

20th Anniversary of the Prince Takamado Japan Centre for Teaching and Research

Introduction

With the arrival of October, the autumn in Ottawa deepens, and the foliage is spectacular. I would like to share some photos from around McKay Lake, about a ten-minute walk from the official residence where I often take walks. I hope you can get a sense of the atmosphere of nature-rich Ottawa, the capital city.



Lake Mckay

This is already the 30th installment of the "Ottawa Correspondence." Over this time, what I feel is the enhancement of Japan-Canada relations. As I have been sharing with you monthly, cooperation and friendship between Japan and Canada have been deepening across a wide range of fields, from politics and security to business, science and technology, culture, and even sports. This month, I would like to talk about the "Prince Takamado Japan Centre for Teaching and Research" (hereinafter referred to as the Prince Takamado Centre), established at the University of Alberta.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Prince Takamado Centre in 2004. A commemorative ceremony was held on September 24-25 at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, the capital of Alberta, and I was also invited. It was a very fulfilling schedule.

It was an excellent opportunity to reflect on Japan studies and Japanese language education in Canada, as well as academic cooperation between Japan and Canada, and to consider the further development of the Prince Takamado Centre in the future.

Prehistory of the Prince Takamado Centre

Everything has a beginning, but nothing begins abruptly. It takes various preparations and foundations before taking shape. The Prince Takamado Centre is no exception. Let's trace the background leading up to its inauguration on June 10, 2004.

Going back to July 1, 1867, at the time of the founding of the Dominion of Canada, there were only four provinces: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, and Ontario. Back then, the three Prairie provinces were called Rupert's Land, owned by the Hudson's Bay Company. It was not until 1905 that Alberta joined the Dominion of Canada as a province. In 1908, the University of Alberta was established through the strong initiative of the first Premier of Alberta. Alberta grew economically as one of Canada's leading coal, oil, and gas producers. Simultaneously, the University of Alberta also developed as a comprehensive university, ranked fifth in Canada and 100th in the world, and even produced Nobel Prize winners. It is also the alma mater of Joe Clark, the Progressive Conservative Prime Minister who defeated Pierre Trudeau's Liberal Party in 1979. The Faculty of Humanities at the University of Alberta conducts academic research from various perspectives, including history, literature, and foreign languages.



Panoramic view of the University of Alberta

In 1996, the "Japan Centre for Teaching and Research" was established as a pillar of Asian studies. The Japan Centre's mission is to provide experts involved in the humanities, social sciences, arts, business, education, engineering, science, and health sciences with excellent knowledge and information about the Japanese language and culture, with a view to developing teaching methods for Japanese language and culture in North America.

And then came Prince Norihito Takamado. Born in December 1954, after graduating from Gakushuin University, he studied at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, from 1978 to 1981. It is said that the usual duration of Imperial Family members' overseas studies was two years, but his studies and research at the university led to a three-year stay. During this time, he deepened his ties with Canada and dedicated his life to fostering friendship and goodwill with Canada. It is also said that he met Princess Hisako at a reception at the Canadian Embassy in Aoyama.

Later, in 1999, when the Canadian Embassy in Tokyo celebrated its 70th anniversary, Prince and Princess Takamado visited Canada. On that occasion, they also visited Edmonton, a hub of the energy industry where many Japanese companies have expanded. The Prince and Princess, who were highly interested in academic exchange between Japan and Canada, visited the University of Alberta and stopped by the Japan Centre. It is said that the Prince's vision of fostering friendship and goodwill between Japan and Canada greatly impressed

those associated with the Japan Centre and the University of Alberta.

However, in November 2002, Prince Takamado passed away. The sudden news of his premature passing was met with deep sorrow among those at the University of Alberta. Overcoming the sadness, President Fraser expressed his desire to realize Prince Takamado's vision by renaming the Japan Centre in his honor and sought Princess Takamado's approval.

On June 10, 2004, with Princess Takamado's permission, the "Prince Takamado Japan Centre for Teaching and Research" was established at the University of Alberta. Inspired by the vision of Prince Takamado, the mission of the Centre was defined as “the exchange of people and knowledge.”



Princess Takamado visits the Center in 2019

Twenty Years and Achievements of the Prince Takamado Japan Centre for Teaching and Research

Since its establishment in 2004, the Prince Takamado Centre has played an important role in Japanese language education, cultural exchange, academic research, and the promotion of international understanding in Canada. However, like any organization that has been operating for 20 years, it has experienced ups and downs. Economic conditions have affected the budget that supports the Centre, and its operation has not been immune to personnel

changes within the university. The spread of COVID-19 in 2020 posed significant challenges for the Centre's operations. Despite this, the Centre has persevered and emerged stronger.

The main achievements of the Prince Takamado Centre over these years can be summarized as follows:

1. Promotion of Japanese Language Education**: In addition to offering Japanese courses at the University of Alberta, the Centre has provided learning opportunities to Japanese language learners worldwide through online platforms. Furthermore, by hosting Japanese language speech contests and workshops for Japanese teachers, it has contributed to improving the quality of Japanese language education.

2. Promotion of Cultural Exchange**: The Centre has organized various programs and events such as lectures, film screenings, and art exhibitions. It has strived to promote an understanding of Japan, including not only traditional Japanese culture but also modern culture, music, food culture, and pop culture.

3. Support for Research Activities**: The Centre has supported academic research on Japan-Canada relations, international relations, Japanese literature, and Japanese society. In particular, it has promoted academic exchange between Japan and Canada by offering scholarships and research grants.

4. Support for Exchange Programs**: The exchange programs between the University of Alberta and various universities in Japan provide an excellent opportunity for mutual understanding between students from both countries. The Prince Takamado Centre supports various exchange programs.

5. Digitization and Provision of Online Resources**: Utilizing digital technology, the Centre has made available various information on Japan, including databases, e-books, and online lectures on Japanese literature, history, and culture, through online platforms.

20th Anniversary of the Prince Takamado Japan Centre for Teaching and Research

The 20th-anniversary ceremony held on September 24-25, 2024, was highly eventful. Here is a summary:

September 24 (Tuesday)

- Prince Takamado Centre Advisory Committee Meeting: Under the leadership of Robert Wood, Dean of Humanities, discussions were held with Walter Davis, Acting Director of the Prince Takamado Centre, Christine Nakamura, Vice President of the Asia Pacific Foundation, and Kuniko Yamamoto, Director of the Japan Foundation Toronto Japanese Cultural Centre.



Advisory Committee

- Eve of the Ceremony at Kurimoto Japanese Garden in the University of Alberta Botanic Garden: The Matsukaze Tea Ceremony Association conducted a demonstration, and speeches were made by President Bill Flanagan, Canadian Ambassador to Japan Ian McKay, and myself, followed by a reception and a performance by the local taiko group "Kita no Taiko." The Kurimoto Garden is a traditional Japanese garden named after Dr. Yuichi Kurimoto, the first international student from overseas to attend the University of Alberta. After graduating, Dr. Kurimoto returned to his hometown Nagoya and established Japan's first railway school, which is now Nagoya University of Commerce and Business.



Tea with Ambassador McKay



With President Flanagan, Acting Director Davis, and Consul General Wajima



Kitano Taiko (Northern Drums)

September 25 (Wednesday)

The 20th Anniversary Ceremony was held at the Timms Centre for the Arts, one of the University of Alberta's proudest venues, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., with a reception and informal discussions during breaks.

- Congratulatory Addresses: The ceremony began with a congratulatory address from Salma Lakhani, the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta. As the official representative of King Charles III, Canada's head of state, her presence was a testament to Alberta's expectations of the Prince Takamado Centre. President Flanagan, in his address, spoke of being deeply impressed by his meeting with Princess Takamado and announced a total of \$320,000 in funding and new personnel for the Centre over the next five years. I spoke about the current state of Japan-Canada relations amid the international situation and the role of the Prince Takamado Centre, while also expressing gratitude to generous sponsors like Mitsubishi Corporation Canada, Marubeni, and Driving Force. Then, a special video message from Princess Takamado was presented. She spoke warmly about the Prince's affection for Canada and his expectations for the Centre in realizing his vision, which drew resounding applause from the audience.



With Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Lakanni

- Introduction of Research Grant Programs: On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Prince Takamado Centre, five programs to receive research grants for 2024 were announced. These are international joint research projects involving Japanese universities, focusing on academic and specialized areas related to Japanese society and culture.

-Gordon Hirabayashi Memorial Program: Gordon Hirabayashi, originally from Washington State in the United States, stood up for justice by protesting the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Obama for his leadership in human rights. In 1959, Hirabayashi relocated to Edmonton and joined the faculty of the University of Alberta, where he established the Faculty of Social Sciences and served as its dean. For 25 years, he taught at the university, significantly raising the standards of the faculty. At the same time, he was deeply involved in the redress movement, the struggle for justice for Japanese Canadians in Canada. However, after his death in 2012, his achievements, which deserve a place in history, gradually faded from memory. In response, the Japanese community in Alberta has undertaken initiatives, including the production of a documentary film, to pass on Hirabayashi's legacy. The Prince Takamado Centre supports these activities, and the current status of these initiatives was introduced at the 20th-anniversary ceremony.



Gordon Hirabayashi

-Special Lectures: The first lecture was given by Dr. Richard Sutton, an AI giant from the University of Alberta who developed AlphaGo, the AI that defeated the world champion in a game of Go. He began with the philosophical question of "What is intelligence?" and gave an overview of the development of artificial intelligence and computer science since the 20th century. He spoke quietly, but with passion and hope, about the future of AI, its role in human society, and the idea that a decentralized and free cooperative circle is better for society than centralized and uniform control. After the lecture, I had the opportunity to briefly meet with him, which was truly moving.

The next lecture was given by Dr. Joshua Mostow of the University of British Columbia, who has been honored for his outstanding research on the Ogura Hyakunin Isshu (a classical anthology of one hundred poems by one hundred poets). He explained the reception of the anthology during the Edo period, centuries after it was originally compiled, including the differences in interpretation by various editors, variations in the writing of kanji and hiragana by publishers, and even the subtle differences in ukiyo-e illustrations included in the prints, all while displaying the original Hyakunin Isshu on screen. At times, he drew comparisons to Shakespeare, offering deep insights into the relationship between literature and society.



With Professor Sutton

-Panel Discussion: Walter Davis, Acting Director of the Prince Takamado Centre, acted as the moderator, and I participated along with Calgary Consul General Iwashima, Kuniko Yamamoto, Director of the Japan Foundation Toronto Japanese Cultural Centre, and Christine Nakamura, Vice President of the Asia Pacific Foundation. I believe very fruitful discussions were held on how to further develop the Prince Takamado Centre as it marks its 20th anniversary. There were many questions, comments, and suggestions from the audience. Some key topics included strengthening the financial foundation, enhancing the organization, creating networks with other institutions, engaging younger generations, increasing visibility and recognition, establishing events based at the Prince Takamado Centre, and active public relations, publishing, and dissemination.

Towards the Next 20 Years

Participating in a series of events for the 20th anniversary of the Prince Takamado Japan Centre for Teaching and Research, I realized the immense potential and latent capabilities of the Centre.

First and foremost is the power of Prince Takamado's future-oriented vision. Strengthening friendship and goodwill, as well as academic exchange between Japan and Canada, is the purpose and foundation of Japan's diplomacy with Canada. This vision is inspiring the government, academia, industry, business, and intellectuals. Furthermore, the University of Alberta, home to the Prince Takamado Centre, is one of Canada's leading universities, having produced Nobel laureates and prime ministers. Additionally, it is ideally located between the Atlantic coast, Eastern Canada, and the Pacific side. Moreover, Alberta is the fastest-growing province in Canada. New energy industries, such as ammonia and hydrogen, are emerging in addition to the traditional coal, oil, and gas industries. Furthermore, research and development in cutting-edge sciences, including AI, are accelerating. Leading companies from Japan, the United States, and elsewhere are investing in search of business opportunities.

I feel that now is the time to take action to turn these possibilities and potential into reality, rather than just words.

Therefore, I would like to conclude this installment of the "Ottawa Correspondence" by writing some purely personal ideas that could, in some way, contribute to the further development of the Prince Takamado Centre.

1. Summarize the outcomes of this wonderful 20th-anniversary event into a report by the end of the year and share it as widely as possible with those interested in Japan-Canada relations.
2. Gather the opinions expressed at the advisory committee meeting and panel discussion to quickly begin consideration and discussion towards formulating a "strategy and action plan" for the Prince Takamado Centre. Key points will include specific activities of the Centre, measures to enhance financial scale, including corporate support, strengthening the functions of the advisory committee, and enhancing public relations, publishing, and dissemination.
3. With the perspective of establishing a regular event based at the Prince Takamado Centre,

hold the Prince Takamado Centre Annual Meeting every year on June 10, the date of the Centre's establishment. Through special lectures, research presentations, networking, and symposiums, the Centre's activities will be strengthened. At the 2025 Annual Meeting, adopt the "strategy and action plan" mentioned in point 2 above.

4. 2028 marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Canada. This is a highly significant milestone, and we should work towards achieving an appropriate presence, activities, reputation, and recognition for the Prince Takamado Centre by implementing the "strategy and action plan."

Conclusion

Given the current harsh geopolitical reality and the need for measures against global warming, cooperation between Canada and Japan is inevitable. The Prince Takamado Centre, with its great potential and capabilities, is expected to play a special role in the development of these Japan-Canada relations.

I am also determined to do my utmost, albeit in a modest capacity, for the further development of the Prince Takamado Japan Centre for Teaching and Research.

(End)