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In 2005 I was told that a distinguished group of Judges and Public Prosecutors from Japan would be visiting London and I was asked to give them some lectures on advocacy. Japan was about to re-introduce into its criminal justice system, after an absence of, I think, 50 years, a form of lay jury, called Saiban-in. I thought this was a one-off visit to the Middle Temple. Yet here we are 18 years later and the strong bond between our colleagues in Japan and us could not be better.

The honour of the Order of the Rising Sun, which you, Ambassador, have most kindly presented to me today, is a remarkably generous gift from His Majesty the Emperor and the Japanese Government. I am more thrilled than words can adequately express. If I were to die tomorrow, I would die the happiest person in the world. I do not intend to die now because I know that your amazing chef will have prepared the most exquisite dinner, which I do not intend to miss.

It has been an enormous pleasure to have worked with so many talented Judges and Public Prosecutors from all over Japan over the past 18 years. No one country has a monopoly on wisdom. On the contrary, we learn from the experiences of each other. Our legal systems have a great deal in common. The problems in society that we face are the problems that you face too. What we share is a firm belief in democracy and the Rule of Law. It is why our legal systems, our Courts and our Judiciary are held in such high regard by the public. The public can be confident that there will be no corruption, no political interference in Court judgments, no bias or prejudice. The same sadly cannot be said for all countries in this troubled world.

The Middle Temple deeply treasures its bond with Japan. Our links in fact began a very long time ago. Rokuichiro Masujima graduated from the University of Tokyo, then joined the Middle Temple as a student member in 1881. In 1883 he became the first person from Japan to be called to the English Bar. He later returned to Japan where he founded Chuo University. I understand that one meaning of the Japanese word Chuo is “middle”. We like to think that his choice of that word for the name of his university was a recognition of his bond with the Middle Temple.

With the help of your new Legal Attache, Mr Kawate, we are about to begin the arrangements for the 2024 Middle Temple Seminar for Judges and Public Prosecutors from Japan. One topic about which I would like to hear from the visiting delegates is the recent experiment at the University of Tokyo where the Judge at a mock trial was not human but artificial intelligence. Is this the future? For the sake of the Judges here today, I hope not, but it is clear that this is an area where Japan leads the world in its research and innovation.

Ambassador, although I am the immensely lucky recipient of this wonderful honour, in truth I am but one member of the Middle Temple team which has had for many years the absolute pleasure of working closely with our distinguished colleagues in Japan. I shall treasure this for as long as I live and I thank His Majesty the Emperor, the Government of Japan and you from the bottom of my heart. Arigato!