

## **Greeting from the Consul General of Japan Amamiya Yūji**

On March 18th 2021, I had the pleasure of presenting my greetings to the participants at the *Venice/Japan International Food+ Symposium* and to attend the three day online event. I was deeply impressed by the richness and depth of each lecture made by various speakers. A number of stakeholders such as scholars, businesspersons, government officials and students exchanged their thoughts in a concrete effort to stimulate the ever-growing interest in Japan and its culture. The success of the event was especially achieved thanks to the excellent network of professors and staff of Ca' Foscari University of Venice, both inside and outside Italy, and their hard work to make this Symposium a special occasion. It was truly encouraging for us to encounter so many Italians who cultivate a strong interest in Japan and understand Japan so profoundly, especially in a modern global society where diplomacy often faces complex contexts. I would like to renew my sincere gratitude to Prof. Fabrizio Marrella, Vice-Rector for International Relations and Cooperation of Ca' Foscari University, who hosted us, and Prof. Maria Roberta Novielli, Prof. Bonaventura Ruperti and Prof. Silvia Vesco, curators of the present volume, for giving me the opportunity to add some words to it.

Food and culinary culture are one of the timeliest topics when we look at the latest developments in Japanese and Italian relations. Since I took office as a Consul General in Milan, I have noticed that the interest in Japanese cuisine and food in general has shown a sig-

nificant increase, driven by the success of Expo Milano 2015. The number of Japanese restaurants has increased considerably, not only in Milan but also throughout Italy. Nowadays, more and more people are discovering 'authentic' Japanese cuisine, also thanks to the growing number of Italian tourists visiting Japan, which reached the highest number of 160,000 people in 2019. However, these positive trends have been forced to stagnate due to the coronavirus pandemic. As soon as the pandemic crisis is finally over, the Consulate will make full use of the collaboration with the Japanese community in Northern Italy, starting from the Japanese Cuisine Goodwill Ambassador in Italy chef Ichikawa Haruo as well as the Japanese Chamber of Commerce in Italy and the Jetro of Milan in order to promote the various tastes of Japanese cuisine and its culinary culture.

Another significant moment of the recent relationship between Japan and Italy was the conclusion of the Japan-EU EPA in 2019 that has triggered the commercial expansion. After its entry into force, in fact, trade between two countries has increased: Italian exports to Japan increased by 19% compared to the previous year and imports from Japan by 9%, and specifically the increase of imports from Japan in the agri-food sector was equal to 11% and that in the beverage sector to 6%. However, we are well aware of the fact that the extent of imports from Japan to Italy in both sectors is still limited, being compared with that of Italian exports to Japan (the ratio is 1 to 65). It reminds us that there is more room to be exploited to increase Japanese imports to Italy in these sectors.

The Japanese government has set the goal of reaching five trillion yen, about 41 billion euros, for the worldwide export of agri-food products from Japan. The percentage of exports on the domestic production of these products in Japan is only 2%, and this is very marginal compared to other countries – such as Italy whose export of agri-food products covers about 21% of its internal production. Considering the global expansion of the agri-food market as well as the growing interest in Japanese cuisine worldwide, the potential for increasing exports of agri-food products from Japan could be very high.

This year 10 years will have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred on 11 March 2011. There are still people living displaced, uprooted from their homeland, and there are still issues to be addressed in order to complete the reconstruction. However, thanks to the support received from around the world, the regions affected by the earthquake have made great strides and the tie between them and the world is becoming stronger and stronger. One of encouraging signals is that the export volume of agri-food products in the province of Fukushima returned to pre-earthquake levels in 2017 and for three consecutive years has recorded an ever-increasing expansion. After the nuclear accident, 54 countries, including the EU, introduced restrictive measures on the import of Japanese agri-food

products. To cope with this situation, the Japanese government has introduced very strict control criteria and methods for radioactive substances, engaging in very intense activities aimed also at eliminating the damage caused by unfounded rumors. As of March 2021, 39 countries have lifted their restrictive measures. The European Union also gradually cancelled some restrictive measures, starting with the revocation of the need to present the non-radioactivity certificate for rice and some fish products from the province of Fukushima in 2015 and, hopefully, there may be other developments in this regard in the future.

In conclusion I strongly hope that the Symposium, whose main achievements are collected in this book, represents an important step of a vast undergoing process, to drive our countries even closer to each other.

