

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL SASAYAMA TAKUYA

May 2021

The Stay-at-Home Order issued for all of Ontario has been extended to June 2, but the government on May 20 announced a roadmap by which public health measures will be gradually eased. At the same time, vaccinations are being administered at full speed, making use of every available opportunity to accelerate the process. The stated goal is to give at least the first shot of the vaccine to 65 per cent of adults by the end of May.

However, many of the measures intended to combat the spread of COVID-19 remain in place. Given the fine weather we have had, there were times when I resented the restrictions on such outdoor activities as golf. However, I must ask nonetheless that you continue to monitor the information provided by your local authorities and follow the safety protocols.

This month, I would like to give you an overview of Japanese language education in Ontario.

According to The Japan Foundation, Toronto, there are about 5,000 students of Japanese at various institutions in Ontario. The history of Japanese language education in Canada began in British Columbia, where many Japanese immigrants first settled, and expanded eastward as the country's relationship with Japan deepened. One characteristic of Ontario is that a large percentage of Japanese language students here are enrolled in higher education.



Canadian students studying Japanese at The Japan Foundation, Toronto
(Photo courtesy of The Japan Foundation, Toronto)

The heart of high-quality Japanese language education in Ontario is its universities. There are more than 300 students of Japanese in each of the following institutions: York University, Renison University College, and the University of Toronto. Many students are also enrolled at McMaster University, Huron University College, Brock University, Western University, Queen's University, and elsewhere. Japanese can be taken as minor at Huron University College and York University. Most university courses are currently offered only online, but because this saves students time normally spent commuting or

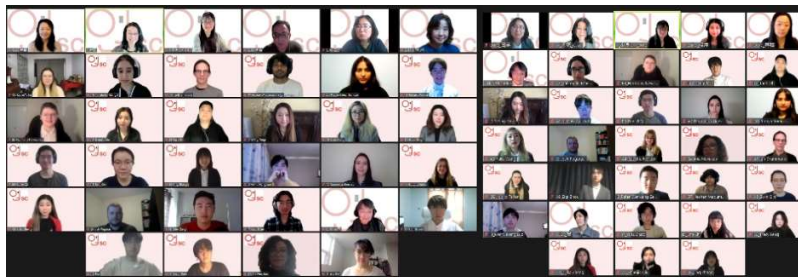
moving between campuses, the number of applicants has actually increased at some universities. Apparently, there are also courses for which the waiting list has grown longer.

There are more than 10 high schools in Ontario which offer Japanese as regular courses or recognize Japanese classes for credit. In addition to such language courses, there are also six Japanese heritage language schools which are passionately teaching students about Japanese culture and customs.

Ontario and Japan enjoy fruitful economic relations and Japanese businesses are very active here. There are many who wish to utilize the Japanese language for business. To meet such demands, there are various institutions that support Japanese language learners of all ages and all levels from beginners to advanced students.

To accommodate their needs, enrichment of teachers and professors is essential. The Japan Foundation, Toronto also plays a major role in this regard. For example, in addition to Japanese language classes, they regularly hold online seminars for Japanese language teachers in Canada, as well as hold workshops and provide opportunities to exchange ideas and information. As a national organization, the Canadian Association for Japanese Language Education (CAJLE) holds academic presentations and study groups for teachers each year. CAJLE and The Japan Foundation, Toronto also co-organize opportunities for language instructors to share information under the “Continuing Learning Japanese” banner, as well as the Online Network for Japanese as a Heritage Language.

Intermediate and high school students can be motivated to study Japanese for various reasons. Connections with Japan established through manga, gaming, and social media and the desire for greater understanding might be typical sources of inspiration. Furthermore, there are events held in Ontario to maintain their motivation. One of them is the Ontario Japanese Speech Contest which takes place every year around the start of March. About 30 contestants participate annually. Students of the aforementioned Japanese language teachers participated enthusiastically again this year. Many Japanese companies have also long supported this project. In addition to Ontario, Japanese speech contests are held in British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, Manitoba, the Ottawa region, and Atlantic Canada. Winners of the regional contests proceed to compete at the national level.



(Copyright :Organizing Committee for the Ontario Japanese Speech Contest)

As well, since 2018, Huron University College and The Japan Society Canada have been co-hosting the Japan Bowl. This event is modeled after a quiz show and is for high school students. Teams of three contestants apply and the contest is held in early spring. It was held online the past two years, but the number of participants has been growing. This year, there were 33 students participating from 14 high schools.



The Japan Bowl logo

I imagine there are various motivations and objectives among those studying Japanese in Ontario. I myself took French at school as a second foreign language in addition to English, but I must confess I have not retained it at all. In addition, I also studied Spanish and Korean when I was posted to Mexico and South Korea. I went to school or hired a tutor with the aim of better appreciating the culture of the country where I was working. Nowadays, you can even stream audio courses online. However, once one leaves their posting, there is very little opportunity to use the local language and motivation diminishes as well. One thing I can say is that people will always appreciate your attempts to communicate with them in their own language, even if you know just a few words.

My understanding is that, while there are about 5,000 students of Japanese at various educational institutions in Ontario, there are also many who are studying on their own. However, given Ontario's total population and the diverse cultures present here, I cannot help wondering whether this should be considered a large number. Is there room for expansion? Unfortunately, Japanese is not a language that is widely used worldwide. I think people who study Japanese are those who want to be directly connected to Japanese culture and business. In a sense, the number of Japanese learners in a country reflects its relationship with Japan. Looking at things this way, I believe there is indeed a lot of room to further expand and deepen exchange between Japan and Canada. I also think there is much to consider in relation to Japanese language education, such as increasing the number of instructors, bringing Japanese into the mainstream at educational institutions, and expanding employment opportunities for those who study Japanese. As Consul-General, I also wish to further increase my own support.

SASAYAMA Takuya
Consul-General of Japan