

News From Under the Southern Cross (Edition 77):

Ambassadors Come and Go

2 June 2022

In the opening of the Broadway musical 'Grand Hotel', as performer after performer walks through the revolving door on the stage, the repeated refrain is: 'people come, people go'. The same goes for the various Ambassadors in Canberra – they also come and go, I feel.

1. A Farewell for My Friends

The other day at my residence in Canberra, I held a hearty farewell for both the High Commissioner of Fiji and the Ambassador of Norway who, having finished their terms of over five years, were headed their separate ways to Geneva and Myanmar.



At the farewell for the High Commissioner of Fiji, Ambassador of Norway, and their spouses
Patricia and Kristina at my residence

In addition to a dining room – where we usually hold formal meals – the official residence of the Japanese Ambassador is also equipped with a ‘tempura counter’ which can accommodate about 7 people. The layout is ideally suited to Japanese hospitality, and I feel grateful to have this kind of space in the residence. When I first glimpsed the dust-covered woodgrain counter after my arrival, I said to the residence chef, Chef OGATA, “we should definitely make use of this”.

At the farewell, we had only the first course of our meal in the dining room and from there moved to the tempura counter, where we ate tempura and sushi to our hearts’ content. Of course, I also took the opportunity to promote Japanese saké and whisky.

All this was not just for the sake of my own enjoyment. Through a process of trial and error, we have been searching for the ‘winning formula’ for entertaining guests. When guests who are accustomed to such diplomatic dinners tell us, “this was such a memorable night”, I feel that the meticulous preparation and hospitality of the residence team – consisting of Chef OGATA, Maream, Yuriko and Daphne – is being rewarded.



Welcome to our tempura counter – ‘Little Tokyo’ in Canberra



The residence team helping me in my quest for the 'winning formula'

2. Two Types of Ambassadors

According to one of my perceptive Australian friends, "there are only two types of Ambassadors in Canberra". I've heard there are 'those who work hard' and 'those who hardly work'!

Norwegian Ambassador, His Excellency Mr Paul Larsen, and Fijian High Commissioner, His Excellency Mr Luke Daunivalu clearly belong to the first type. A year and a half ago, almost immediately after my arrival, I was invited to join a club called 'The Bikers', a group of Ambassadors who cycle around the lake every Saturday morning.



Every Saturday, I join my friends 'The Bikers' and cycle around Lake Burley Griffin

It is not all about taking a breather on weekends and getting some exercise. While riding side-by-side or sipping flat whites during a rest stop, we also exchange information. The other day, on my invitation, we were joined by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon Andrew Wallace MP. Incidentally, this was not on a mountain bike like us Ambassadors, but on a fully-fledged road racer. He was so fast that, even on my lithium battery-powered e-bike, I could not keep up with him. It's true – Australians should not be underestimated!

3. Friends Support Friends

The three pillars of a diplomat's work are cultivating personal relationships, collecting information and public relations. Of course, being stationed in Canberra and acting as the Ambassador in charge of the relationship between Australia and Japan, the principal target audience is Australians, regardless of the type of work being done.

At the same time, the role of relationships with diplomats from third-party countries, in providing useful connections and information, cannot be understated. In particular, with like-minded countries which have the same values and strategic interests, by sharing experience and expertise while cultivating personal relationships and collecting and analysing information, we are able to do our jobs to an even higher standard. Therefore, I check in with other main embassies on a semi-regular basis so that we can bounce ideas off each other.

Meanwhile, because we are all from the same world of diplomacy, there are many aspects in which we enjoy a friendly rivalry. Access to important representatives and public speaking opportunities, for example, are some of the things which each Ambassador should seek out in the name of national interests. It goes without saying that I am expecting some fierce competition.

4. Mates at the Ready

An addition to this multi-talented group of diplomats (in Japanese, we would call them 'hundreds of flowers blooming together' – does that make those others 'hundreds of overgrown weeds', I wonder?) is the Ambassador of Lithuania, His Excellency Mr Darius Degutis, who made his striking debut in Canberra recently.

Against the backdrop of the growing awareness in Lithuania of the importance of the Indo-Pacific region, he arrived in Canberra to establish the Embassy of Lithuania in Australia. He also arranged and timed Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis' trip to Australia and speech at the National Press Club so that it coincided with the opening ceremony of the Embassy. Darius thus succeeded in significantly raising the profile of Lithuania in Australia.

This comes as both Australia and Lithuania face economic coercion and intimidation from a certain trading power. Darius' adept footwork and diverse skillset is coupled with his wife Nida's charming smile and wonderful cooking, adding new colour to Canberra's diplomatic scene.

5. The True Meaning of 'Indo-Pacific'

In Canberra, there are many Ambassadors from Europe and South America. Among them are some who have deep connections with Japan.



The snow-covered Kenrokuen Gardens which charmed the Polish Ambassador and his wife

One example is European Union Ambassador to Australia, His Excellency Dr Michael Pulch. He is a veteran diplomat with a deep understanding of Japan who used to work there as the head of the Trade and Commerce Section in the EU Delegation to Tokyo. I was heartened to learn that Ambassador Pulch and his wife Gabriele had enjoyed watching the Japanese film 'Drive My Car'.

Both Polish Ambassador His Excellency Mr Michał Kołodziejcki and his wife Barbara studied at Kanazawa University. They often talk about the breathtaking beauty of Kanazawa's Kenrokuen Japanese Garden in the snow. It was also Michał's idea to hold a screening at the Polish Embassy of the film 'Persona Non Grata' about SUGIHARA Chiune*, which was co-hosted by both our embassies (you can read about this in News From Under the Southern Cross, [Edition 47](#)).

(*SUGIHARA Chiune was a Japanese diplomat who served as Consul in Lithuania from 1939 to 1940. He is known for having issued Japanese transit visas to thousands of Jews fleeing from Nazi persecution.)

On the other hand, there are many Ambassadors who have not yet been to Japan. It is an important role for the Japanese Ambassador to deepen their understanding of the Indo-Pacific strategic environment and the roles played by Japan and Australia. It is my hope that they will think about using their time off to visit Japan. For that reason, I am greatly anticipating the next stage of the border reopening.

6. Welcome, Vasyl

"Ambassador incoming" – I am referring to our newest member, Ambassador of Ukraine, His Excellency Mr Vasyl Myroshnychenko. As discussed in News From Under the Southern Cross [Edition 67](#), President Zelenskyy's recent address to the Australian Parliament was a great success.



With Ambassador Myroshnychenko at my residence

Moreover, the only four Ambassadors (or representatives) invited to the Defence Debate (between now-outgoing Minister for Defence Peter Dutton and Shadow Minister Brendan O'Connor) at the National Press Club during the federal election campaign were from Japan, Ukraine, Lithuania and Taiwan. Please do not be tempted to call us the 'Gang of Four'! In a venue filled with journalists, it was quite moving to see Vasyl welcomed with a standing ovation.

Vasyl had, before leaving Ukraine, endured the horrors of war from within a bomb shelter. In June, I will hold a welcome dinner for him at my residence. I have no doubt that, alongside Australian VIPs and the Ambassadors of like-minded countries, we will warmly welcome him into our circle and form tight-knit relationships.

7. 'For those who've come across the seas'

After this, I plan to host a welcome dinner for the recently arrived Ambassador of Indonesia, His Excellency Dr Siswo Pramano and incoming Ambassador of the United States, Ms Caroline Kennedy.

Indeed – the networks cultivated by our predecessors and colleagues in Tokyo,

Jakarta and Washington are going to bloom in Canberra. This is the true pleasure of diplomacy.

YAMAGAMI Shingo