

Consul-General Kiya, distinguished friends, it is my great honour to be a recipient of the Imperial Decoration, Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette.

At the outset I want to thank my good friend Consul-General Kiya who nominated me for this award and for being so incredibly generous to organise such a reception. Consul-General, you have made me feel very special.

I am so proud to have my wife Suzanne and our daughter Daisy as well as some close friends to share this with me.

I am humbled to receive the award and also to be in the same company of people who have distinguished themselves in promoting Australia-Japan relations. There are many of you in this room.

I am also honoured to be in the company of people like yourselves, amazing sponsors without whose long term support my own efforts would not be nearly so productive. I do thank you for your valued friendship and steadfast support.

I think everyone present knows that my main activity has been in the sphere of economic relations, with annual conferences, Australia-Japan Roundtables, business advisory and other projects. In the past few years I have also been privileged to contribute in the sphere of geopolitics and security.

Running through all these activities is my personal love and respect for Japan, which provides energy for my promotion of the bilateral relationship. It is now 35 years that I have happily applied myself to this labour of love.

Over these 35 years I have had the privilege of knowing and working with a wonderful and diverse group of people from Japan and Australia, from business and government, academics and politicians. It has been an enriching and stimulating experience and continues to reinforce my confidence in the strength of this relationship.

I came to my vocation in a roundabout way, through studies in religion, culture, history, art and architecture. Business and economics came later and maybe that was the right order for me.

The first time I travelled to Tokyo and Kyoto was in 1989, the peak of the beautiful bubble economy, a time of boundless optimism and animal spirits and long expensive lunches. I went to Japan with the expectation of seeing the miracle economy at first hand and I was not disappointed.

And as a student of Japanese culture I expected to be and was astounded by the magnificent temples, shrines and gardens and the art. I also saw first hand the Japanese civilisation, the essential layer of behaviours and attitudes that make for a civilised society: the warmth, respect for others and for self, a duty of care to the society, the almost instinctive application of craftsman principles to every occupation.

It is remarkable that Japan has not really changed since that time. It remains in my dictionary under the term “civilised”, despite economic shocks and natural disasters.

My wife Suzanne is always impatient to return and looks forward to the generous attention she would receive from the Japanese service culture, the best in the world. She learnt quickly how to navigate easily in the metro and loves to travel to Kyoto on the shinkansen.

A few years ago I was able to take Suzanne to my favourite little temple, Koto-in, which is located in the Daitokuji complex in Kyoto. It is the epitome of zen aesthetics, with the greenest moss, tall bamboo and a pebble garden.

We also recall memories of a late Friday night dinner in Tokyo, close to midnight, strolling from Marunouchi to the Ginza, walking amongst the late night crowds of merry and gentle people.

These and many others are the small and vivid memories that add up to genuine appreciation, respect and love.

This is repeated in the greater Australia-Japan relationship, which on the surface looks an unlikely friendship but which has few imitators.

Where is the affinity based? I can only guess at a psychic or temperamental affiliation, personally for me and perhaps for Australia in general. There may be similarities between the laconic Aussie and the reticent Japanese; an individualism tempered by lack of grandstanding on the Australian side and a group focus with subtle individual differences on the Japanese side.

The economic relationship is well known and I will only make the brief comment about how the trade and investment relationship has been crucial to the economic growth of both countries. For Japan, Australia's critical role as a trusted source of vital energy and resources has been supplemented as an important market in itself. For Australia, Japan continues to be the second largest export market and now the second largest investor, in fact the largest in recent times.

If we look at the long arc of Australia-Japan relations back to the 19th century, we can see that WWII was an aberration. In 2018 in Tokyo I was

invited to give a speech as part of the 90th anniversary of the Japan Australia New Zealand Society, established in 1928. It is another example of enduring institutional ties.

The rapidity of the re-engagement from 1957, culminating in the 2015 free trade agreement, security and military cooperation and close collaboration from APEC, East Asia Summit, G20, the CPTPP and the QUAD, shows that when values coincide, cultural differences can enhance rather than obstruct relationships.

There are numerous institutions in Australia dedicated to the flourishing of the Australia-Japan relationship. They include the Australia-Japan Business Cooperation Committee, grass roots Australia-Japan Societies, Sister Cities, academic, scientific, business and political institutions. I am but a small cog in that marvellous machinery, but proud to be there.

In the 20 years since the Roundtable series was established, many milestones have been reached by Australia and Japan. The cultural, social, trade and investment components have been complemented by rapid developments and formal agreements in strategic cooperation, intelligence sharing, interoperability in defence and the most recent Reciprocal Access Agreement. There is a reason I mention all these milestones.

Recently I watched an interview from the 1960s with Japan's great 20th century writer Yukio Mishima. He was asked a question about national policy and replied that he would prefer Japan to be more independent.

On reflection, in the current historical context, I would have to support that view in reference to Australia as well. Economic dependency does not provide real benefit, nor does security dependency. That does not mean removing Australia from its critically important formal alliances on which our security rests. In addition to that foundation we need to create more space to clarify our priorities and focus our efforts for greater beneficial outcomes in return for our investment of people and money.

My view is that greater independence is achieved by nurturing real friendships with countries like Japan. True friends allow each other a measure of independence and appreciate and protect the other's character, which can develop in its own way. Friendship allows mutual mentoring on the basis of good faith. We can teach each other and learn from each other without imposition. True friendship is revealed in treating each other as equals, in achieving shared goals via consultation, not in using economic coercion nor in being pulled into ill advised ventures that are costly in both lives and money.

I cannot think of a better bilateral relationship than that between Australia and Japan. We are each other's best friend and critical partner, with shared values, with mutual respect and trust. We can help each other to maximise our economic and political security.

It is with this broad vision that I have been active in the organisation of Australia-Japan Roundtables, now in the 20th year of operation and more than 160 events in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Brisbane, Tokyo and Singapore and with the invaluable support of many of you present here. Over time there has been an accumulated level of impact of the Roundtables, forming a critical mass and keeping the relationship front and centre with the business community in the major cities and with influential representatives.

Please allow me a moment to elucidate. As you know the structure of the Roundtable dinner achieves two goals: enough time for the guests to get to know each other around the table; and the chance to engage with an important speaker in a small format environment. Our speakers have included a former Prime Minister, a former Chief of Defence Forces, Federal Resources, Agriculture, Trade and Foreign Affairs Ministers, State Premiers, senior representatives of Treasury and the Reserve Bank, senior public servants, CEOs of Australian companies.

Therefore, in addition to the value of networking and of engaging with high level speakers, we can add the impact of having these speakers engage with the Japanese business community, keeping Japan in their attention and as a consequence keeping Japan in the focus of the wide networks that these speakers command. There is real synergy in this process and over time makes a real contribution to the vitality of the relationship. I think all of us involved should feel some level of pride.

Those of us who are engaged in the Australia-Japan relationship do not have to balance economic relations with strategic relations. We are indeed very fortunate, a happy band of colleagues.

For the future, there is much more for us to do, as the Indo Asian Pacific region faces new challenges, economic and geopolitical. Australia and Japan must be pillars of stability and work together more than ever before.

Once again, thank you. It is possible to feel both humble and proud. I am humbled to receive the award and proud to count you all as my friends.