

Speech by SJ at reception to celebrate birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan
(English only)

Following is the speech by the Secretary for Justice, Mr Paul Lam, SC, at a reception hosted by the Consul-General of Japan to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan today (February 10):

Consul-General Kenichi (Mr Okada Kenichi), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Konbanwa (Good evening in Japanese). That's the only Japanese I know. It is a great pleasure to be here on this very special occasion - the celebration of His Majesty the Emperor Naruhito's 63rd birthday. This also marks the fourth anniversary of His Majesty's accession to the throne as Japan's 126th Emperor. On behalf of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), may I extend to you, Consul-General and the people of Japan, our warmest congratulations.

After three very challenging years caused by the pandemic, I am very pleased to say that Hong Kong has now returned to normal. We launched the "Hello Hong Kong" Campaign very recently. We certainly look forward to meeting more Japanese friends in Hong Kong. I have to say we miss you very much!

Strong ties between Japan and Hong Kong

Japan and Hong Kong enjoy a very long history of close relationship in various areas. Among other things, Hong Kong and Japan are the sixth largest trading partner of each other as recorded last year.

Japanese companies have an active and substantive presence in Hong Kong. In 2022, there were about 1 400 Japanese companies operating in Hong Kong, which accounts for over 15 per cent of the total number, making Japan the largest source of foreign companies in Hong Kong. Many of them are using Hong Kong as regional headquarters to oversee their business activities in Asia, including a wide range of sectors from electronics, financial services, to information and communications technology.

We are also very pleased to note from the findings of the latest survey on Hong

Kong's Business Environment of the second half of 2022 conducted by the Japan External Trade Organization, Hong Kong, that the number of respondents seeing improvement in Hong Kong's business environment is on the rising trend.

Hong Kong people's love and affection for Japan is evidenced by the fact that it is definitely one of the most, if not the most, popular tourist destinations for Hong Kong people. Before the outbreak of COVID-19, in 2019, there were around 2.3 million Hong Kong visitors to Japan. Let's remember the population of Hong Kong in 2019 was only about 7.5 million. In fact, my last overseas visit was back in February 2020 when my wife and I went to Nagoya for the Chinese New Year holiday.

Japanese music, movies and cartoons have always been very popular in Hong Kong. For myself, I still remember when I was very young, I watched Gundam on television instead of doing my homework.

Turning to sports, as Asians, I must say that we are all very impressed by Japan's excellent performance in the Qatar World Cup not too long ago, in particular, beating strong European teams, namely, Germany and Spain. Kaoru Mitoma, in Chinese 三笘薫, who now plays for Brighton in the English Premier League, has become the idol of many soccer fans in Hong Kong.

As the Secretary for Justice, I feel obliged to mention legal co-operation between the two jurisdictions. A Memorandum of Co-operation was entered into between the Ministry of Justice of Japan and the Department of Justice of Hong Kong back in January 2019, aiming to strengthen co-operation on issues relating to international arbitration and mediation, and to facilitate the development of services for international arbitration and mediation in Hong Kong and Japan. As I mentioned to Consul-General when we met in last November, I am considering very seriously to visit Japan with legal professionals in Hong Kong later this year.

Strong fundamentals of Hong Kong

Hong Kong also plays a very significant role in the relationship between Japan and China. Under the principle of "one country, two systems", Hong Kong acts as the super-connector between China and the rest of the world, including of course Japan. As an illustration, over 10 per cent of the total trade between Japan and the Mainland

was routed through Hong Kong.

President Xi has made it crystal clear back on July 1 last year that the principle of "one country, two systems" will be maintained in the long run. That of course included the advantages and features of Hong Kong such as the rule of law as mentioned in the Consul-General's speech. I am very confident that there are countless opportunities ahead to enable us to foster a closer relationship in different areas, which would serve the common interest of Japan, China, and Hong Kong SAR as a part of China.

Closing

My dear friends from Japan, as we celebrate your Emperor's birthday, may I sincerely wish the people of Japan good health, prosperity and happiness, and that the friendship between the Japanese people and Chinese people would be closer than ever.

May I now propose a toast: To His Majesty the Emperor and the People of Japan and Hong Kong, China. Thank you very much.

Ends/Friday, February 10, 2023