



*A Message from
Her Imperial Highness
Princess Takamado*

It is a great pleasure for me to be the Honorary Patron of the Japan Bowl. Established 15 years ago, the Japan Bowl has continued to play a significant role in encouraging American high school students to study Japanese, a language which is not easy to learn. However, I hope that in the process, the participants will gain an interest and an insight into a country with a distinct heritage and a rich culture, especially as Japan is your neighbor across the Pacific, your natural gateway into Asia and a long-standing friend of the United States.

In the 21st century, the world has definitely become a smaller place, and the movement of people and goods has increased. With the advancement of IT, communication by electronic means, rather than direct exchanges between people, has now become the norm. There are hidden dangers here, for words are only a form of shorthand. When we see or hear a word or sentence, what we actually understand depends on how much we share in terms of common experience or learning with the other party. As children, we were all taught to “stand in another’s shoes” or “to see things from the other person’s point of view”. Language is a short cut towards enabling one to do that and to reach a better understanding between different cultures.

Many students who do well in high school Japanese often go on to further studies at university level or pursue careers that incorporate some kind of contact with Japan. Whether it be home stays, academic projects or work experience in Japan, learning about the everyday life of the ordinary Japanese people and understanding their values and goals will lead to friendships that last a lifetime. And along the way, Japanese will no longer be just a classroom subject, but a living language that represents a vibrant nation and its innovative people, and a common language that students can use in real dialog.

I wish all the students competing in this year’s Japan Bowl good luck and hope their visit to Washington is an enjoyable and educational one. In the same way that learning English helped me to better understand the world beyond Japan, I am confident that learning Japanese will lead to greater awareness and knowledge of the world beyond the United States for this year’s Japan Bowl participants.