

Speech at the Birthday Celebration of His Majesty
The Emperor of Japan

Honorable Paul Chan, distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen, good evening.

First of all, I would like to sincerely thank Mr. Paul Chan, Financial Secretary of the Government of the Hong Kong SAR, for being with us today as our guest of honour, representing the Hong Kong Government. I would also like to thank all of you for joining this gathering.

My name is Mitsuhiro Wada, I just arrived in Hong Kong to take up my post last week. Hong Kong was the first place overseas that I visited. I studied Chinese language at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in the summer of 1984, which was the starting point of my diplomatic life. Therefore I feel deeply touched to be returning to Hong Kong as Ambassador and Consul General of Japan. Although I have been posted to Beijing several times in the past, it is the first time for me to work in Hong Kong in an official capacity. I look forward to working closely with all of you in the years to come.

His Majesty the Emperor of Japan is turning 85 years old on the coming 23rd of December. Next January will mark the 30th year of his reign and His Majesty will abdicate on 30th April. It is such an honour to celebrate His Majesty's 30th birthday before his abdication with all of you here.

As you may be aware, there were many natural disasters in Japan this year and His Majesty has been energetically visiting the affected areas. Meanwhile we have received heart-warming support from Hong Kong. It is a great encouragement for us to have Hong Kong visitors enjoying travelling and sight-seeing in various areas of Japan. In addition to the already popular tourist destinations, I would be delighted to see tourists from Hong Kong also visiting the Tohoku region and Hokkaido, the northeastern area of Japan, since the number of Hong Kong visitors to Tohoku, in particular, is still far fewer than those going to other areas. .

This year is a very special one for the relationship between Japan and Hong Kong, with the official visit of Mr. Taro Kono, the Minister for Foreign Affairs to Hong Kong in March, and Mrs. Carrie Lam, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong SAR paying an official visit to Japan last month. It is of great importance that Japan and Hong Kong issued a joint statement regarding the enhancement of co-operation and exchanges in a wide variety of areas such as innovation, science and technology, as well as education during Mrs Lam's visit.

Let me also share with you that, this year marks the 3rd anniversary of the Japan Autumn Festival. The number of events is increasing year by year, reaching over 170 registered events this year. Four governors (from Aomori, Gifu, Shiga and Hyogo), and four vice governors (from Hokkaido, Tokushima, Kumamoto and Okinawa) visited Hong Kong during the period of the Autumn Festival. We would like to further strengthen the relationship between Japan and Hong Kong next year and beyond by holding the Japan Autumn Festival again. Your continued support, co-operation and active participation would be highly appreciated.

During this year that marked the 40th Anniversary of the conclusion of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, paid an official visit to Japan in May, while Mr. Shinzo Abe, the Prime Minister of Japan officially visited China in October, which was the first official visit in 7 years for a Japanese prime minister. With the background of Japan-China relations getting back on track and further proceeding to “a new stage” of the relations of the two countries, we believe that we can further strengthen the relationship between Japan and Hong Kong.

Thank you very much for your attention and patience. I think it is time for food and conversation and to enjoy the rest of the evening. This year again, we have the generous support of many local governments in Japan at the booths in the venue hall who are introducing local tourism and their famous delicacies and local products to you all. These are the local governments from Iwate, Fukushima, Tochigi, Fukui, Kobe city of Hyogo, Tottori, Fukuoka, Saga, Kumamoto, Miyazaki, Kagoshima, Okinawa and the Japan Chicken Association. Also the Tohoku Tourism Promotion Organization and the local governments of Wakayama, Tokushima, Kagawa have prepared some tourist information pamphlets at the entrance, it would be our pleasure if you would be interested in taking a look at them to plan your trips for the coming year to many different places including the north-eastern region of Japan. Moreover, we would be delighted to know your opinion after tasting the Japanese sakes being served at the bar counter, which are award winning products in the Japan Wine Competition and IWC.

I would like to thank the Kobe City government who has provided the toasting wine tonight. It is called “Inji Shinano Riesling”, and has a sweet, fruity flavour.

Mr Paul Chan, ladies and gentlemen, thank you again for joining us tonight and I wish you a prosperous year ahead.

“To His Majesty the Emperor Akihito, and the people of the People’s Republic of China and the people of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region”

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