

Address to the winners of the NSW/NT 2018 Essay Competition

(Sponsored by the Consulate General of Japan in Sydney)

Consul-General Mr Takewaka, sponsors, prize winners and guests

I am very happy the Consul-General invited me to join the celebrations today. It is a pleasant reminder of the fact that, even in retirement, I continue to enjoy the benefits of a career in Japanese studies. Mr Takewaka has asked me to say a few words to encourage all of you to continue your interest in Japan. The Japanese Consulate-General in Sydney is to be congratulated for the contribution it has made to Australia-Japan relations, over many years, through this essay competition for secondary-school students in New South Wales and the Northern Territory. It is very gratifying to see so many enthusiastic young students from a broad geographical spread of schools in both the private and public systems. It is particularly pleasing to see a student from Darwin in the “outstanding” category of the senior division.

When I was in high school in the 1950s, we learnt very little about Japan. What we did learn was mainly negative. My own interest in Japan did not really take root until I entered university. I decided to study Japanese because it was becoming clear by the early 1960s that Japan was about to become a major economic power. After my undergraduate studies at the University of Sydney, I was fortunate enough to win a scholarship to undertake post-graduate studies in Japan. As I had chosen, as my area of research, the study of Japanese dialects, I had the opportunity to visit many places in Japan, some very remote. Because I was young and strong, I was delegated to carry the professor's, in those days still very heavy, tape recorder. Our professor was from the old school which demanded absolute commitment and loyalty from its students. In return, the students could rely on the professor to help them find jobs and, in many cases, marriage partners. I was lucky enough to find both all by myself.

Needless to say, after postgraduate study in Japan, I was more-or-less destined to follow a career in education. Others in my cohort at university went on to carve out successful careers in business or diplomacy. One of my former students was recently the Australian ambassador to Japan. There are still many interesting career opportunities in education, the arts, diplomacy, journalism etc open to people with training in Japanese studies, particularly in the Japanese language. I think some of you prize winners today have begun studying Japanese at school. Whether or not you have started your Japanese-language studies at school, I would encourage you to study Japanese at university. The key to understanding a country and its culture lies in its language. The study of Japanese can be challenging, but the rewards are many. Not least of the benefits of studying Japanese language and culture is what the comparison reveals to us about our own culture.

I have been impressed by the influence Japan has had on Australian culture over the past fifty years. Australians and Japanese have got to know each other pretty well. This friendship has come about not only through the obvious ties of trade and business, but also through grassroot exchanges such as school visits and sister-city relationships.

The most obvious example is the influence of Japan in food culture. Who would have thought that Australians would take so readily to eating raw fish in the form *sushi* and *sashimi*, with or without *wasabi*? Japanese noodles, *ramen*, *udon* and *soba* have become part of the Australian diet and vocabulary. Even more technical Japanese culinary terms like *dashi* and *umami* are used in the vocabulary of Australian chefs and connoisseurs of good

food. The interest of young Australians in Japanese *manga* and *anime* is well-known. For some this has carried over into the recent fashion for *kosupuree*.

You may be interested to know that this cultural interchange works in two directions. A few weeks ago, in Tokyo I attended the ninetieth-anniversary celebrations of the Japan-Australia-New-Zealand Society, JANZS. There I met the president of the Japanese netball association and learnt about the Japanese AFL and life-saving associations, established with the support of clubs in Australia. The entertainment for the function was a duet performed by a Japanese didgeridoo player and a traditional Tsugaru shamisen.

Finally, I would like to bring to your attention another Japanese word that has recently had an international impact. That is the word *ikigai*. It is the title of a best-selling book by the Spanish authors, Héctor Garcia and Francesc Miralles. Garcia translates the term as “the happiness of always being busy”. Literally, the meaning is more like “what makes life worth living.” The authors concluded on the basis of observations made over a twelve-year period of residence in Japan, that this philosophy was responsible for the extraordinary longevity of the Japanese, particularly those from Okinawa. The idea of having a long, happy, active, fulfilling life is encapsulated in the concept of *ikigai*. The secret of finding ones *ikigai* is to do something you love doing, something you are good at, something that contributes to society and that brings pleasure to others, and, importantly, provides you with the resources you need to maintain a healthy body and soul. I am fortunate to be able to say that Japanese studies has provided me with my *ikigai*. I hope the interest in Japan you have gained through participation in this essay contest can contribute to your future *ikigai* too.