

Remarks by H.E. Mr Hiroshi Suzuki,
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,
at the Presentation Ceremony of the Foreign
Minister's Commendation to
Mr Nicolas Maclean & Prof Timon Screech

Mr Maclean,
Professor Screech,
Lord Salisbury,
My fellow Ambassadors,
Distinguished Guests,

Thank you very much for coming to the Japanese Embassy this evening to attend the presentation ceremony of the Japanese Foreign Minister's Commendation to Mr Nicolas Maclean and Professor Timon Screech.

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome two truly remarkable "Sensei". Mr Maclean and Professor Screech have been awarded the Commendation independently, but I am hosting

a joint award ceremony tonight because of their close cooperation in co-chairing “Japan400”.

As a result, they had to wait for more than a year, because Prof Screech is based in Kyoto. We had to find an opportune occasion for Prof Screech to travel to the UK to hold this ceremony.

Mr Maclean has made an outstanding contribution to cultural and people-to-people exchange over many decades.

Among his achievements, the creation of the British English Teachers Scheme (BETS), in which he played an instrumental role, deserves special mention.

Mr Maclean persistently advocated the importance of such a programme. In order to overcome certain skepticism held by Japanese Government officials, he contributed an article to Tensei-Jingo, a famous column on the Asahi

Shimbun.

If you ask any Japanese, that person would surely know Tensei-Jingo column. It is that famous among the Japanese people.

His article caught the eye of Mr Junichiro Koizumi, who was a member of the Japan-UK Parliamentarians' League. Mr Koizumi would become Japanese Prime Minister later on, but this was way before that. Support from influential people followed and the pilot programme of BETS was finally launched in 1978.

It was so successful that it eventually led to the establishment of the JET programme. This is arguably the most successful youth and educational exchange programme the Japanese Foreign Ministry has ever put together.

All JET participants become huge fans of Japan and become friendship Ambassadors of Japan for lifetime. Today, my Embassy sends the

largest number of JET participants of any Japanese mission worldwide. So, thank you very much, Mr Mclean.

Professor Screech has conducted pioneering and wide-ranging studies on Edo-period art, urban culture and the history of international exchange.

His works include “Tokyo Before Tokyo” and “The Shogun’s Silver Telescope”. He is often described as a Japan scholar of encyclopedic knowledge. He studies not only “about” art, but also “through” art.

By introducing the social contexts behind artworks, his perspective has offered us in Japan fresh insights, while at the same time greatly deepening the understanding of Japan among the British people.

In 1613, Tokugawa Ieyasu wrote to his contemporary, King James I: “*Though separated by ten thousand leagues of clouds*

and waves, our territories are as it were close to each other.”

In 2013, the two great “Sensei” worked hand-in-hand and co-chaired a huge Japan-UK cultural undertaking entitled “Japan400”, celebrating the historic anniversary of 400 years since the arrival of the English ship *Clove* in Japan.

Over 220 events were held throughout the year across the UK and Japan. Those who recall these events can truly appreciate its enormous scale. Without their strong leadership, it is hard to imagine how this landmark venture could have taken place.

Japan and the UK are not neighbours in geography. Yet, both of our peoples feel a sense of closeness – a closeness of hearts, built through the tireless efforts of passionate “Sensei” like Mr Maclean and Professor Screech.

In closing, let me extend my heartfelt congratulations to Mr Nicolas Maclean and Professor Timon Screech on receiving the Japanese Foreign Minister's Commendation.

Thank you very much.