

Speech at the BFI London Film Festival

By H.E. Keiichi Hayashi,

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It is a great pleasure for me to be here this evening. First of all may I thank you, Mr. Koreeda, for joining us and giving such a stimulating talk today.

I would also like to congratulate Mr Koreeda on the selection of his current movie *Like Father, Like Son* into the prestigious BFI official competition and wish him well.

I was born and raised in what is called the Golden Age of Japanese Cinema. The days of Kurosawa, Ozu or Mizoguchi. At that time one of the most popular ways of spending a family weekend was to go out to a near-by cinema. Although I loved *samurai* period movies, I must confess Kurosawa was a bit too rough for me.

We even used to have a regular school outing to a bigger cinema. As I recall, somehow the movies were all recommended by the Ministry of Education, meaning they ought to have some positive educational impact.

They may well have been good movies, but we children did not think they were particularly cool because we would always be ordered to write an essay afterwards, often for competition. That was a burden.

I think cinema-going is nothing if it fails to be entertaining, whether recommended by the Government or not, or with or without educational effect. But happily today I only enjoyed the movie and the talk. To have to speak afterwards is not a burden, I must add.

I am no cinema critic, but I think the pivotal question his current movie poses is: “Is blood thicker than water?”

The Japanese Government wants to promote some cool Japanese cultural contents in the world, in order not only to make export earnings but also to enhance the branding image of Japan. I am also committed to that campaign.

In the world of culture and sports, however, the irony is that if a certain character or product becomes universally popular, it tends to go beyond the blood-line and transforms itself to become international.

The blood or the origin may be Japanese, but it is to be loved and identified with by the whole world. The famous Wimbledon phenomenon may be the case in point.

The Japanese film industry has had ups and downs over the half century since my childhood. But after almost being swallowed up by Hollywood, we now feel there is a renewed, growing interest in Japanese movies.

For this re-emergence much is owed to the new generations of talented Japanese directors, like Koreeda-san. They have proved that even without Armageddon and super-heroes we can be entertained. Their works are cool, and are fast becoming hot items in the international market.

What it means is that we may not be able to monopolise them within Japan anymore. But I think that is exactly what all Japanese would like to see. It is a matter of national pride.

Koreeda-san, thank you very much for coming to London; I am very proud that you are able to be here with us all. We are truly grateful for the important contribution you make, not only to Japanese cinema but to world cinema. Good luck in the competition and beyond.