

Speech

Presented by HE Mr YAMAGAMI Shingo

Ambassador of Japan to Australia

On the occasion of the opening of the 26th Japanese Film Festival

And a screening of *Dreaming of the Meridian Arc*

at Palace Electric Cinema – Wednesday 16th November 2022

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening.

It is my great pleasure to attend the opening night of the Japanese Film Festival.

Like most of you, it gives me much joy to be back in the theatre, watching movies on the big screen after so long.

So on behalf of everybody here, I would like to convey my sincere thanks to Mr Shono, Director of the Japan Foundation, Sydney and his dedicated team for putting on this wonderful festival.

I believe we have many film buffs in the audience and of course, I am one of them.

During my postgraduate studies in New York, I often went to this small theatre in Greenwich Village to immerse myself in the world of film.

This taught me more about life in America than actually attending lectures at Columbia!

I know there are some teachers in the audience, so I am sorry to say that!

Now, let's talk about tonight's film.

Set in Chiba - East of Tokyo, the story goes back and forth between the present and the Edo period, more specifically the 1820s.

Here in the present, Katori city officials come up with the idea of turning the

life of INO Tadataka into a *Taiga Dorama* – the most famous of Japanese dramas - to boost the number of tourists to the city.

After retiring at the age of 49, which is quite young by today's standard, INO took up astronomy which led to drawing the first-ever map of Japan in 1821.

The accuracy of his map is quite significant even by today's standard.

Japan closed itself off to the world – with a few exceptions – between 1639 and 1854.

This period is called Sakoku – closing of Japan.

Despite the myth that Japan was in the dark ages during Sakoku, it was quite the opposite.

Traditional Japanese culture blossomed, and science and mathematics advanced so much that the wealth of knowledge of Japanese scholars at the time was quite astounding.

Meanwhile, the Edo Shogunate needed an accurate map of Japan to protect the coastlines from the threat of Western imperial powers.

And so INO was tasked with creating a map.

INO spent a staggering 17 years walking around Japan – more than 40,000 kms – which coincidentally equals one lap of the Earth.

Imagine how difficult it would have been without proper footwear like Onitsuka Tiger sneakers or the luxury of bullet trains.

I must say though that the traditional straw sandals they wore are quite appropriate for Japan's climate because they stop you from getting athlete's foot.

Roads and other Infrastructure developed greatly during the Edo period allowing INO and his team to have comfortable stopovers during making of the map.

People in the Edo period did not have a lot, but the characters in the film seem happy.

That reminds me of an English diplomat, Ernest Satow in Japan at the end of Edo period who recorded in his chronicle, "Japan is poor but every child is smiling".

Sadly, INO passed away in 1818 before seeing the completion of his map of Japan.

INO's dedicated disciples were devastated, but were determined to complete this enormous project.

In order to honour their master's fervent wish, they hid INO's death from the authorities for three years.

You may recall KUROSAWA's famous film, *Kagemusha*, which depicts a political decoy of a famous feudal lord, TAKEDA Shingen.

Kagemusha were used quite often in those times because unlike today, there was no social media for people to identify them so easily!

Last thing that I would like you to pay attention to in this film is Chiba's coastline.

Even today, the beautiful scenery of the coastline remains unspoiled from power lines!

Well, I have spoken for too long!

Please sit back and enjoy the film.

And just like the officials of Katori City wanted, I hope you go home tonight and book your next trip to Japan!

Thank you.