

## News From Under the Southern Cross (Edition 82):

### The City Without Starbucks

25 July 2022

Last week I travelled to Melbourne once again. Compared with other large cities in the world, what stood out to me about Melbourne was the lack of Starbucks. According to the people of Melbourne (called Melbournians), the city is “The World Capital of Coffee”. As such, local coffee is one of their greatest points of pride.

#### 1. The depth of a third go around

While sipping the flavourful pride of Melbournians, a flat white, I deliberated. A flat white, which may not be a familiar term to some Japanese, is the most popular coffee in the southern hemisphere, certainly in Australia. It is an espresso with milk. It is distinctive in that the milk used is a smooth steamed milk, and froth floats on the coffee. As a result it has both a generous amount of milk and the rich body and bitterness of the espresso.

When it comes to my third trip around the Australian landmass, I don't want to fall into a rut. If I don't move past the protocol of a formal visit and begin to dig deeper, I cannot enter the world of a truly skilled master. Based on a foundation of personal connections and trust which I have built since arriving at my post, I need to elevate the level of information gathering and sharing. This was the theme of this trip.



The Melbourne skyline (Source: City of Melbourne website)

## 2. Access to VIPs

On my last trip to Melbourne I was able to meet with Premier Dan Andrews in his office. This time, we invited him to dinner at the Residence of Melbourne based Consul-General SHIMADA. This allowed us to have a frank and in-depth discussion on a variety of issues.

Consul-General SHIMADA joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs one year after I did. We have known each other since we both studied in the United States more than 35 years ago, and he succeeded me as Director of the Treaties Division of the ministry. When I was the Director-General of the Intelligence and Analysis Service, he acted as my trusted right hand man. He is the most talented of the 1985 diplomatic service cohort.

As one of Consul-General and Mrs SHIMADA's excellent ideas, he provided Premier Andrews and his wife Catherine with an experience bursting with Japanese culture. First, the koto instrumentalist Brandon Lee and his ensemble (TANIGUCHI Mai, Chiemi SHEPHERD, and OYUKI Mizuno) gave us a warm welcome with a 4-piece instrumental performance. After we were treated to a first-rate Japanese meal by the Residence Chef Mr OTSU, and while enjoying some Yamazaki whisky we were able to appreciate a demonstration of traditional Japanese archery, using a straw training post as a target, by Mrs SHIMADA. The arrows left the bowstring with a sharp twang, sliced through the stillness of the foyer, and hit the target. All of the watching guests gave a cheer. I said to the wowed Mrs Andrews "In the Japanese family the wife is not only the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, she also acts as the Minister of Defence!" and she nodded deeply. This is Japan's defensive deterrence!



Welcoming Premier Andrews and his wife with the sound of the koto

Premier Andrews and his wife have agreed that we should next meet in Canberra at my Residence. I also look forward to them visiting Japan in the near future.

### 3. Intellectual sparring with experts

The longer I stay in Australia, my interactions with intellectuals become deeper.

This time I delved into a discussion with Mr Greg Sheridan, a long-time columnist of Australia's most circulated broadsheet newspaper – The Australian.

We have some mutual acquaintances, and I have met a number of times with Greg. We've covered a range of topics, starting with Japan-Australia relations of course, but also Ukraine, the situation in Taiwan, and Australian domestic politics, and I found I have learnt a lot from our interactions, probably more than he did.

Greg displays the warmth and depth of feeling towards Japan that is particular of Australian intellectuals, and a fascinating personality. I very much look forward to meeting him again.

### 4. Supporting Japanese businesses

Whichever city in Australia I visit I make sure to support the Japanese companies working hard day in and day out on the front lines of business. This time I visited two companies.

#### (1) First, Yakult

The Melbourne Yakult factory produces 380,000-400,000 bottles a day, which are sold not only throughout Australia but in New Zealand as well. The fact that Canberra's supermarkets have Yakult available is something that I, the proverbial "man with digestive issues" as once described in a hit song by a famous Japanese singer, greatly appreciate.

I asked the people at Yakult Australia, including the CEO Mr ONO, two questions that I had been hoping to ask for a long time:

Question 1: What is the origin of the name Yakult?

Question 2: If you feel like just one isn't enough, do the benefits improve if you drink another one or two?

The answer to Question 1 is as follows: in Esperanto (the constructed language

made to connect the world) yoghurt is “jahurto”, and this was the origin of “Yakult”. With regards to Question 2, it is more important to drink Yakult regularly than to drink a lot at once. A very honest trustworthy company, indeed!



Visit to Yakult



Visit to Rinnai

## (2) The next company is Rinnai

Rinnai Australia was established in 1971. It has 550 employees, and annual sales amount to \$400 million AUD. I was able to attend the launch event of their new 100% hydrogen water heaters.

These water heaters do not produce any CO<sub>2</sub> in the combustion process, and are a big step forward in the realisation of a carbon-free world. I introduced in my previous letter the joint work of Japanese companies to produce hydrogen out of La Trobe Valley’s brown coal and to ship it to Japan. I think that Rinnai’s move to produce 100% hydrogen water heaters is a similarly timely initiative in the era of technology-driven decarbonisation.

The Hon. Lily D’Ambrosio MP, the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Action in the Victorian Government, also attended the launch event. It was just the kind of cold weather where a warm shower provided by one of these hot water heaters would be very welcome. My speech for this occasion can be read [here](#).

## 5. Public speaking

I make it a point to include speeches and interviews with media outlets in my business trips in order to increase Japan's presence in Australia. On this trip I was able to give a speech at a luncheon meeting of Asialink, one of the think-tanks most representative of Melbourne.

Most of the audience were business leaders based in Melbourne. So, in my speech, I focused on the future economic relationship between Japan and Victoria, on which I was able to have a candid discussion with the participants. My speech is available to read [here](#).

The event took place in a Herbert Smith Freehills meeting room, with an uninterrupted view over the verdant city of Melbourne. We covered a variety of topics, including AFL (popular with Melbournians), Japan-Australia relations, hydrogen, high-speed rail, and tourism. I found that, while savouring the wonderful view of Melbourne, I had an endless amount of positive and big-scale future projects to talk about.



Giving a speech at the think-tank Asialink

Melbourne is a city that makes one want to visit again and again.

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