

Remarks of Ambassador Mitsuru KITANO
at the Launch of “Ireland-Japan: Connections and Crossings”
at Royal Irish Academy

It is a huge pleasure and honour for me to address this distinguished audience at the Royal Irish Academy for the launch of the new book “Ireland-Japan: Connections and Crossings.”

I would like to extend congratulations on the publication of this book of great significance and attractiveness. This is a book beyond discipline. It consists of forty chapters ranging from diplomacy, economy and education, to history, culture, poetry and memoir. This shows the multitude of areas which connect our two countries. As Japanese Ambassador, I am excited that such a book has been published on our relationship.

This is also a very beautiful book. I suppose readers will notice that this is a creation by those who love books and have a commitment to produce a fine book. The cover design, layout, typography, inserted photos and pictures are all magnificent. The quality of the paper is extraordinary. Thus, it is also a very heavy book. I weighed it. The result was that it weighs 1.6 kilograms.

This book is heavy not only physically, but also in its content. Among contributors, you will find two Nobel Laureates. The late Seamus Heaney from Ireland and Kenzaburo Oe from Japan. Numbers of eminent scholars, writers and practitioners penned for this volume. I feel privileged to be one of the contributors, from the area of diplomacy, along with Ambassadors Paul Kavanagh, John Neary and James Sharkey from Ireland and Ambassador Keiichi Hayashi from Japan.

This book is the result of years of endeavor. I know that editors and authors have been working on this book for years. I am delighted it has come out this year, namely on the sixty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries back in 1957. In the chapter I contributed, I wrote that, in the recent past, the year 2013 and the year 2017 were important in our bilateral relationship. The year 2013 was when there were reciprocal visits by then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Taoiseach Enda Kenny. The year 2017 was when the two countries celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of diplomatic relations.

Then I further wrote the following. “Given our common interests and mutual benefit, I am certain we will have more opportunities that bring our relations to an even higher level in the near future... I would not be surprised to look back on 2022 as another such year of opportunity.” Now with the visit of Taoiseach Micheál Martin to Japan in July and the publication of this book, I feel I was right in saying this.

Whenever I open the pages of this book, I am reminded of the complexities of our bilateral relationship. Our relationship is multi-layered. Strong bonds exist in so many areas. Even though our two countries come from different cultural backgrounds, Japanese people have been interested in Irish literature and vice versa. Even though the two countries are geographically apart, we have found a good economic partner in the other country. Even though Ireland and Japan do not belong to the same confederation or alliance, we have so much to collaborate with each other in diplomacy.

What has made this rich bilateral relationship possible? There might be no simple answer nor single answer to this question. However, from my perspective, an important keyword will be “people.” Despite various differences, Japanese people and Irish people have some commonalities. They both care about others around them in the community. They both attach importance to things invisible to the eye. They can be inward-looking but, at the same time, can be outward-looking. For me, it is natural that these two peoples are interested in and feel an affinity with each other. It seems to me that the richness of our relationship, and thus the richness of this book, stem from the human bond established between two such peoples in each specific area whether it is in literature, economy or diplomacy. The title of this book “connections and crossings” is very telling.

The publication of this book is undoubtedly a clear positive sign for our bilateral relationship. With this good indication, I am very optimistic about the future course of our bilateral relationship, as I put in my essay in this book.

Before concluding, allow me to add my personal thanks. My term as Japanese Ambassador to Ireland is due to be completed shortly in early December. I have had a wonderful time here in Ireland. I have had a number of great experiences. To be involved in this project is one of them. Thanks to that, I was

able to get to know many wonderful people both in Ireland and Japan. I owe to this book enabling me lots of such connections and crossings.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.