

## Obituary to my dear friend

### Professor Dr. Takao Takahashi (1948-2020)

We have lost our dear friend, father, grandfather, husband, colleague, mentor, professor and teacher, Takahashi sensei. Takao was so much to so many people, and I'm sure other people will also try to write some words to capture something of the essence of our dear departed companion. He has left this world for the next, leaving his love and wisdom through his writings, his words and wonderful paintings, and the spirit that he shared with all of us. Although he had warned us that he would be leaving us prematurely as he fought bravely against cancer to spend more precious days with his family who survive him, I had dearly prayed to have pleasure to meet my dear friend and teacher again. Thank you for willing your body to enjoy this last spring to bless your dear grandson, daughter and wife with more days together.



Professor Dr. Takao Takahashi served as the Dean of the Graduate School of Social and Cultural Sciences of Kumamoto University, and also one of the founding professors in the HIGO Program, Priority Organization for Innovation and Excellence. He led the bioethics research group since its founding there in 1996. In addition to writing hundreds of papers in bioethics, neuro-ethics, disaster ethics and philosophy, among the books I especially appreciate are: *Taking Life and Death Seriously: Bioethics from Japan* (2005), and *Philosophy and Practice of Bioethics across and between Cultures* (edited by Takahashi, Ghotbi and Macer, 2019). He received many accolades from organizations such as awards from the Association for Philosophical and Ethical Research in Medicine, the Asian Bioethics Association, and an honorary doctorate from Kyushu University. He also served as a founding Professor of Philosophy and Bioethics at American University of Sovereign Nations since 2013. He is irreplaceable and is deeply missed already.



My first visit to Kumamoto was in February 2007 at the kind invitation of Professor Takahashi in 2016, which would commence a wonderful time in my life in which I visited Kumamoto University over 20 times (so far). I appreciate the introduction through our mutual friend Professor Ichiro Matsuda. Although I first visited Japan in 1987, and worked to develop the field of bioethics in Japan through my position as a foreign professor at the University of Tsukuba from 1990 to 2005, ironically it was after I had moved from Japan to work as UNESCO Regional Advisor for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok, that I would have the opportunity to start my love affair with Kumamoto.

We instantly had deep communication and very simply agreed that we should start a series of cross cultural Bioethics Roundtables at Kumamoto University, a decision that led to a series of 12 annual bioethics roundtables bringing together scholars from all

around the world, in addition to two bioethics roundtables at United Nations University. He had support in developing bioethics internally from Professors Tomohiro Tanaka and Atsushi Asai, and a team of young scholars. Each person who engaged in dialogue took some part of Professor Takahashi's spirit within them. We approached bioethics from two fundamental pathways, he from the necessity of self-determination to protect the dignity of people, and myself from the perspective that bioethics is the love of life. We would continue to dialogue on all aspects of bioethics, disaster ethics, the environment and culture every time we met and in between as well.

There are so many things I owe to his wisdom beyond the dialogues I also cherish friendships that emerged during these times we grew together. I also carry with me an honorary doctorate that was awarded under his supervision in 2009, at the anniversary of the University being one of first three honorary doctors of the University.

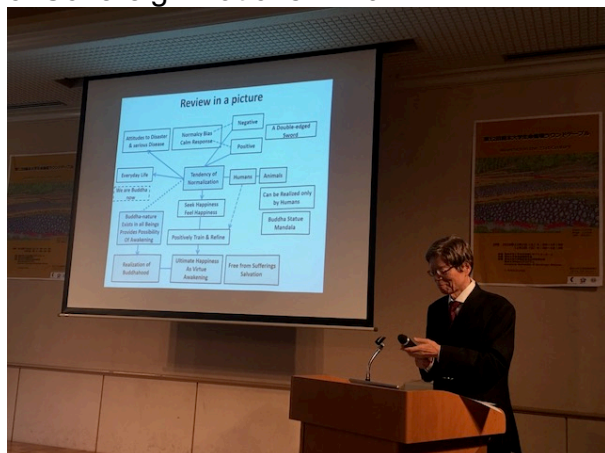
I also share in this obituary some photographs because this may bring to life some of the moments that shaped people's lives who are intertwined because of time together. I also urge for the sake of his memory that those of us who were brought together continue to work for the principles of justice and love among all people and how we can apply our traditional wisdom, philosophical rationalism, faith and logic to find better solutions for the contemporary challenges that we face in our reshaping world.

Among the roundtables the largest was the roundtable in 2005<sup>th</sup> the 15<sup>th</sup> Asian Bioethics conference which saw a hundred scholars from around the world come together, and remarkably we could all fit in the University Hall (Kusunoki Kaikan) and share wisdom together about bioethics. I am thankful that I did make some videos and these are available to view on YouTube, however, I regret that I did not record video from the very first times.



Professor Takahashi was one of the founding professors of the American University of Sovereign Nations, and he brought a group of professors and students to our campus as fieldwork. We also had a chance to share sunrise in the Grand Canyon together, and other places in Arizona and California, meeting with native American tribes and delivering a lecture in our university.

He was always proud of his students and we shared a common passion to motivate students to nurture them to present at international conferences, and to develop into International scholars. Among his former students there are now professors, as well as many other teachers and servants of humanity. He fought for his students during their thesis defenses, supporting a richer diversity of thought than a regular professor. Through the roundtables it was possible that we could bring students from other countries of the world together and they were also inspired. The photos below include his lecture at the 12<sup>th</sup> International Kumamoto Bioethics Roundtable in 2018, and at American University of Sovereign Nations in 2014.



If I have to dedicate this obituary to anyone it is to his dear family who gave up some of their precious time with him during his working career because he was always devoted to his students, his colleagues, to Kumamoto University, and the pursuit of wisdom.

It is not only the academic times that I celebrate when I think with teary eyes about what I will miss. Those who are new to Kumamoto University may not know that what is now a car park opposite the entrance to the regular venue, the Kusunoki Kaikan (Hall) was in fact a former clay tennis court where I had a pleasure to have spent a few hours with Professor Takahashi, amongst writing papers and organizing conferences and giving lectures to students. He and the two dear students that played did not know how much that game of tennis meant personally to me, as it was the first time, I played what used to be my main teenage sport, tennis, after having spent two years recovering from a back injury.

In addition, we went for walks and picnics to Mount Aso, walking on the Meadows of the mountain. It is here with the spirit of Mount Aso, Kumamoto Castle and all those who have lived in the past that Professor Takahashi will now share his joy and wisdom. He has left us many books and papers, philosophical models and theories of how to apply bioethical theory to practice, that will engage generations to come. These are brought to life by his passion. I'm not sure if any University can really appreciate what he has meant for the world and for peoples he brought together. He will surely be missed by all of us who were privileged to walk some steps together.



A day before his passing, as a member of the World Emergency COVID19 Pandemic Ethics Committee, he is a co-author of **A Call to Cease the Use of War Metaphors in the COVID-19 pandemic**. This photo is from fieldwork at U.S.S. Midway, where we shared with our group that peace is our ethical pursuit, never to be confused with war.

It is a legacy for international dialogue and love between peoples, combined with intellectual rigor that I will carry in my heart for the rest of my days on the planet.

So, my dear friend, you have done your part to make this world closer together and that legacy is how we will carry on with your spirit, humbly as stumbling people, but much better than before we met you. Thank you, Takao.

- Darryl Macer, Ph.D., Hon.D., President, American University of Sovereign Nations  
Email: provost@ausn.info

*There are also several youtube videos of his lectures:*

Triage and the medicine in disasters

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0LB6F9ANa8>

Disaster Ethics: Philosophical Foundations and its Implications

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqjuWZqkmmM>

Behind the Attitudes to Disaster and Disease

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yJoBINjLMdg>

*On the same AUSN YouTube channel there are videos of many lectures from Kumamoto where you can also enjoy his discourse and dialogue.*

*Three of his papers that present an introduction are:*

Takao Takahashi, Three Levels Structure Analysis and its Significance, [EJAIB 19 \(January/March 2011\), 1-5.](#)

Takao Takahashi, Bioethics and Environmental Ethics in the Age of Co-Disaster, [EJAIB 22 \(January 2012\), 1-3.](#)

Takao Takahashi, Happiness in Bioethics, [EJAIB 26 \(Nov. 2016\), 214-6.](#)

You can search more on <https://www.eubios.info/eubios.htm>