

Netherlands queen's day

Historical relations help friendship move forward

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AMBASSADOR OF THE NETHERLANDS

On the occasion of Queen's Day 2010, the official birthday of Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, The Japan Times has presented me with the opportunity to address its readers.



Nowadays it is hard to imagine that for many centuries, the Japanese archipelago was completely isolated from the West. Between 1639 and 1854, the only Western country that had a toehold here was the Netherlands. A small Dutch contingent of traders, physicians and scientists lived on the tiny man-made island of Deshima off Nagasaki City. They had been moved there from Hirado — the place where they had received an official trade permit from the first Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1609. I see this as having special significance. The granting of exclusive trading rights was a token of trust and over the centuries it led to close ties between Japan and the Netherlands

Even today the Deshima period is a source of inspiration — recently a book about Deshima was published by the successful British novelist David Mitchell with the title: "The Thousand

Autumns of Jacob de Zoet."

Japan and the Netherlands share a unique history. Looking back, we can see historical trends that continue into the present.

First of all, an interest in each others' cultures: witness the van Gogh exhibition that will open in the National Art Center, Tokyo, this September; but did you know that not only van Gogh's sunflowers, but also the character Miffy, so popular in Japan, is from the Netherlands?

Secondly, a common stake in the ever more important issues of climate, environment and water: witness the imprints left behind in large numbers by 19th century Dutch water engineers in the Japanese landscape and today's joint seminars and research on water management and technology.

Thirdly, the Japanese physical and cultural landscape is a treasure trove of Dutch historical memorabilia: Japanese words deriving from the Dutch language, such as *bier* (beer), *kompas* (compass) and *schop* (spade); museums and archives are to be found in small towns and regions; Dutch heritage sites in Hirado and Deshima draw many visitors; but today also a mutual interest in our cultures is evident: *manga*, *anime*, martial arts and sushi are popular in the Netherlands while Dutch jazz, pop music,



Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands

DJ's, Dutch design and K-1 fighters are gaining ground in Japan.

We celebrated the 150th anniversary of our diplomatic relations with Japan in 2008 and the 400th anniversary of trade relations between the two countries in 2009. From April 2008 to December 2009, more than 300 events have taken place with the "Netherlands in Japan" celebrations, mostly celebrated in areas that connect both countries today, such as scientific and cultural exchange, economic and commercial activities, cooperation in international settings in several fields: political, military, water management and climate. There were also a lot of events that touched upon the historical ties as well.

Many government ministers from the Netherlands visited Japan during these two years. Minister of Economic Affairs

Maria van der Hoeven visited Nagasaki and Tokyo in June 2008. Minister of Foreign Affairs Maxime Verhagen visited Japan in October 2008 and met with the then Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone. Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende was invited by the Japanese government and visited in October 2009 with Ronald Plasterk, the minister of education, culture and science. The prime minister received an honorary doctorate from Keio University and met with the His Imperial Majesty Emperor Akihito. Camiel Eurlings, minister of transport, public works and water works visited in October 2009 as well. He unveiled a monument for the civil engineer Isaac Lindo who established the *Yedogawa Peil* at the end of the 19th century.

Among the events, I would like to mention in particular the concerts by the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, the Vermeer Exhibition in the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum and the exhibition of the enormous beach animals of the Dutch artist Theo Jansen. The trade pass issued by Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1609, the document that stands at the beginning of our relations and which is currently preserved in the National Archives of the Netherlands, was brought to Japan for the first installment of the exhibition "Netherlands and Japan —

from Rembrandt to Siebold" at the Nagasaki Museum of History and Culture.

I was encouraged to see that communities such as Sakura City in Chiba Prefecture and Hirado City in Nagasaki Prefecture also seized upon the milestones in our long-standing relationships to execute a whole year of events that engaged the entire community. Local events stressed the international history and outlook of these cities. Sakura hosted a superb exhibition on Dutch design, which was visited by Their Imperial Highnesses Prince Akishino and Princess Kiko, and Hirado celebrated the 10th episode of its Youth Soccer Exchange Project with the Dutch city Noordwijkerhout and the cultural exchange program 12xHolland.



Together: People dressed in orange celebrate Queen's Day on the canals. ATBC, AMSTERDAM

an opportunity to reconfirm our good bonds and to get together to think about our mutual future.

Friendship takes energy, time and investment. It involves practical issues, like exchanging knowledge, trading and visiting each other. We aim for a mix of past and present,

economic activity and cultural exchange, innovation and political dialogue, that will emphasize our long-term commitment to the relationship with Japan and will serve as a springboard to the future. In conclusion, I look forward with confidence to the future — a future with a rich shared history.

Sincere Greetings to Her Majesty Queen Beatrix On the Occasion of Her Birthday



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