

News from under the Southern Cross - Edition 10

An ever-shifting self-image

16 April

Today I would like to introduce you to a debate that could be heard in Canberra. 100 days have passed since I arrived in Canberra to take up my position. Among the vigorous exchanges of opinion that I have had with members of Australia's political establishment, government departments, mass media, think tanks, and ambassadors from other countries, one issue that frequently comes up is "What level of power does Australia have?" and "Is 'middle power' an appropriate nomenclature for Australia?"

(1) 'Countries of understatement'

In response to a question put to him during a media interview while serving as Australia's ambassador to Japan, former ambassador Bruce Miller described Japan and Australia as 'countries of understatement' when asked what they had in common. One could say that this attitude is the polar opposite to "punching above one's weight", an attitude to foreign policy that British PM Winston Churchill was renowned for putting into practice. Hence I occasionally feel that Australia's opinion of itself is more reserved than is necessary, which then acts as an impediment to third parties trying to make an accurate assessment of Australia's value.

While there are Australians who are quietly confident that Australia is no longer a 'middle power' given its influential role in the G20, there are others who are exceedingly self-depreciatory, claiming that "we are still only a small power" and so forth. This ever-shifting self-image of Australia is certainly hard for outsiders to grasp.

(2) Population and Manufacturing

In the background to this attitude of understatement is a strong awareness of the issue of Australia's "small population", an awareness that has existed since the country's foundation. At the beginning of the 20th Century Australia's population stood at 5 million. Despite the rapid growth that took place after WWII and the development in population numbers that has seen Australia's demography reach 25 million, the argument still persists that this growth does not qualify Australia to be regarded as a "major power". Yet one of the deeply fascinating things about Australia is that even now its population continues to grow, with expectations that it will surpass 30 million at some point around 2030.

As for manufacturing, during WWII Australia manufactured its own warplanes. In the postwar era it had a record of developing both steel and automobile manufacturing industries - industries to which it still retains strong attachment. Yet when one looks at the emergence of Australia's large-scale agriculture, energy and mining industries, developments in automation and advances in innovation in the services' industry, it seems odd to measure national power based solely on the robustness in Australia's manufacturing industries. As you know, the G7 is not only made up of countries with a strong industrial manufacturing base like Japan and Germany.

(3) 'Global Power'

Whenever I am asked for my opinion, I say that Australia is a "global power". While there are many ways of measuring what constitutes a "major power" or else a mere "middle power", which is itself a subjective process, Australia is clearly a nation that has global influence.

Amid my everyday dealings with various Australian government-related organisations, I am always struck by the capabilities of the Australian military and Australia's intelligence agencies. While the Australian military is relatively small with an overall strength of around 60,000 personnel, it is blessed with the very latest in equipment and is indeed formidable. This strength derives from the fact that Australia has been in every major conflict since WWI and so possesses a wealth of actual battlefield experience. One memory that still remains fresh in my mind is the close co-operation between Australia and the SDF group dispatched to Iraq.

Speaking from my experience as a former Director-General of the Intelligence and Analysis Service, intelligence co-operation between Japan and Australia is incredibly close. The vigorous and effective activities undertaken by Australia's intelligence agencies as an important part of the Five Eyes network are both understood and appreciated by just about everyone that has once set his/her foot in the world of intelligence.



SDF engaged in humanitarian reconstruction support activities in Iraq © SDF

(3) Making regional rules and regulations

In addition to this, the ability of Australia to both conceive of and execute initiatives concerning economic integration in the Indo-Pacific region by taking a leading role in APEC and the TPP etc. is worthy of attention. In the background to the preservation of the TPP following the Trump administration's decision to pull out of the agreement was the co-operation between Japan and Australia. Moreover, during negotiations for RCEP it was Japan and Australia who advocated for a high degree of quality concerning trade liberalisation and rules-making.

This is why Australia deserves to be called a "global power". At the OECD in Paris, Australian Mathias Cormann will assume the role of Secretary General from June onwards. Expectations are that he will provide leadership at an international institution described as the world's largest think-tank for global economy (particularly in regard to trade and investment). His deputy will be my old acquaintance Kono Masamichi, who has been dispatched from Japan. I myself am particularly proud of this development in collaboration between Japan and Australia.

The Quad meanwhile provides an even bigger canvas. As was conveyed in detail at the previous Leaders' Summit, Australia has become a strong partner for Japan in response to issues concerning the distribution of vaccines, climate change, and critical and emerging technologies in conjunction with the United States and India.



The Quad Leaders' Virtual Summit 12 March 2021 ©Prime Minister's Office of Japan HP



Japan-Australia Leaders' Summit 17 November 2020 ©Prime Minister's Office of Japan HP

(4) 'No matter where you look, there's Aussies'

I recently learned an interesting statistic. Dear reader, do you know which group of foreign inbound tourists spends the most while visiting Japan? In truth, it's not one of Japan's Asian neighbours with its reputation for indulging in 'shopping sprees'. It's the Aussies!

An Australian spends around 250,000 yen (AU\$2,998) during a single visit to Japan. Moreover they stay for an average of 12.9 days, making them one of the longest-staying visitors to Japan. They are certainly highly valued customers.

And Japan is not their only port of call. Is this because of an innate ability to put words into action? For those who have lived in international cities, worked in global companies, and made a difference in international organisations, the fact that Aussies are engaged in various activities full of vitality would be self-evident.



Tourists enjoying Niseko ©JNTO

**Travel Expenditure and Travel Consumption Per Person for Foreign Visitors to Japan
(according to nationality and region)**

2019 Fiscal Year

Nationality - Region		a. Travel Expenditure Per Person		b. Number of foreign visitors to Japan		c. Consumption amount for foreign tourists to Japan (=a x b)	
		(Yen/Person)	Comp. previous year			(100 million yen)	Comp. previous year
General Tourists	All Nationalities - Regions	158,531	3.6%	29,855,742	3.5%	47,331	7.2%
	South Korea	76,138	-2.5%	5,568,997	-26.0%	4,240	-27.8%
	Taiwan	118,288	-7.3%	4,609,007	2.7%	5,452	-4.8%
	Hong Kong	155,951	0.9%	2,252,080	4.0%	3,512	4.9%
	China	212,810	-5.4%	7,995,815	23.5%	17,016	16.8%
	Thailand	131,457	5.7%	1,316,885	16.6%	1,731	23.2%
	Singapore	173,669	0.5%	489,969	12.6%	851	13.2%
	Malaysia	133,259	-3.2%	497,655	7.4%	663	4.0%
	Indonesia	131,087	-7.3%	410,288	4.2%	538	-3.4%
	Philippines	107,915	-11.5%	609,549	28.8%	658	14.0%
	Vietnam	177,066	-6.0%	494,251	27.6%	875	20.0%
	India	157,244	-2.6%	173,692	13.9%	273	11.0%
	United Kingdom	241,264	9.2%	412,848	27.2%	996	38.9%
	Germany	201,483	5.1%	229,430	7.8%	462	13.2%
	France	237,420	10.0%	335,862	10.5%	797	21.6%
	Italy	199,450	-10.8%	162,074	8.6%	323	-3.1%
	Spain	221,331	-6.7%	129,895	9.7%	287	2.4%
	Russia	183,015	-2.8%	118,684	26.8%	217	23.3%
	United States	189,411	-1.1%	1,700,805	12.8%	3,222	11.6%
	Canada	181,795	-0.8%	366,758	13.7%	667	12.8%
Australia	247,868	2.4%	610,955	12.7%	1,514	15.5%	
Others	221,514	10.9%	1,370,243	15.2%	3,035	27.7%	

Cruise Ship Visitors	39,710	-10.2%
----------------------	--------	--------

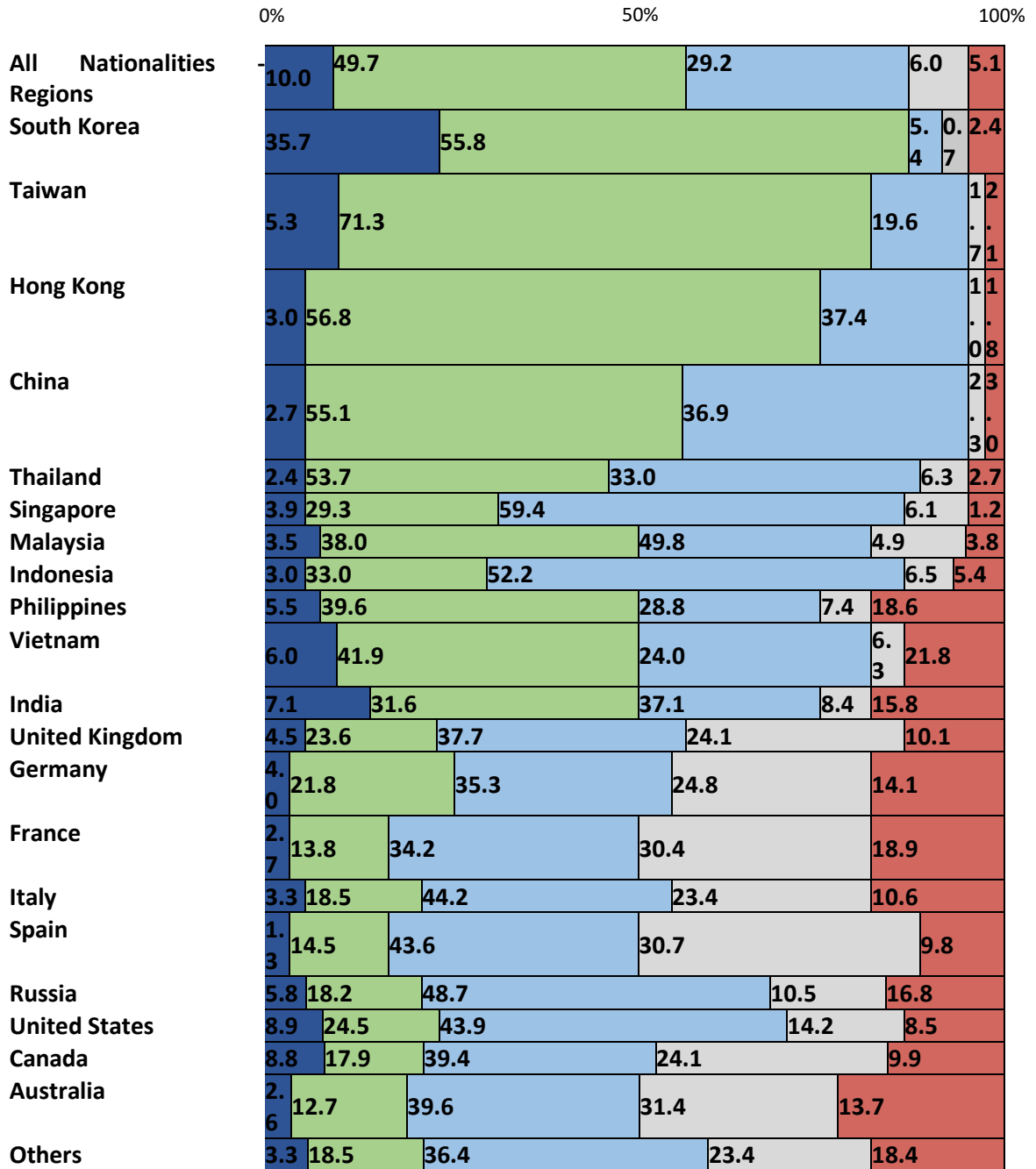
2,026,307	-13.3%	805	-22.2%
-----------	--------	-----	--------

Overall		
---------	--	--

31,882,049	2.2%	48,135	6.5%
------------	------	--------	------

Source: JNTO

Number of Days Resident in Japan (according to nationality and region)



Key:



3 days or less



4 – 6 Days



7 – 13 Days



14 – 20 Days



Over 21 Days
Less than 1
Year

Source: JNTO

(5) Aussies that Japan hasn't noticed yet

Back in my high school days, Olivia Newton John introduced me to the world of pop music. Yet how many Japanese people are aware that she is Australian? Moreover, if you happen to be aware that the leading actors of the 2012 film "Les Misérables" (Hugh Jackman and Russell Crowe) are both Australian, you must be from Australia or from Hollywood.

The activities of so many Australians in Hollywood surely adds considerable value to the nation's 'soft power'.

(6) A lifestyle and sporting 'great power'

For myself, given my history of having been stationed in Europe and the US, one of the first things I noticed after arriving in Australia was "just how abundant this nation is". And this not only applies to the average GDP per person, which is 1.4 times that of Japan. There are many such examples; brilliant sunshine, spacious living space, high-quality diet, improvements in infrastructure, and less stress involved in everyday life. It truly is a 'lifestyle great power'.

The fact that there are currently over 100,000 people of Japanese origin living in Australia, which may soon surpass the number of Japanese living in China, is all the evidence that many Japanese find how good things are here.

In addition, there's probably no need to mention that Australians have astounded the world at sport, be it swimming, tennis, rugby, or cricket etc. Australia is a strong opponent every time Japan competes in the qualifying rounds for the Asia Cup soccer tournament, and we all remember the bitter pill we had to swallow when Australia beat Japan in the baseball semi-final at the Athens Olympic Games.

It's also probably worth mentioning that Japan's "Ajinomoto National Training Center", where top-level athletes like Olympians undertake their training, is based on the lessons learned from Australia's experience with the Institute of Sport.



A friendly junior volleyball match at the Australian Institute of Sport, itself a model for Japan)



Plus500 Brumbies (Canberra) versus Hito Communications Sunwolves (Japan)

(7) In closing

I set out to write this letter holding the question of whether Australia is really a "middle power". So to anyone with an interest in what I've written or to those whose take all this with a grain of salt, I say by all means come to Australia and see for yourself once the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. With its success in controlling the spread of COVID-19 and the sense of liberation that comes with not having to wear a mask all the time, Australia indeed possesses all the skills to be a "global power".

YAMAGAMI Shingo