

A record of exchange as the Consul-General of Japan in Sydney (Edition 4)

～ Emperor's Birthday Reception ～

6 March

[Translation published 10 March]

On Thursday, 27 February, the National Day Reception celebrating the Emperor's Birthday was held at my official residence.

We were blessed with fine weather, and this year, we welcomed some 200 guests. I am grateful that so many people were able to find time in their busy schedules to attend. The reception aimed to introduce as many of Japan's attractions as possible, not only cultural aspects but also Japanese companies and products available in NSW. The Expo 2025 in Osaka, Kansai, which will be held this year from April until October, was also introduced. In addition, there was a ceremony to confer Imperial Decorations on individuals who have contributed to the promotion of Japanese culture in NSW.



Some readers might be wondering why the reception is held on the 27th when His Majesty the Emperor's Birthday is on the 23rd of February. Local circumstances are also considered and it is permitted to hold the National Day Reception several days before or after the 23rd, and as that date fell on a Sunday this year, the 27th was chosen with the hope that as many invitees as possible would be able to attend.

I became the Consul-General in Sydney in spring last year and so it was my first time to host the National Day Reception. Preparations on site began the week before, and of course as is the case with every year, no matter how well we prepared, there was one thing beyond our control – the weather. I entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Heisei Period (1989-2019), and for me, the Emperor's Birthday Reception being in December or February is strongly associated with winter. Holding a poolside evening reception in summer was a novelty for me, but during summer in Sydney, rain is often forecast and so a rainy weather schedule also has to be planned. Therefore, the fine weather on the day was such a relief!



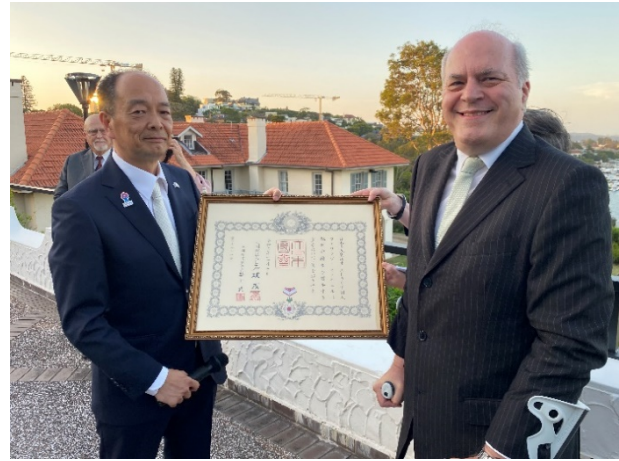
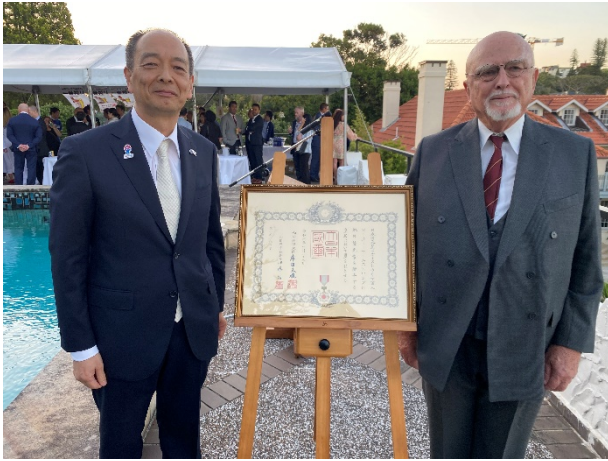
The formalities began with the Japanese and Australian national anthems. The anthems were performed by the Sydney Japanese Chamber Orchestra, comprising young musicians with great potential, and led by the artistic director of the Strathfield Symphony Orchestra, Dr Sadaharu Muramatsu. With Ms Kay Hughson's beautiful singing, it was a wonderful and moving performance.

The guest of honour was the Honourable Anoulack Chanthivong, Minister for Industry and Trade, who was representing the Premier of New South Wales. In front of NSW state dignitaries such as Chief Justice Andrew Bell and President of the Legislative Ben Franklin, the Mayors of Cowra, Dubbo, Inner West, and Woollahra and the Lord Mayor of Newcastle, and many people supporting Japan-Australia relations in the worlds of business, arts and culture, and sport, Minister Chanthivong delivered a wonderful speech displaying understanding of and friendship for Japan – notably, it was filled with a warm regard for Japanese culture and sprinkled throughout with Japanese phrases and sentences.



Following the guest of honour's remarks, the conferment of the Imperial Decorations was held for Dr Peter Armstrong, former President of the Australian Sumo Federation, and Mr Philip Mitchell, former President of the National Federation of Australia Japan Societies (Immediate Past President of the Australia-Japan Society of NSW). Both men were recognised for their contributions to promoting understanding of Japan over many years, in fact from a time when harsh views of Japan still remained in Australia and understanding towards Japanese culture was still not particularly

deep. Dr Armstrong was recognised for his efforts promoting sumo in Australia, and Mr Mitchell for the promotion of mutual understanding across diverse fields including culture, education and business. I had the privilege to present them both with their medal and certificate from His Majesty the Emperor, and the pride and pleasure evident as they were surrounded by their many family members impressed me greatly.



The above is an outline of the ceremony, however, a major aim of this reception is to communicate the charms of Japan, and I would like to explain briefly what went into this.

First, in the entrance hall, an ikebana arrangement by Mrs Hiroko Prado of Ikebana International Sydney Chapter welcomed guests, and in the neighbouring rooms, guests could view a bonsai by Mrs Megumi Bennett, as well as enjoy Japanese sake from Fukushima Prefecture.

Then, moving on to the outside space, there were booths set up by Japanese companies and Japanese government organisations with a local presence. To introduce them in alphabetical order, they were: Coopers (provided Ebisu and Sapporo beer), Fujifilm (displayed cameras and mammography models; instant photo service using Instax), JTB (travel information and information about their Japan-Australia cultural exchange projects/activities), Lion (a subsidiary of Kirin, provided Kirin Ichiban-shibori and Hyoketsu), Nippon Food Supplies (a subsidiary of Takara Shuzo, provided Mio sparkling sake), Toyota (displayed an FC Crown hydrogen-powered car which our guest of honour Minister Chanthivong studied with great interest), and booths by government organisations JETRO, CLAIR and JNTO. It was a great success.

When guests left, they were presented with a Kikkoman sauce set (sashimi soy, yakiniku and yakitori sauces) and Suntory Boss canned coffee.

In addition to the above, Chef Onishi, executive chef at the Residence, prepared a variety of dishes for the guests' enjoyment. To introduce some of the dishes, they included roast beef using Omugi Gyu sirloin (barley beef sirloin) provided by NH Foods, *tsukune* – a type of beef and chicken meatball, prawn tempura, and eel rolls.

All seemed to be very well received and they disappeared in no time. Sydney has the second highest number of diplomatic missions of cities around the world (after New York), but surprisingly few consulates have an executive chef at their official residence. Thanks to the long hours of preparation by Chef Onishi, I believe that we successfully communicated the appeal of Japanese cuisine.



The reception welcomed many guests, and even though it was crowded, it went smoothly and without incident. With so many guests, I was disappointed that I couldn't spend as much time as I would have liked talking with every guest who kindly attended the celebration, and I look forward to having another opportunity to do so.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all the companies and individuals who supported and cooperated towards the event, and all the guests who attended.