

Queen Elizabeth II's birthday

U.K.-Japan: Enduring friendship in times of change

David Warren
BRITISH AMBASSADOR TO JAPAN

I am very grateful for the opportunity to address the readers of The Japan Times on the occasion of Her Majesty The Queen's 84th birthday. Every year at this time we receive many kind messages of congratulations from the Japanese people, which show the great warmth and affection in which the Royal Family is held. And they reflect the enduringly strong links between the U.K. and Japan. We share interests and values; we are both outward-looking, democratic, trading nations with a commitment to a peaceful, stable



and prosperous world. We are working together for global prosperity and stability. It is a great privilege to be ambassador to a country with which we enjoy such a strong and supportive relationship.

Common purpose

The contacts between Britain and Japan — whether in the political, commercial, scientific or cultural worlds — have continued and indeed grown over the past year. The trade and investment relationship is particularly important. Japan is the largest export market for U.K. goods and services outside the U.S. and Europe, with exports worth around £9

billion. More than 2,000 U.K. companies do business in Japan every year. There are some 1,400 Japanese investors in the U.K., employing around 100,000 people in various sectors, from pharmaceutical to automotive. Over the last year, 71 Japanese firms either expanded their investments or made new ones. U.K. brands in Japan are increasing their visibility, with store openings by Patrick Cox, Cath Kidston and Jo Malone. And we are celebrating the 35th birthday of that modern Japanese icon, born in the U.K. of course, Hello Kitty.

Action to combat climate change remains one of the most important areas for British cooperation with Japan. Nissan and Toyota have announced investments in the U.K. for electric and hybrid vehicles, and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries announced plans to invest in the development of next-generation offshore wind turbines in the U.K. Britain and Japan worked together at the COP15 conference in Copenhagen in December, to move towards a lower-carbon world. Through its commitment to an ambitious mid-term emissions cut of 25 percent, and generous pledge of \$15 billion 'fast start' funding, Japan played an important role in these negotiations.

Meeting the challenge of achieving a low-carbon society will be impossible without all of us making a contribution as individuals and in our communities. That's why the British Embassy has recently signed up to the Ministry of Environment's "Challenge 25" initiative, which aims to show how important the action of every individual is in changing attitudes and reducing emissions. Through a variety of initiatives, from offsetting all official air travel and carbon emissions from official transport to the purchase of a new fleet of bicycles for our regular trips to the ministries in Kasumigaseki, we have re-



Her Majesty: Queen Elizabeth II visits Derby Cathedral in England on April 1 to continue the Holy Week tradition of distributing "Maundy money" to deserving subjects. AP

duced the embassy's carbon footprint by 11 percent, and our fuel consumption by about 20 percent, compared to last year. We have been surprised at how much we have been able to reduce our emissions just by taking a few simple steps. It shows how much we can all do if we work together.

And we have been grateful for Japanese support in so many other areas — in the world's efforts to restore international financial stability following the economic crisis of 2008/09; in announcing a further \$5 billion in aid for Afghanistan over the next five years, which will make an important contribution to the stability of that country; and in our increasingly close relationship in international organisations, especially in the work currently under way on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament.

Scaling New Heights

The interest in Japan in the United Kingdom remains

very strong. The Japan Society in London plays an active and important role in promoting wider awareness of Japanese culture, art, design, as well as helping to strengthen links between British and Japanese businesses and institutions. Two years ago, we celebrated 150 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Britain and Japan. The contribution that many British pioneers made to the development of Japan, both before and after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, is less well-known than it might be. But the work of the engineers, architects, doctors and other professionals from Britain who were active in the years in which Japan began to transform itself into a major industrial world power is a fascinating one.

And the extent to which the early Japanese pioneers of reform and change looked to Britain for a model to follow is equally fascinating. In pride of place in the embassy is a

photograph of the "Choshu Five" — the first five students from Japan at University College, London, in 1863. All went on to distinguished careers in the Japanese government in the Meiji Era. Over the next decade, as we move into a period in which we shall be celebrating various anniversaries of the events of that period of intense change and development, I hope that we shall be able to mark the beginning of those cultural and educational links, and the way in which — in very different circumstances and a very different age — they remain as relevant and as powerful today.

This year, we mark two specific anniversaries in U.K.-Japan relations.

One hundred years ago the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition took place at White City in London. It was the largest international exposition that Japan had participated in to date, and was driven by Japan's desire to increase the understanding of Japan in the U.K., and trade between our two nations. Over 8 million visitors attended and the exhibition played an important role in further popularizing Japanese goods and culture.

Fifty years before this, in 1860, Sir Rutherford Alcock, Britain's first minister to Japan, became the first foreigner to climb Mount Fuji. Alcock did much to extend understanding of Japan in

Britain through his books *The Capital of the Tycoon* (1863) and *Art and Industries in Japan* (1878). His affection for Japan is reflected in his writings, which include the observation:

"I [saw] peace, plenty, apparent content, and a country more perfectly cultivated and kept, with more ornamental timber everywhere, than can be matched even in England."

I am happy to say that the exchanges between the peoples of Britain and Japan continue to grow. There are currently some 18,000 U.K. nationals living in Japan, and the U.K. is the home to some 60,000 residents from Japan. Every year some 70,000 Japanese people study in the U.K.

For new graduates from the U.K., the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET) for assistant language teachers remains one of the most popular ways of experiencing Japan. As I travel around the country talking to Japan-British Societies about Britain today, it's always a pleasure to meet some of the JET teachers and get a better understanding of their work and experiences. I know, from lots of friends and colleagues whose first exposure to Japan came from the JET programme, what an important contribution this can make to a lifetime's involvement with this fascinating country. I would very much like to expand this

programme if we can. It's important to extend this activity for the benefit of future generations of graduates.

Meanwhile, Japan, as a producer and also a showcase of new technologies and their applications, continues to provide opportunities and challenges for us at the British Embassy as we present our work, and the U.K. more generally, to the public. The embassy Web site has recently been re-launched and my blog (<http://blogs.fco.gov.uk/roller/dwarren/>) continues, I hope, to provide a more personal window on the work that we are undertaking in Japan. However, I do hope that we can make this a two-way exchange, so I should be delighted if those who are reading the blog can join in the debate on some of the issues it raises. All comments are very welcome!

Finally, the major event of the summer will of course be the gathering of the world's leading football (soccer) nations in South Africa to compete for the FIFA World Cup. Sport is a very dangerous area for an ambassador to get involved in — all I am going to say is that Japan and England will both be present, and I wish both teams all the best. And England, of course, just a little bit more than that!

In celebration both of the strength of the links between the U.K. and Japan, and of Her Majesty The Queen's 84th birthday, I send my warmest wishes to all the readers of The Japan Times, and my best wishes for the year ahead.



Impressive: With the 2012 Games, London will be the first city to host the modern Olympics three times. BRITISH EMBASSY

Learn English to engage the world

People who know about the British Council do so for many different reasons. One of our objectives is to develop a wider knowledge of the English language in Japan. This doesn't have to be British English. We work to promote the English language not just because it's our language, but because it's

the world's language.

We have a great deal of work to do on this front in Japan. Japan's level of English seems much less advanced than its level in most other respects. A related trend is that the number of Japanese candidates applying to overseas universities is declining much more sharply

than the shrinkage in the relevant age group, with demand from male students particularly weak.

Most readers of this article can probably think of a host of reasons for these trends, and there isn't space for them all here. But two main points seem

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Fun: Held annually since 1966, the Notting Hill Carnival in London, led by the Trinidad and Tobago Caribbean community, is one of the largest street festivals in the world. BRITISH EMBASSY

**Birthday Greetings to
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II**



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(In Alphabetical Order)

Queen Elizabeth



Historic: Located in central Scotland, Castle Campbell, originally built in the late 15th century and the chief stronghold of the Campbell clan, is an awe-inspiring sight and just one of the many castles in the United Kingdom. BRITISH EMBASSY

The British Council works to promote the English language in Japan

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worth making. The first is that Japan is going in the opposite direction from the rest of the world. A senior figure in the Japanese education sector commented recently: “In this country, everybody’s talking about globalisation. But the actual trend is the other way around.”

The second is that Japan’s weakness in English is a real constraint on its ability to engage internationally. One reason why fewer Japanese young people are studying overseas is that their English isn’t good enough for the entry requirements. Young people in other countries are working much harder to earn the opportunities that English can bring them. There are other reasons for the malaise in the Japanese econo-

my, but poor English is an increasing drag as the rest of the world becomes increasingly interlinked.

Exams are part of the problem. As long as university entrance exams treat English more as an intellectual exercise than a means of communication, Japanese students will continue to focus on aspects of English that are of limited use in the real world. Exams where students can learn techniques to “beat the test” are also unhelpful.

One positive trend is that higher-quality exams are gaining a share in the market. IELTS, which is partly owned by the British Council, continues to grow strongly in Japan, and we recently launched a partnership with the Society for Testing Eng-

lish Proficiency (STEP) that we hope will lead to a further acceleration. It’s also encouraging that major Japanese companies are starting to adopt STEP BULATS, a high-quality English test aimed at the business sector. Still, Japan can learn from the enthusiasm for English in neighboring countries. In recent years both China and Korea have seen double-digit growth among IELTS test-takers.

Japan could also consider the teaching of English in schools. One obstacle our teachers have noticed is a lack of confidence and fear of using English among learners. Japanese schoolchildren do not seem to be accustomed

to taking the initiative to speak up in the classroom. But the introduction of compulsory foreign language in primary schools is a positive step; the British Council is busy teaching schoolchildren and training teachers in this sector, and we’d like to expand this work further.

As we noted at the start, the level of English in Japan isn’t just a British issue, and we know we can’t turn it around on our own. We are eager to work with other agencies and organisations with an interest in this issue. If we fail, Japan risks drifting into isolation.

For more information on the British Council please visit the Web site at: www.britishcouncil.org/japan.htm

Help for British nationals

We understand that the current disruption to air travel, a result of the volcanic ash cloud in Europe, is causing difficulties for British people in Japan. Our consular teams in Tokyo and Osaka continue to provide assistance to those who need our help. Embassy staff are visiting Narita airport on a daily basis, working with the local authorities to resolve visa problems and advising people who have run out of funds. If you need more information on the kind of thing we can help with, and what we are able to do for you, please go to

<http://ukinjapan.fco.gov.uk/en/help-for-British-nationals>

You may be aware that passport application processes at the British Embassy have recently changed. You now need to send your passport applications directly to our Passport Production Centre in Hong Kong, where they will be produced and returned directly to you in Japan. This is part of a global initiative to streamline the overseas passport operation. It has already happened in other parts of the world and is working well. If you have any questions on the new procedures, please go to our Web site (<http://ukinjapan.fco.gov.uk>) and click on the Passports link.

We’re also here to help in the event of a crisis, such as a major earthquake. But we can’t help you if we can’t find you. If you’re visiting, or if you are resident in Japan, please register with us on LOCATE — www.locate.fco.gov.uk/locateportal — so we know how to contact you.

And finally, thank you to our wardens for all their hard work on behalf of the embassy and consulate-general. The wardens are our network of volunteers who have links in to the British community. They help us promote LOCATE and would help us respond in a major crisis. We’re always on the lookout for more volunteers. If you are interested, please take a look at the Web site to find out more:

<http://ukinjapan.fco.gov.uk/en/help-for-british-nationals/living-in-japan/general-advice/warden-network/>

Birthday Greetings
to
Her Majesty
Queen Elizabeth II

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