

France National Day Special

Culture strengthens meaningful relationship

LAURENT PIC
AMBASSADOR OF FRANCE



Paul Claudel, French poet and ambassador to Japan in the early 20th century, referred to an “instinctive sympathy” that unites our peoples. This unique feeling of closeness has grown

throughout the years, shaping our friendship, the way we see each other and, more importantly, our world vision. Our bonds are based on solidarity, especially when we face difficulties, as Japan has recently. All my thoughts go to the people affected by the torrential rains, particularly the victims' families.

2018 is a very special year for our partnership, as it marks the celebration of the 160th anniversary of diplomatic ties. Since the early days of the Meiji Era, French and Japanese have been attracted to each other

in a very singular manner where fascination for the other's culture and civilization played a key role. French thinkers, artists and writers were pioneers in discovering and studying Japanese culture and arts and introducing them to Europe. Conversely, France was instrumental in building Japan into a modern nation.

This mutual attraction gave birth to an incredibly intense cultural relationship in every field of creation, including literature, cinema, painting, music, fashion, gastronomy, design and more. Today, the biggest French cinema festival abroad is held in Yokohama. Japanese directors such as Hirokazu Kore-eda are regularly recognized at the Cannes Film Festival, recently by the most prestigious prize, the Palme d'Or. Contemporary arts and design are also growing popular in France, where Japan Expo annually gathers more than 250,000 fans of Japanese culture.

“Japonismes 2018,” inaugurated on July 12, is the perfect embodiment of this cultural Franco-Japanese communality. From July until February, this great cultural sea-

son will introduce the public to the very best of Japanese traditions and creations. I am particularly proud that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has chosen Paris for this global event. I am sure it will be a resounding success.

Culture has nourished our partnership and given it a particular density and strength. From the beginning, our relationship has been fueled by a more comprehensive common ambition. Today, the feeling of sharing a common destiny has never been stronger between our two countries, shaped by similar democratic values. In a world of uncertainties, France and Japan are facing similar challenges and have an important role to play together.

Our respective leaders, President Emmanuel Macron and Abe, have had an intense dialogue over the past year and met several times. They share a similar vision of the world and the will to tackle major global issues such as climate change or nonproliferation, protect peace and ensure prosperity for our peoples through international cooperation. They promote mul-

tilateralism, the rule of law and openness, rejecting unilateralism.

France is a core European country, but it is also a nation of the Pacific. It is the only European country maintaining permanent forces in the region, able to annually send French navy vessels to Japan to participate in joint exercises. More than 1.5 million French people live in the Indo-Pacific, a region vital to our interests. Along with Japan, we want to preserve peace, stability and freedom of navigation in this region.

Similarly, France is bound to be Japan's gateway to the European Union, the world's largest market. Geographically at the core of Europe, resolutely engaged in European integration, moving forward, open and innovative, Macron's France has much to offer Japan. More Japanese companies are investing in France where they benefit from a highly educated workforce, modern infrastructure and pro-business reforms that are deeply transforming French economy and society. The signing of an economic partnership agreement between the EU and Japan in the upcoming



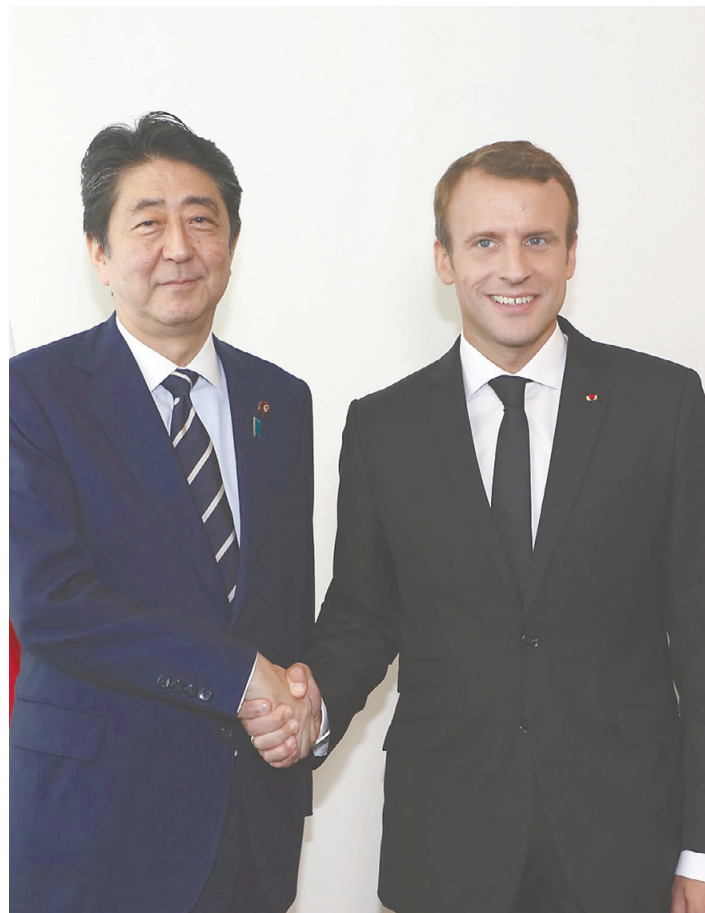
Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Ambassador Laurent Pic (fourth from right) and Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike (third from right) during a press conference in Tokyo on July 2 for “Japonismes 2018,” a series of cultural events to be held in Paris from July 12. EMBASSY OF FRANCE

days will pave the way for the deepening economic partnership between our countries, benefiting our companies.

France is Japan's natural strategic partner in Europe, because of its dynamic demographics, its international influence as a permanent member of the U.N. security council and a commitment to a stronger

Europe. As our countries will be chairing the G7 and G20 next year, there is much we can do together to shape, for our people and the rest of the world, a better future.

This content was compiled in collaboration with the embassy. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the newspaper.



Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and President Emmanuel Macron shake hands after their bilateral talks during the U.N. General Assembly in September. EMBASSY OF FRANCE



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