First Lecture
May 14 (Monday), 2018
5pm The Lightfoot Room, Old Divinity School, St John’s College
[pre-lecture tea reception starts at 4:40pm]

Picturing Gentlemen: Portrait Photography and the Colonial Mask

There is an 1899 photograph of the Japanese Governor General of Taiwan, Kodama Gentarō, playing croquet on his mansion’s back lawn. That photograph, which arrests the eye in its
spontaneity, was the beginning of my exploration of the conditions of portrait photography in Taiwan during Japanese colonization. In this lecture, I consider the Japanese colonial photographic industry and its products (portraits) in three contexts: the state of photographic technology in the world at that time, the ideological machinery of colonization in Taiwan, and the wider phenomenon of colonial mimicry. Here I focus on colonial-period photo albums and commercial directories that present portraits of politically and economically influential men, both Japanese and Taiwanese. Bringing these considerations together suggests an aspect of the colonial ideological machinery that has been understated in other studies: the colonial portrait as a mask in several forms.

This year’s Chuan Lyu Lecturer

Joseph R. Allen is a Professor Emeritus of Chinese literature and cultural studies and Founding Chair of the Department Asian Languages and Literatures, University of Minnesota. His PhD in classical Chinese literature is from the University of Washington, Seattle. He has held a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship, two Fulbright Research Fellowships to Taiwan, and a Faculty Fellowship in the Humanities at Harvard University. In 2016 he received the Dean’s Medal for Academic Achievement from the College of Liberal Arts. First trained in classical Chinese poetry, Allen’s early work includes In the Voice of Others: Chinese Music Bureau Poetry and a study of the early Mulan narratives, "Dressing and Undressing the Chinese Woman Warrior." He has also translated and written about modern and contemporary Chinese poetry, both of Taiwan and China. More recently his work has focused on cultural studies, including his “From Textbooks to Lingerie: Classical Chinese Poetry and Taiwan Popular Culture” and Taipei: City of Displacements, which won the 2014 Levenson Book Prize in Chinese Studies. His current research focuses on photography in Taiwan.