

Koyo Matsuri Reception

Tuesday 4 May 2021

Good evening.

I would like to begin by acknowledging Councillor Bill West, Mayor of Cowra.

Mr Bob Griffiths, Chairman of the Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre.

Sir Rod Eddington, President of the Australia Japan Business Co-operation Committee.

Mr Don Kibbler, Director of the Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre Committee.

Dr Peter Armstrong, Associate Professor, School of Architecture, Design & Planning, University of Sydney.

Mr Shono Keiji, Director of the Japan Foundation, Sydney.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Please allow me to begin by congratulating you all on the very first Koyo Matsuri.

紅葉 or 'autumn leaves' are to the Japanese autumn what cherry blossoms are to spring.

A centuries-old Japanese pastime of admiring nature undergo change.

Celebrating – what one could describe as – the 'alter ego' of *hanami* or cherry blossom viewing.

This new festival will wonderfully complement its sister event, the Sakura Matsuri, which I very much look forward to attending later this year.

The Koyo Matsuri marks a new chapter for the Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre.

After what has been a difficult time since the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Thanks to your tireless efforts, the garden and centre have been beautifully maintained during its closure, ensuring its survival.

Many of my predecessors have commented on the importance of Cowra in the bilateral relationship between our two countries.

But it can be perfectly summed up in the words of former Japanese ambassador, Hatakenaka Atsushi, who said;

"Cowra is the spiritual home of Japan-Australia relations".

Historically, Cowra represents a tragic time in both Japanese and Australian history.

But today it is a symbol of peace and reconciliation.

Cowra forms the very foundation of our two countries' friendship.

Japan and Australia have gone from being on opposing sides to the same side.

And today, we can say we enjoy a great friendship.

Perhaps an even greater friendship than the one you share with your mates across the Tasman.

Before being posted to Canberra, I went in search of books to read up on all things Australia.

However, I could only find 3 in the biggest bookshop in Tokyo.

So to acquaint myself with this country, I asked friends who are very familiar with Japan-Australia relations.

They recommended the Japanese book, *The Bugle Call of Cowra*.

You may be aware of this story about Japanese POW, Toyoshima Hajime who went by the name Minami Tadao.

He is believed to have led the mass breakout by sounding a bugle for the charge.

The more I learned about Cowra and that tragic event, the stronger I felt I had to visit this place.

A place where mutual respect was born in the shadow of tragedy.

My predecessors, Mr Sato Yukio and Mr Hatakenaka Atsushi strongly encouraged me to visit Cowra at the earliest possible opportunities.

And I had that opportunity very early on.

Even before the presentation of my credentials as Ambassador to the Governor-General.

It was breathtaking to see with my very own eyes this quiet, peaceful place.

Surrounded by beautiful pasture with hills that roll on after one another like waves.

What particularly struck me was the lengths the people of Cowra have taken to cultivate peace with Japan.

As a Japanese citizen, I was profoundly moved by Cowra's sincere consideration and thoughtful gesture towards my home country.

The people of Cowra will always have my deepest respect and gratitude for their efforts in maintaining and preserving the Japanese War Cemetery.

And the Cowra Japanese Garden, when upon entering envelopes you with a sense of peace and serenity, is arguably the most beautiful Japanese garden outside Japan.

And my residence garden comes in a close second.

Japan and Australia's relationship is developing at a remarkable speed.

But we must not forget the role of Cowra and its history plays in this relationship.

The Japanese War Cemetery.

The Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre.

The World Peace Bell.

The Sakura Matsuri.

Sakura Avenue.

The Cowra-Seikei student exchange.

These are the milestones of the peace process between Japan and Cowra, and more broadly, Japan and Australia.

And I'm confident Koyo Matsuri will become one of these.

Congratulations again on your very first Koyo Matsuri.

Thank you.

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