

## **Letter from Kanji**

Dear Canadian friends,

Thank you for your continued support of the development of Japan-Canada relations.

This time, I would like to report on the conferment ceremony that took place at my official residence last week, on July 3rd, in which the Order of the Rising Sun, Silver Rays was awarded to Ms. Sachiko Okuda.

## **2024 Spring Conferment of Decorations**

First, I would like to provide an overview of Japan's decoration system. In Canada, there is the Order of Canada. It was established in 1967 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the founding of Canada, at the suggestion of then Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. It honours Canadians who have made a lifelong contribution to Canada.

Japan's system of decoration was established after the Meiji Restoration and the establishment of the Meiji government in 1868 as a system for the nation to recognize individuals for their achievements and accomplishments. The Orders of the Rising Sun, including the Order of the Rising Sun, Silver Rays that Ms. Sachiko Okuda has just received, was established on April 10, 1875 (Meiji 8) as Japan's first order of decoration, and consists of eight grades, from First Class to Eighth Class.

The following year, in 1876 (Meiji 9), Charles Le Gendre, who worked as a diplomatic advisor to the Meiji government, and Gustave Émile Boissonade, who contributed to the development of Japan's domestic laws, became the first foreigners to receive the Order of the Rising Sun, Grand Cordon, Second Class. Subsequently, in 1888 (Meiji 21), its operation was stipulated in the "Internal Rules for Conferring Decorations to Foreigners," and it is still basically followed today.

Article 7, paragraph 7 of the Constitution of Japan stipulates that "conferring honors" is one of the Emperor's acts of state. The Emperor performs state acts with the advice and approval of the Cabinet, so actual decisions are made by the Cabinet. Medals are awarded in the name of His Majesty the Emperor, and this is based on the Constitution of Japan. That is how important it is.

The awards are presented every year on national holidays in the spring (April 29<sup>th</sup>: Showa Day) and autumn (November 3<sup>rd</sup>: Culture Day). So it came that Ms. Okuda would receive the Order of the Rising Sun in the spring of 2024 (Reiwa 6). Incidentally, of the 101 foreign recipients this time, 30 were women.

In any event, Ms. Okuda's award of the Order of the Rising Sun Silver Rays is a great honour for the Japanese community in Ottawa.

### **Ms. Sachiko Okuda's Achievements**

Ms. Sachiko Okuda was born in Montreal in May 1958 and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Social and Cultural Anthropology from McGill University and a Master of Library and Information Sciences from the University of Montreal. As a librarian, she has worked at the National Library of Canada, the Treasury Board Secretariat Library of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the International Development Institute Library, among others. At the same time, she has demonstrated strong leadership in Japanese Canadian organizations in Ottawa.

She was also sent to Kobe from 1992 to 1993 as part of the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET), one of the world's largest people to people exchange programs, and served as an English teaching assistant. Actually living in Japan gave her a deeper understanding of modern Japan.

The Japanese government highly recognizes Ms. Okuda for the following three main achievements:

First, her contributions to strengthening friendly relations between Japan and Canada.

Ms. Okuda began serving as a President of the Ottawa Japanese Community Association (OJCA), an organization under the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC), in 1988 and served as its president twice. She played a central role in community activities, especially cultural exchange, for Japanese people not only in Ottawa but throughout Canada.

For example, the Mochitsuki Market held in Ottawa every December is a great opportunity to

introduce Japanese culture, with mochi-pounding demonstrations and sales, as well as performances of taiko drumming, folk songs, and karate.

In addition, she actively promoted Japanese culture through various lectures and video media. This is of great significance in passing on the intellectual heritage of the Japanese community to future generations.

And what's important is that these activities themselves directly contribute to strengthening the friendship between Japan and Canada.

Second, she contributed to the dissemination of Japan-related information in Canada.

From 1993 until 2020, except for periods when she was raising her children, Ms. Okuda served as co-producer and co-host of Contact Japan, Ottawa's only Japan-focused monthly cable television program. The program provides a wide range of information about the Japanese community and promotes cultural projects.

Additionally, Ms. Okuda is a frequent speaker and conference moderator, and served as the emcee for Japan Day at the Canadian Museum of History, Canada's most visited museum. In 2018, she also served as moderator at the 30th Anniversary of the Redress Agreement event, co-hosted by the Library and Archives Canada and the OJCA.

These activities greatly promote the Japanese community in Canada and understanding of Japan.

Third, she contributed to improving the status of people of Japanese descent in Canada.

Currently, Japan-Canada relations are very good, thanks to the respect and trust that Japanese Canadians have earned in Canada. The turning point for this was the 1988 Redress Agreement. Signed by Prime Minister Mulroney and Japanese Canadian leader Art Miki, the Canadian government officially apologized for the brutal atrocities committed against Japanese Canadians during World War II, including the internment and confiscation of their property, and provided compensation to the Japanese Canadian community, including individual compensation. The Redress Agreement has become a model for subsequent reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian federal government.

Ms. Okuda actively participated in the redress movement that led to this agreement, working with not only the Japanese Canadian community, but also the Jewish community, labor unions, and human rights activists, and played a major role in achieving the agreement. Ms. Okuda was one of the few Japanese Canadians actually invited to attend Prime Minister Mulroney's official apology at Parliament on 22 September 1988.

### **Volunteer Work**

In addition to the above-mentioned accomplishments, Ms. Okuda has also made various contributions to the local community through her personal volunteer activities. In particular, some new immigrants to Canada may need to improve their English proficiency. She has taught such people in ELD (English Literacy Development) courses at Rideau High School and Gloucester High School. She teaches the ability to read, speak, listen, and write English.

Her friendly and effective lessons not only improve her students' English skills, but also give them the courage to live hopefully in Canadian society. The students know that Ms. Okuda is a total volunteer who takes time out of her busy schedule to help. And they say they have a lot of respect for her.

Her volunteer work is diverse, but in 1995, she worked tirelessly to raise funds for the Ottawa Red Cross after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. Heartfelt donations from Ottawa residents were delivered to the affected areas. The kindness of Canadian citizens will not be forgotten.

### **Passing the Torch to the Next Generation**

In addition to the achievements and activities mentioned above, Ms. Okuda is also an all-around athlete, playing a variety of sports including ice hockey, soccer, and cycling. She is exactly the kind of person who would be considered a leader of both academics and sports in old Japanese high schools. Ms. Okuda is loved and respected by the next generation, and at the same time, she is an inspiration to the next generation.

The award ceremony held on July 3rd was an opportunity to congratulate Ms. Okuda on her

receiving the Order of the Rising Sun, while also reaffirming the importance of ensuring that the important role she has played is steadily passed on to the next generation. More than 100 relatives, seniors, colleagues and friends rushed to the event. The Ambassador's official residence hosts many different meetings and events, but this day was truly special. The future of the Japanese community looks very bright.

The guest of honour was Mona Fortier, Member of Parliament for Ottawa-Vanier and Liberal House Whip. In her speech, Ms. Fortier called her an "inspirational figure" and a role model not only for the Japanese Canadian community but for Canadian society as a whole. She was highly praised for her contribution to the local community through her ELD volunteer activities and to deepening the Japan-Canada relationship.

Melisa Kamibayashi, President of the OJCA, gave a speech on behalf of the Japanese community and is a central figure in the next generation who has taken over the torch from Ms. Okuda. I felt that the vision and trust they have cultivated over more than 20 years as a teacher and student is extremely strong.

Furthermore, speeches from Ms. Okuda's daughter Myma and son Alex were filled with intimate and candid words from her closest family members, which touched the hearts of many in attendance.

The toast was given by Senator Andrew Cardozo, who has been a close friend of Ms. Okuda for 40 years and the two worked hand in hand to achieve the redress agreement in 1988.

Ms. Okuda said, "I believe that this award is not something I received myself, but something that the entire Japanese community received." It speaks volumes about her humility. At the same time, I am convinced that Ms. Okuda's will will surely be passed on to the next generation and bear even greater fruits.

### **In Addition**

In fact, three days after the awards ceremony, on Saturday, July 6th, the "Natsu Matsuri" (Summer Festival) was held. The summer festival began 20 years ago, but this year it was co-hosted by the Ottawa Japanese Community Association (OJCA) and the Ottawa Japanese

Cultural Centre (OJCC) for the first time, making it even more exciting. Many Japan-related people from not only Ottawa but also Montreal and Toronto came together to present Japanese food, taiko drums, judo, go, Yosakoi dance, and the JET Alumni Association. There were plenty of great performances, and the event was bustling with over 1,000 visitors throughout the day. It was an extremely fulfilling Japanese cultural event. It seemed like the event had the potential to grow into a core event promoting Japanese culture in the nation's capital, Ottawa.

And there, smiling gently, was Ms. Okuda. It was impressive to see her watching over the development of the Japanese community and the deepening of friendship between Japan and Canada.