

Thai-Japanese Relations: its future beyond six hundred years*

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1. Introduction

I am very pleased to be provided with this opportunity to speak here at this Institute of East Asian Studies on the subject of “Thai-Japanese Relations.” especially as this is the twenty-fifth anniversary year of the Institute’s foundation and I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the staff for arranging this occasion.

The speech that I am going to make today was first delivered in July at the Siam Society which is a very prestigious organization with strong support from the Thai Royal Family and also a close relationship with Japan. This Institute of East Asian Studies also reflects the close relationship between Japan and Thailand as, under the patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Mahachakri Sirindhorn, and with the building donated by the Japanese government, it was initially established as the Institute of Japanese studies in 1983 with the aim of promoting Japanese studies in Thailand. It is my sincere desire that today’s speech will help people understand the much longer history and

much stronger bond of our bilateral relationship and facilitate further cooperation in the future.

Today the relationship between Japan and Thailand is excellent. Starting with the frequent visits between the Royal Family of Thailand and Imperial Family of Japan, we can witness active exchanges and close cooperation in various areas which encompass not only trade, investment and cultural exchange but also political and security interaction in the international arena. However if we look back on our history, we will find that this wonderful relationship did not develop naturally but evolved out of continuous efforts of our ancestors who were involved in various exchanges and cooperation over the past 600 years, the accumulation of which has resulted in today’s rich and multi-layered cooperative relationship.

Today I am going to begin with the history of exchanges between Japan and Thailand over 600 years, then overview the current situation, and, building upon those, share with you some of my views on how to proceed for the future.

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2. The 14th century, our first contact

As I mentioned, our two nations have a history of exchanges over 600 years. Our records testify that the first contact began with Thai people of the Ayutthaya period. According to these records, seamen sailing under an order of the king of Ayutthaya to deliver gifts to the king of Korea stayed in Japan for a year while in transit in 1388. Counting from this year, our relationship is well over 600 years old. Another Chinese document shows that the Chinese helped an Ayutthaya ship which drifted to China on its way to Okinawa in 1404. Furthermore, the famous ceramics of Sukhothai were exported to Japan in the 14th century and widely used as tea ceremony utensils in Japan.

Other records show that Okinawa, which is the southernmost island of Japan, was already very active in trading with China as well as South East Asian countries in the 15th century and had sent about 150 ships to South East Asian countries between 1425 and 1570. Out of those, 57 ships were sent to Ayutthaya, followed by 20 to Malacca, 10 to Pattani, and 6 to Java. This shows us how important for Japan the trade with Ayutthaya was. Among the trading items during this period were Japanese swords exported to Ayutthaya, together with Chinese ceramics and high quality textiles. When people attend national events in formal attire in Thailand, traditionally they wear beautifully decorated swords, and the highest grade of sword is called “Prakan Chai” (the

treasure sword of victory). I have heard that all the Prakan Chai during the Rattanakosin period were Japanese swords.

3. The 17th century

We now move on to the 17th century, which ushered in the Tokugawa Shogunate after a period of civil war. Even though the Tokugawa Shogunate adopted a national isolation policy, trade between Japan and Ayutthaya continued through Dutch merchants. While Japan was closed to the world, cosmopolitan Ayutthaya became even more open to the world. In his book entitled “Discovering Ayutthaya,” by Dr. Charnvit Kasetsiri, former rector of Thammasat University, it is described that there were as many as 40 ethnic groups in Ayutthaya, as testified by a French envoy who visited Ayutthaya in the 17th century. Those ethnic groups included Japanese, Chinese, Dutch, Portuguese, French, and British as well as those from neighbouring areas of today’s Thailand. Westerners came to Ayutthaya to trade or to promote Christianity. Many Japanese came to trade but there were also some who had escaped from the persecution of Christianity in Japan. There were also Samurais who had lost their masters in Japan and were in search of new opportunities overseas.

According to Dr. Charnvit, the number of Japanese in the Japanese village peaked somewhere between 1,000 and 1,500. During this period, the most famous Japanese was “Yamada Nagamasa,” who attained the official

title of “Okya Senaphimuk.” He is well known in Japan but his story is also introduced in a textbook for junior high school students in Thailand.

Another interesting episode which adorns our history is a story of a lady whose name is “Mrs.Gimmer,” or “Thao Thong Kip Ma” in Thai language. Her parents were both Christian, her mother being Japanese and father having both Japanese and Portuguese blood. Escaping from the persecution of Christianity in Japan, they settled in Ayutthaya, where Mrs.Gimmer was married to a Greek. She introduced a recipe for “Foi Thong,” very popular sweets in Thailand. These sweets were originally from Portugal but also turned into very popular sweets in Nagasaki, Japan, called “Keiran-soumen.” So it is possible that Mrs. Gimmer acquired the recipe while her family was in Japan and brought it to Thailand.

One more interesting story about food: The main export item from Japan to Ayutthaya in the 17th and the 18th centuries was copper, followed by soy sauce, kelp (konbu), and dried bonito (katsuobushi). Guessing from these items, people in Ayutthaya were already interested in Japanese food. “Awamori,” a very famous sake of Okinawa, was originally brought from Ayutthaya in the 14th or 15th centuries. Even today, Thai rice is still being exported from Ayutthaya to Okinawa as an ingredient for Awamori. Such mutual interest in food from this early period may be a reason for the present-day popularity of Thai food in Japan

and of Japanese food in Thailand. Incidentally, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a program to train Thai chefs in Japanese cuisine, in order to send them to work at Japanese Ambassadors’ residences. Presently nearly 30 skilled Thai chefs are working as chefs at residences of Japanese Ambassadors all over the world. This program started in Thailand, which still enjoys a monopoly on such training.

Skins of deer and shark were export items from Ayutthaya to Japan at that time. These were being processed into clothing, armour for samurai warriors, or hilts for Japanese swords. This clearly shows that the trade expanded into various fields in the 17th century.

4. The 19th century

With the arrival of the 19th century, both Japan and Thailand were confronted with the onslaught of colonialism by Western countries. Commodore Perry of the United States forced Japan to open up and end its isolationist policy. Japan moved into the Meiji era in 1868 and started a national policy of modernization. In Thailand, His Majesty King Chulalongkorn succeeded to the throne in 1868 and embarked upon the modernization of Thailand. Both nations began their modernization processes at the same time; this is not a coincidence. Both nations were making the utmost efforts to maintain their independence after being thrown into the turbulence of international relations. One example shows a

commonality of the fate of our two nations. Japan concluded the Treaty of Peace and Commerce in 1858 with Mr. Townsend Harris, who came to Japan as the first Consul General of the United States. Mr. Harris had stayed in Thailand before he came to Japan, and, during his stay in Thailand, concluded the Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Thailand and the United States in 1856.

Japan and Thailand, two of the few remaining independent nations in Asia, began various diplomatic interactions during this period. It should be noted that some Thai leaders visited Japan to check on the situation of Japan. Japan established diplomatic relations with Thailand in 1887 by signing the Declaration of Amity and Commerce. The declaration was signed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, His Royal Highness Prince Devawongse, who visited Japan on his way back home from the United Kingdom. This was the first diplomatic relationship that the Meiji Government established with South East Asian countries. Embassies were established in both Tokyo and Bangkok in 1897, and His Royal Highness Prince Bhanurangsri Savangvongse visited Japan in 1890. Those visits of Thai leaders to Japan during this period later led to the dispatch of Japanese advisers to Thailand. There were many foreign advisers to help the modernization process in Thailand, but I would like to share a few interesting stories about some Japanese advisers.

The first is about the Rajini (Girl's) School in Bangkok. The first principal of this school was a Japanese lady named Ms. Yasui Tetsu who, after returning from Thailand, established the very famous Tokyo Woman's Christian University in Japan. The story began when the first female school, established by His Majesty King Chulalongkorn, was closed since the western educational system didn't quite fit Thailand. His Royal Highness Crown Prince Maha Vajiravudh submitted a report about a Japanese female educational system to His Majesty King Chulalongkorn after the Crown Prince stopped over in Japan in 1902 on his way back home from the United Kingdom. Mr. Inagaki, Chief of the Japanese Mission in Bangkok, received a request for the dispatch of a Japanese advisor on female education. The Japanese Minister for Education directly approached Ms. Yasui, who was then teaching at a school in Japan after three years' study in the United Kingdom. She first wavered over the request, but she made up her mind and arrived in Bangkok in 1904 to become the first principal of Rajini School, and stayed there for three years. Ms. Yasui's devotion to female education seems to remain at the school even today, which I witnessed during my visit last year. Her photograph was there, still casting very caring and gentle eyes on students.

Dr. Masao Tokichi is another adviser from Japan, who was sent to Thailand in 1897. In those days, the Thai government was trying

to establish a modern legal system in order to satisfy the conditions for negotiating the revision of unequal treaties. The Japanese Government had just begun negotiations with Western countries to restore the rights of taxation. Dr. Masao came to help these efforts of the Thai Government, with Japanese experience. He drafted Thai criminal law and helped to organize commercial law. Later, he was appointed as the Chief of the Japanese Mission to Bangkok to promote diplomatic relations, but he unfortunately passed away in Bangkok during his assignment.

The last episode of friendship for the 19th century is a story about the “Nittaiji Temple” or “Japan-Thai Temple,” which was built in Nagoya around the turn of the century. In 1898, a British archaeologist found a clay pot which contained human bones in the northern part of India. These human bones were later confirmed as the real bones of Buddha, or a relic of Buddha, when the ancient script on the clay pot was decoded. The precious relic was donated by the British Government, which then ruled India, to His Majesty King Chulalongkorn, and it was enshrined in the temple Wat Saket. Upon request from Japan to share the relic, His Majesty decided to donate the relic as a gift to all Japanese Buddhists, regardless of their sectoral denominations. Leaders of various Buddhist sects in Japan got together and, after discussions, decided to cooperate with each other to build a completely new temple to receive the gift, which doesn't belong

to any specific sect. His Majesty King Chulalongkorn very kindly donated the relic, together with a golden statue of Buddha and some money for the construction of a new temple. Thus, the Nittaiji Temple was built in 1904. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej visited the temple in 1963. The new main building to enshrine the Golden Buddha was completed in 1984, where writing of His Majesty King Bhumibol is on display. A statue of His Majesty King Chulalongkorn was completed in front of the main building in 1987. The Nittaiji Temple is definitely a symbol of the good bilateral relationship between Japan and Thailand.

As I have briefly explained, from the 19th to the 20th century when both countries were in the process of modernization and integration into the international community, the bilateral relationship between Japan and Thailand expanded into much broader areas. In 1952 diplomatic relations were restored between Japan and Thailand after the Second World War.

5. Japan-Thailand relations today

As mentioned at the beginning, nowadays Japan and Thailand enjoy very close and good relations in the most diverse areas.

(1) Imperial and Royal Families relations

First, regarding the relationship of the Imperial Family and Royal Family, the close contacts which started in the 19th century are continuing and expanding even further today.

His Majesty the Emperor of Japan has visited Thailand three times. The first was when he was a crown prince, and in 1991 he visited Thailand in his first official overseas visit as the Emperor. Then in 2006 he attended His Majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej's 60th Anniversary of the Accession to the Throne. His Majesty King Bhumibol visited Japan in 1963. A Japanese news article which reported on His Majesty's visit said that even though it was His Majesty's first visit to Japan, His Majesty was very familiar with the Japanese life style and enjoyed Japanese food once a week. There are many other exchanges taking place, including official and unofficial visits by the other Imperial and Royal Family members, which surely contribute to the intimate feeling that exists among the people of both nations.

(2) People to people exchange

A strong bond through people to people exchanges has taken root between our two countries. The number of Japanese residents in Thailand registered at the Embassy is now about 47,000 (in 2009). The actual number will be much bigger if unregistered Japanese are counted. About 1 million Japanese visit Thailand annually and 170,000 Thai people visit Japan. I was pleased to see a recent survey in the newspaper, which ranked Japan first as Thai people's favourite overseas destination. I would like to see more Thai people visit Japan in coming months and years.

In talking about people to people exchanges, we should not forget the exchange of students. More than one hundred years has passed since the first Thai students, four males and four females, were sent to Japan by Her Majesty Queen Saowabha in 1902. Today more than 2,000 Thai students are studying in Japan. After their return to Thailand, those ex-students are very active and successful in various fields in Thailand. The Old Japan Students' Association, Thailand (OJSAT) was established in 1951 as the first of its kind in the Asia region and is today under the patronage of His Majesty the King. Those ex-students are playing very important roles as bridges between our two countries.

(3) Political relations

Japan and Thailand have maintained a good political relationship. After Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva took office, he chose Japan as a first destination for his overseas travel outside ASEAN. This is an episode which testifies to the importance of our bilateral relationship.

In maintaining the peace and stability of the Asia Pacific region in the post Second World War era, both Japan and Thailand have played a significant role as alliance partners of the U.S. In the midst of changes in the international environment after the end of the cold war, both countries have strengthened and expanded their cooperation to enhance regional

security. A shining example is our cooperation on Cambodia peace talks. In June 1990 when the Tokyo meeting on Cambodia convened, the Japanese Government worked together with the Thai Government in order to secure a final settlement agreement among the four Cambodian factions. It was a successful contribution of our joint efforts. Another eminent example of our cooperation in political and military spheres took place when an international force was sent to East Timor in 1999. The Royal Thai Armed Forces joined the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) and the Japanese Government provided US\$100 million to support the activities of INTERFET. Later, the Japanese Government dispatched more than 2,300 personnel of the Self Defense Forces to contribute to the United Nations Missions in East Timor.

In recent years, the Royal Thai Armed Forces and the Japanese Self Defense Forces have advanced concrete cooperation to contribute actively to international peace. For example, for reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan, the Royal Thai Armed Forces dispatched its engineering unit to Afghanistan in 2003, and the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force provided transportation support for the unit. In response to the Tsunami disaster in 2003, the Japanese Self Defense Forces conducted disaster relief operations including search and rescue for disaster victims, medical services, epidemic prevention, and transport of relief supplies. Since 2005, the Japanese Self Defense Forces

have been a formal member of the Cobra Gold exercise designed to ensure regional peace and stability. These good relationships have been strengthened through personnel exchanges over a long period of time. More than 200 Thai military officials have studied at our National Defense Academy in Japan and many Japanese officials have studied at Army Command and General Staff College in Thailand.

(4) Economic relations

Let me turn to economic relations. Japan is the largest trade partner for Thailand, ranking third in exports and first in imports. Japan is also the largest foreign investor in Thailand, accounting for about 40% of all foreign investment. For Japan, Thailand is our biggest trading partner in South East Asia and the eighth biggest in the world. The Japanese Chamber of Commerce (JCC) in Bangkok has more than 1,300 members, being the largest Japanese Chamber of Commerce in the world. It is estimated that there are more than 6,000 Japanese companies in Thailand - if non-JCC member companies are counted, JCC-member and non-member companies together have created more than 510,000 jobs in Thailand.

Even though our two countries enjoy close and amicable relations today, there were difficult times in the past, which we have together overcome. Many of you might still remember the boycott movement against Japanese products in the beginning of the 70's. Since then, Thailand has adopted active policies

to introduce foreign capital, undertaken various regulatory reforms, and promoted the relaxation of restrictions on foreign investment. Japan, on its part, has provided economic assistance to support the economic growth of Thailand, in areas such as infrastructure improvement and the development of human resources. For example, the Japanese Government provided intensive assistance to “the Eastern Seaboard Development Project,” which was being carried out with the strong commitment of the Thai government at that time, to help improve the investment environment in Thailand.

After the Plaza Accord in 1985, Japanese companies started to move their production bases from Japan to sites abroad, or they increased procurement of component parts from abroad, in order to offset a sharp appreciation of the yen. Many Japanese companies chose Thailand, which, as a result of the developments I have just mentioned, had come to possess an advantageous investment environment, and they built their plants here. These Japanese companies have created employment and made their best efforts to become good citizens in Thai society. As the number of Japanese living in Thailand has increased, direct interactions between Japanese and Thai people are also increasing accordingly. We have to remember that these interactions have played an important part in bringing about the present amicable bilateral relationship.

When the Asian Currency Crisis (or Tom Yam Kung Crisis) hit Thailand in 1997,

the Japanese Government took leadership in coordinating assistance among the international organizations and the G7 countries and mobilized every financial instrument at hand to help recover and stabilize the Asian economies. “The New Miyazawa Initiative,” launched during the annual meetings of the IMF and World Bank Group in 1998, was a US\$30 billion financial support package for Asian countries, the largest assistance among similar initiatives at that time. Many Thai people, including Prime Minister Abhishit Vejjajiva, told me that at the outbreak of the Asian currency crisis, many foreign companies left but Japanese companies stayed in Thailand. In fact, the number of JCC (Japanese Chamber of Commerce) members after 1997 was maintained at the same level as before the crisis. When my Thai friends tell me that a friend in need is a friend indeed, referring to this experience, I can not but feel delighted.

This is how the present stable economic relationship between Japan and Thailand has been established. In 2007, the Japan-Thailand Economic Partnership Agreement (JTEPA) entered into force. This agreement eliminated customs duties on more than 90 percent of the total amount of both imports and exports, strengthened coordination in various fields such as expansion and facilitation of investment, and liberalization of services, and promoted cooperation in nine fields such as human resource development, enhancement of the business environment, and science and technology. And today, various kinds of cooperation are being carried out under this strengthened partnership.

6. Future cooperation in the bilateral relationship

We have traced the interactions between Thailand and Japan from the initial contact of the two countries up until the present. With those in mind, I would like to discuss how we should enhance our bilateral relations in the future. I would like to touch upon four issues, namely, the future of our economic partnership, cooperation for Mekong regional development, overcoming economic disparities in society, and environmental problems.

(1) The economic partnership between Japan and Thailand

First, I would like to begin with the economic partnership between Japan and Thailand. Japanese investors and companies would like to continue their investment in Thailand to compete in the world market through their partnership with Thailand. For that purpose, the stability and predictability of the investment environment is crucial. Japanese investors and companies are making extremely difficult choices when they decide on overseas investment, because investing overseas could lead to a hollowing-out of industries and decline of employment in Japan. We have entered a new era in which Japanese automotive companies in Thailand have started to produce cars in Thailand for export to the Japanese market. Even though this would worsen the employment situation in Japan, Japanese companies are strengthening their partnership with Thailand

in order to survive global competition. Then, the problem of Map Ta Put hit those investors all of sudden. For them, the core of the issue is that the construction or operation of factories has been abruptly suspended despite the fact that required permits have been already properly obtained. If an important investment project can be interfered with in this way, the partnership could be severely damaged from its foundations. The damage done by the UDD demonstrations is another problem. Many business operators, including a number of Japanese companies, were adversely affected by the demonstrations. It is very important for Thailand to acknowledge that stability of the investment environment is a prerequisite toward common prosperity for Thailand and Japan and to carry out necessary policies and measures to solve pending problems, including the Map Ta Phut issue.

The promotion of the Free Trade Agreement is another issue where Thailand's forwardness is eagerly awaited. To maintain the high competitiveness of Thailand as an investment destination, it is essential to keep up with other nations in FTA policies. Potential competitors are making every effort to conclude new FTAs. If left behind, this will directly affect the international competitiveness of Thailand. Even though there are many difficult domestic issues to be solved toward the conclusion of FTAs, I believe that these problems could be overcome through patient negotiations and innovative approaches.

Furthermore, promoting economic integration of ASEAN is also an important element. With a population of 575 million, bigger than the EU, the scale of the ASEAN economy today is less than 8 percent of the EU. These figures tell us about the growth potential of ASEAN as a region. If ASEAN as an economic entity could improve its economic efficiency to be like that of the EU, ASEAN could become even more competitive in attracting investments. If ASEAN countries make continuous efforts to integrate their economies and to improve the connectivity within its region as the EU has done over the years, that would lead to improved international competitiveness and prosperity for Thailand. With the economic integrity of ASEAN as an overarching objective, we should at the same time enhance the cooperation among Japan and Mekong region countries.

(2) Development of Mekong region

The Mekong region has a huge potential for economic development, but that potential is yet to be fully utilized. In order to make use of this potential, we should seek the development of the region as a whole. Connectivity across the borders is important, but various disparities within the Mekong region make it difficult to facilitate this connectivity. While regional cooperation is in progress to mitigate the disparities, I believe Japan should contribute to this process in a constructive way. The stability and prosperity

of the Mekong region can contribute to the mitigation of the disparities within ASEAN, while ASEAN is planning to establish the ASEAN community in 2015. Strengthening the “Connectivity,” which ASEAN emphasizes as one of its targets, could create business opportunities in the Mekong region because the current absence of networks both in hardware and in software among existing production bases and industrial complexes scattered around the Mekong region is holding up economic activities in the region.

In November 2009, the first summit meeting between Japan and the five Mekong countries was held in Tokyo, where all leaders shared the view that Japan and the Mekong countries should continue to mobilize their resources for the development of both hard and soft infrastructure and tackle “Human Security” challenges such as economic disparities, environmental devastation, climate change, infectious diseases, and natural disasters. As a result of the meeting, the “Tokyo Declaration” and “Action Plan 63” were adopted. Placing emphasis on the Mekong region development, Japan will continue its policy to expand its Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam (CLV countries) respectively. Japan has committed more than JPY 500 billion of ODA in the next 3 years for the Mekong region as a whole. It was agreed that the summit meeting will be held every year, and the next meeting will be held in Hanoi in October this year.

I believe that Thailand and Japan can work together on this important regional endeavour. In fact, this coming September, Japan and Thailand will co-host the Mekong-Japan International Conference in Bangkok to discuss Mekong development issues including transport linkage improvements along the East-West Economic Corridor and the Southern Economic Corridor.

(3) Overcoming economic disparities in society

The next topic is the issue of economic disparities in society. Thailand is now faced with a pressing need to mitigate the economic disparities in a rapidly growing economy. It is my opinion that improvement of the social security system is one of the required solutions to this issue. Since I assumed my present post as Ambassador to Thailand, this issue has been on my mind and I have been asking myself whether there is any contribution we can make. Japan achieved high economic growth after the Second World War by empowering the middle class through the expansion of the social security system, where all the members of society received a share of the fruits of economic growth. This has contributed to the creation of a stable society in the end.

Furthermore, Thailand and other ASEAN countries have to tackle the approaching problems associated with an ageing society with fewer children, even though they are still in the midst of their economic development.

I thought that there is a need to pay more attention to the importance of this issue and I wrote an article in the Bangkok Post in October last year. In addition, we organized a symposium on “The Middle Income Class and a Social Safety Network” in March this year at the Dusit Thani Hotel. All the participants, including Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, who took part through a video link, and Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General of ASEAN, shared the view that assisting socially vulnerable elderly people is a common challenge in Thailand and other ASEAN countries.

If Thailand feels that it may be worthwhile to look at the past experiences of Japan when it tackles this important but difficult issue, we shall spare no effort in providing whatever assistance we can extend

(4) Environmental problems

Finally I would like to take up the environmental problems. The Map Ta Put issue is also related. With rapid economic growth in Thailand, environmental concerns are growing among Thai people. In the past, Japan also experienced serious environmental problems during the course of its rapid economic growth. After a painful trial and error process, a system of environmental laws and regulations was adopted, and enforcement systems for those regulations were set in place. As a result, Japan is now a leading country in the field of environmental protection. I would like to offer the Japanese past experiences, including its past

failures, to Thailand for its reference. The Thai media have often introduced Japanese examples where factories and local populations worked together to overcome environmental damage. The Japanese Government has also started cooperation with the Thai Government to this effect, by dispatching environmental specialists to Thailand and through starting a project toward the establishment of a regulatory regime to control pollutant emission.

I recently read a news article which said that a Thai power generating company together with Mitsubishi Corporation will build the world-biggest solar power plant in Lopburi province by using solar cell technology from Sharp Corporation. The Thai Government is now promoting new sources of energy. I believe that cooperation between our two countries through the utilization of Japanese environmental technology has a significant potential in overcoming the challenge of achieving both economic growth and environmental protection.

7. Closing

In the very beginning of my speech, I mentioned that this excellent relationship did not come naturally. It is rather a result of the efforts of many individuals who were engaged

in various exchanges at various points in time over the past 600 years. However, I now feel that there might exist a kind of inevitability which links our two countries.

Thailand, known for its openness, has always been the focal point of regional traffic and the regional network in this part of the world. Thailand has been very hospitable to foreigners and foreign cultures. When Japan, which is located at the eastern edge of the Asia region, sought exchanges with a wider region, it was quite natural that Japan sought out and strengthened relations with Thailand, a country that has maintained its independence, has been the centre of the region, and has always been open to the world.

Interaction between our two countries has brought great benefits to both of us and enriched the lives of the people of both countries. We should not take this relationship for granted. We should continue to nurture this relationship for future generations. We should continue to learn from each other and to work together in order to overcome whatever difficulties may present themselves in front of us in future, so that the people of Thailand and Japan may enjoy the fruits of this promising relationship.

Thank you very much for your attention.