

Edition 5: Letters and Essays from Sydney 2.0

～ Sister-city ties and citizen-to-citizen exchange ～

5 December

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Soon after arriving in Sydney to assume my post, I had the opportunity to visit a number of cities in NSW which have sister-city relationships with cities in Japan. I visited Dubbo, Newcastle, Bathurst and Campbelltown, and I received a visitor from Lismore.

There are 39 sister-city relationships between local governments in Japan and NSW. The reasons why they were established vary. To give a few: in some cases, the relationship came about through a meeting between the heads of local governments; in other cases, it was the initiative of someone within the local government with a passionate interest in Japan or in Australia; and in yet others, it was due to a characteristic shared by both towns. What sister cities have in common is they have developed warm bonds through exchange and student and youth exchanges flourish.

In November, I welcomed Mrs Tazuko McLaren from Lismore to my residence. She arrived in Sydney from Lismore, together with her friends including Nakayama-sensei, who are involved in Japan-Australia student exchange in Yamato-Takada City in Nara Prefecture, Lismore's sister city. Next year, Yamato-Takada City and the City of Lismore will mark the 60th anniversary of the signing of their sister-city agreement. They have the longest history of any Japan-Australia sister-city relationship.

Mrs McLaren has worked for many years teaching Japanese at Southern Cross University in Lismore. On this occasion, Mrs McLaren kindly guided me to a church in Hunters Hill (Sydney) where I had the honour of meeting Father Paul Glynn. I was able to report to Fr Paul that before coming to Sydney, I visited the place where his brother, Father Tony Glynn, rests in peace in a suburb of Yamato-Takada.



(Visiting Nara Prefecture before taking up my post in Sydney)

The brothers, Fr Tony and Fr Paul Glynn, are from Lismore. They led various exchange initiatives in Yamato-Takada and in Australia seeking to heal the emotional scars of former Australian POWs; the brothers made an enormous contribution to Japan-Australia reconciliation. The work of Fr Tony has been highlighted in the film, “The Railroad of Love” (愛の鉄道 Ai no Tetsudo).

I am eager to see how both cities will mark the 60th anniversary next year. Moreover, I hope to visit Lismore at the earliest opportunity.



In October, I visited the city of Bathurst which is located approximately 3 hours by car to the west of Sydney and is famous for the “Bathurst 1000” car race, one of Australia’s leading motor races. Bathurst has a sister-city relationship with Ohkuma Town in Fukushima Prefecture. It is in Bathurst where Mrs Fudeko Reekie worked for 35 years as a Japanese teacher and has supported exchange with Ohkuma to this day. There is also an “Ohkuma Garden” in Bathurst. When Ohkuma Town was devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster, many donations were received from Bathurst. Mrs Reekie presented me with a very valuable resource – a book recording the history of exchange between both local governments. The book is a compilation of the efforts that stakeholders have made working for Japan-Australia friendship.





About a one hour drive from central Sydney is Campbelltown, which has had a sister-city relationship with Koshigaya City in Saitama Prefecture for close to 40 years. In November, the “KAZOKU” Festival was held at the Campbelltown Arts Centre where there is a Japanese garden. People of all ages gathered to enjoy various performances such as traditional Japanese drumming and dance. It was a great success. I was very impressed by the beautifully maintained Japanese garden and the splendid arts centre. I also ran into the owner of the former GOSHU Japanese sake company which used to produce Japanese sake in Australia and I learnt many things from our conversation. It seems Japanese language education is also one of the pillars of exchange in Campbelltown, and I certainly noticed many high school students at the festival.



Also in November, I visited Dubbo about 400km west of Sydney. The city is a transportation hub. This year, Minokamo City sent a delegation to visit Dubbo on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Minokamo donating the “Shoyoen” Japanese garden and its tea house “Jurian”. Shoyoen is named after the writer TSUBOUCHI Shoyo, a native of Minokamo. There is also a Minokamo Way in Dubbo. Sister-city exchange between the two cities has been continuing for more than 30 years, and high school student exchange also flourishes.

At the anniversary dinner I attended, translation was being performed by a woman from Minokamo who spoke very fluent English. When I asked her about her background, she told me a heart-warming story. During her high school days, she did a homestay in Dubbo, and afterwards, fate brought her together with a local man from Dubbo and they married. The morning after the dinner, I was invited to breakfast by a couple active in local exchange.

Dubbo is home to the sister zoo of Sydney's Taronga Zoo – it's an enormous zoo, much larger than Sydney's. There are also traces of Dubbo's early European settlement – historic remains like the Old Dubbo Gaol, now a museum. I was told Dubbo is also proud of the local red and white wines and lamb, so allow me to take this opportunity to promote them!



Turning to “big cities”: there are sister relationships between the cities of Nagoya and Sydney, and between Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the state of NSW. As for Nagoya City, I was told by Nagoya City Mayor Kawamura and other city hall representatives when I visited them before coming to Sydney that the sister-city relationship particularly supports local SMEs to export to Australia. It is a good example of a sister-city relationship built on economic exchange. Also, Nagoya's Higashiyama Zoo and Sydney's Taronga Zoo are “sister zoos”. “Sister exchange” can really take on so many different forms.

Above are some examples of sister-city exchange that I have encountered in a little over 2 months so far. Going forward, I will visit other cities and towns promoting exchange with Japan. The purpose of such visits is to express my respect to those involved in exchange activities and to promise my ongoing support. Most sister-city ties have been developed as volunteer activities and I believe this very fact reveals the fondness that people involved in exchange activities have for the Japan-Australia relationship.

Supporting people who are working hard and love Japan and Australia is an important part of this Consulate's work.

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