

Remarks by H.E. Mr HAYASHI Hajime,
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,
On the Occasion of the Bestowal of
The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette
upon Mr Michael Houlihan
on Friday 26 January 2024

Distinguished Guests,

It gives me great pleasure to have this opportunity to pay tribute to Mr Michael Houlihan for his outstanding contribution to enhancing cultural exchange and deepening relations between Japan and the UK through Japan House London.

With his wealth of expertise in art and culture as well as his experience in museum management, Mike was appointed as the first Director General of Japan House London in June 2016. Subsequently, during the two years of preparation for the opening of JHL and for about four and a half years afterwards, he worked tirelessly to develop JHL into a solidly established institution in the heart of London, thereby doing a great deal to promote the appeal of Japan.

Let me take this opportunity to talk about some of Mike's achievements.

Firstly, he showed great initiative in paving the way for JHL's successful opening. He took overall responsibility for the preparations, from organising exhibitions giving sophisticated insights into Japanese culture and values to the less glamorous aspects such as negotiating with the Council and briefing local residents. Buoyed by his adroit oversight, JHL embarked on an unparalleled mission to promote fresh aspects of Japan in the UK. The opening in 2018, attended by many celebrities, in particular HRH Prince William, the then-Duke of Cambridge, and Mr Aso Taro, the then-Deputy Prime Minister of Japan, was a truly spectacular and memorable occasion.

Secondly, Mike devoted himself to laying the groundwork for making JHL a steadily evolving and sustainable project. He visited Japanese and British companies in the UK to explain the importance of the JHL project and was able to secure a number of corporate members. By October 2022, when he retired, the number had grown to 34, and it now stands at 40. It is gratifying to note that JHL has been able to forge productive and forward-looking relationships with these companies.

Thirdly, after the opening of JHL, Mike continued his efforts with his creative and dedicated team to effectively promote Japanese culture, including its relatively undiscovered or less well-known but potentially appealing aspects. Let me give one example of the distinctive events that took place under Mike's stewardship. The exhibition *Biology of Metal: Metal Craftsmanship in Tsubame-Sanjo*, held in 2018, showcased traditional metalworking techniques and the history of local industrial development in Japan. It won the top prize in the Communication Design category of the internationally prestigious German Design Award. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that this exhibition led to business opportunities between the two countries.

The total number of visitors to JHL has now exceeded 1.8 million. JHL has become a widely recognised Japanese cultural institution in London and a perfect platform for cultural exchange and mutual understanding between the peoples of the UK and Japan.

We are deeply indebted to Mike for the solid foundations Mike has laid. He has achieved this through his deep understanding of the original and unique objectives of JHL, which Mr Hara Kenya, joining us from Japan for today's purpose, played a major role in forging.

In view of his magnificent work, Mike is clearly a most worthy recipient of the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette, bestowed upon him by His Majesty the Emperor of Japan. This decoration is the ultimate proof of his dedication and commitment and testifies to JHL's resounding success. Please join me in congratulating him on his great achievement. Mike, Congratulations!