

News from under the Southern Cross – Edition 13: Visit to New South Wales

19 May

In the week of May 3rd, I was quite the eager beaver. On the 4th I made a day trip to Cowra, while I visited Sydney from the 7th to the 8th. I travelled to both destinations by car, which was two hour one-way trip from Canberra (in the case of Cowra), and three hours (in the case of Sydney). In a vast country like Australia, such journeys are par for the course. It's the Aussie way of doing things.

1. Revisiting Cowra

(1) Koyo Matsuri (Autumn Festival)

Once again I made my way to Cowra, the town I introduced in “News from under the Southern Cross No.3”. As for why I did this, it's because Autumn is in full swing (right now we're the opposite of the Northern Hemisphere where it is Spring!) and this year saw the first ever Koyo Matsuri (Autumn Festival) held in Cowra. This festival, related to the Midori no Hi and Kodomo no Hi festivals in Japan, was hosted by the Cowra Japanese Garden and Culture Centre chairman Bob Griffiths and introduced locals to Japanese culture such as the tea ceremony, Ikebana, origami, wearing kimono, traditional crafts and paper picture stories. As the Japanese Garden had been forced to temporarily close because of COVID-19, the festival was also a chance to celebrate its re-opening.



Explaining about kimono at the Koyo Matsuri

(2) The epitome of beauty

Once again my breath was taken away by the beauty of Cowra's Japanese Garden. During my first visit, I described it as "the best Japanese garden in the Southern Hemisphere". However since the change in seasons only amplified its attractiveness, during my speech (which can be read [here](#)) I spontaneously described it as "the best Japanese garden outside of Japan". I tend to be a bit inconsistent when objects of such beauty appear before me, for which I can only offer my apologies. But I truly feel this way. By all means pay it a visit.



The Cowra Japanese Garden

(3) A warm reception

One thing that touches me every time I come to this town embraced in gentle, rolling hills is the kindness by which the townspeople regard Japan and the honest and warm reception that they provide. I find this profoundly moving, especially given the town was the scene of almost indescribable tragedy.

I was joined by Mayor Bill West in journeying to the town cemetery where we both laid wreathes in memory of the fallen on Australian and Japanese graves, all the while reflecting on the path taken by Japan and Australia to achieve peace and reconciliation between one another and form mutual respect.



The wreath laying ceremony

(4) Meeting up with an old friend

One thing that made me particularly happy during my Cowra visit was the opportunity to meet up with children's literature academic Watanabe Tetsuta. I've known Tetsuta since we first met at kindergarten and studied together at primary school in Tama-kyūryō. Tetsuta had come up from Melbourne in order to perform at the paper picture show. As soon as I saw him, it was almost as though the clock had been wound back 50 or so years. Maybe we were brought together by the spirits of those who fell at Cowra?



Watanabe Tetsuta performing at the paper picture theatre



Catching up with Wanatabe Tetsuta

2. Official state visit to New South Wales

(1) Off to Sydney

I embarked on a business trip to Sydney, the fourth such trip I have undertaken since taking up my post as Ambassador. Given that this was an “official visit”, the NSW government, as host, made arrangements for me to meet and chat with Her Excellency the Hon. Margaret Beazley AC QC, Governor of New South Wales, Premier of New South Wales the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian MP, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly the Hon. Jonathan O’Dea MP, President of the New South Wales Legislative Council the Hon. Matthew Mason Cox MLC, and the Hon. Thomas Bathurst AC, Chief Justice of the New South Wales Supreme Court. During my conversations, I was able to share a wide range of opinions on topics such as the basic values that Japanese and Australian citizens share in democracy and the rule of law, the long-term commitments that Japanese corporations have made in Australia rather than any short-term profiteering, and joint Japan-Australian cooperation in future infrastructure projects in Western Sydney.

I was very much heartened by the extraordinarily positive conversations that I was able to have with all of my hosts, learning about their fondness for Japan and their relationship to it, including one who “confessed” that they had visited Japan on their honeymoon. When I heard from one

of my hosts that “meeting Japanese is relaxing and delightful”, I had a feeling that this comment cut to the essence of the present relationship between Japan and Australia.



Meeting with NSW Governor Beazley



Meeting with NSW Premier Berejiklian

(2) A meeting with Saigō Teruhiko

Through an introduction by a mutual acquaintance, I had the fortune while in Sydney to be able to meet with Saigō Teruhiko. For someone such as myself born in 1961, Saigō Teruhiko is a major singing star and the first of the “three great male vocalists” of the 1960s. Of course, he has not only had great success as a musician but also as an actor, and I felt his aura and the weight of his words to the very core of my being. I very much enjoyed conversing with him and discussing how to boost the presence of Australia in Japan.



Meeting with Saigō Teruhiko

YAMAGAMI Shingo