

Speech by

His Majesty the King of Sweden

at the State Banquet hosted by  
His Majesty the Emperor of Japan

Tokyo, 26 March 2007

Your Majesties,

It is with great pleasure that I today begin my second State Visit to Japan, accompanied by H.M. the Queen, two Government Ministers and a major delegation. We are deeply grateful for the generosity shown to us by Your Majesties through this invitation.

The magnificent reception here in the Imperial Palace earlier today reminded us of our first State Visit in 1980, to Your Majesty's father, His Majesty Emperor Hirohito. It is a great privilege to experience once again the calm and peaceful atmosphere of this beautiful palace.

Whenever we return to Japan, the Queen and I always share the same feeling of interest and curiosity. And the visits have certainly added up... For my part, there have been visits in connection with World Scout Foundation events and to study technological advances with the Royal Technology Mission. The Queen, for her part, has taken part in several important conferences on children's rights.

"The beautiful country" is the title that Swedish writer Sten Bergman gave to his well-known book on Japan, which came out in 1962. That title is still a very fitting description of this country, as the Queen and I can confirm after our journeys in different parts of Japan. We have particularly vivid memories of our visit to Hakone in 1990, when we stayed at Fujiya Hotel, just as my grandfather, King Gustaf VI Adolf, had done several decades earlier. A marvellous old wooden building in mountainous surroundings.

But Japan is not just beautiful! When Bergman wrote his book, Japan was in the midst of incredible economic development, which propelled the country into its position as one of the world's strongest economies. I am sure that during our days here, we will see a whole range of examples illustrating precisely the vigour and creativity of the Japanese economy.

The strong traditions and deep historical roots of the world's oldest monarchy live side by side with the modern dynamism of Japan, a coexistence that is truly fruitful and productive. The Queen and I, as well as other members of our family who have visited Japan, have been able to see this. This applies to our oldest daughter, Crown Princess Victoria, who has been here several times, and our son, Prince Carl Philip, who was in Tokyo briefly in the autumn in connection with the production of a film on Carl Linnaeus. My sisters, Princess Désirée and Princess Christina, also have special memories of their travels in this fantastic country.

Although the geographical distance between Japan and Sweden is great, the ties between our countries are strong. We established diplomatic relations with one another as early as 1868.

These days there is extensive exchange between our countries in virtually every area, not least in economics, science, health and care services, design, music, art and literature. Many major Swedish companies have long had operations in Japan and new companies are finding their way here. Successful forms of cooperation have been established in the automotive industry and the IT sector.

The island of Hokkaido is home to a Swedish cultural centre, the Swedish Center Foundation, where typical Swedish wooden houses have been assembled. The city of Asahikawa has its own Vasa Skiing Competition, which I myself have taken part in. And Swedish wooden houses, of various shapes and sizes, are a popular import in Japan.

The two visits that Your Majesties have paid to Sweden during my reign stand out in a very special light: first as Crown Prince and Princess in 1985 and later the successful State Visit in May 2000.

Sweden's former Prime Minister visited Japan in 2004 and last year Japan's former Prime Minister Koizumi paid a much appreciated visit to our country.

In just two months' time, we will have the privilege of welcoming Your Majesties to Stockholm and Uppsala in connection with our celebrations of the 300th anniversary of the birth of Carl Linnaeus – Sweden's greatest and most internationally prominent scientist ever.

Your Majesties have an impressive knowledge of Linnaeus and his botany. Tomorrow the original version of Linnaeus's pioneering work *Systema Naturae* will be exhibited at the National Science Museum here in Tokyo. This is the first time this volume has been allowed to leave Sweden. It is a privilege to be able to show it to Your Majesties.

When the Queen and I visit Nagasaki later this week, we will have a chance to see the place where Linnaeus's disciple Carl Peter Thunberg stepped ashore in 1775. Thunberg has had a great influence on what people in Sweden know about Japan and represents one of the very first cultural exchanges between our countries.

There is a great deal of interest in Japan in Sweden and positive curiosity about Japanese culture and lifestyles. Personally, I am fascinated by the Japanese sword culture. I still remember a thrilling visit to a Japanese swordsmith several years ago. Japanese graphic arts, design, food and, most recently, *manga* and *animé* are enjoying great success in our country and more young Swedes are now studying Japanese than ever before. There are also several organisations and associations devoted to promoting contacts between Sweden and Japan.

So “the beautiful country” continues to attract and fascinate. Part of the explanation, no doubt, lies in the feeling of timelessness and harmony that Japanese culture conveys. At the same time, the future and the prospects of deeper cooperation between Japan and Sweden in economics, industry, technology and science, generate inspiration and a desire to continue to develop contacts in different fields and at different levels.

Japan and Sweden are well-established democracies and highly developed market economies. Moreover, our countries are both societies built on knowledge and innovation.

I am personally convinced that Japan and Sweden have much to learn from one another, not least in research and development, health and elderly care, energy and environmental issues. Ahead of this visit I made a special request for an opportunity to gain deeper insight into Japan's view of the

challenges we face in deciding on our future energy supply. Together our countries can help find the right way to tackle the global challenges of our time.

Let us raise our glasses together in a toast to the success and prosperity of Your Majesties and Your Family, to cooperation between Japan and Sweden and to the friendship between our peoples. Skål!