

*REMARKS BY THOMAS D'AQUINO
UPON BEING INVESTED IN JAPAN'S
ORDER OF THE RISING SUN – GOLD AND SILVER STAR
EMBASSY OF JAPAN
ROCKCLIFFE PARK, OTTAWA
JUNE 18, 2024*

Your Excellency Ambassador Yamanouchi and Mrs. Yamanouchi,

Thank you Ambassador for your gracious remarks. This is a memorable occasion – one I shall never forget. What an honour it is to be invested in the Order of the Rising Sun - Gold and Silver Star by you - at the behest of His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Japan. I am humbled by this recognition of my commitment – my long-time commitment - to advancing economic relations between our two great countries.

Thank you dear friends and colleagues for joining us on this warmest of days.

In receiving this honor, I am conscious that I follow in the footsteps of eminent Canadians past and present who served the relationship with distinction. Among them are two former Canadian Ambassadors to Japan who are present with us today - James (Si) Taylor and Leonard Edwards. Other recipients of the Order who are dear friends and could not be with us today are Perrin Beatty and Donald Campbell.

Among your guests, Ambassador, I wish to acknowledge an old friend, the Right Honourable Joe Clark who served Canada with distinction as both Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

I first set foot in Japan in the early 1980s at the invitation of the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO). I was the newly-minted, founding CEO of the Business Council on National Issues, today's Business Council of Canada. My visit was surprisingly long, exceeding two weeks. I vividly recall being impressed by the graciousness of all whom I met. I remember being impressed by the dynamism of the Japanese economy and the innovation that was driving its success. In preparing for the visit, I had turned to my friend and mentor, David Culver, CEO of Montreal-based Alcan Aluminium. David was a pioneer in the advancement of the Canada-Japan relationship. He briefed me on the essentials of Japanese protocol and we were destined to work closely together on Canada-Japan relations for the next three decades.

At its heart, my purpose over those years was to promote business cooperation. More broadly, it was to advance two-way trade and investment, as well as dialogue about policy concerns that we shared. Our principal counterpart organization was the Keidanren - led for many years by Director General, Masaya Miyoshi - the same Miyoshi-san who introduced me to a fine meal of the fish known as fugu. He quietly

explained that it is known for its deadly poisonous effects if improperly prepared. I remember him toasting me with generous lashings of saki and with the words "let us enjoy this meal for tomorrow we may not be here to tell the tale".

Over the years, my CEO colleagues and I benefitted from many frank and fruitful exchanges with the most successful of Japanese enterprises - among them Sony, Toyota, Honda, Nissan, Hitachi, Panasonic, Mitsubishi, Mitsui, and Nippon Steel. Among their leaders who stood out, one in particular captured my imagination - the charismatic entrepreneur Akio Morita, co-founder of Sony. Thanks to an introduction from David Culver, I visited Morita-san several times in Japan and hosted him in Canada. To this day, I treasure the iconic Sony Walkman that he gave me as a gift – an advanced version that had not yet been put on the market. I was thrilled!

Quite apart from my travels to every part of Japan with the Business Council, I was fortunate in later years to spend much time in Tokyo and other Japanese cities as a Director of Manulife Financial. There I saw close up how this company – one of Canada's largest investors in Japan and in Asia – runs its insurance and wealth management operations.

The relationship between our two countries, I am pleased to say, is remarkably positive. Canada and Japan both border on the Pacific Ocean. We share membership in the G7, the G20, and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. (CPTPP). Our two countries enjoy a deepening economic relationship marked by impressive Japanese investment in Canada. We respect one another. We trust one another. This respect and trust extends into the security domain as our countries endeavour to come to terms with the growing economic and military might of China.

But let me turn to some of the most memorable personal experiences I have had in Japan. High on my list is the opening of the new Canadian chancery in Tokyo in 1991. Situated on Aoyama Avenue, the chancery, together with the ambassador's residence, overlook the Akasaka Palace gardens. The residence itself, where I have stayed on a number of occasions, is set in one of the most splendid private gardens in Tokyo. The new building, designed by Canadian architect Raymond Moriyama, was a great hit in Tokyo. At the gala celebrating its opening were several members of the imperial family, Prime Ministers Kaifu and Mulroney, three former Japanese prime ministers, business leaders from both countries, and a who's who of Japanese society. Our host was Ambassador Si Taylor and his wife Mary, here with us this evening. I

recall as well, being delighted to join Prime Minister Kaifu at his official residence where he graciously hosted Prime Minister Mulroney.

On quite a different note, I must mention my deep memories of my stay at Kōya-san, the mountain-top seat of the Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism. Susan and I spent a number of nights there in one of its ancient temples. We were lost in the beauty and silence of that sacred space. Our walk through the ancient forested cemetery of Okunoin was deeply moving. The hospitality of the monks, offered with kindness and humility, was touching. Partaking in their early morning religious observances and listening to their chants transported us to another world.

Over the years, Ambassador, Susan and I have been fascinated by so much about Japan – its history, its culture, its spirituality. Let me mention the calm and silence of your sacred spaces, the measured beauty and cadence of your gardens, the ritual of your tea ceremonies, your architecture, your hugely influential art works – and your cuisine! A visit to our residence on MacKay Lake a few minutes down the road from here reflects something of the impact of Japanese design on how we live. We treasure our woodblock prints by masters such as Hiroshige, Hokusai, Yoshitoshi and Kunisada. Our garden reveals some Japanese influence: a cascading stream and a pond is bordered by

carefully positioned handsome stones; a dry riverbed of stones curves beneath our cantilevered house.

This evening, Ambassador, adds another unforgettable experience to my understanding and appreciation of your country. I am being honoured by a country that represents one of the world's great civilizations; a country that has embraced democracy and the rule of law; a country that has led the world in innovation and creativity; a country that revels in its immensely rich cultural heritage. With deepest gratitude, I thank the Emperor, I thank the Government of Japan, and I thank you and your splendid team at the Embassy, in particular Minister Tokuro Furuya and Counsellor Ryutaro Ishii. DOMO ARIGATO GOZAIMASU!