

**Twentieth Australia – Japan Relations Essay Contest 2002 -
Senior Division**

Australia and Japan in the News in 2002

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This year has seen a combination of events which have brought about substantial press coverage on Japan. Detail those events which have been prominent and discuss how you believe these events have influenced Australia's perception of and relationship with Japan."

Australia and Japan have enjoyed a close relationship for many years and as a result, Japan features heavily in Australian news. 2002 has been a year of international unrest in the wake of September the 11th, and a number of issues have arisen that have involved relations between Australia and Japan and the two countries' respective positions on major issues which must be confronted globally. This essay will outline the prominent events of this year and how these events have effected both Australia's perception of Japan and the Australia-Japan relationship, a relationship that continues to be vitally important for Australia into the 21st century. A discussion of Mr. Koizumi's trip to Australia, the Japanese economy in relation to Australia, the Kyoto Protocol, whaling, and less serious issues such as the World Cup and tourism follows.

The Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Junichiro Koizumi, visited Australia in May. This could be considered the most important event of the Australia-Japan relationship for 2002, as a number of pressing issues were dealt with and policy was made clear. In his speeches, Mr. Koizumi expressed his continued interest in a strong relationship between Australia and Japan. While Mr. Koizumi was in Australia he received significant press coverage regarding his propositions and policy. One of the issues Koizumi discussed was the Japanese economy and trade.

Since the downturn of the Japanese economy in the 90's, the Japanese government has been taking action towards improving the economic outlook for Japan and consequently, the Asia-Pacific region. Koizumi stated that as Japan's economy alone accounts for approximately 60 per cent of the total Asian gross domestic product¹, it follows that the Japanese economy has a huge impact on Asian markets, including the Australian economy. Mr. Koizumi's government is trying to make reforms that will improve the Japanese outlook, however some analysts comment that Japan's period of economic dominance is over, especially with the advent of China becoming perhaps *the* major player in the Asian economy. It is important for Australia to maintain good relationships with both China and Japan. Louise Dodson commented in *The Age* that: "Australia's relations with China and Japan are vitally important now when the region is undergoing fundamental change and a new economic and strategic leadership rivalry between the region's superpowers is emerging."²

Another economic issue discussed by Mr. Koizumi was trade. Australia is particularly reliant on Japan in terms of trade. Japan is Australia's biggest overall trading partner, our most significant export destination and following the United States, the most important source of our imports. Mr. Koizumi discussed the possibility of the establishment of a free trade agreement between Australia and Japan. While both Prime Ministers acknowledge that this agreement is unattainable at the present time, both have made a commitment to taking steps towards reaching some form of

¹ <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia~paci/pmv0204/australia2.html>

² Dodson, L. 2002, 'Careful policy is needed to address a changing Asia', *The Age*, 03/05/2002

agreement in the future. A free trade agreement would greatly benefit Australia's economy. Since Mr. Koizumi's visit, there has been further discussion of the establishment of such an agreement. Japan's ambassador to Japan, Mr. Atsushi Hatakenaka again confirmed the possibility, despite opposition from agricultural groups in Japan. Mr. Hatakenaka reaffirmed the benefits that would result for both sides. Another Japanese economic advisor, Mr. Toyoo Gyohten, reiterated Mr. Koizumi's positive statements, saying that even in the short term, Australia and Japan should work towards a "tangible bilateral relationship"³

Another issue Koizumi dealt with was Australia and Japan's similar position in response to terrorism and the global situation post September 11. Both Japan and Australia have made moves to support the US in its strong stance opposing terrorism. Both Australia and Japan have contributed to the war on terror. There has also been discussion between Australia, Japan and the United States in establishing tri-partite security relations. Koizumi also drew attention to Japan and Australia's respective roles as members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) group, in maintaining strong relationships within the group and recognizing common goals. The Japanese Prime Minister invited Australia and the other ASEAN nations to become a "community that acts together and advances together"⁴, an invitation to which both Mr. Howard and Mr. Downer responded positively. Mr. Koizumi also raised the issue of aid and pointed out that Australia and Japan should be collaborative and active givers of aid in our region.

Another major issue in the news has been Japan's position on whaling, which is very much opposed by Australia and other Western nations. In International Whaling Commission conferences this year, Japan has maintained its traditional stance in favor of commercial whaling and has made efforts to have commercial whaling reinstated as legal by international law. To many Westerners, Japan's insistence on whaling is perplexing. The banning of commercial whaling has a virtually non-existent effect on the world's second most powerful economy. Japanese diplomats explain that there are cultural concerns, but it is mainly a matter of principle which causes Japan to continue to take on a formidable anti-whaling coalition including the US, Great Britain, Canada and Australia. Japan finds that commercial whaling is in the interest of science and international law as well as Japanese honor. Japan has claimed that whales eat fish that humans need and has thus justified commercial whaling. There were also concerns raised as to whether Japan was using aid as a means to convince poorer nations to vote pro-whaling. Japan was not successful in having commercial whaling made legal, and Australia and New Zealand, the most strongly anti-whaling nations, were satisfied with a rise in the number of participating nations who voted against whaling. Shane Green surmised the issue well by saying, "...at most levels, Canberra does all it can to strengthen the ties [between Australia and Japan]. Yet when it comes to whaling, we remain divided."⁵

Perhaps the most pressing environmental issue of recent times has been the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, an agreement that aims to lower greenhouse emissions between 2008 and 2012. This is another issue on which Australia and

³ Callick, R. 2002, 'Japan PM still positive about free-trade pact' *Australian Financial Review*, 30/08/2002

⁴ <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia~paci/pmv0204/australia2.html>

⁵ Green, S. 2002, 'Harpoon diplomacy as Japan takes a beating' *The Age*, 24/05/2002

Japan's positions differ. Japan decided to ratify the agreement on the 6th of June. It was a positive step towards the implementation of the agreement which sets out that nations must cut their greenhouse emissions by an average of 5.2% from 1990 levels. Mr. Koizumi made plain his desire for Australia to sign the pact, however Mr. Howard maintains that it is important for the US and developing nations to sign too. The European Union has ratified the protocol, however the United States and Australian governments seem unwilling to accept the economic changes that would result. Japan must cut emissions by 6 per cent, mainly through a greater reliance on nuclear power. Mr. Koizumi urged Mr. Howard to ratify the protocol, however, Australia continues to refuse to sign.

On a less serious level, there have been a number of other issues which have resulted in press coverage on Japan. The most obvious of these has been Japan and South Korea's joint hosting of the 2002 FIFA Soccer World Cup, which was a resounding success. A logistic and sporting triumph, the 2002 World Cup proved to the conservative traditional sporting nations of the world that Asia is a credible force in modern soccer. Japan's soccer team went from being considered only there to 'make up the numbers' to being one of the final sixteen teams in the tournament. The Japanese played with passion and flair and gave their supporters something to boast about. The hosts made the tournament very efficient and the quality of stadiums impressed soccer fans worldwide. The success of the World Cup also impressed upon the international community the strengthening relationship between Korea and Japan, a dissipation of discord felt between the co-hosts ever since Japan's occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945.

Finally, there has been the increasing popularity of one of Australia's sporting stars, Ian Thorpe, in Japan. This has been a very recent development, following Thorpe's success at the World Swimming Championships held in Japan. Thorpe's hero status in Japan has made news to the extent that he has agreed to promote Australia as a tourist destination in Japan. This great appreciation of one of Australia's most successful international sportspeople is indicative of the warmth of the relationship between the people of Australia and Japan.

The press coverage on Japan this year has been substantial and has resulted in a number of developments in Australia's perception of and relationship with Japan. Increased emphasis and importance placed upon economic and security links between Australia and Japan has strengthened our relationship, given the regional ties and the similar responsibilities and interests that the two nations have. The Japanese Prime Minister, Mr. Koizumi's visit to Australia reaffirmed the continued interest that the Japanese have in a close relationship with Australia and was a positive experience for both sides.

On the other hand, matters such as the Kyoto protocol and whaling have been issues on which Australia and Japan have held different positions. However, the two nations have accepted and made an effort to understand the others' position. It is quite reasonable for two countries that have a close relationship to disagree on some issues, as the governments of Australia and Japan are representative of completely different people. However, accepting and tolerating these differences, Australia and Japan can continue to work, to use the title of Mr. Koizumi's speech in Sydney, "Toward a Creative Partnership." Finally, less serious issues such as the world cup and Ian

Thorpe's popularity in Japan have acted as a constant reminder for Australians of our close relationship with Japan. Shane Green commented in *The Age* that "one of the great achievements of the World Cup has been a breaking down of stereotypes in the West."⁶

Ultimately, 2002 has been a positive year for the Australia-Japan relationship. The press coverage on Japan has continually reminded the Australian population of the importance and strength of our relationship.

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