150 years of
Friendship between Japan & Belgium
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When Japan and Belgium signed their first treaty of friendship, trade and navigation in 1866, Belgium was still a young country, busily developing its international relations, and Japan was newly opening itself to the world. They viewed each other as exotic and very far away, but considered that a closer relationship would create new opportunities to the benefit of both countries. Since then, over a period of 150 years, exchanges in the most varied fields have been intense and led to a strong and mature friendship.

Personal relations between the Imperial Family of Japan and my own Family have been a part of this close friendship between our countries ever since the Crown Prince, the future Showa Emperor, was received in Belgium by my great grandfather, King Albert I, in 1921. I personally have had the opportunity to visit Japan on many occasions, including as head of several economic and trade missions. These trips to Japan have allowed me to fully appreciate the depth of its culture and the strength of the bond between our two countries.

It is therefore with particular pleasure that I assume, together with His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, the honorary presidency of the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the friendship between Belgium and Japan. Let us make this anniversary an occasion of joyful celebration throughout the year 2016, as well as a stepping stone for yet further intensification of our relations in the decades to come.

His Majesty King Philippe of Belgium
Together with Prime Minister Michel, I continue to develop the relation between our countries to a new level

Beloved people of Belgium,

On behalf of the Government and the people of Japan, I have the honor of conveying my heartiest congratulations on the occasion of “150 Years of Friendship between Japan and Belgium”. Since the conclusion of the treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation in 1866, Japan and Belgium have developed invaluable relations of friendship based upon the exceptional bond between the Japanese Imperial Household and the Belgian Royal Family.

Their Majesties the Emperor and the Empress of Japan made a visit to Belgium in 1993 as state guests, and His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince, together with Her Imperial Highness the Crown Princess, visited Belgium in 1999 on the occasion of the royal wedding ceremony of His Majesty King Philippe. Furthermore, the inauguration of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan as the Honorary President on the Japanese side for “150 Years of Friendship between Japan and Belgium” is another testimony of how highly Japan regards Belgium.

I myself visited Belgium in 2014 and subsequently Belgian Prime Minister Michel visited Japan in 2015. The fact that mutual visits of the state leaders were set up in only a single year is heartening and together with Prime Minister Michel I would like to continue to develop the relation between our countries to a new level.

Brussels, home of both the EU and NATO headquarters, is the capital of Europe where many Japanese companies have expanded their market. Furthermore, the world-renowned cultures of both Japan and Belgium also deserve special mentioning.

Against the backdrop of Japan and Belgium’s bountiful culturally fertile soils, the turning point by the name of “150 Years of Friendship between Japan and Belgium” will be celebrated in a highly meaningful way through organizing a myriad of cultural events in order to further deepen the bilateral amity.

The floral festival “Ghent Floralièes” will be held at a variety of locations throughout the city of Ghent and will feature an abundance of Japan-themed flower arrangements. The Brussels Flower Carpet on the other hand will completely cover the whole surface of the Brussels Grand Place, a UNESCO World Heritage site, with a Japan-themed flower petal carpet. I invite you all to come and visit these gorgeously organized events.

With the participation of all of you to the 150 Years of Friendship events I have great expectations for our bilateral bond to be nurtured even more. I am deeply grateful to all those who have lent their unyielding effort and support and I profoundly wish our amicable cooperative relationship to develop more than ever throughout this commemorative year.

Beloved people of Belgium,

Mr. Shinzo Abe
Prime Minister of Japan
An anniversary such as 150 years does not come by every day. It provides a wonderful opportunity to stop and take stock of a friendship that is so well established, and goes so much without saying, that we may sometimes lose the measure of everything that unites us.

During my visit to Japan in May 2015 – my first bilateral visit outside of Europe as Prime Minister – I had the occasion to appreciate directly how Belgium and Japan, in spite of obvious cultural differences and geographical distance, share the same values and the same outlook on our globalized world and its future. Our advanced societies face not only similar but common challenges: aging, how to generate new economic growth, climate change and environmental concerns. We share the same desire, and work together, for a peaceful, rules-based international order, based on respect for all persons and their rights. We also enjoy close economic ties, particularly in those high-technology and innovative sectors that are the future of our mature economies, such as biotechnology and electronics. And the frequency of wonderful projects by artists and museums, as well as the number and level of contacts between our universities, testify to the richness of cultural and personal relations between Belgium and Japan.

I am looking forward to welcoming Prime Minister Abe to Brussels in 2016, to celebrate this strong relationship, and to continue working together on this solid basis as partners and friends.

Mr. Charles Michel
Prime Minister of Belgium

150 years ago saw the beginning of a new era in the long history of Japan and its relation with the rest of the world, especially with Europe and with my own country Belgium.

We both went through turbulent times but we have now since decades a strong structural relationship based on common interests and even more common values. We are strengthening this relationship via negotiations with the EU on a Free Trade Agreement and more broadly a Strategic Partnership Agreement. In a world of renewed instability, threats and terrorism our values are at stake. Those developments bring us even closer together.

The excellent cooperation between Japan and Belgium was illustrated by very successful royal state visits in the past, and also in 2016 by our common celebration of the 150th anniversary of our diplomatic relations. Belgium and Japan are allies and friends. I contributed in my former capacities as Prime Minister and President of the European Council and nowadays as Haiku Ambassador for the Japan-EU Friendship.

Happy Anniversary!

Count Herman Van Rompuy
The Friendship Ambassador for the 150 Years of Friendship between Japan and Belgium
The year 2016 marks the 150th anniversary of Japanese-Belgian diplomatic relations which were established when our nations concluded the Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation in 1866. Japan was at the dawn of transition from closed-door feudalism to an open embrace of Western civilization. Belgium was a young independent state buzzing with industrial revolution. 150 years later, our bond is strong and the celebration of “150 Years of Friendship between Japan and Belgium” will be the pinnacle of our relationship.

Our two countries have experienced an extraordinary turn of events over these years, which were marked by wars, reconstruction, transformation in domestic and international politics and economy. Throughout those turbulent years, we maintained friendly relations.

Today, Japan and Belgium are both democratic, free and peaceful, and making active international contributions so that peace and development can be shared by the whole world. Our ties of friendship are stronger and more promising than ever.

I invite you all to celebrate this wonderful anniversary together. Let us look back at our past, and think ahead for our future.

To represent Belgium in Japan is a high honor for a diplomat at any moment. Coming at the time that we celebrate the 150th anniversary of friendship between our nations is a unique chance.

150 years ago, Japan and Belgium first established diplomatic relations. As Ambassador to Japan, I cannot but have a thought to appreciate how much I benefit from the work of my Japanese and Belgian predecessors in this century and a half. But diplomatic relations are only a small part of the story. The strong relationship between Japan and Belgium rests on the work of all the Belgian and Japanese citizens who have given substance to it through this long period, and make it more lively today than ever. Every day I meet people, Japanese and Belgians, who contribute to building ties between our countries, and every day I am encouraged by the variety and dynamism of those links in every sector and walk of life.

The celebrations of the 150th anniversary will put these ties in the limelight. More importantly perhaps, they will also be a wonderful opportunity to consolidate them, foster new contacts, launch new exchanges. I invite you to participate fully in these exciting times for the friendship between Japan and Belgium.

Mr. Gunther Sleeuwenagen
Ambassador of Belgium to Japan

The strong relationship between Japan and Belgium rests on the work of all the Belgian and Japanese citizens

Mr. Masafumi Ishii
Ambassador of Japan to Belgium
This 150 years celebration brings us a further drive: to work harder and strive higher for the benefit of our peoples. May business and cultural exchange in Japan and Belgium flourish and the friendship between the citizens of our countries prosper with it!

Please let me convey my sincere and warm congratulations for 150 years of diplomatic relations and friendship between Japan and Belgium. A glance over our shoulders at the history of this period reveals the tremendous tenacity, vision and foresight from countless people of both countries, facilitating huge strides forward in mutual understanding, growth and connectivity, in many areas, including social, cultural, business, technological, environmental, economic, political etc.

I hope this year of commemoration will celebrate all the past as well as the more recent achievements, and act as a stimulus for further synergy to face the challenges that lay ahead in the ever-changing world environment.

Adjacent to the royal domain in Laeken (Brussels), the Japanese Tower stands out as a tangible symbol of the relations between Belgium and Japan. Commissioned by King Leopold II and designed by Parisian architect Alexandre Marcel, its construction began in 1901. Marcel reused the Japanese entrance porch of the Tour du Monde, which he built for the World exhibition in Paris in 1900. He also designed the gallery that covers a monumental staircase leading up to the pagoda. Decorated with stained glass windows, it depicts scenes from the genpei wars. Wooden panels and gilded metal plaques were ordered directly from Yokohama.

Long before construction was finished in 1904, king Leopold II saw the economic opportunities Japan could offer his small industrious country. However, it was his successor King Albert I who would open a commercial exhibition in 1911 entitled “Permanent Belgian-Japanese exhibition”, showcasing products of industry and crafts from both countries. The Japanese government sent samples and the Meiji emperor himself sent a personal gift to celebrate the opening.

In 1921 the tower became part of the Royal Museums of Art and History (RMAH). Since its partial restoration for the Europalia Japan festival in 1989, it has housed several exhibitions of Japanese art from the RMAH and abroad. Together with the Chinese Pavilion and the Museum of Japanese Art, it forms the Museums of the Far East, currently undergoing restoration.

Extensive research revealed that the Japanese materials used for the decoration of the upper floors may be older than previously thought. Also, the archives from the period 1909-1921 were only recently discovered, providing new research material even up to this very day.
During the first half of the nineteenth century there was little interest in Belgium for Japan and vice versa. That changed in 1854 when the US as the first Western power concluded a treaty with Japan. The first ‘Belgian’ to travel to Japan probably was the Count Charles Descantons de Montblanc (1833-1894), Frenchman, but also Baron of Ingelmunster. He had close contacts with the fief of Satsuma, and acted as representative of the fief at the International Exposition of Paris in 1867. In the meantime, after painstaking negotiations undertaken by the diplomat Auguste t’Kint de Roodenbeeke (1816-1878) Belgium had succeeded in 1866 to become the ninth Western state to sign a treaty with the Shogunate.

The Meiji Restoration (1868) marked the formal end of the period of Japan’s isolation. The country now embarked upon a far-reaching program of political, social, economic, institutional and cultural modernisation. For the execution of this program it sought inspiration in many Western countries, mostly the major powers, but also smaller countries including Belgium. Japan’s reformers were interested in both the institutional organisation and technological know-how of Belgium. Testimonies to this interest are among others the various Japanese missions abroad which included Belgium in their itinerary. The highest profile mission was the Iwakura mission, which toured the United States and Europe between 1871 and 1873, but there were equally a number of individual students who came to Belgium to study at Belgian scientific institutions.

The History of Belgian - Japanese Relations

Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation
Visit Tokugawa Akitake to Belgium
Meiji Restoration

1866 1867 1868

Takugawa Akitake, younger brother of the last shogun (boy in the middle) visiting Belgium, 1867
Students were particularly interested in technological know-how, but a few also studied juridical and monetary aspects. Best known is perhaps Matsukata Masayoshi’s aide Kato Wataru, who was charged with the task of studying the history and organisation of Belgium’s central bank. After a three-year stay in Belgium, Kato returned to Japan, and played a seminal role in the establishment of Japan’s central bank, the Bank of Japan. Later, he was appointed head of the banking department of the newly founded bank. In the area of technological know-how, Belgium was recognised as a leading power in the fields of gunpowder, steel and glass industry, as well as the cultivation and processing of flax. Conversely, Belgian companies saw in Japan a promising market for their products and opened branches in Japan. This notwithstanding, it was not until 1898 that both countries opened legations in each other’s capital. Japan posted its first minister plenipotentiary in Brussels. Motono Ichiro became the first in a row of Japanese diplomats, among who figured some prominent ones, such as Kato Tsunetada (posted in Brussels from 1902 to 1906), and above all Adachi Mineichiro (legate to Belgium from 1917 to 1927). On the Belgian side the most remarkable diplomats were Albert d’Anethan (legate in Japan from 1893 to 1910) and above all Albert de Bassompierre (legate from 1920/21 to 1939).

On the artistic level Japan served as an important source of inspiration in the form of Japonisme for Belgian artists playing an important role in the Art Nouveau movement, while some Belgian writers, notably Maurice Maeterlinck, Emile Verhaeren and Georges Rodenbach, were avidly read and widely translated in Japan.
Although not counted as a major power, before 1914 Belgium enjoyed much esteem with the Japanese authorities as well as the public opinion. With the war, that image would even be strengthened on account of the staunch resistance Belgium put up against the German invasion. These events also affected the relations between Japan and Belgium. Due to the tension between Japan and China, Crown Prince Leopold’s visit to Japan, which had been scheduled for the spring of 1932, was cancelled. The Prince did visit French Indochina, but returned to Belgium without visiting either Japan or China. This did not prevent Belgian diplomacy from taking a conciliatory stance when the League of Nations condemned Japan in the Lytton report for its role in Manchuria and the Manchu state. While Belgium enjoyed brisk economic growth and prosperity as a founding member of what was to become the European Union, Japan’s spectacular growth catapulted the country to the status of economic world power, a development accompanied by commercial frictions with some major competitors in the international market. Belgium was one of the first European countries to benefit from direct Japanese investment. Notable in this respect is Honda Motor Corporation’s investment in a production plant in Aalst as early as 1962, the first Japanese investment in Europe by any of Japan’s major production companies. In the cultural field by far the most notable event was the organisation of Europalia Japan 1989. This was arguably the most comprehensive and highest profile cultural fiesta ever organised by Japan in Europe. It included events covering a panoply of Japan’s high culture as well as a representative selection of popular culture. The last quarter century has not witnessed another event of similar proportions, but in its wake the bilateral relations have steadily grown more robust, and involved an ever increasing number of Belgian and Japanese citizens.
## Event Calendar

### January

26 November 2015 to 8 January
- "The Spirit of Budo" Exhibition - The History of Japan’s Martial Arts (Japan Foundation’s travelling exhibition)

January to December
- Projet Senbazuru “Mille grues pour le Japon”

19 January
- Official Opening Ceremony - 150 Years of Friendship between Japan and Belgium

23 January
- Miyabi Gagaku Concert - by Kitanodai Gagakukai

25 January
- “Eat Japan” food symposium

27 January to 27 March
- Impressions Japonaises, photo exhibition

28 January to 26 February
- Haiku Paintings exhibition - by Ken Yagi & Hiro Saika

29 January
- Rubens Lecture and Concert

30 January to 10 April
- Exposition Un Esprit Japonais. Gisbert Combaz, la Céramique et la Création Belge

### February

4 to 8 February
- Salon des Vacances - Japan in the spotlight

5 February to 30 April
- Le Japon à Mariemont, hier et aujourd’hui

12 February to 4 March
- Bonten Taiko Concert with Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra

23 February
- Sarugakukai Kyogen Performance

### March

early March
- Doll making lecture by Master Keiho Ando

March-April
- Quand La BD Belge Regarde Vers Le Soleil Levant

10 to 25 March
- Invisible Needs of Life - Reconstruction 5 years after 311 tsunami (exhibition & symposium)

11 March
- Fukko concert - commemorative charity concert

10 to 13 March
- East Japan Great Earthquake 5th Commemorative Event

11 to 13 March
- Made in Asia

18 March to 14 August
- Game Changers - The Radical Silhouette From Balenciaga To Kawakubo

18 March to 1 May
- Festival - Japan Host Country, Japan Meets Belgium

24 to 26 March
- “Matsuri” Festival

26 March
- Conference: Entre Bouddhisme et Shinto

### April

22 April to 1 May
- FLORALIËN Gent - Japan as guest country

23 to 24 April
- Meiji Shrine Gagaku Concert and Martial Arts Performance

25 April
- Bi Japon fashion show

### May to December

Many more events are to be held throughout the year 2016. Please visit the 150th anniversary website for updates and contact organizers for further information.


Attention: All details are subject to change.

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JICC: Japan Information and Cultural Centre of the Embassy of Japan in Belgium
May

May to August
Japanese mask exhibition by the Mask Museum
JICC

June

1 to 2 June
Urasenke tea ceremony lecture and demonstration
JICC

24 to 26 June
Brugge Japan Day
Bruges

30 June
Opera singer’s concert by Yukiko Shimbo
JICC

July

July
Tokyo Chuteiiki saxophone concert
JICC

August

12 to 15 August
Brussels Flower Carpet - Japan as a guest country
Grand Place

September

September
Comic Strip Festival - Japan as a guest of honor
Parc Royal & Place des Palais
2 to 10 September
Snake Dance - The Recital
Brussels, Mons, Ghent, Antwerp, Ostend
24 September
Symposium: How Bells Connect Belgium and Japan
Congress and Heritage Centre Lamot

October

October
“The Feverish Era” contemporary art exhibition
BOZAR

1 October
Japon Nature
Mariemont, Molainvelz
8 to 13 October
Japan Week - international cultural exchange program
BOZAR etc
22 to 23 October
The International Aïkido Celebration-Brussels
Tour & Taxis

November

November 2016 to June 2017
Japanese Mask Exhibition
Mask Museum

12 November
Noh Play by Kyutaro Hashioka
BOZAR
12 to 13 November
Japan Folk Festival 2016 in Brussels
Flagy
12 to 27 November
Ars Musica “The Country of the Rising Sound”
Brussels (BOZAR etc), Liège, Mons, Namur, Charleroi, Bruges

23 November
Zen Adages from A to Z, lecture by Prof. Andreas Thele
Royal Academy of Belgium

December

December
Closing Ceremony
Brussels
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