

みなさん、おはようございます！

It is a pleasure to be here at the NSW Japanese Teachers' Conference 2022.

1. Introduction

(1) COVID – respect for the work of teachers

Thank you to all the teachers here for everything you do. Over the past two years, I think the broader community has a new found respect for the important job teachers do on a day-to-day basis. I know that several people in my office with school-aged children breathed deep sighs of relief when their children returned to school for in-person classes earlier this year. Forced home schooling was an eye-opener!

(2) Thank Department & JF & Dedication of teachers

I would like to thank the NSW Department of Education for arranging this opportunity for teachers across the sectors¹ to further their

¹ The conference is open to teachers in Catholic systemic and independent schools as well as government schools. Among the 162 expected attendees, there are some primary school teachers; most are high school teachers. There are also several pre-service teachers (teachers in training/university students).

professional development and to exchange ideas about teaching Japanese language.

I'd also like to acknowledge the participation of the Japan Foundation Sydney.

I understand there are several pre-service teachers here – I hope this will be an opportunity to learn from your SEMPAAI and begin to create your professional networks.

I noticed Japanese textbook publishers and bookshops also came. Thank you for your contribution.

I know that all of you here today share a sense of dedication to the learning and teaching of Japanese language.

2. Japanese language education in Australia

Today I would like to share some observations about Japanese language here in Australia and then give an overview of some key developments in the Japan-Australia relationship.

(1) Own observations re. role of Japanese in Australia

A major part of a diplomat's work is to make connections, by visiting places and meeting people. The past two years have, as you can imagine, made this much more difficult than usual.

But, whenever circumstances have allowed, I have travelled to places in NSW and the Northern Territory, which comes under the jurisdiction of my Consulate.

One of my important jobs as Consul-General is supporting Japanese language education. I have had discussions with people involved in promoting Japanese language education, and I have also had the opportunity to observe several classes in schools. I was really impressed by the level of engagement by and commitment of teachers. It was energising!

I believe that Japanese language education acts as a contact point with Japan, increasing the level of interest, familiarity and understanding that Australians have for Japanese culture.

Indeed, Japanese language education plays an important role in creating promoters of exchange and cooperation between Japan and Australia. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone involved in Japanese language education here in NSW.

(2) Statistics

So, if we look at the statistics: according to the most recent survey by the Japan Foundation, there are around 400,000 people studying Japanese in Australia, which places Australia fourth behind China (approx. 1 million), Indonesia (approx. 710,000), and South Korea (approx. 530,000).

However, if we consider the number of learners per 100,000 people, then Australia is by far number one in the world with 1,708 learners. The next two in the top ten are South Korea with 1,040 learners and Taiwan with 721 learners per 100,000. This means that around 1 in 60 people in Australia are studying Japanese.

(3) Importance of school exchange

What do you think the number one motivation is for students to study Japanese?

I am sure that the answer varies from person to person, but when observing Japanese language classes, I felt that exchange between Japanese and Australian schools is a particularly strong motivation.

In many of the Japanese classes I visited, the rooms were decorated with photos showing students enjoying themselves on school trips in Japan and with posters covered in letters received from the Japanese school that students visited during exchange.

Of course that would be great motivation! It's when you first have direct contact with a country's culture and have a true reason to use the language that you think, "I'm glad I studied it!" Particularly for children, engaging in exchange with people of their own age, who they may become friends with, will leave the strongest impression.

Unfortunately, since two years ago, mutual visits between Japanese and Australian schools had to stop due to COVID-19. But virtual exchange did continue, including an online exchange program between schools in Japan and Australia called “Australian Olympic Connect | Tomodachi 2021” held in the lead up to the Tokyo Olympics. From April to July 2021, Tomodachi 2021 connected primary and high school students from more than 600 classes in Japan and Australia.

I hope that the schools connected online via Tomodachi 2021 will be able to engage in in-person exchange very soon and that student exchange programs and school trips also resume, providing participants with memorable experiences during their formative years.

3. Japan-Australia relations

I would now like to briefly discuss the importance of the Japan-Australia relationship and introduce some new developments between Japan and NSW. I hope some points might prove useful.

(1) High-level meetings

Despite the COVID challenges, high-level meetings between our two countries have continued to take place regularly, advancing bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

This year in January, a summit meeting was planned for here in Sydney, but due to the increase in Omicron at the time, Prime Minister Kishida had to withhold his planned trip.

A virtual summit was held instead, and our two leaders signed the Reciprocal Access Agreement, elevating our security and defence cooperation to a new level.

Last month, Australia hosted the Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Melbourne, and by mid-year, we are expecting the Quad Summit in Japan.

Japan and Australia are now working together toward the realization of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific".

The "Special Strategic Partnership" that Japan and Australia share today would not be possible without the many and varied ties in the business and culture arenas.

(2a) Business ties – general

Turning to the economy: Business ties between Australia and Japan are both long-standing and deepening, particularly between NSW and Japan.

For NSW, Japan is its second largest trading partner and its largest export destination, and recently, direct investment, including mergers and acquisitions (M&A), has been increasing across sectors.

In 2020, Japan topped the list as the largest source of foreign direct investment in Australia. And that investment is growing, particularly following the COVID pandemic.²

The NSW Government's recently appointed Senior Trade and Investment Commissioner in North Asia will be stationed in Tokyo. This is in recognition of Japan's status as one of Australia's largest sources of foreign direct investment and as NSW's largest export market for goods.³

In addition, in NSW, there are approximately 230 Japanese companies that have entered the market, Japan's 3 megabanks all have their main Australian office in Sydney, and Japan's major ICT companies are also serving the NSW state government.

For Greater Sydney development, including Western Sydney infrastructure projects, the NSW Government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with six Japanese companies and organisations.

² This is taken from the Ambassador's address to the NT Legislative Assembly (p.8)
<https://www.au.emb-japan.go.jp/files/100304757.pdf>

³ The content (abbreviated) is from the Ambassador's speech at the Roundtable on 1 Feb. 2022 (p.3)
<https://www.au.emb-japan.go.jp/files/100297543.pdf>

One of the major challenges the world is facing is energy and decarbonisation. Japan-Australia cooperation in “decarbonisation through technology” is already underway. Let me give you a few examples.

In late January, I visited the Hunter region with Ambassador Yamagami. Hunter Hydrogen Hub was developing. A Japanese company, Idemitsu, long engaged in coal mining, is now joining this new initiative.

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI) will provide Snowy Hydro’s Hunter Power Project with two new gas turbines which can use hydrogen mixed with natural gas. Commercial operations will start as early as next year.

Also located in the Hunter, at Orica’s ammonia plant, an Australian start-up MCI, which has investment from Japan’s Itochu Corporation, plans to set up a demonstration plant to capture CO₂ to be used for making construction materials. It is expected to expand in Japan.

(3) Olympics and sports

These security and economic ties between Japan and Australia are built on people-to-people exchange, which cultivate mutual understanding and trust. I have already touched on student exchange. Sport is also a great way to connect us – two sport-loving nations.

Last year, Japan was greatly encouraged by the positive support and messages that the Australian Olympic Team gave us for Tokyo 2020.

I can't speak about sport and not mention last night's match between Japan's Samurai Blue and Australia's Socceroos as part of the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers. I was lucky enough to be there. The Samurai Blue won by 2 to 0 – it was a great match! No one could tell the outcome until close to the end.

Although there will always be winners and losers in sporting terms, in terms of people-to-people ties, it is win-win. Such exchange helps to further strengthen our bilateral relationship.

(4) Sister city relations

Sister city relations also foster our friendship. NSW is a sister state of Tokyo, and Sydney a sister city of Nagoya, both for around four decades.

My thoughts and condolences go out to the people of Lismore among those suffering the impact of the recent floods. You may know that Lismore and Yamato-Takada established the first ever sister-city relationship between Australia and Japan way back in 1963, even before I was born.

Did you know that a Japanese university is opening a new campus in NSW soon? The sister city relationship between Newcastle and Ube Cities has been active for more than 40 years, which led to a new campus of Nihon University being developed in Newcastle. The relationship is expanding!

(5) [Travel & Culture](#)

Looking ahead, I, for one, am optimistic that travel between Japan and Australia will rebound strongly.

The trend pre-COVID was very solid. In the 5 years between 2014 and 2019, the number of Australian travellers to Japan doubled, from around 300,000 to more than 600,000.

Moreover, before COVID, 43% of Australian travellers to Japan were repeaters. Many Australians understand and appreciate Japan's regional diversities beyond the major tourist destinations.

During the COVID lockdowns, of the many online and in-person events that were part of the Sydney-based Japanaroo, tourism events

such as virtual tours and events at restaurants introducing Japan's regional cuisine were very successful.

So, I am pleased to say, Australians' interest in Japan hasn't waned!

Japanaroo 2022 is being planned for September this year. Please keep an eye out for information about the exciting events that will be organised.

Here I would like to let you know the Consulate's socials: as you can see on this slide, we are on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. We have just joined YouTube as well. Please follow us for news, events and information about Japan.

And a final fact for you: did you know that the Japanese community in Australia is the third largest outside Japan? There are approximately 100,000 Japanese nationals currently living in Australia, the third largest number after the United States and China.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to repeat that the contribution of Japanese language teachers to Japan-Australia relations is enormous.

New South Wales is lucky to have so many dedicated and enthusiastic teachers spreading interest and even love of Japanese language and culture to the next generation.

I would like to thank you all and encourage you to continue your important work.

Finally, I wish this year's conference great success.

Thank you.