations with international agencies, such as the [OECD](#), a club of 30 rich countries committed to free trade and development. Her assignments included dealing with the OECD's environmental affairs committee ... by all accounts she acquitted herself well—

her command of spoken languages, so rare in Japan, was a huge advantage—and was popular with most of her workmates."

Two years later, in 1988, Masako was chosen by the Ministry to be sponsored for two years' postgraduate study overseas with full pay, just as her father Hisashi had been years earlier. Masako enrolled at [International Relations](#) under [Sir Adam Roberts](#)<sup>[24]</sup> at [Balliol College, Oxford](#).<sup>[25]</sup> However, for unclear reasons Masako did not finish her thesis<sup>[26]</sup> and instead returned to Japan in 1990.

## Courtship and marriage

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500-yen coin was issued to commemorate the Imperial Wedding

Masako first met [Naruhito, Crown Prince of Japan](#) in November 1986, during her studies at the [University of Tokyo](#). The prince was immediately captivated by her and arranged for them to meet several times over the next few weeks. Because of this they were pursued relentlessly by the press throughout 1987. However, Masako's name disappeared from the list of possible royal brides due to controversy about her maternal grandfather, Yutaka Egashira, who while working for the [Industrial Bank of Japan](#) was assigned to take over management of one of its creditors the [Chisso](#) Corporation to prevent it from financial collapse. Chisso, built in the 1930s, dumped the methylmercury used to make [acetaldehyde](#) (a chemical in plastic) into the water surrounding [Minamata](#) and other towns, causing the infamous [Minamata disease](#) and the resulting scandal.

Despite this controversy and Masako's travelling to [Oxford University's Balliol College](#) for the next two years, Naruhito remained interested in her. Masako refused to marry the prince because it would force her to give up her promising career in diplomacy and severely restrict her independence and freedoms.<sup>[19]</sup> Masako finally accepted his third proposal on 9 December 1992.<sup>[19]</sup> It was reported that he argued that serving as Crown Princess of Japan would only be "another form of diplomacy" before she finally accepted this third proposal.<sup>[33]</sup> The [Imperial Household Council](#) formally announced the engagement on 19 January 1993; the engagement ceremony was held on 12 April 1993. Although many

were surprised at the news, as it was believed that the prince and Masako had separated, the engagement was met with a surge of renewed media attention directed toward the Imperial family and their new princess.

Masako married Crown Prince Naruhito in a traditional wedding ceremony on 9 June 1993

## Family

### Children

Masako's first pregnancy was announced in December 1999, but she [miscarried](#).<sup>[12]</sup>

The Emperor and Empress have one daughter: [Aiko, Princess Toshi](#) (敬宮愛子内親王, *Toshi-no-miya Aiko Naishinnō*, born 1 December 2001 at Imperial Household Agency Hospital in [Tokyo Imperial Palace](#)).

## Public life

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In 1994, the couple visited [Saudi Arabia](#), [Oman](#), [Qatar](#) and [Bahrain](#). They visited [Kuwait](#), the [United Arab Emirates](#) and [Jordan](#) in 1995, and again traveled to Jordan in 1999.<sup>[43]</sup> In 1999, they also went to [Belgium](#) to attend the wedding of [Prince Philippe, Duke of Brabant](#).<sup>[43]</sup> In 2002, they paid a visit to [New Zealand](#) and [Australia](#).<sup>[43]</sup> In 2006, the Crown Prince and Crown Princess went to the [Netherlands](#) with their daughter, Princess Aiko, at the invitation of [Queen Beatrix](#) for a private visit.<sup>[44]</sup>

On 30 April 2013, the Crown Prince and Crown Princess were present at the inauguration of King [Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands](#), which was the Crown Princess's first official overseas appearance in eleven years.<sup>[45][46][47][48]</sup> In October 2014, she was present at a banquet held in honour of King Willem-Alexander and [Queen Máxima](#) at the Tokyo Imperial

Palace, which was her first appearance in such a ceremony in eleven years.<sup>[49]</sup> She welcomed the couple during an official ceremony at the palace which was her first appearance in a welcoming ceremony after five years.<sup>[49]</sup> In July 2015, Princess Masako traveled to [Tonga](#) with the Crown Prince in order to attend the Coronation of King [Tupou VI](#). Over 40 members of the Japanese media covered the event, during which the happy-looking Crown Princess was warmly welcomed.<sup>[50]</sup> In November 2015, the Crown Princess attended the Autumn Imperial Garden Party at Akasaka Imperial Garden. It was the first time for her to attend the event in twelve years.<sup>[51]</sup>

## Health

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Masako has remained largely out of the public eye since 2002, reportedly due to emotional disorders which many speculate are caused by the pressure to produce a male heir and adjusting to life in the Imperial Family. In July 2004, she was diagnosed as suffering from [adjustment disorder](#) and was reported to be seeking treatment.