Resolution on the Retirement of
Kiyoko Morita, Lecturer of Japanese
May 18, 2016

Kiyoko Morita was born in a small village a few hours’ train ride from Tokyo. She remembers the day when her father took her to a park in Tokyo, and was approached by an American soldier. She was four-years old and dressed in a kimono. He was there as a member of the Occupation forces that entered Japan following the end of World War II. He gave her chocolate and gum.

This first encounter with a foreigner made a lasting impression. What did he say? Where was he from? Kiyoko wanted to know. Later, as a junior high school student, she studied English, a compulsory subject, with great enthusiasm. She must have shown promise, because her English teacher sent her to a Canadian missionary to get pronunciation practice.

Kiyoko decided to become an English language teacher. While at a junior college in Sapporo, she met an American teacher whose husband was stationed in Hokkaido. They took an interest in her and invited Kiyoko to Berkeley California to continue her studies. After graduating from California State University, she returned to Japan and English at Matsushita Panasonic’s English Language School in Osaka. While there, she joined a team that created an audio textbook tape to be played on Panasonic’s newly developed cassette tape recorder.

The transition from English to Japanese teacher came as an invitation to teach American college students at Amherst College’s Associated Kyoto Program housed at Doshisha University in Kyoto. With an eye to making Japanese teaching a profession, she returned to the US and began graduate work in East Asian studies at Indiana University. Her Master’s thesis was on incense and Japanese literature, and was published as The Book of Incense by Kodansha International.

While still working on her PhD qualifying exams, she was offered a teaching position at Colby College. She later moved on to Harvard University, Wellesley College, and Tufts, where she began as a part-time Japanese language teacher in January 1993. This came at the invitation of Charles Inoue, then Japanese Program Director, but formerly Kiyoko’s TA while a graduate student at Harvard.

At Tufts, Kiyoko taught all levels of Japanese. She advised several senior honor theses, and especially enjoyed helping her students with literary translations. She also developed a “teaching Internship” that trained Tufts undergraduates to teach Japanese to students in the neighboring elementary schools. This program developed into the Education Department’s MAT program in Japanese in collaboration with the GRALL department. With the support of now retired Dr. Yu Lan Lin of Boston’s World Languages Program, Japanese became one of the world languages taught in Boston’s public schools. Six of her students were accepted into this program, and 5 became certified Japanese language teachers. Of this number, only two were native Japanese language speakers.

Today, Tufts University is the only school on the East Coast where students are being trained to become certified K-12 Japanese language teachers. As a part of her legacy, Kiyoko’s students are now veteran Japanese language teachers, whose students are now coming to Tufts to pursue degrees in Japanese studies.

Kiyoko will be remembered as a caring, dedicated teacher. She has received several recognitions:

- Lieber Distinguished Associate Instructor Teaching Award, Indiana University, April 1983;
- Distinction in Teaching Award, Harvard-Danforth Center, June 1986;
- Indiana University-Tenri University Exchange Fellowship, 1988-1989 ;
- Professor of the Year 2000-2001 (Tufts TCU Senate), May 2001.

Kiyoko Morita also had a gift for establishing and nurturing connections with influential people and institutions. As a founding member of the Boston branch of the Shino School of Incense, she introduced the art of incense to many university and museum throughout the United States. She is also a board member of the Massachusetts Hokkaido Association and the Japan Society of Boston, which awarded her with the Jack Thayer Award in 2014 for her contributions to US-Japan relations.

We will miss Kiyoko’s warmth, talent, and broadness of vision. Upon the retirement of Kiyoko Morita as a Lecturer in Japanese at Tufts University, we the members of the Department of German Russian and Asian Languages and Literatures move that these remarks be spread upon the minutes of the Arts and Sciences faculty.

Respectfully submitted,
Charles Shiro Inouye
Professor of Japanese