

**BJLA 20th Anniversary Reception, hosted by Ambassador Tsuruoka at the Embassy of Japan,
Thursday 8 March 2018**

Speech by Mr. Scott Hopkins, Co-Chair, British Japanese Law Association

Ambassador Tsuruoka, BJLA members and guests, let me start by thanking the ambassador and the Japanese embassy - and in particular Maeda san and Hamai san - for not only hosting this reception, but also for the many years of friendship that we have enjoyed between the BJLA and the Embassy.

Indeed, it is the fostering of friendships that lies at the heart of the BJLA. Of course we believe that mutual understanding of our legal systems is important for international cooperation and commercial relationships - but we also believe that building relationships between lawyers at a personal level is a worthy end in and of itself. After all, it is the people we deal with that provide the most vivid colour and meaning to our working lives.

It is striking how unexpected friendships can impact the course of one's life. I myself have felt that impact and I am frequently reminded how crucial it has been. If you will indulge me, I would offer two by way of example.

The first is Prof Masatoshi Ikeda, former lecturer in sociology and sponsor of the ice hockey program at Toyo University, who upon his return to Tokyo following a Canadian tour with his ice hockey team decided to offer a 17 year old Canadian a scholarship to his university. Where would I be this evening had I never met Professor Ikeda? Working as a lumberjack? Or perhaps Governor of the Bank of England?

The second is Richard Playle, partner at a firm then called Denton Hall, who saw the makings of a lawyer in a not-so young Canadian who had come to London from Japan to study politics and Japanese and now wanted to pursue a career in the law. I certainly wasn't your typical Oxbridge graduate and I was aware that Richard was going out on a limb to consider me. What a relief it was to finally receive the offer of a training contract and to burn the dozens of rejection letters I had received on a bonfire on Guy Fawkes' Night.

Now some of you may wonder where I am going with this, so here is the punch line. It was Richard Playle who, as a partner at the then named Coward Chance, got together with others to form the BJLA. It is therefore with a sense of gratitude and responsibility to Richard that I have been co-chairing the BJLA with Professor Nakajima for these many years. It is my 'gimu', or

obligation, towards my 'sempai', or superior, gratefully assumed and hopefully honorably discharged.

I will end by thanking you all for coming here this evening and by encouraging you to make the most of the BJLA to meet and exchange views with other lawyers, and also to use it as a platform to speak to members about legal issues that are important to you. We are always very happy to hear ideas for future seminars and give people an opportunity to speak. You never know what cord you may strike with a member in the audience and what friendship it may lead to – who knows, it may change the course of your career – or even your life.