

Distinguished Guests,

I feel privileged to have the opportunity to honour Dr Robin Wilson for his outstanding contribution to deepening cultural relations between Japan and the UK.

Dr Wilson is an anthropologist who, since 2015, has been building the Oxford Anagama Kilns in Wytham Woods, thereby bolstering Japan-UK ties in the field of arts and crafts.

The Anagama is known as the oldest form of kiln in Japan, dating back to the 5th century. Such kilns are wood-fired and take several days to fire. Though their use is thus time-consuming and susceptible to ambient conditions, they are treasured for the unpredictable natural beauty of the ceramics they produce, each piece being utterly unique. Since ancient times the Japanese have lived in harmony with nature, and have always loved the simple yet inherent beauty of nature's creations such as the works emanating from Anagama kilns.

The Oxford Anagama Project was set up to introduce this traditional Japanese pottery production method to the UK and to make it publicly available to as many potters as possible in this country and beyond. The famous Leach Pottery in St Ives, which began with the

collaboration between HAMADA Shoji and Bernard Leach about a century ago, is a good example of the creative interaction between British and Japanese ceramic artists. Against this promising backdrop, the Anagama Project has become a catalyst for cultural exchange between the UK and Japan, not only for professional potters but more generally for people who simply appreciate the aesthetic delights that ceramics can offer.

The Project has also provided fascinating academic material on the natural chemical reactions involved in Anagama firing, soil properties and topography. Moreover, it has led to the further promotion and development of ceramic culture in the UK by providing a forum for people from all walks of life to experience pottery creation through the use of a traditional Japanese Anagama kiln.

Furthermore, the Project has embraced the University of Oxford, British potters and volunteers as well as Japanese potters and Anagama experts, including Mr ISEZAKI Jun, a Living National Treasure in the arena of Bizen ware. The Embassy of Japan is honoured to have had the opportunity to collaborate with the Project by exhibiting the various pieces created in this kiln last year. Indeed, my wife and I visited Oxford last June and it was an exciting

experience to see the Anagama kilns and the exhibition at Harris Manchester College, which had been transferred from the Embassy.

The Oxford Anagama Project will presumably have no end. It will continue to change and develop, just as the pursuit of beauty in pottery never ends. Once again, I would like to appreciate Dr Wilson and his team for their significant contribution to bilateral cultural exchange and to thank everyone involved in this initiative, including the University of Oxford. I look forward to seeing how it evolves in the future.

It now gives me great pleasure to present Dr Robin Wilson with the Ambassador's Commendation.

Thank you.