

Letters and Essays from Sydney 2.0 – Volume 16

~ One year on in Sydney ~

19 September

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On 23 September it will be one year since I arrived to take up my post here in Sydney. The year has flown!

In the first issue of this “Sydney-Dayori 2.0” newsletter, I wrote about five “First Impressions” since my arrival.

A year has passed, but those impressions remain the same: 1) The city is clean, 2) it’s a city where it’s easy to integrate, 3) a city that is kind and open, and full of vitality, 4) ingredients are abundant and food is delicious, and 5) people are friendly towards Japan. Looking at each of those points now, I feel “Yes, that’s right”. Only, I wrote that “rubbish isn’t dropped” and I guess I wasn’t observant enough on that point.

Looking back over this past year, I realise that various events are being held at the same level or even more frequently than pre-COVID, and people are travelling between Japan and Australia as they used to.

There is probably an element of pent-up energy that accumulated during the COVID crisis being released, but more than that, I feel that we are on track to see Japan-Australia ties become deeper and more diverse than they were pre-COVID, and the remarkable activities of Japanese people in Sydney are also exceeding pre-COVID levels.

In an interview I gave on my arrival, I said that if I could be of any help to let me know and I would go anywhere, and I have followed that to this day. It’s a constant struggle to manage schedule clashes and make adjustments, but that in itself demonstrates the wide range of events being held in Sydney and gives me confidence. Cultural and art events, business community exchange, regional exchange including sister-city ties, sports exchange, the promotion of Japanese food and drink, school exchange, academic exchange – there are so many. I have shown up in all sorts of places, given speeches and remarks in support of people’s activities, hoping that, I can contribute, no matter how little, to increasing the

presence and profile of Japan in Sydney. With these thoughts in mind, I have never let up my pace over this past year.

In June, Dr SEN Soshitsu, a grand master of the Urasenke school of tea (chado) visited Sydney. There were also notable activities in ikebana, calligraphy and sumie ink painting, and in music, and I had the opportunity to attend exhibitions and concerts. A more unusual event was the invitation to a koi (Japanese carp) competition.

Sports exchange is also thriving. The Australian national baseball team participated in the World Baseball Championships, the Kashima Antlers youth soccer team visited here, and there was also exchange between Japan and the NSW Waratahs. (I wish I could have welcomed Japan's women's national soccer team, Nadeshiko Japan, to Australia!)

From Fukuoka and Nagano Prefectures, there have been high-level visits led by governors, mayors and parliamentary officials. There have also been many events associated with sister-city exchange. If I listed them one by one this newsletter would run for far too many pages, but I can say that I have visited regional cities around NSW and the greater Sydney metropolitan area and supported exchange at the local level. I am grateful for the fact that there are so many Japan-related events at the community level and for the friendship shown to Japan among the people I meet wherever I go.

I am not quite sure if it fits in the category of "contemporary culture", but I was surprised and delighted to see the scale and visitor numbers of the SMASH! event held at the ICC in Sydney. (And I was thrilled to be able to meet the voice artist FURUYA Toru.)

Attending a travel fair promoting ski resorts, I was so pleased to see the large number of people gathered around the Japan booth. I heard that the number of Australian tourists visiting Japan has returned to pre-COVID levels. Japanese food and Japanese beverage events are very popular with Australians and always draw good crowds.

I also actively visited universities and research institutes. Intellectual exchange and industry-university exchange between Japan and Australia are expected to progress further.

I have prioritized attending events related to reconciliation. Laying wreaths and paying my respects to the fallen, I attended commemorations for "VP Day" (Victory in the Pacific Day) which corresponds with End of War Day in Japan, the attack on Sydney Harbour and the Cowra Breakout. It is an important task to pass on the spirit of Japan-Australia reconciliation, achieved through the efforts of those who came before us, while we look forward to the future.

It seems that business travel is also back to pre-COVID levels. I have had the opportunity to exchange views with many business people and on every occasion I learnt 'new points of interest'. Roundtables and dinners have been held at my official residence to support networking among Japanese and Australian businesspeople. This month, a Japanese industry mission related to Western Sydney Development visited, and it is hoped that concrete collaborative projects will be realised in Western Sydney.

In March, elections were held in NSW and a new Labor Government was elected. Good relationships are being built with Premier Minns, Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament. I am grateful that they are always open to dialogue. I will be sure to clearly convey the voices of the Japanese community and Japanese businesses.

And of course, as the Japan-Australia relationship continues to grow stronger and closer, visits by Japanese government and parliament members have also resumed post-pandemic. From January this year alone, many dignitaries have visited from Japan. I am grateful for this.

Particularly striking is the increase in exchange in the area of defence. In August, I attended a reception onboard a Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force vessel. Taking advantage of the joint exercise between Japan, Australia, India and the US, each of the countries hosted welcome receptions onboard. As for the reception hosted by Japan, the preparation, the formalities and the catering were all perfectly conducted by the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, and I felt pleased and proud. The fact that many Defense Agency and Self-Defense Force members are visiting Australia is testament to the significant growth in security cooperation between Japan and Australia.

I have shared with you above some of my 'impressions' gained in the one year since those 'first impressions' from when I was newly arrived

The weather is warming up just now, and daylight savings will start soon. Striving to balance my public and private life, I would like to enjoy another Sydney summer with my wife.

In my second year as the Consul-General of Japan in Sydney, I would like to continue to work in the spirit of "If I can be of any help, I will go anywhere", and in cooperation and collaboration with the Japanese community, endeavour to raise the profile and presence of Japan in Sydney.

(Ends)