

Message from Consul-General Takako Ito

It has been about a month since I assumed my position as Consul-General of Japan in Toronto, and I would like to take this opportunity to share some of my impressions, experiences and thoughts I had since my arrival.

First of all, I was really impressed by the excellent activities undertaken by the local Japanese-Canadian community as well as by the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre (JCCC). I arrived in Toronto a little earlier than originally scheduled in order to join the 50th anniversary celebration of postwar immigration from Japan to Canada. The celebration was attended by over 400 people, forcing the organizers who quickly sold out of tickets to turn away latecomers. The backgrounds of Japanese Canadians vary: the descendants of those who came to Canada before the war; postwar immigrants who came here after the resumption of Japanese immigration to this country since 1967; and younger Japanese people who arrived rather recently. I was moved by listening to the experiences of so many people who have contributed to multicultural Canada while nurturing their ties with Japan. Recognizing the immense value of the 140-year history of Japanese immigration, I have come to fully appreciate the depth of Canadian multiculturalism which even today continues to attract immigrants from Japan along with their heritage.



At the 50th anniversary celebration of postwar immigration

As well, the JCCC, which was the venue for the anniversary celebration, is not only large physically, but also the history of the Japanese Canadians and the Japanese culture are scattered here and there within. With an open policy which welcomes anyone who is interested in Japanese culture, the Centre is frequented and enjoyed by both Japanese Canadians and Canadians of other heritages. Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan also visited the JCCC in 2009. I feel

there likely is not another Japanese cultural centre anywhere in the world that is as loved by so many local residents. A Japan House was established by the Government of Japan just this year in São Paulo. In Toronto, however, the Japanese Canadian community has established and maintained the JCCC for decades as a hub of Japanese cultural activity without receiving support from the Japanese Government.

Secondly, I was taken aback by how widely popular Japanese culture has become among Canadians compared to the Canada where I worked a quarter century ago. I understand, for example, that there are now close to 800 Japanese restaurants in Toronto. Walking in the city one sees not just sushi eateries but also *izakaya* and ramen shops. Kendo also was not as popular back then, and was practiced mainly by Japanese Canadians. Now, however, I understand the martial art has become so widespread that there are kendo clubs established at various universities and participants are often not of Japanese descent. I also attended a *shodo* (Japanese calligraphy) exhibit on Nov. 5, and the competition leading up to the exhibition had received entries from various locations in Canada, including British Columbia and Quebec. I enjoyed very much



At the Shodo Canada exhibition

seeing the wonderfully distinct and imaginative work produced by Canadians. I have heard as well from local educators of the Japanese language that it is now drawing great interest, and that the number of students is increasing to the point where the classrooms are always full. They told me that many people are studying the language on their own from having their interest sparked by manga and anime, and that the level of proficiency among the Canadian students is quite high. Cosplay, I understand, is also tremendously popular. Canadian multiculturalism features cultures brought to this country from countries around the world.

That Japanese culture is especially popular in such an environment is an indication that it possesses qualities which appeal to people. At the same time, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to those who have devoted years of effort to promote appreciation of Japanese culture among the Canadians, and my determination to facilitate the promotion of Japanese culture even further during my tenure.

Thirdly, after becoming reacquainted with, or meeting for the first time, people who maintain strong ties with Japan, I would like to express my appreciation for their long-term, rooted presence in Canada. At the 30th Anniversary Annual Conference of the Japan Studies Association of Canada, I was reunited with Mr. Joseph Caron, former Canadian Ambassador to Japan, whom I first met when I was working as Secretary at the Embassy of Japan in Canada. I



At the reception for JET returnees

was also delighted to see former McGill University Vice President Fumiko Ikawa-Smith and Dr. Joseph Kovalio who is still teaching at my alma mater, the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University. At a reception I hosted for the returning participants of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, the JET alumni shared with me their fond memories of Japan and the love they still hold for our country. As well, at various events I attended, I met many Canadians who told me they once lived in Japan. Similarly, recent immigrants to Canada from a third

country but who have also lived in Japan, as well as diplomats from elsewhere who once served in Japan, have “come out” to me. I would be most pleased if such people could remain fans of Japan who can convey to other Canadians the many marvellous aspects of our country.

Fourthly, I am delighted that some Japanese individuals who have contributed to the world community are being highly valued right here in Toronto. In the past month, there were two opportunities to recognize the immense accomplishments of Japanese individuals working in the field of healthcare. In the first, the Gairdner Award, often



Dr. Nakamura's presentation on the MCH Handbook at the U of T

considered a stepping stone to the Nobel Prize in Medicine, was awarded to Dr.

Akira Endo, distinguished Professor Emeritus of the Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology. He developed the first statin drug, said to be the most sold medicine in the world. It is used daily by patients with



At the Gairdner Awards ceremony

high cholesterol – about 40 million people globally. Dr. Endo, due to his health, was only able to send a video message that was screened at the awards ceremony, but his smile and sense of humour were clearly visible for all of us to see. The other was Osaka University Professor Emeritus Yasuhide Nakamura, who spread Japan's Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Handbook system around the world. Building on the MCH Handbook's contributions in postwar Japan in lowering maternal and infant mortality rates, Dr. Nakamura promoted its use in the international community. He gave a passionate presentation on his experiences in remote areas of Indonesia, to the audience that were mainly medical students from the University of Toronto and Ryerson University. Both Dr. Endo and Dr. Nakamura were undeterred by the countless obstacles they encountered. They are the kind of magnificent Japanese individuals who tell of their experiences with a gentle smile. It was to me a source of happiness and pride that I was able to learn of their contributions toward the betterment of people's lives around the globe.

There is much more I would like to tell you, but I shall leave that for next time.