

Heading back East?

A Message from Mr Takashi Ishida, Director General
The Japan Foundation, London, September 2011

After four years serving in Britain, representing the Japan Foundation London, I am saddened now to be leaving to take up a position heading our Toronto office from next month. I am very grateful for all of the support I have received from so many individuals and organisations, and shall have warm memories of this time working together with such exceptionally dedicated and kind people.

It is no wonder that our London office has enjoyed team-winning moments of remarkable growth and achievement, both in terms of programme development and project delivery, and my thanks goes to all those partners, participants and of course members of staff involved. These include (for it would be impossible to be exhaustive) the new opportunities offered by the establishment of a JLPT examination in Edinburgh, and an extra summer exam in London; also new university teaching posts created through our grants at SOAS, Sheffield, Edinburgh, Newcastle and East Anglia . not to mention a myriad of artist talks out of our London office.

It would also be remiss of me not to mention the year 2011 as being a particularly memorable one, as Japan suffered her greatest natural disaster in recent history this March. The year has provided me with opportunities to learn and work together with many people in different ways, encountering many instances of personal, institutional and social expressions of care for the distressed as practised in the UK, and this brought to the Japan Foundation a degree of breadth and depth in its activities, linking British and Japanese people, and indeed beyond. One such case was this year's annual UK-Japan science workshop in Cambridge, in which a Japan Foundation grant was used to enable the special participation of high school students and teachers from the areas affected by the Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami disaster. A friend in need is a friend indeed. The whole experience and observations afforded have enormously impressed me, as someone who happened to experience 9/11 in New York ten years ago, showing that this way of thinking is indeed well-grounded and practised in this land, confirming my belief that such a demonstration of a sense of community and compassion is crucial for any human and social relationship to grow, as is perhaps symbolized by the cherry trees in prayer for peace at Tavistock Square near my office, to draw on a personally familiar example.

Now that it is time to go, I am left regretting countless things that I never had the time to see or do while in the UK. However, looking back, many special experiences stand out, although it is necessary to finally confirm my open-secret identity as a petrol-head to talk about some of the memories I will cherish the most, aside from those relating to my working and professional life. My annual visits to the Vintage Motorcycle Club's Banbury Run were truly amazing experiences for someone who has long been excited by great names of British engineering such as Enfield, Triumph and Norton. I felt like I got a real glimpse into how the past is living on in the present-tense, talking with some of the riders who were as classic as the bikes they were riding! Sadly I never made it to the Isle of Man famed for the TT races, but that is a good excuse to come back to these shores again, hopefully before too long whilst my physique remains intact. Also there is some unfinished business of savouring or rather



wandering through the British landscape (though not purporting to be like a peripatetic), and also in the archives searching for possible hidden Japan-UK connections.

I will also treasure recollections of more cerebral activities, such as attending the Local History Society, coming to greatly appreciate the British passion for social and family history. I will miss my favourite television documentaries such as *Who do you think you are?* and *Time Team* and that very British institution Radio 4, which has become my constant companion. Now that I begin to pack up my belongings I realize that I have probably spent too much time exploring second-hand bookshops wherever I have happened to visit, but I am sure I will find myself in a few more such wonderful establishments before I finally leave.

For a countryside schoolboy who devoured Sherlock Holmes in translation, and enjoyed playing a role in the Merchant of Venice through English language club activities, forty years was by no means a short time to wait before finally reaching the UK four years ago. Indeed, if I hadn't enjoyed encounters such as these so as to keep me interested in the world beyond Hiroshima through language and geography, it is hard to believe that I would have arrived here at all. It was certainly a worthwhile wait, to say the least. (Plus, I would otherwise never have come to appreciate anything about Marmite or Pimm's!)

I would like again to express my sincerest thanks to all of you for your interest in and support for the activities of this office during my time here, and hope that the same warmth and kindness will be extended to my successor, Mr Tsuyoshi Takahashi, who also assumes the responsibility of Regional Director for Europe.

29 September 2011
London