

Speech
Presented by NAITO Yasushi, Consul-General of Japan in Perth
On the occasion of the 2024 Shinju Matsuri Floating Lantern Matsuri in Broome
Sunday August 25, 2024

(Acknowledgements)

The Hon Melissa Price MP,
President and Board Members of Shinju Matsuri,
Horizon Power representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

(Broome and Japan)

It is a great privilege to be here at Shinju Matsuri 2024. This is my third visit to Broome but I have a special feeling of coming back home.

Japan and Broome have a special history, which dates back more than 130 years to when Japanese pearl divers first arrived. Since then, families and descendants, facing and living through many challenges, became a bridge between our two nations. I am pleased that the multicultural tradition prevails in Broome and that the Japanese connection is maintained.

Shinju Matsuri, or Pearl Festival, originally started among Japanese residents in Broome during the 'Obon' season to honour the spirits of their ancestors. Now it has developed into a famous regional festival that features the proud multi-culturalism of Broome.

(Inspiration of Pearl Divers)

I had the honour of meeting a former pearl diver, Mr Akira Masuda again few days ago. He is now 90 years of age and is the oldest Japanese former pearl diver in Broome. I was impressed to listen to the story of his venture to travel across the ocean at the age of 21 from Taiji of Wakayama in 1955 to come to Broome to become a pearl diver.

He used to be a strong diver who did deep dives for 40 meters, which caused many of his colleagues to suffer decompression sickness and even to lose their lives while young. He must have had tough times and I asked him so, but he repeated saying "Broome is a great place, with the people, and the freedom" and he bought me another beer.

The resilience of the pearl divers' community and their love for the land and people of Australia became a solemn inspiration to the Japanese community in Australia and made positive influences. Many Japanese residents in Western Australia thereafter followed and contributed to forging friendships with Australians through people-to-people bonds.

(Visit by Students from Japan)

I am happy also to see the sister city relations become active again. St Mary's College sent students to Taiji Town in Wakayama in April for a cultural immersion program. Reciprocally, five students from Taiji visited Broome this month and received a very warm welcome in Broome. I still remember the impressive calligraphy of Taiji students wrote on the lantern that I released last year 「日本から海にかけて陸続き」 meaning "a walking distance beyond the sea" . And for this year 「海を越えた友情」 meaning "friendship across the ocean" that shows the closeness of the two coastal towns across the ocean.

We resumed the All Nippon Airways Perth to Tokyo direct flight last October which made a huge impact, Tokyo becoming one of the top holiday destinations for Australians.

In promotion, the "Walking On A Dream" video clip of Rika Hamaguchi, a famous model and contemporary dancer from Broome, dancing with the backdrop of beautiful scenery of the Kimberly were shown to millions of people, including on the iconic screen of Shibuya Crossing and attracted many to visit Western Australia.

The ANA direct flight is on a pause at the moment but it is resuming again on the 14th of October. Another great news, is the direct flight launched between Singapore and Broome that gives another option for more foreign visitors to come to this beautiful part of Western Australia.

(Sound of Taiko at the releasing of Lanterns)

Today, I am happy to have two members of Taiko On as the guests of Shinju Matsuri. Taiko On is a famous Japanese drumming group in Perth launched 10 years ago and Sanshi and Aya are good friends of mine. We are fortunate to have groups like Taiko On, not only as fantastic performers but also as passionate cultural ambassadors dedicated to connecting people.

Today, Japan and Australia cherish the friendly relations, closest bilateral partner based on mutual trust broadly supported by grassroots human bonds. With partnerships in resources and energy, the two countries achieved remarkable economic success and contributed to the world economy in a massive scale, becoming a rare success model of the world.

We acknowledge our difficult past while reflecting our achievement we have built through a journey we walked together. Japan and Australia have an extraordinary relationship that transcends time, distance and culture, united in resolve, admiration and friendship. It all started here in Broome.

(In Conclusion)

Enjoy the dynamic drums and nostalgic Shinobue flute of Taiko On as we proceed to the releasing of our lanterns to the ocean. Each of you have your own prayers and I for one, in accordance to Japanese tradition, pray and thank our ancestors and pray for enduring peace, harmony and friendship.

Thank you for your attention.

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