Ambassador's Message (Vol.27/ October 24, 2016)

"Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 2016"

Dear friend of Japan,

I hope this e-mail finds you well.

I would like to begin this message with the Samurai Blue and Socceroos facing off in the World Cup qualifier in Melbourne this month. Despite the friendly rivalry between our two sporting nations, I was left wondering after the game if I should have worn a two-sided soccer jersey; Japan on one side and Australia on the other so that I could support both teams diplomatically. From this perspective, it was indeed fitting that the end result was a tie (1-1) after a hard-fought, 90-minute match.

Now, I would like to share with you some wonderful news from this month. Dr. Yoshinori Ohsumi, professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology has been awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 2016. Dr. Ohsumi was awarded the prize for his discoveries of mechanisms for autophagy.

Attached is the press release from The Nobel Committee, and in it they state below;

"The word autophagy originates from the Greek words auto-, meaning "self", and phagein, meaning "to eat". Thus, autophagy denotes "self eating". This concept emerged during the 1960's, when researchers first observed that the cell could destroy its own contents by enclosing it in membranes, forming sack-like vesicles that were transported to a recycling compartment, called the lysosome, for degradation. Difficulties in studying the phenomenon meant that little was known until, in a series of brilliant experiments in the early 1990's, Yoshinori Ohsumi used baker's yeast to identify genes essential for autophagy. He then went on to elucidate the

underlying mechanisms for autophagy in yeast and showed that similar sophisticated machinery is used in our cells.

Ohsumi's discoveries led to a new paradigm in our understanding of how the cell recycles its content. His discoveries opened the path to understanding the fundamental importance of autophagy in many physiological processes, such as in the adaptation to starvation or response to infection. Mutations in autophagy genes can cause disease, and the autophagic process is involved in several conditions including cancer and neurological disease."

Dr. Ohsumi is the 25th person from Japan to be awarded the Nobel Prize, and he is the 3rd Japanese researcher to be solely awarded the Nobel Prize in natural science. Meanwhile, it is a splendid achievement for Japanese researchers to be awarded the Nobel Prize for 3 years in a row, which bears witness to the fact that Japanese basic research leads the world in a wide range of fields.

I am sure that all Japanese people are very proud of their achievements. I would like to wholeheartedly congratulate Dr. Ohsumi for being awarded the Nobel Prize 2016. The Government of Japan promises to further strengthen its effort to contribute to the advancement of science and technology in Japan.

Yours sincerely,

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Sumio Kusaka

Ambassador of Japan to Australia