

Remarks by H.E. Mr. MIZUUCHI Ryuta, Ambassador of Japan to Zambia
Japan-Africa 440 Anniversary Concert
Wednesday, 6 October 2021

Ambassadors and Representatives of International Organisations,
Colleagues of the Diplomatic Corps,
High ranking Officials from the Government, Politics, Business and
Academia,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we commemorate the 440th Anniversary of relationship between Japan and Africa, I would like to welcome you all to my Residence and, express my sincere appreciation to all invited guests of this evening.

Also, I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the two Japanese artists, DODO Azusa and ONODERA Miki, who travelled all the way from Japan to Zambia. This alone at the time of COVID is amazing, but these ladies are sending their impressions of Zambia every day through their Facebook pages. All of the sudden, Zambia has become extremely hot in certain circles in Japan, for which I also wish to express my special thanks.

Today, we are here to recall an event which took place 440 years ago in Japan – a historical record that a man from Africa became the “First African Samurai” at the court of ODA Nobunaga, the ruler of Japan in the 16th Century. I have been thinking how I can transpire this to the Zambian people and, among my friends, I was fortunate to find those ladies who shared my interest to do so. Physically, the distance between Japan and Africa cannot be shortened. However, the dimension of time and space becomes no longer relevant once you are aware that we have a common basis of memories. These Japanese ladies are envoys who are here to recall this – with a piece of music, a lingua franca of all the peoples around the world.

Behind the story of Yasuke, there are many human activities at that time: Spain and Portugal set out to the ocean to reach out to spices which had been brought to Europe by Arab traders. However, Turkey, the Ottoman Empire, became so strong and positioned between Asia and Europe. Therefore the Europeans were forced to seek an alternative trade route to bypass the Turks. The expansion of Islam was another impetus for the Roman Catholic Church to explore other places which should be put under the Christian influence. Thus the African Continent became the logical target of such endeavours, followed by Asian countries including Japan. Yasuke was part of the Jesuit missionary whose head was Alessandro Valignano, a man from Napoli.

There are two contradictory remarks about Yasuke's origin. Francois Solier, a French Historian, refers to Yasuke in his book as "native to Mozambique", or belonging to a folk called "Cafre" and inhabitant near the Cape of Good Hope". Therefore, I would simply argue that this man may have come from a place somewhere in the South-Eastern part of Africa, possibly along the Zambezi basin, and Zambia might not be excluded. Valignano later organized a mission of four young Japanese Christian boys and sent them to Rome where they were granted an audience with Pope Gregory XIII and Sixtus V. Thus this mission must have passed through the Southern African coast. Unfortunately, no official report is known about their possible stay at African ports.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

COVID has changed the lifestyle of many people around the world, but I hope that this evening's concert will mark the dawn of post-COVID diplomatic and cultural activities in Zambia and beyond. This is the special, hidden message from myself to my friends in Zambia, in particular, the audience of this evening.

With these remarks, I wish you all an enjoyable evening.