

Good evening.

Thank you for inviting me to tonight's concert, held as part of Matsudo Week celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Matsudo-Whitehorse sister city relationship. My name is SHIMADA Junji, and I have started my official duties in Melbourne at the end of January. This is the first concert I am attending in Melbourne, so I am very excited to be here.

Firstly, on this special occasion to commemorate the establishment of the longest continuing sister city relationship in Victoria, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to everyone who has contributed throughout the years. The 50th anniversary is a big milestone, vindicating the genuine friendship, mutual understanding, and trust between the two cities. The Matsudo-Whitehorse relationship is based on numerous exchanges of many officials, students, and citizens in the past 50 years. I believe that these strong cultural, educational, and economic ties that have been forged through these exchanges, will bring people in both Matsudo and Whitehorse together to further strengthen and develop their connections in the future.

I heard that tonight's concert will feature a collaboration between the Japanese koto as well as the sitar and the tabla, which are instruments originating from India, and beautiful Japanese ink artworks will be on display. I believe that the harmonious fusion of different instruments and genres of art is just like the sister city relationship between Matsudo and Whitehorse, people of various backgrounds coming together to create a special bond.

I believe maintaining a sister city relationship itself can be difficult and with the COVID-19 pandemic, which has greatly restricted international travel, it is no doubt a great challenge for those involved. I do however, sincerely hope that the Matsudo-Whitehorse sister city relationship will continue to grow and flourish in the years ahead, and I hope everyone will enjoy the concert for the 50th Matsudo Week tonight.

Congratulations again, and thank you.