

Good morning. My name is SHIMADA Junji and I am the new Consul-General of Japan in Melbourne. I arrived in Melbourne less than a month ago. It is my great pleasure and honor to be speaking at today's Melbourne Japanese Summer Festival.

I'd like to briefly introduce myself. I am originally from Osaka, which has been Melbourne's sister city for over 40 years. Around the time Osaka became Melbourne's sister city, I went on my very first overseas trip to Sydney as a young university student! Since then, I have been looking forward to returning to Australia, so I am incredibly happy to be able to live and work in Australia now.

I would like to show you this beautiful boomerang which I was gifted in Sydney in 1983. I have always treasured this. I feel that this boomerang has guided me and finally returned me to Australia. On the backside of the boomerang, it says "guaranteed to return"! What a simple and meaningful phrase this is!

The theme of today's festival is "Kizuna – We, together". The Japanese word kizuna means connections and ties, and I feel a strong sense of connection to Australia just from my background and experiences up until now.

Held every year since 2010, the Melbourne Japanese Summer Festival is one of the largest Japan-related events in Victoria. It is an event for people of all ages and cultural backgrounds to experience Japanese culture, fostering people-to-people ties at the grassroots level and ultimately strengthening the overall Japan-Australia relationship.

While we cannot enjoy the festival in person this year, I am pleased to see that the festival is still going ahead – just in a different format. Please let me take this opportunity to sincerely thank the City of Melbourne for their ongoing support and express my gratitude to everyone including the sponsors who have worked hard to make this online festival possible, so that people can get to know Japan better.

I hope that today, you will all learn something new about Japan and deepen your understanding about Japanese culture through the activities and performances, so that the next time you can travel to Japan, you will enjoy the experience even more.

To conclude: though the COVID19 pandemic is still ongoing, while keeping physical distance, let's strengthen social connections - Kizuna. I hope there will be more opportunities for face-to-face interaction soon.

I hope you will all enjoy today's festival.

Thank you.