

Letters and Essays from Sydney 2.0 – Volume 15

~ Visit to Sydney by a Grand Master of Urasenke ~

3 July

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From 8 to 11 June, the fifteenth Iemoto (Head) of Chado Urasenke, Grand Master Dr SEN Genshitsu, visited Sydney. It was ten years since Dr Sen last came to Sydney in 2013.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of Grand Master Sen's Oceania Mission and the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Chado Urasenke Tankokai Sydney Association. It also coincides with the 49th anniversary of the establishment of the Urasenke Brisbane Liaison Office and the 30th anniversary of the establishment of Chado Urasenke Tankokai Melbourne Association. Many Urasenke tea ceremony practitioners living in Oceania, including in Brisbane and Melbourne, gathered in Sydney on the day of the tea ceremony.

Looking back, I remember having listened to a lecture by the Grand Master when I entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in 1990. It took place at the MOFA training institute which was then located at Myogadani in Bunkyo-ku in central Tokyo. The training institute has since moved to Sagami-ono on the outskirts of the Tokyo-Yokohama conurbation, but I have heard that he continues to deliver lectures at the institute. A colleague 5 years my senior also heard the Grand Master speak, which means that Dr Sen has been giving lectures over the course of at least 40 years. He not only talks about the tea ceremony, but he also explains to young MOFA officers about working for peace and how to prepare oneself for life. In addition, Dr Sen has worked as a MOFA advisor, a Government of Japan and United Nations Goodwill Ambassador and a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador. I am grateful for his tremendous support and cooperation in the field of diplomacy.



On 8 June, a commemorative dinner was held at the Royal Automobile Club.

The following day on 9 June, Dr Sen conducted a special tea ceremony “Wago no Chakai (和合の茶会)” and gave a lecture at the National Maritime Museum. A tea ceremony demonstration was given by Urasenke teachers. In the afternoon, three tea ceremonies were conducted, one by each of the Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne associations. I also participated in the series of events.



At the start of his lecture, Dr Sen took a tea bowl in his hands and told us a tea bowl is “round (MARUI 丸い)”, like a “circle (WA 輪)”, like “harmony (WA 和)”, and can lead to “peace (HEIWA 平和)”¹. The Grand Master has visited Ukraine three times, and recently he was in contact with Urasenke people in Kyiv. He was moved to hear that they are continuing with the tea ceremony which creates a peaceful space even in the midst of war, and this is the only peaceful space they have. Dr Sen expressed his desire to visit Ukraine again, and he hopes that the situation will allow him to do so. He continued to talk to us without pause and without notes for close to an hour and a half.

¹ WA 和 means ‘harmony’ or ‘peace’. It is the second character in the word for peace HEIWA 平和. It is also used to refer to Japan the country, such as in WASHOKU 和食 meaning ‘Japanese (traditional) cuisine’. WA can be explained in many ways, but briefly, 和 conveys the sense of harmony through completion or ‘the whole’, like a circle is complete in and of itself.

In April this year, the Grand Master turned 100, and many participants wanted to know his secret to good health. Dr Sen gave two answers: “posture” or “stance” and “green tea”. I will remember this and try to practice it myself.

Through the lecture and events, I felt the passion that the Grand Master has for his wish for peace through a bowl of tea and the tea ceremony, and his commitment to live as an embodiment of “peacefulness from one bowl of tea”. Dr Sen’s passion is as strong now as it was when I took his lecture at the MOFA training institute more than 30 years ago.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and respect to Dr Sen for promoting Japanese culture and furthering mutual understanding between Japan and other countries, as well as for his various contributions in the field of diplomacy. I wish him the very best for his future endeavours.



(Ends)