

Professor Takanori Kitamura

Honorary Fellow

Citation

Professor Takanori Kitamura is a native of Japan with long-standing connections to China in general and Hong Kong in particular. Both Hong Kong and Japan have, at various times, been described as resembling “Cultural Galapagos Archipelagos”, isolated and diverging from the wider world. That may seem fanciful in today's hyper-connected world – but perhaps we should think less of absolutes and more of degrees or kinds of disconnection, and the mistrust and even dislike that it can engender. The best way to build empathy and trust between groups is for them to get to know one another. That is not a mere assertion of faith but an empirically demonstrable truth. Connections really matter to all our futures, and we need to find the right ways to create and strengthen them. International growth and development, harmony – and quite possibly our safety and posterity's, too – may all depend on successes in this enterprise. We owe a debt of gratitude to those who bring them about.

Professor Kitamura is one such person. He has worked tirelessly to build the kinds of bridges that matter, through diplomacy, through education and by example. His highly

distinguished career in the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs commenced shortly after he had completed his BA at Nagasaki University – a city which was Japan's sole international trading port for over two centuries (thereby offering a window into Japan as Hong Kong has sometimes been thought of as a window into China).

Once in the Ministry, he spent two years learning Chinese in Beijing before heading to Harvard to take an MA in regional studies. That was followed by a series of home and overseas postings, including Beijing, New York, Hong Kong, and Manila, as well as Tokyo headquarters. He came back to Hong Kong in 2004 to assume the post of Consul-General and devoted himself to fostering bilateral ties between Hong Kong and Japan. One of these efforts was to initiate and establish a scholarship fund to encourage Japanese students to study on the MBA course at CUHK. After services in Hong Kong, he was posted to Greece as Japan's Ambassador, following which he retired in 2010.

To our great good fortune, he did not simply return home to Japan, but came back to

Hong Kong where he not only has strong links with the business and political communities but has also taken up a series of roles at CUHK with a strong association with New Asia College. He has now been here with us for some thirteen years, first as Professor of Japanese Studies and then as Adjunct Professor, while also being a Senior Research Fellow at CUHK's Institute for Asia-Pacific Studies. Beyond these named positions there is, however, more. He provided seed money that to help establish the Research Centre in Comparative Japanese Studies, and he activated his networks in Japan to initiate an annual two-way academic and cultural exchange programme that connects our students with those at Saga University in Japan. Few of us would describe this as retirement in the normal sense!

Japanese flowering cherries are one of the wonders of the plant world. They were developed in their homeland by breeding and selection over centuries, but they are not the longest lived of trees and, by the end of the nineteenth century, many varieties had been lost or were at risk of loss. Part of their salvation lay in their universal appeal – one of

the finest varieties, *Akatsuki*, that had vanished from Japan and survived only in paintings, was identified in an English garden, reintroduced in 1932 via the trans-Siberian railway and re-christened *Tai-haku*; two far distant groups of islands were connected through a shared aesthetic to the lasting benefit of the wider world. The annual cherry-blossom pilgrimage is a key moment in the Japanese calendar, but we can share some of Japan's delight right here at CUHK, because we now have 20 Japanese flowering cherries of our own. Professor Kitamura personally chose these trees, in Japan, and donated them to celebrate the 20th anniversary of our Department of Japanese Studies. Bridgebuilders can build their bridges in many ways.

Professor Kitamura is a diplomat, a thinker and educator, a tireless connector, and a true friend to this university. He has made CUHK and its campus richer and more beautiful places. Mr Chairman, it is my pleasure to present Professor Takanori Kitamura for an Honorary Fellowship.

The citation is written by Professor Nick Rawlins