

## Taiwan-Japan ties still blooming

Written by Wang Hui-sheng 王惠生

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On Oct. 22, more than 2,000 guests from 180 nations, including Representative to Japan Frank Hsieh (洪耀星), senior officials and nobility, gathered in Tokyo to join the Japanese in celebrating the accession of Emperor Naruhito to the Chrysanthemum Throne and the beginning of the Reiwa — “beautiful harmony” — era.

In a tweet written in Japanese, President Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) expressed “a heartfelt hope that the close bond between Taiwan and Japan will continue to grow and remain as strong and beautiful as the rainbow over Tokyo today.”

Japanese and Taiwanese formed a “Showa Sakura” association to present Japan with a clone of a sakura tree that the Showa emperor — Naruhito’s grandfather — planted during his 1923 visit to Taiwan when he was crown prince. It was a small gift with great emotional significance as a symbol of the continuing and future relations between Taiwan and Japan.

The Japanese chairman of the association said that “Taiwan alone in the whole world could think of such a perfect congratulatory gift,” and honorary chairperson Yoko Kishi Abe, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s mother, said that, “I hope these cherry trees will continue to grow and further deepen relations between Taiwan and Japan, bringing us ever closer.”

I am convinced the wish expressed by Yoko Kishi Abe — the eldest daughter of former Japanese prime minister Kishi Nobusuke — that bilateral relations would continue to develop in the same way that the Showa sakura has continued to thrive from the Showa to the Reiwa era is heartfelt because the two Showa-era prime ministers who offered the strongest support for Taiwan were Nobusuke and Sato Eisaku, Shinzo Abe’s uncle.

Taiwan and Japan are separated by a narrow strip of water, and a twist of fate has given them 50 years of shared history and cherished shared memories that bring our people together.

Hsieh, who studied in Japan and is a former legislator and premier, is close both to Taiwanese in Japan and the Japanese themselves. As representative, he has traveled tirelessly throughout Japan, building a strong network of contacts with local governments and Taiwanese

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expatriates.

He normally adopts a low profile, but when necessary, he puts his network to use.

One example of this is property belonging to the Taiwan's representative office, which is worth \$15 billion (about US\$138 million). Without the Japanese government's assistance, it would have been very difficult for Taiwan to hold on to this property.

The two nations do not maintain diplomatic ties, but with the exception of Taiwan, Japan's neighboring countries are less than friendly toward Japan, and so Taiwan's friendship is precious.

The Taiwanese public's spontaneous donations and assistance in the wake of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami have borne fruit, and opinion polls show that 90 percent of Japanese have a good impression of Taiwan.

Not to be outdone, friends of Japan can also be found throughout every age group in Taiwan, and last year, 4.76 million Taiwanese visited Japan.

Of all the nations in the world, there are perhaps no two others with such good neighborly relations.

In both nations, government officials are as influenced by the public as the public are by the government, because in neither country can elected officials at both central and local government level afford to ignore the friendship between the two peoples.

Exchanges between local government officials in the two countries are flourishing, unrestricted by the lack of diplomatic relations: Last year, 323 Japanese local officials traveled to Kaohsiung to participate in a Japanese-Taiwanese summit.

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Since members of the Japanese Cabinet come from all over that nation, developing local connections is a shortcut to reaching the Japanese central government.

Typhoon Hagibis this month devastated parts of Japan, and Shinzo Abe's response to Tsai's timely expression of concern was that "Taiwan is an important partner that shares basic values with Japan and a valued friend.

Shinzo Abe expressed his heartfelt gratitude for Taiwan's friendship.

In the wake of an earthquake in Hualien County last year, Japan promptly sent a rescue team, and Shinzo Abe posted a picture of calligraphy on his Facebook page in support of Taiwan.

Hsieh has said that "exchanges between autonomous local governments and civic society, as well as mutual help in times of disaster, are three important mainstays of the friendship between Taiwan and Japan."

These three pillars are firmly planted in the soil of Taiwan and Japan, and the ties between the two has developed from a relationship based on slogans to a partnership based on mutual support.

During the Showa era, Taiwanese and Japanese lived under the same roof and shared the same joys and hardships.

Now in the Reiwa era, the two have long since gone their separate ways, but remain interdependent, as both are members of the democratic camp, enjoy human rights and the rule of law and share the same values.

With a new emperor on the chrysanthemum throne, the two will naturally continue to develop

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and grow together as their friendship is perpetuated.

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Translated by Perry Svensson

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