

TWENTY-FOURTH AUSTRALIA-JAPAN RELATIONS ESSAY CONTEST

By Felicity McDonald

Dear Kimura-san,

I must admit, your letter came as quite a surprise to me. I wasn't expecting such an unusual request from a foreign dignitary and a friend. However, if you believe my ideas will be of some use, then I am more than happy to provide you with a few professional suggestions.

Japan and Australia are two nations with similar goals in mind - to expand economically on the world stage - and any collaborative project would have to be undertaken with that knowledge in hand. The project should offer mutual benefits to its participants and encourage growth and prosperity within their respective communities. It should operate on a number of levels in the professional, political and public sectors to ensure that its message of improved relations is clearly received by all members of both Japanese and Australian society.

The first part of the project should be to organise and implement what I would term as *professional* or *business exchanges*. As I'm sure you are well aware Kimura-san, currently there exists a healthy relationship between many sister schools and cities in Japan and Australia. However, exchanges between two cities seem largely limited to secondary and tertiary students and can exclude working professionals. If educated, working people from each of our countries were encouraged, and possibly financially assisted by their respective governments, to travel away from their homeland and participate in an exchange, they would return home bringing many exciting new discoveries to their industry and having learnt more about themselves and their host's culture. During these proposed exchanges they would acquire innovative skills and knowledge to implement in their profession on their homecoming, build new friendships, improve their language and communication ability, and develop a deeper understanding of their host country and its customs. Below follow some suggestions for professional exchanges though the list is by no means exhaustive:

Two possible business exchanges could be tailored for members of the Australian health care industry including doctors, naturopaths and yoga instructors. These professionals could enhance their knowledge in areas such as natural medicine, which has been perfected in Japan over thousands of years, by travelling to your country Kimura-san, and working in traditional medicine shops. Secondly, approximately 90 million Japanese people believe in Buddhism¹, or 84% of the total population². As the fourth-largest organised religion in the world³, Buddhism has naturally gained popularity in other parts of the world. Yoga, believed to be the means through which one can attain God, enlightenment and self-realisation and central to Buddhist philosophy, involves concentration, meditation and stretches. It has also rapidly garnered support in Australia and the Western world as an excellent means of

¹ Japan Guide (2004) *Basic Information – Buddhism* [Internet]. Available: <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2055.html> (11/09/06)

² Wikipedia (2006) *Japan – Religion* [Internet]. Available: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan#Religion> (11/09/06)

³ Wikipedia (2006) *Buddhism* [Internet]. Available: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism> (11/09/06)

maintaining physical fitness. The ever-growing demand for experienced yoga instructors in Australia provides an ideal opportunity for qualified Japanese trainers to work in Australia on a professional exchange.

If you examine the Japanese economy carefully you will recognise that its industry relies heavily on steel manufacturing, though due to recent changes in their economy, only 21% of the workforce now labours in manufacturing jobs⁴. Steel is also a key industry in Australia, with Japan alone importing 39% of its total imported iron ore from Australia⁵. Through a professional exchange, Japanese engineers and miners could trade advice and compare techniques with Australians, while learning how to employ new and more modern methods to easily extract the iron ore their country possesses and entice younger, potential workers into a more lucrative industry.

Australian fashion designers such as Collette Dinnigan, Wayne Cooper and Lisa Ho are popular all around the globe and in Japan, where many young people in particular, are shunning traditional dress and prefer to wear clothing that is trendier and more modern. Living in Tokyo, I am sure you must have witnessed the extremities of this preference in the form of the *ganguro* girls in the Shibuya neighbourhood - not exactly my style, old friend! Correspondingly, Japanese electronic games, *anime* and *manga* (itself, a fusion of traditional woodprinting and Western art⁶) have delighted Australians for decades with characters such as Astro Boy established household names and films such as *Shichinin No Samurai* classified as the 6th best film ever made⁷ by Western critics. The motion picture was so successful that it spawned the creation of a successful Hollywood remake, *The Magnificent Seven*⁸ (though I always thought the original was the best Kimura-san, it's a personal favourite!). In the Arts sector, business exchanges hosted in Australia for Japanese fashion designers and in Japan for Australian graphic artists, computer game designers and filmmakers would be of obvious benefit to both of our great nations.

As a multicultural nation, Australian cuisine is extremely diverse and incorporates dishes from many countries such as Italian pizza, American hotdogs, British roasts, Irish stews, Indian curries, French pastries and Mexican tacos. In short, Australian cuisine literally has an international flavour! Moreover, Japanese cuisine such as *sushi*, *soba* noodles and *sashimi* are very popular in Asian restaurants throughout Australia, and Melbourne's China Town boasts some fantastic Japanese eateries including *Nihonbashi Zen* (when you're in town next Kimura-san, I suggest you try the *kushiyaki* skewers there - a very tasty delicacy!). In return, Japan has welcomed Western conglomerates such as McDonald's to establish themselves in the land of the rising sun, in order for their citizens to enjoy novel fast food such as fries and hamburgers. Therefore, I feel a final and ideal professional exchange would be

⁴ Lansford, Lewis and Schwarz, Chris (2002) *The Changing Face Of Japan*. Published by Hodder Wayland in Great Britain. Page 40.

⁵ Bunce, Vincent (1994) *The Real World – Japan*. Published by Watts Books in London, Great Britain. Page 15.

⁶ Wikipedia (2006) *Japan – Culture* [Internet]. Available: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan#Culture> (11/09/06)

⁷ International Movie Database (2006) *Top 250 Movies As Voted By Our Users* [Internet]. Available: <http://www.imdb.com/chart/top> (11/09/06)

⁸ Guile, Melanie (2002) *Culture In Japan*. Published by Heinemann Library in Melbourne, Australia. Page 20.

between Australian and Japanese chefs and cooks so that they can introduce their new culinary skills to their restaurant, café or hotel on their arrival back home.

Apart from the business exchanges that will help expand both of our countries' industries and improve our already healthy relationship, it is also necessary to have a collaborative project that will reach those who have the most influence on Australia's affiliation with Japan – the leaders and politicians.

Throughout his time in office, Prime Minister John Howard has visited China numerous times and it is clear that Australia relies on close ties with the Asian nation for economic growth⁹. Continuing negotiations regarding a Free Trade Agreement between the two countries has been a key focus of each of Mr. Howard's trips. A Free Trade Agreement is beneficial to both parties because it encourages greater trade and investment, creates more jobs, raises the standard of living and demonstrates a close cooperation and strong relationship between the states involved¹⁰. Australia has successfully modelled a Free Trade Agreement with the United States already and considering Japan is Australia's greatest export partner, receiving 20.7% of its total exports¹¹, a Free Trade Agreement could be an excellent collaborative project on which to embark. A visit by Japan's Prime Minister to Australia or vice versa provides positive opportunities for media exposure and the chance for our governments to develop a healthier, more communicative rapport with the possibility of further strengthening their countries' economies.

My final suggestion for a collaborative project Kimura-san, involves the public and provides material for tremendous public relations coverage. Sport is something that is very close to the hearts of many Australians and Japanese. The recent FIFA World Cup caused nearly every Australian to get a taste of 'footy fever' (there were certainly several days where I went to work a little late and rather bleary-eyed, having barely slept after staying up late to watch the soccer!). The achievement of the Socceroos to succeed through to the round of sixteen was a delightful surprise and has generated a marked rise in the popularity of the sport in this nation. Japan also shares a passion for soccer, its second-most popular sport¹², and in 2002 it co-hosted the FIFA World Cup with South Korea. Sport encourages qualities that are fostered in both Australian and Japanese cultures such as loyalty, fairness, dedication, leadership and perseverance. In a similar vein to the annual game held each October between the Ireland International Rules Football team and the Australian team, if Australia and Japan were to establish an annual soccer match it would promote unity and further improve the relationship between the two countries. A national team could be selected and in the preface to the game publicised, training sessions could be held to raise awareness of the event among the general public. The professional athletes from each team could also hold some free skills workshops for children, who would get the chance to meet their

⁹ Central Intelligence Agency (2006) *The World Factbook – Australia – Economy* [Internet]. Available: <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/as.html#Econ> (11/09/06)

¹⁰ Australian Government Department Of Foreign Affairs And Trade (2005) *Potential Benefits – Overview* [Internet]. Available: <http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/china/fta/facts/overview.html> (11/09/06)

¹¹ Central Intelligence Agency (2006) *The World Factbook – Australia – Economy* [Internet]. Available: <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/as.html#Econ> (11/09/06)

¹² Wikipedia (2006) *Japan – Sport And Recreation* [Internet]. Available: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan#Sport_and_recreation (11/09/06)

heroes and learn some new skills, thus ensuring that future generations continue to have a positive view of their foreign friends.

As you can see Kumira-san, by implementing collaborative projects in professional, political and public sectors, and giving them the attention and commitment they require and deserve, the relationship shared by Australia and Japan is guaranteed to be further enhanced and grow even more stable, healthy and harmonious. I would love to hear some feedback on my suggestions and I wish you all the best in the immense task before you.

Kouun wo inorimasu!

Felicity

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