



March 15, 2024

410th Anniversary of the Arrival of the Keicho Envoy to Spain  
400th Anniversary of the Death of Luis Sotelo

## The Reiwa Envoy to Europe 2024

# PROPOSAL

### 1. Background

1) The Keicho Envoy and Japón-sans, people with the surname "Japón"  
In 1613, at the order of Lord Date Masamune of the Sendai (or Date) Domain, the Keicho Envoy was formed and dispatched to Europe with Hasekura Tsunenaga as the chief envoy and Luis Sotelo, a missionary, as a vice envoy. In October of the same year, the delegation, on board Date's black ship, "San Juan Bautista," set sail as the first diplomatic mission in Japanese history from Tsukinoura in the present-day Ishinomaki to Spain and Italy. A year later, in October 1614, the group landed in Coria del Rio (hereinafter referred to as Coria city) in the Province of Seville, the birthplace of Sotelo, and was greeted with enthusiasm. That was exactly 410 years ago. Tsunenaga and his fellow delegates arrived in Civitavecchia, Italy, the following year. From there, they went to Rome, where the Pope gave them an audience. Tsunenaga was even conferred the title of honorary citizen of Rome. The documents Tsunenaga brought back to Japan (housed at the Sendai City Museum; some are designated national treasures) and other related documents at the National Archive of Spain were registered with UNESCO's Memory of the World Program in 2013. In addition, the Japan Society of Naval Architects and Ocean Engineers recognized San Juan Bautista, the vessel that carried the envoy, as a "ship heritage" in 2023.

Coria city is supposedly home to over seven hundred descendants of the envoy members who share the same surname, "Japón" which means "Japan" in Spanish. (The number exceeds 1,000 in the entire Province of Seville.) Japón-sans in Coria City have been promoting international friendship with Japan through an organization called Asociación Hispano-Japonesa Hasekura (The Hasekura Tsunenaga Hispano-Japanese association) since the 1980s, and many of them have visited Miyagi. In 1992, a large delegation from Sendai visited Coria city and interacted with Japón-sans. Furthermore, in 2013, Coria city invited Tsunetaka Hasekura, the 13<sup>th</sup> head of the Hasekura Family, to its events commemorating the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the envoy's arrival, where Mr. Hasekura appeared in the traditional hakama pants and jingasa hat for samurai.

### 2) Post-quake international exchange

In the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, people in Sendai and Ishinomaki deepened their friendship with Japón-sans, who believed they inherited samurai blood from the Date Domain. With deep-rooted pride, those descendants of the envoy members were hoping for the recovery of their ancestral hometown. Under such circumstances, they discovered a new way of cultural exchange, through music and sports, promoted by US NPO, "Circle Wind." Here is a synopsis of their major cultural exchange (events).

- August 2013: Ten Japón-sans and 21 Coria city choir members were invited to Sendai and Ishinomaki. A joint choral festival and a haiku poetry exchange were held at the Ishinomaki Chuo Community Center and Mototerakoji Catholic Church in Sendai, respectively. (400<sup>th</sup> anniversary concert to commemorate the departure of the Keicho Envoy with Japón-sans, in collaboration with Miyagi Prefecture)



- July 2014: A Sendai-based choir, “Hagi”, and New York-based choir “Tomo”, visited Coria city and Seville. The haiku poet Mayuzumi Madoka and a few amateur haiku poets from Ishinomaki joined the chorus members. They had a joint choral concert and a haiku exchange at Royal Alcázar of Seville (world heritage), where the Hasekura Envoy stayed for one month, and Coria City Culture Center respectively. (As a Japan-Spain cultural exchange project through haiku and chorus)
- September 2015: About 10 members of the Hasekura Tsunenaga Hispano-Japanese association came to New York to attend the 8<sup>th</sup> Circle Wind Concert. Each member read a haiku to memorialize Taylor Anderson, an English teacher who lost her life in the great tsunami in 2011.
- November 2015: Juan Manuel Japón, Vice-President of the Hasekura Tsunenaga Hispano-Japanese association, visited Japan for the Tohoku Crossing Project. He deepened his friendship with the choir members as well as the parents of Taylor Anderson in Ishinomaki, the goal of this running event.
- April 2017: The New York-based mixed choir “Tomo” visited cities of Coria and Seville. There was a reception at the Coria del Río City Hall. The group visited a local elementary school. The group members then traveled to Civitavecchia, Italy, to visit the Church of the Holy Japanese Martyrs. The group held a mini-concert in front of a fresco depicting the kimono-clad Virgin Mary.
- September 2017: The 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Circle Wind Concert was held at the Isaac Stern Auditorium, the largest concert hall of Carnegie Hall. NPO Circle Wind invited a civic choir in Coria city, Coro Dabar, accompanied by Juan Francisco Japón of the Hasekura Tsunenaga Hispano-Japanese association. The visitors from Spain had a chance to interact with the Tohoku University' Male Choir and Mixed Choir, who had flown in from Sendai, as well as Japan Choral Harmony “Tomo” of New York.
- November 2017: Mayor of Coria del Río, Modesto González, and President of the Hasekura Tsunenaga Hispano-Japanese association, Juan Francisco Japón came to Japan. They visited Komyoji Temple in Sendai, Hasekura Memorial Park in Osato-cho, and Empukuji Temple in Kawasaki-machi, all of which are said to be the place where Tsunenaga rests in piece. They also paid courtesy calls on the Faculty of Arts and Letters of Tohoku University, the mayor of Sendai, the mayor of Ishinomaki, and the governor of Miyagi prefecture.
- September 2018: NPO Circle Wind invited a girls' choir of Tomares, an adjacent city to Coria city, to its 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Circle Wind Concert. These young people also visited the Japanese Children's Society “Ikuei Gakuen,” a Japanese-language day school, and spent a fun-filled day with the society's students.
- April 2019: In conjunction with Japón-Hasekura Supporting Association founded the previous year, NPO Circle Wind hosted the 1<sup>st</sup> Hasekura Cup soccer tournament in Coria city and sent twenty junior members of Cobaltore Onagawa U15, which turned out to be the last envoy to Europe in the era of Heisei. The Japanese players made good challenges against Seville's Real Betis Balompié U15 and Coria CF U15 teams. They also participated in training at Real Betis Balompié's soccer ground and had a pleasant surprise to be invited to watch a La Liga game at the Seville CF stadium. Coinciding with the Japanese athletes' visit, about twenty New York Circle Wind Boys and Girls Chorus members flew to cheer them on. The children gained a valuable experience by visiting local schools and making a guest appearance at a choral festival of the Andalusia region schools.



2013: Ishinomaki



2014: Spain



2015: New York



2017: Ishinomaki



2019: Spain



2019: Spain

## 2. Envoy to Europe for the era of Reiwa to resume

Interaction with Japón-sans, which started in 2012, came to a halt in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Projects to trace the footsteps of the Hasekura envoy, which would include visits to Coria city, Seville, Madrid, Barcelona, Civitavecchia, and the Vatican City in Rome, remain suspended. Now that the pandemic appears to be finally under control, there is a growing sentiment to resume such events.

Coria city and Civitavecchia have both decided to resume their Japan Week in late October this year. We are planning a tour to visit Coria city and Civitavecchia for the occasion. We will form a new choir, "Coro Hasekura," to participate in the Japan Week events and interact with choirs in both cities. We will make the tour open to the general public to participate in the tour that will trace the journey of the Hasekura envoy. Masataka Hasekura, the 14<sup>th</sup> head of the Hasekura Family, will lead the envoy to Europe for the first time in the Reiwa era.

Please review the attached document "**Outline**" for the gist of the tour. Please note, however, that the description on the plan is for your reference only. We will finalize the details as the project progresses.

## 3. Let's nurture Reiwa's heroes in our native place, Miyagi!

The Keicho envoy to Europe was a significant project that should be noted among the many outstanding achievements by Date Masamune, the founder of the Sendai Domain, who laid the foundation for our home prefecture's culture, traditions, and arts today. More than four hundred years later, we must also give some credit to Tsunenaga for carrying out Masamune's dreams and ambitions with great faith and loyalty.

Unfortunately, the facts that the Keicho Envoy was the first diplomatic mission in Japanese history and that Hasekura Tsunenaga was the first Japanese diplomat are surprisingly unknown. This envoy was dispatched 260 years before the Iwakura Mission. Furthermore, Tsunenaga was not the only local hero who ventured out into the world. The heroes who followed him should also be recognized as well. Here are some examples:

- Who was the first Japanese official to travel around the world? **Tamamushi Sadayu** was selected to travel to the United States by the Sendai Domain to ratify the Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Japan and the United States at the end of the Edo period. Later, when the Boshin War broke out, he was called "Sakamoto Ryoma of Tohoku" for his efforts in establishing the Ouetsu-reppan Alliance. Still, after the Boshin War, he was held accountable and died a violent death.
- **Takahashi Korekiyo** and **Tomita Tetsunosuke** studied under Tamamushi at the Sendai Domain's academy. Takahashi, known as "Prime Minister Daruma," was a crucial player in the financial success of the Russo-Japanese War. He is also well-known for his experience of being sold into slavery in San Francisco when he was young. Tomita was a talented young man selected by the Sendai Domain to study at Rutgers University in New Jersey. He became the first vice consul general of New York while still a student. He is also known for serving as an interpreter for Okubo Toshimichi and Ito Hirobumi during the Iwakura Mission to the United States. After returning to Japan, Tomita served as Governor of the Bank of Japan and Governor of Tokyo. He



also contributed to founding the present Hitotsubashi University, the present Sendai Ichiko High School, and the present Nika High School, as well as many banks and insurance companies. The 77 Bank is one of them. He is often referred to as the “Shibusawa Eiichi of Sendai.”

- This is not the end of the list of the legendary figures who leaped out of Miyagi and spread their wings in the late Edo period to the Meiji period. You will find others like **Frank Yasuda** from Ishinomaki, who was called the "Japanese Moses" for his actions to save the Alaskan Natives (Inuit). Nitta Jiro's novel, “Arasuka Monogatari” (Alaskan Tale), was based on his life story. Later, a movie featuring Kitaoji Kinya was made based on this novel. Nitta also wrote a book entitled "Mikkosen Suianmaru" (Stowaway Ship Suianmaru) based on the story of **Oikawa Jinzaburo**, also known as Tome's Oijin, who became a successful businessman after illegally migrating to Canada. Kami-machi, a small town in Miyagi, has **Yokoo Tosaku**, an adventurer, known as “the Asian Columbus.” **Makino Tomisaburo** of Ishinomaki is famous as the pioneer of Japanese settlement in Hawaii.

Unfortunately, these remarkable figures (perhaps except for Takahashi Korekiyo) never appear in a textbook for Japanese history. I do suspect there are not many people, not only in Miyagi Prefecture, but even all across Japan, who recognize these people. Still, I believe that the dreams, romance, ambitions and passion Masamune and Tsunenaga had were passed down to these great historical figures, making them contribute considerably to Japan's modernization. I can say this type of challenging spirit with the sight on overseas is the basis of our hometown's local characteristics. Just FYI, the Major League superstar, Ohtani Shohei, was born and grew up in Mizusawa, which was a part of the Date Domain.

As you can see, our native place, Miyagi Prefecture, produced many great predecessors who made significant contributions to Japan's modernization. We were born in a place with such a great foundation and history. I believe it is our duty to pass on the legacy of those great predecessors to the next generation by deepening our understanding of them with ever-growing respect.

The concept of the Reiwa Envoy to Europe 2024 was born out of the desire to look back on the Keicho Envoy's historic achievement and pass the legacy to future generations by understanding the significance. I hope the mission will inspire as many young people born and raised in Miyagi as possible so they will become the leaders of the next era and guide Japan and Miyagi with pride in their hometown.

Thank you for your interest. I look forward to your participation.

Masaki(Mike) Shirota

President, Japon-Hasekura Supporting Association

Honorary member, the Hasekura Tsunenaga Hispano-Japanese association, Spain

President, NPO Circle Wind

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