

Good evening. こんにちは。

It is my pleasure to speak at this opening night of the 2022 Japanese Film Festival in Melbourne.

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the organiser, the Japan Foundation Sydney, for their continued efforts to showcase Japanese films of various genres to the people of Australia and promote awareness of Japanese culture here. I would also like to thank The Kino Cinema and ACMI for hosting the festival.

In recent years, Japanese films continue to take the spotlight on the international stage. As you may recall, the film 'Drive My Car' (ドライブ・マイ・カー) based on a short story by the best-selling author Murakami Haruki won the Academy Award for best international feature film this year. Films can tell us a lot about culture, and I believe that holding a film festival is a great way to introduce Japanese culture, old and new, to people around the world.

Tonight's opening film is 大河への道, Dreaming of the Meridian Arc. Set in both Edo period and present-day Japan, the story follows two officials of Katori City in Chiba Prefecture who are trying to produce a historical TV series about Ino Tadataka, in order to attract tourists. Ino is one of the most important historical figures in Japan, widely known for completing the first highly accurate map of Japan in 1821.

At that time, Japan was in the period called Sakoku in which the nation isolated itself from the rest of the world. In order to prepare for foreign intrusions, especially threats from Russia, the Edo Shogunate desperately needed a precise and complete map of Japan. Ino - who was given a big task - spent over 17 years, walking more than 40,000 kilometres across Japan. That's about the same distance as the circumference of the Earth! Unfortunately, Ino passed away before the completion of his project, but his disciples carried on his legacy. I will not go into more details as I may drop some spoilers!

Throughout the film, you will witness beautiful sceneries of different parts of Japan, and it will make you want to book a flight to Japan tomorrow! Now that Japan's borders are open to the world again, I sincerely hope that you will find the opportunity to visit Japan and explore different parts and regions of Japan, just like Ino Tadataka. I am certain that you will have an unforgettable experience and discover something new.

Thank you, and enjoy the film festival!