

**Keynote Speech by H.E. Mr. HAYASHI Hajime,  
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,  
at the Institute of Directors Japan-UK Symposium  
at Japan House London on Monday 24th April 2023**

Ministers, My Lord, Distinguished Guests,

I would like to start by expressing my sincere appreciation to the Institute of Directors and Japan House London for organising and hosting this wonderful symposium, and for bringing together such an esteemed panel of speakers and guests from the UK and Japan.

Today's event celebrates the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Iwakura Mission, a delegation that embarked on a voyage of discovery from Japan to the United States, the United Kingdom and some other European countries back in December 1871. Their learnings and experiences would go on to play an important role in Japan's modernization, and the strong UK-Japan relationship that endures to this day. As Ambassador of Japan to the UK, I would, therefore, like to take this precious opportunity to talk a little from a Japanese perspective about the significance of this mission.

It was 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1871, early in the Meiji era, when a ship carrying over 100 Japanese leaders, government officials and students departed Japan for San Francisco. The mission was led by Iwakura Tomomi, then Japan's most influential statesman, and we could recognise him as then Prime Minister though such title did not exist at that time. And he was accompanied by four leading political figures, three of whom - Okubo Toshimichi, Kido Takayoshi, and Ito Hirobumi were then Government ministers. In fact, many senior leaders of the new administration were part of this long journey, despite a series of serious reforms taking place in Japan at the time.

They would go on to visit 12 countries and 120 cities across the US and Europe, and study all aspects of western civilisation, ranging from politics to military, business to industry, and education to science and arts, and conferred with monarchs, prime ministers, business leaders and top academics, in hope of adopting measures of value to Japan.

Their second destination was the UK, arriving in Liverpool from the US in August 1872, and here the mission would absorb much of the knowledge that would form a huge part of their plans for a new, modern Japan. At this time, a post-industrial revolution Britain was on top of the world under the reign of Queen Victoria, and this was reflected by the wide scope of their visit. Indeed,

this was evident in the diary written by Mr Kunitake Kume, private secretary to Iwakura Tomomi. He wrote diaries in each country that the Mission visited, but the one for Britain was by far the longest at 443 pages, 46 pages more than the US and more than double that of countries such as Germany and France.

The voyage centered around research. Members of the delegation debated and studied, while their shared experience and understanding led to actual policy decisions after they returned to Japan.

They studied the factories of Manchester and Birmingham, and the breweries of Burton-upon-Trent. They visited the woolen mills of Yorkshire and the shipyards of Glasgow and Liverpool. There were also trips to coal mines in Newcastle and Wales, and the newly built London underground. I also understand that they visited every single room of the Houses of Parliament, which is quite an achievement!

They were received by Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle and met Lord Granville, the British Foreign Secretary and other high-level government figures, but also spent time in the impoverished areas of East London and northern towns of the UK. They were deeply impressed by the technological innovations of Victorian Britain, but also shocked by the depravity of the cities' slums.

So what were their key observations from their time in Britain?

Firstly, it was clear that to achieve prosperity, a country requires technological advances, a strong link between trade and industry, and a hard-working population. Britain was clear evidence of the benefits that an industrial revolution could bring, having been through this process a few decades earlier. The delegation learned about the economic structure bringing together industry, transport, communications, banking and taxation, and their impact on trade.

The delegation also studied the law and government, noting the power of the landed gentry in the House of Lords, and the balance struck by the two-party system between conservatism and reform. They also learned extensively about British education, together with the equipment and training of military and naval personnel.

The visit was also an opportunity for the mission to reassert the status and authority of the Emperor among Western powers, and to establish relations with western statesmen. These relationships would prove to be extremely beneficial when members of the mission took up even

more senior roles in government later on, including Ito Hirobumi who would go on to be the first Prime Minister of Japan.

The group also compared different political systems, looking for the most appropriate model for Japan. The US was seen as too large with a relatively brief history, while Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland were considered too small. The general consensus for the participants was that either Britain or Germany would be the best.

There were also some amusing stories along the way, many of which can be found in the diary of Kume Kunitake. Inevitably, he remarked about the weather, noting that “throughout our travels in England, it was invariably cloudy and raining whenever we arrived in a city, but the weather would always brighten up again on reaching the open countryside”.

After a rich and fruitful 122 days in Britain, the delegation would depart for France from Victoria station, just down the road from here, on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1872.

While this was the end of their visit in Britain, their return to Japan would see UK-Japan cooperation reach new heights. Based on their learnings overseas, the modernisation of Japan began, with British influence playing a key role. Rapid industrialisation created new export opportunities for British heavy industries and employment opportunities for skilled workers. In the opposite direction, the influx of Japanese art and cultural artefacts into Britain led to a ‘craze for Japan’.

In 1872, Japan’s first railway line was built with technological and financial support from Britain, connecting Tokyo and Yokohama. And over 1000 British built railway steam engines were exported to Japan between 1871 and 1911. Indeed, the Emperor Meiji’s private rail coach was a custom designed walnut panelled, Birmingham built coach, with Lancashire cotton cushions and Nottinghamshire lace. It was spring-supported on Leeds bogies, and ran on Barrow and Sheffield rolled rails, hauled by a Manchester built steam engine. All the switching and signalling equipment was also British.

Leading British engineers and architects would also make an important contribution to education in Japan. For example, Scotsman Henry Dyer was recommended to develop a curriculum for the Imperial College of Engineering in Tokyo in 1873, aiming to educate young Japanese engineers to help achieve rapid modernization.

And British architect Josiah Conder became professor of architecture at the Imperial College of Engineering in 1877, overseeing the development of the Marunouchi area of Tokyo into a business district.

There was a milestone in Japan-UK diplomatic relations in 1902, when the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was signed by British foreign secretary Lord Lansdowne and the Japanese resident Minister Hayashi Tadasu – also a member of the Iwakura Mission. In 1905, Hayashi became the first Japanese Ambassador to the Court of St. James's in the first Japanese Embassy in the world.

And now, in 2023, the friendship between Japan and the United Kingdom continues to flourish, as befits two countries who share fundamental values of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. This can be found in all the key areas of bilateral cooperation, not only between our governments and heads of state, but also among businesses and academic institutions, and ranges from the political and diplomatic, to defence and security, and economic and business fields, to cultural and people-to-people exchange.

For example, Japan-UK economic cooperation has made significant progress in recent years, with the Japan-UK Economic Partnership Agreement coming into force and the UK's accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement on Trans-Pacific Partnership. Furthermore, the prime ministers of Japan and the UK have met in person frequently, including during the UK presidency of G7 and COP26, and most recently in London earlier this year.

The proud history of Japan-UK security and defence cooperation has also continued to develop to a 'new level', with two Japanese ships – the JS Kashima and the JS Shimakaze – completing port calls in London and Portsmouth last year, while HMS Queen Elizabeth made a port call on Yokosuka, near Tokyo a year before. Japan, the UK and Italy also announced a new Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP) in December last year, while Prime Minister Kishida and Prime Minister Sunak signed the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) to further deepen our security and defence cooperation in January this year.

The goods and service trade between our two countries totaled £26.8 billion in the 12 months to September 2022. The UK also continues to be one of the leading investment destinations for Japanese business, even after Brexit, and I am impressed to learn how the UK attracts foreign direct investment from all over the world. As a matter of fact, many Japanese companies have made fresh investments in the UK, especially in future orientated sectors such as green and digital. Japanese direct investment in the UK totaled £92 billion in 2021, and there are nearly 1,000

Japanese companies active in the United Kingdom, creating more than 170,000 jobs. Meanwhile, during his visit to the UK in May last year, Prime Minister Kishida delivered a message at the Guildhall saying that you can invest in Japan with confidence – “Invest in Kishida”, as Japan certainly welcomes investment from the UK to Japan as well.

While the international community faces a number of serious challenges, I know that we will work together to find possible solutions. Our strong partnership is built on the many years of exchange and cooperation that we have shared since the Iwakura Mission arrived in Liverpool more than 150 years ago. And in many ways, our partnership now is underpinned by many of the same qualities shown by the Iwakura Mission – a strong focus on talented personnel, a willingness and flexibility to adapt and learn from each other, and the bravery to make bold and courageous decisions. The breadth of our cooperation is also reminiscent of the wide range of areas studied all those years ago.

I would like to conclude my remarks by thanking everyone again for their hard work in organising such a wonderful occasion here this afternoon. Today is a valuable opportunity for us to not only celebrate our friendship, but also to look forward to new opportunities in the future. I hope that this event is another successful story in our long history, perhaps for the next 150 years to come.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.