

Speech

Presented by HE YAMAGAMI Shingo
Ambassador of Japan to Australia

On the occasion of the Australia Japan Society Victoria Spring Gala
at Crown Towers Melbourne – Friday 2nd September 2022

[Introduction]

Thank you for the kind introduction.

Australia-Japan Business Co-operation Committee, Chief Executive Officer Mr Richard Andrews;
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade State Director, Mr Andrew Cumpston;
Japan Chamber of Commerce & Industry President, Mr HORIE Takashi;
Japanese Society of Melbourne representative, Mr YUASA Mikiyasu;
Australia Japan Society Victoria President Ms Celeste Koravos, Co-Chairs Mr Ross Ciaravolo & Ms
OGAWA Natsuko;
Councillors of the City of Melbourne,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

KONBANWA (こんばんは) ~ Good evening. Or, I should say, TADAIMA (ただいま) ~ I'm back!

Having now visited Melbourne nearly ten times in less than two years, stepping onto the tarmac at Tullamarine almost feels like coming home.

And what a beautiful home it is!

It comes as no surprise to me why over 24,000 Japanese residents have chosen to settle in Melbourne, or that it is consistently named one of the world's most liveable cities. In fact, this year Melbourne came in at 10th position overall, a ranking shared with none-other than its Japanese sister-city, Osaka!

There's nothing like a bit of healthy sibling rivalry.

Melbourne and Osaka share many great qualities that contribute to their enviable quality of life:

Both cities are meccas of culture, fashion and *food*!

In Osaka, you'll be hard-pressed to escape the delicious smell of 'takoyaki' wafting down the street. In Melbourne, it is the aroma of the world's best coffee that will entice you into the nearest café for a 'flat white'. I have to say Melbourne definitely has the upper hand when it comes to the number of locally-owned cafes.

Both cities are full of laughter!

Osaka is the heart of Japan's 'manzai' comedy scene, and Melbourne is the proud host of the Melbourne International Comedy Festival. I'm no Carl Barron, though, so please don't expect too much from me tonight.

Osaka has Osaka Castle, Melbourne has the sacred grounds of the MCG!

I've been lucky enough to watch OSAKA Naomi play at Rod Laver Arena and see the Demons clash with the Bulldogs at Marvel Stadium, but I'm yet to tick a cricket or AFL match at the MCG off my bucket-list. I'll be sorry to miss tomorrow's Geelong versus Collingwood match!

As a diplomat, the *Cat's* got my tongue when it comes to picking sides, but I've certainly learnt the hard way never to underestimate a *Maggie*! Tonight I didn't bring my helmet with chopsticks!

Despite the impending swooping season, I am truly excited to be back in Melbourne and on such a fantastic occasion. I'd like to acknowledge AJS Victoria and Committee members for their time and efforts in bringing this wonderful event to fruition.

As many of you know, AJS Victoria was the first organisation of its kind in Australia, founded in 1965 at a time of growing political and commercial interest in Japan. Since then, there have been many significant developments in the Japan-Australia partnership.

Tonight, I'd like to reflect on our journey thus far and share some of the excitement of what is to come.

[Development of the Japan-Australia partnership]

Since the signing of our Commerce Agreement some six decades ago, Japan and Australia have enjoyed a complementary trade relationship that has underpinned our economic growth.

Today, exports to Japan account for around ten percent of Australia's total trade and include everything from critical minerals, coal and LNG, to some of my favourite sources of energy: beef, cheese and sugar!

More locally, Japan is now Victoria's third-largest trading partner and there are an impressive 190 Japanese companies operating in the state. This includes major trading houses like Mitsui, Mitsubishi and Toyota who first established their businesses in Sydney, but went on to move their headquarters to Melbourne. Block your ears, Sydney, as this speaks volumes about the importance of Melbourne to Japan!

Further liberalisation of our trade through the Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement has also helped forge a deep trust between us. Holding confidence in the Australian market, Japan's direct investment has more than doubled over the past twelve years.

Japan looks forward to Australia's continued role as a safe, reliable partner and place to invest, despite some recent coal-royalty-induced-hiccups. I know Australia, especially Queensland, likes 'big' things – the Big Banana, Big Pineapple, Big Prawn - but I'd greatly appreciate it if 'Big Surprise' was left off the list!

Of course, the Japan-Australia partnership has not only been supported by investment and movement of goods, but also by a movement of people.

Travel between Australia and Japan has played a central role in our economic prosperity. In 2019 - simpler times for the tourism industry - 91,500 Japanese tourists visited Victoria. Australian tourists were also a valuable asset to Japan's inbound tourism market, staying an average of thirteen days and spending the largest amount per person.

Needless to say, the ski slopes of Niseko and Hakuba, and local izakaya throughout the country have been missing the familiar sound of the Aussie accent, terribly! But with direct flights between Melbourne and Tokyo now running several times a week, we can't wait for the full recovery of tourism to further boost our economies and our people-to-people connections.

I've already mentioned Osaka, but there are now 101 sister city and 6 state-to-state relationships between Japan and Australia.

Japanese is also the most widely studied foreign language in Australian schools. I hope you were paying attention to my greeting - I'll be testing you all later!

Those 400,000 students of Japanese have the opportunity to add cultural context to their studies through many great exchange events held throughout the country, including the Melbourne Japanese Summer Festival and Sake Matsuri.

And this is what we're really here to celebrate tonight: connections forged at the grassroots level, and the work that has been and continues to be done through the goodwill and generosity of everyday Australians and Japanese.

[Current challenges and opportunities]

Now is the time to further strengthen and solidify these ties between our people.

In an increasingly severe security environment, our shared values and shared vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific region are more important now than ever.

The deep trust Australia and Japan have built through decades of trade, investment and people-to-people exchange means our two countries are well placed to cooperate multilaterally and bilaterally in response to these very real challenges.

As expressed at both the Quad Leaders' Meeting in Tokyo, and the Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting that took place here in Melbourne in February this year, Japan and Australia have a mutual commitment to upholding the rules based international order.

Russia's war in Ukraine has now been continuing for over six months. In light of the increasing threat of a similar fate being met by Taiwan in our own region, Japan and Australia must continue to strengthen and expand our cooperation as special strategic partners.

Another vital area of cooperation where our two countries can and should work together is the fight against climate change.

Again reiterated at the Quad Leader's Meetings, emissions reduction is a goal of utmost priority for the Indo-Pacific. Japan and Australia share a vision for a low emissions future, and there are many opportunities to work together to contribute to the cause of emissions reduction and energy transition in line with the Quad climate goals and outcomes of COP26.

Just last month, Australia took steps towards enshrining new goals for emissions reduction into legislation. With our goals and values aligned, Australia and Japan will continue to support each other in our transition to renewable energy.

[Looking to the future: Innovation]

As I speak, investments by Japanese companies are driving innovation and research in renewable energy in Australia.

Last year, I had the pleasure of attending the commencement ceremony of the world's first global hydrogen supply chain project, right here in Victoria.

Pioneer technology is being used to produce and transport hydrogen all the way from the Latrobe Valley to Kobe, Japan. Driven by an all-Japanese multi-industry consortium, the enormous scale of this project is second only to the impact its success is sure to have.

Also in Victoria, Japanese manufacturer Rinnai has recently taken the global lead in successfully producing a residential water heater that runs entirely on hydrogen. After shivering through another freezing Canberra winter, an emission-free hot shower does sound very enticing!

Even more enticing, though, is the thought of taking a spin in a hydrogen-fuelled Toyota! I am excited for the very lucky attendee who will win Toyota 'Mirai' experience in tonight's raffle!

Earlier this year I had the chance to experience a test drive during a visit to Toyota's Hydrogen Centre in nearby Altona. It ran so smoothly and was as quiet as the State Library. The name 'Mirai' means 'future', and what a 'bright' future it is shaping up to be – further demonstrated by Toyota's use of the same fuel-cell technology to light-up the Marvel Stadium sign and coaches' box a few months ago at the Demons vs. Bulldogs AFL match.

This showed us that even beyond the transport sector, the potential for hydrogen as a clean and efficient source of energy generation is truly game-changing. Apparently not game-changing enough for the Demons, though!

There are already twenty Japan-related hydrogen projects in the works across Australia, and competition is high among states and territories. Indeed, an interest in hydrogen is also not exclusive to Japan and Australia. In order to make the most of these incredible opportunities, we must act with speed...

...Which reminds me of another Japanese innovation I hold close to my heart – high-speed rail!

Just imagine the opportunities a high-speed rail connection would create for the east coast of Australia! One obvious drawcard being more Japanese visitors encouraged to stretch their legs further south of Bondi and the Bridge to take advantage of the countless attractions, cuisine and events that Melbourne and Victoria have to offer.

If there is any aversion to linking-up the coast, just think: if perpetual rivals London and Paris can do it, surely there is hope for Melbourne and Sydney? As someone from Ramsay Street once told me, 'that's how good neighbours become good friends.'

You never know, high-speed rail may be just what Melbourne needs to push even further up the 'liveable cities' ranks? Perhaps even overtaking Osaka!

In fact, Osaka will be holding the World Expo 2025 in less than three years' time, under the theme 'Designing Future Society for our Lives'. The Expo will be a great opportunity to display some of these amazing innovations and further celebrate the leaps and bounds Japan and Australia have made together.

I look forward to seeing some of you there!

[Concluding remarks]

There really is so much to look forward to. With countless opportunities for further cooperation and exchange ahead of us, the Japan-Australia partnership is stronger than ever.

Having just shared a 'kanpai' with Japan's delicious sake, I couldn't help but identify some symmetry with the Japan-Australia partnership. I'm not just referring to the way that sake brings people together, or our shared love of a good local drop.

Just as good sake is made from high-quality rice, water, koji and yeast, there are several key ingredients that have been carefully crafted to create our unique partnership. The most important being trust, and a trusted team of 'kurabito' – brewery workers – who tirelessly and lovingly tend to the sake to create the final product.

As trusted friends, business partners and supporters of the Japan-Australia partnership, I'd like to thank you all for your tireless work as kurabito of our sake brewery.

May we share many more kanpai's ahead!

Thank you.

[Ends]