

Remarks by H.E. Mr. HAYASHI Hajime,
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,
at the film screening:
'Sympathetic Souls -A Biography of Hokiichi Hanawa'
on 11th September 2023

Distinguished guests,

Good afternoon and welcome to the Embassy of Japan.

Thank you for coming to today's screening of the documentary film about the life of Hanawa Hokiichi.

Hokiichi was a famous scholar in the late Edo Period in Japan, who compiled a large collection of classic Japanese books and other important documents from medieval times in the late 18th to the early 19th century. Born to a relatively ordinary farming family on the outskirts of Edo, or Tokyo today, he suffered from poor health and was afflicted with blindness from an early age.

It would have been unthinkable at the time for such a person to become an eminent scholar. Nonetheless, buoyed by an outstanding memory, a strong desire to learn and tireless determination, and surrounded by people who recognised his talent and supported him, he has left a significant mark on academia. In addition to that, it is worthy of note that, in Japanese society at that time, not only the ruling class, the samurai, but also the common people, such as farmers and merchants, had access to high-level education, which contributed to Hokiichi's academic accomplishments.

Nevertheless, in Hokiichi's time books were very valuable and there were no

libraries. Rare books were only available to a few people, and some of these books would have been little known even at the time. Without Hokiichi's inspired mission, they would have disappeared without being recognised by succeeding generations. Much of what people today are able to learn from such materials about Japan in ancient times is down to him.

Forty years after coming up with the idea of collecting books so as to make them available to everyone including future generations, he completed his grand project, known as the *Gunsho Ruijyu*. It was only two years later that he passed away, no doubt satisfied that he had realised his dream.

In 1921, the *Gunsho Ruijyu* was donated to the Cambridge University Library in commemoration of the visit to the UK by the then-Crown Prince and future Emperor Showa, which was made on the invitation of King George V. This gift was not simply a set of books but the quintessence of Japan's wisdom. I deeply appreciate the fact that Cambridge University has carefully looked after these priceless documents until today.

This documentary film was created to shine a light on Hanawa Hokiichi and to introduce him to as many people as possible. Today, he is not well known even in Japan, but considering his achievements he deserves proper recognition not only in his homeland but around the world. I would like to express my respect for the impressive ambition and diligence of everyone involved in making this film. I believe it will successfully convey to the audience here today the significance of the *Gunsho Ruijyu* and Hokiichi's incomparable contribution to our knowledge of history.

Thank you very much.