

Saturday, 13 July 2019
Ravenswood School for Girls, Gordon

Professor The Honourable Dame Marie Bashir, Patron of
the NSW Camellia Research Society,
Mr Daniel Low, Society President,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to attend the **50th Annual Camellia Show**.

First of all, I would like to congratulate the NSW Camellia Research Society on realising this wonderful event. It is my great honour and pleasure to see the flowers alongside displays of Sogetsu Ikebana and Bonsai.

I have been asked to speak to you about the *camellia in Japanese culture*. During my time in Sydney, I have met many people who have taken up a particular aspect of Japanese culture as their hobby or their life's work, and they know far more about it than most Japanese people do. I am sure that applies to many of the camellia fans here today, but I hope you will find some of my observations of interest.

The camellia is one of the traditional garden plants of Japan, long cherished by Japanese people. However, before it found its place in the Japanese garden, the camellia was an extensively hard working plant. The camellia is native to Japan and as long ago as the Jomon Period 縄文時代 – that’s over 2,300 years ago – the camellia was used for practical purposes. Its wood was used to make strong tools – everything from axe handles to combs – and the seed from the camellia was used to make camellia oil. For centuries in Japan, camellia oil has been highly prized, as a cooking oil and as a facial and hair oil. It is still used in beauty products in Japan and today it is well known around the world.

It is told in an ancient 8th century Japanese history chronicle, called the Nihon Shoki 日本書紀, that camellias were presented to Emperor Tenmu 天武天皇 in the year 685. In the Muromachi Period 室町時代 – from the 1300s onward – camellias grew in popularity as ornamental flowers and they were commonly used in ikebana and the tea ceremony. In the Edo Period 江戸時代 (1603 to 1867) the camellia became even more widely appreciated; this is not surprising because camellias were the favourites of some very influential people, namely the first three Tokugawa Shoguns 徳川将軍 who in effect ruled Japan from their seat of power in Edo as Tokyo was then known. The Tokugawas’ interest led to a camellia boom among feudal lords.

The simple shape of the camellia is often seen as a stylized design element in Japan, and you will notice it in many works of art and on decorative items such as kimono fabric. Part of the reason the camellia is so well loved is it is one of the few flowers that will bloom in what is otherwise a flowerless season, in winter and very early spring.

Camellia flowers have travelled the world and been embraced by people in many countries, including here in Australia. As in Japan, people appreciate the colour it brings to gardens in colder seasons and the infinite variety of shape and colour that the cultivars give us. In Japan back in 1695, there were already 200 horticultural varieties recorded, and I understand that today there are several thousand varieties around the world. In Japan we now have the term ‘foreign camellia’ – these are camellias that were cultivated overseas and have made their way into collections in Japan. A love for the beauty of camellias has created many connections around the world.

I hope that many such connections are made at the upcoming *International Camellia Congress*, which will be held from February 29th to March 6th 2020 in Goto city 五島市, a group of islands about 100 kilometres to the west of Nagasaki in Kyushu, Japan. More than 4 million wild

camellia trees grow on the islands – it is an ideal environment for them – and Goto is famous for being the largest producer of camellia oil in all of Japan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This event is the last event I will attend as the Consul-General of Japan in Sydney as my posting has come to an end. I consider myself very fortunate to have been able to participate in a wide range of events in Sydney and around NSW, and to have met so many people with an interest in Japanese culture which has led them to engage with Japan and Japanese people.

Cultural exchange and the bonds it creates are a profound source of strength of the Japan-Australia relationship, and I have no doubt that this will continue into the future.

To conclude, let me wholeheartedly wish **the 50th Annual Camellia Show** great success. For those who have entered the competition, good luck, but moreover, I hope this weekend is an excellent opportunity for participants to learn more about the wonderful camellia and to enjoy meeting people with a shared love of camellias.

Thank you.

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