

## Cross Border Business Law Blog

# Emperor Akihito's Curious Speech

on 8.12.16 | Posted in General

Japanese Emperor Akihito, who is 82 and reportedly in failing health, [gave a rare speech](#) this Monday that suggested much more than what he actually said. Emperor Akihito has served in the symbolic position for 27 years and has battled various health issues, including cancer. During his speech, he expressed doubt that he would be able to continue fulfilling the duties of the emperor as he ages, but refrained from suggesting that he may leave the Chrysanthemum Throne. So why can't he just abdicate? The answer is a unique interaction between the terms of Japan's constitution and its post-war history. After Japan surrendered to the Allies in August 1945, the Emperor's father, Emperor Hirohito, renounced his divine status and agreed to a new constitution that removed all political power from the Chrysanthemum Throne and required that an emperor serve until death. These changes to the authority of the emperor were extraordinary given the impressive power Emperor Hirohito had wielded prior to and during World War II. But Emperor Hirohito took seriously the new ceremonial role, and Emperor Akihito has strictly followed that post-war tradition. Today, Japan's constitution binds Emperor Akihito to serve until death, but any suggestion that parliament should change the constitution could violate the Emperor's careful avoidance of interference in the political affairs of Japan. And so, Emperor Akihito hinted as strongly as possible in his speech that he would like to abdicate after his long years of service. The next move belongs to parliament.

**Tags:** abdicate, Chrysanthemum Throne, divine status, Emperor Akihito, Emperor Hirohito, Japan's parliament, Japan's post-war history, Japan's post-war tradition, Japanese Emperor Akihito, Japan's constitution