

Remarks by H.E. Mr Hiroshi Suzuki,
Ambassador of Japan to the UK,
On the occasion of the launch reception of
Wales and Japan 2025
At Temple of Peace, Cardiff, Wales
on 9th January 2025

First Minister Morgan,
Distinguished Guests,

It is my great honour to celebrate the launch of ‘Wales and Japan 2025’, and I would like to thank First Minister Morgan and the Welsh Government for inviting me and my wife Eiko to this memorable event.

First and foremost, let me congratulate First Minister Morgan for her splendid rendition of “Kimigayo” (Japanese National Anthem). Her Japanese was perfect, and my wife just told me, “Oh, Hiroshi, you must practice your Welsh National Anthem much harder.”

In the Japan-Wales relationship, the economic aspect would probably be the most noticeable. In fact, at the State Banquet last June, His Majesty the King recollected that “the innovations I saw left me with a lasting impression of the power of blending the traditions of Eastern and Western civilisations, together with progress in science and technology for the benefit of all,” during his first visit to Japan for Expo 1970 in Osaka as the Crown Prince.

SONY and Panasonic subsequently established operations in Wales, and today over 50 Japanese companies operate here, employing around 6,000 people. We commemorated 50 years of successful economic relations between Japan and Wales that followed at the Japanese Embassy in 2023.

This is my second visit to Wales in my two months as Ambassador. Last month, I congratulated Panasonic Manufacturing UK on their 50th anniversary of presence in Wales and applauded their dedication towards decarbonisation in Wales and then the UK, through the Panasonic HX initiative.

This time, I visited SONY and Shoda Sauces, two other great examples taking root in the local communities near Cardiff, and also exchanged views with the Wales Japan Club.

They all impressed me by their togetherness with local Welsh communities. I hope our economic relations will further deepen in various areas such as wind power and semiconductors.

Our relations have also progressed in other aspects. At the 2019 Rugby World Cup in Japan, Wales made it to the semi-finals. The Team and supporters therefore spent much time in cities such as Kitakyushu, Oita and Kumamoto, activating exchanges. 2019 also saw our cultural ties further expand as our two UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Conwy castle and Himeji castle, twinned.

Another enduring connection is the Sakura Cherry Tree Project, launched in 2017 as a symbol of the never-changing friendship between Japan and the UK. In fact, I was one of the three founders of this project, and am pleased to see the project taking root in Wales too, most notably at St Fagans National Museum of History. As we set the target of planting 10,000 trees in the UK, I hope more cherry trees will take root across Wales, offering Welsh people with festivities, which we call “Ohanami.”

Looking ahead, ‘Wales and Japan 2025’ is a timely initiative to deepen the economic and cultural ties between Japan and Wales, foreseeing the next 50 years of our friendship.

In this regard, people-to-people exchanges are essential. I wish the Welsh mission to Expo 2025 and the Wales Days at the UK Pavilion a huge success in this context. I also hope that this may create a momentum for Welsh youth to experience Japan with our Working Holiday Scheme.

I would like to conclude by hoping that this event will become the first page of our fruitful next 50 years of friendship.

Thank you very much.