



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

SIR EDWARD 'WEARY' DUNLOP ASIA LECTURE

**The Hon. Linda Dessau AC,
Governor of Victoria
Friday 5 February 2021**

Distinguished Guests

Let me start by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering, and by paying my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders here with us.

I am delighted to have been asked to deliver the Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop Asia Lecture, particularly as Asialink celebrates its 30th anniversary of engagement with Asia, but I admit to having approached it with some trepidation.

First, it is impossible to overlook that this Lecture is named for someone so significant to this nation's history.

A surgeon, a World War II soldier, a man who, while a Prisoner of War himself, saved the lives of hundreds of others. A man whose military leadership and bravery are legendary, but whose contribution to the life of our nation went even further in the post-war years.

Suffice to say at this point that I feel humbled to be asked to deliver a Lecture named for this great Australian. At least, I would say I feel *'humbled,'* but I hesitate.

I recall Golda Meir's admonition of General Moshe Dayan when, having received her recognition and praise on a particular public occasion, he said, *'I feel humbled'*, to which the Prime Minister drily replied, *'Moshe, don't feel so humble. You're not that great!'*

I also note the standing of those who have delivered this Lecture since its inception in 1993 – among them, six Australian Prime Ministers and a Deputy, a clutch of Ministers and Secretaries of Foreign Affairs and of Trade, business, academic, military and community leaders, United Nations and other international guests, as well as one serving Governor... that is, a Governor of the Reserve Bank!

And those who have been awarded the Sir Edward ‘Weary’ Dunlop Medal have been no less outstanding.

And so, against the backdrop of such an illustrious group of alumni, I feel compelled to start with a disclaimer. Actually, two of them!

The first is that I am likely to bring a Victorian flavour to what I say. I apologise in advance. Of course, I’m a proud Australian and, hopefully, not too parochial in my outlook. It is, however, inevitable that I will default to examples of what I know most closely – and of which I am naturally proud.

My second disclaimer is that, in my position, I cannot talk politics, policy or economics. I am not sure whether that will disappoint or relieve you. In any event, there is one area in which I am comfortably able – and, in fact, keen – to venture.

I want to talk about relationships, the various challenges of this past year having shown us that this is an especially important time to think a little more carefully about them.

My perspective as the Governor of Victoria stirs my appetite for this topic, having it front of mind for more than five years, during official visits to some 15 countries – several visited a number of times – and during a steady flow of calls and meetings with Heads of State, Ambassadors, Consuls-General, as well as with visiting leaders across business, health, medical research, environment and urban planning, arts, sport, investment and education, hosted at Government House.

I should just say, that level of international engagement is by no means unique to me. For many decades, it has been an important part of the Victorian Governor's role. And I know from discussions with my counterparts in other States, it is increasingly the case across each State and Territory of Australia.

There is no mystery why. It is specifically for the reason for which I was something of an apologist a few moments ago. It is because this role is **not** directly engaged with politics, policy or economics.

Politicians can come and go...at elections, or sometimes in between. Policies can change quite quickly, or meet roadblocks or diversions, if not full-scale U turns. And the economy is inextricably linked with both politics and government policies.

By contrast, the position of Head of State is not necessarily limited to or by electoral cycles. It provides an opportunity – almost unique to the role – to meet in a context that is, in the broadest sense, a non- transactional one. And – as is well understood and respected in our region – it can provide a continuity or permanency of relationships beyond just the politics of the day.

When delivering this Lecture in 2005, Paul Kelly referred to the '*permanency*' in our engagement with Asia, saying that we could not afford to be '*a fair-weather friend*', that we were in it, '*for the long haul*', and that meant both '*the good and the bad*'.

Perhaps it is my background as a Family Court judge but, reflecting on the '*permanency*' of which he spoke, I am immediately struck by the analogy between personal relationships on the one hand, and relationships between nations on the other.

We know that the 'honeymoon' period of any personal relationship is generally an easy one, bringing with it the flush of a new romance, the discovery of a multitude of things in common and the capacity to look benignly on the differences that we discover.

But we know too that there are times in our personal relationships when we need to call on something deeper than that first flush of romance and the frisson of excitement that goes with

it. When the going gets tough. Or even when the going just gets ordinary. When our differences expose the gaps between us. When hurts are deeply felt, or trust is challenged.

That's when the foundations of the relationship really matter. (Anyone married for 40 years knows that!)

Equally, we know that it will be strong human connections – the people to people links – that will support our international relationships, enabling them to flourish *'for the long haul'*.

We know that, when it comes to bilateral or multilateral relationships, we cannot afford to depend only on the politics of the day – or a singular transactional objective.

We know that relationships worked on in the atmosphere of easier times will prepare us best to meet the hurdles of political challenges or changes.

And we know that such challenges and changes are upon us right now – at a moment in history when rebuilding, recovery and resetting are required not only locally, but on a global scale as well.

Of course, it is not by chance that Asialink chose to name this Lecture, and the Medal that will be presented tonight, after Sir Edward Dunlop.

'Weary' Dunlop was renowned for his capacity to set aside old worldviews, in favour of new and better ones. To forgive. To renounce hatred. To move forward: to recognise that Australia is part of Asia, and that forging relationships with Asia is both necessary and fruitful.

Just as he had in wartime, he led by example. Teaching and undertaking surgical work in Thailand, Ceylon (as it then was) and India; promoting the training of Asian medical personnel in Australia; and as an active contributor to the Colombo Plan and the Australia-Asian Association of Victoria, Weary Dunlop showed an innate understanding of the importance of building links between people, in order to build links between nations.

That understanding lies at the heart of Asialink's work, and was front and centre at its cross-sectoral conference last year, with the evocative title, *'Public Displays of Affection: How Can Artists Rebrand Soft Power?'* The Conference agenda dealt with cultural diplomacy, creative exchange, and the power of artistic influence across the Asia-Pacific.

In the course of it, Singapore's High Commissioner to Australia, Kwok Fook Seng, spoke eloquently of people to people links being the key to soft power.

US diplomat, Professor Cynthia Schneider, referred to areas influencing soft power as including arts and culture, education, science, business and sports.

I want to touch upon some of those important sectors.

Let me start with education.

We know that, until the crisis of the global pandemic scuppered the 2020 academic year, more than 600,000 students from Asia were studying with us in Australia.

Victoria could be justifiably proud that, according to QS Best Student Cities rankings, Melbourne was ranked third in the world, behind only London and Tokyo.

Of course, we know the impact of COVID-19 on international education.

First and foremost, we know of the disruption to the international students affected: those who have returned home, and those who have remained here. We know too that universities, government and community groups have offered supports, but we all look forward to an easier and more settled time for these young people to continue their studies.

Then, we cannot overlook the economic impact and pressing revenue challenges for our universities, and that those challenges remain significant, as the new academic year gets underway.

But, there is another pressing concern. It is that, with any sustained reduction in international students, our younger Australians risk growing up not knowing ‘the other.’ That is, without the friendships and knowledge so gained, their capacity to navigate the cultural complexities of our region would be severely impeded.

Similarly, many thousands of young people from across Asia-Pacific could miss the life-changing experience of studying within the ferment of Australia’s multicultural setting, learning more of us and more of each other.

Asialink, and with it the Asia Education Foundation, or AEF, have always seen education as a priority, fundamental to forming relationships and forging partnerships within the region. Anyone seeking to understand the impact of shared educational experiences, and the import for those who join us to study here from overseas, need look no further than the sentiments expressed by Singapore’s Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, when he addressed a joint sitting of our Federal Parliament in October 2016.

Prime Minister Lee spoke of his first experience of Australia some 50 years earlier when, as a teenager on exchange, he stayed with a family in Melbourne. He spoke with heart-warming familiarity of his lifelong friendship with them, of other long-lasting personal ties and of the lessons about Australian culture, learned through them.

I must say that one of the great pleasures for us in this role is seeing the sorts of associations of which the Prime Minister spoke, and how they endure.

Seeing them in their earliest days, for example, when we welcome primary school children from our Chinese Sister Province, Jiangsu, at Government House. We have now hosted thousands of these youngsters. We have listened to them as they have proudly shown their developing skills in English, and watched the young Victorians in turn, earnestly performing traditional Chinese dances they’ve learned – all of which enthralls them to also study overseas in the future.

And we have seen the relationships and collaborations that form amongst the participants or alumni of a multitude of programs, exchanges and dialogues, both in Victoria, and during our

official visits overseas. Not just student exchanges, I might add, but a broad range of exchanges, including between government officials and among those early in their careers across business and a range of organisations.

During our overseas visits, we always make a point of initiating alumni events, and they are always uplifting.

On each occasion, we have met some of the particular country's best and brightest. They have returned home to start successful professional, business and, in some cases, political lives. It has been obvious that their appreciation of a bigger global picture, and their links to Australia, have stood both countries in good stead.

I recall a lunch in Nanjing, at which a group who had studied in Melbourne across several decades were gathered. It was heartening to hear of their careers – a leading neurologist and a senior bureaucrat amongst them – but in particular, to sense their affection and enthusiasm for Australia, their happy memories of the time spent here, the comfortable way in which they spoke of Melbourne and their travels around Australia and – inevitably – their apparent pleasure in declaring a lifelong allegiance to one AFL footy team or another. (They knew how to impress the Governor of Victoria!)

That experience has been replicated for us at alumni events in India, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Vietnam (as well as, I might add, in other regions).

A group of entrepreneurs in India – in Bengaluru – gave me a particular boost. Among them were those who had spent some study time in Australia. Now, as successful innovators in the digital space, they were feeding back to us some of the lessons learned in scaling and commercialising their businesses. A perfect case study in shared knowledge, in both directions.

I want to say something more about the contribution of Australia's universities, when it comes to our important international relations.

We know just how many cross-cultural insights are taught, learned, researched and exchanged within our universities, and the academic institutes associated with them.

There are countless examples, Asialink's location and role within the University of Melbourne proving a good case in point.

But I particularly want to emphasise the widespread collaboration that we see championed by our universities on a global scale and, generally, regardless of the prevailing, sometimes complicated, political winds. It tells us much about the central role of the relationships within which such collaborations are nurtured.

Let me give a timely example of what I mean. Right now, the complexities in our relationship with China are to the fore. Yet, all the while, research scientists continue to work together on shared enterprises.

As I speak, The Doherty Institute has virology and infectious disease collaborations with universities in China. It is by no means exceptional in that regard.

Collaborations within the region – and beyond – are common within Australia's research institutes, and will no doubt be an important feature of the new Australian Institutes for Infectious Diseases and Global Health, to be established in our Parkville precinct.

We can all be grateful for the bonds of mutual respect and professional comity between scientists, that fuel such co-operation. It is impressive. And the necessity of it has never been in sharper focus than it is right now.

But it is more than just such shared research that should impress us.

In this role, I have seen how our universities are so often at the vanguard of our broader relationship building.

RMIT University's special place in Vietnam provides a good illustration. RMIT was the first foreign university to establish a presence in Vietnam and is now celebrating 20 years in Ho Chi Minh City.

Anyone who knew Vietnam those two decades ago will understand the level of foresight and commitment that must have facilitated the decision at that time.

In 2019, we visited the campus there. We were impressed by the scale of its operation, its first-class architecture and its breadth of programs.

But we were particularly struck by its collaborations back into Australia, and the deep affection with which it is regarded by its nearly 10,000 students and more than 700 staff across campuses now in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and by the Vietnamese Government who has afforded it many awards and much recognition. It seemed that everyone in Ho Chi Minh City knew about '*Rimmit*', as it is known there!

Turning to India, although it has rightly been observed that, in the past, Australia has not always been consistent in building its relationship with this important neighbour, Victoria's Deakin University opened an office in India nearly 27 years ago now. More credit to it, when you think of our nascent relationship at that time.

A flagship of this unbroken, long-term relationship is the joint venture between Deakin and India's research think tank, TERI.

Located in Gurgaon, The TERI-Deakin Nano-Biotechnology Centre is jointly supported by both organisations, and brings together their complementary expertise: TERI's in agriculture, biotechnology, green energy, bioremediation and nanotechnology, and Deakin's in material, chemical and physical sciences.

We saw first-hand some of their significant strides in developing nano-pesticides and nano-nutrients.

Turning to business.

As someone without deep first-hand experience of running a business, it occurs to me now – with the benefit of hindsight – that, as a child, I did actually learn some fundamentals.

My father travelled to and in Asia a great deal for business. Often, he went to Hong Kong.

On my first visit alone to Hong Kong, as a student, I was collected at the airport, taken to my hotel and then looked after by CY, a business associate of my dad, and his family. When his daughter travelled to Melbourne, my family did the same in return.

The relationship between my father and CY was one forged across years of trusted business together. They seemed oblivious to, or at least uninterested in, which way the political winds were blowing at any particular time.

They had done business together for years. It was to their mutual benefit, and neither had ever been let down by the other.

Of course, trade agreements and favourable tariffs and policies are important to support and grow trade, but economic and policy supports come to little without trusted and trusting partners with whom to deal. Certainly, little beyond one or a few transactions, or at the least, falling short of their full potential. No number of incentives can create the trust that will sustain a broad range of secure long-term business dealings.

In his recent presentation to an Asialink forum, Carrillo Gantner AC, (well known to you here), quoted Chinese American cellist Yo-Yo Ma as having said that *'Business is about value creation. But culture is about the creation of values, beginning always with trust...'*

Therein lies the explanation as to how a Shanghainese born Hong Kong businessman could do easy business, across many years and many miles, with a Polish born businessman in Australia. They had built a relationship in which they trusted each other with their student daughters. They were going to trust each other and choose to do business with each other for a very long time.

It is of course no longer a novel proposition that business people must be alive to the culture and values of the country in which they are doing or propose to do business.

The fact that in 2019, nearly 14,000 people participated in Asialink Business development programs and events, is just one example of the appetite for learning, within our business community.

It is pertinent to note here the transformative capacity of scholarship programs. I think of the Hamer Scholarships, sponsored by successive Victorian Governments, but today with a specific emphasis on business, providing young people from Victorian businesses up to \$15,000, to study for six months in China, Japan, Korea or Indonesia.

More than 300 Victorians have been the beneficiaries of these scholarships since the program's founding in 2012. As they advance in their careers, we know that the relationships they have formed will underpin business opportunities in both jurisdictions.

I want to talk about sport.

There is no mystery as to the impact of sports diplomacy, nor, I am sure, any surprise at my interest in it!

Sports can create considerable goodwill by helping to bridge cultural differences – even without a language in common – and sport, we know, carries strong links into business.

We can all cite examples. Our links with India and Sri Lanka have been supported by a shared love of cricket. With Japan and Korea, through the AFC Asian Cup.

I have seen first-hand, formerly as an AFL Commissioner, and more recently as Governor, the positive impact of our indigenous Australian footy in China, having attended an exhibition game in Shanghai in 2010, and the AFL Port Adelaide v St Kilda game played there in 2019.

It was particularly evident at that last game. Around it, there was a multi-faceted trade mission, including a business matching service for Australian and Chinese companies, a sports science and sports tech export program and an investment attraction program.

As Asialink Business has noted, the Shanghai games highlighted not only the synergy between sport and business, but also the eagerness of businesses to leverage the goodwill created by Australia's sporting status.

I also saw the capacity of sport to open the door to long-term engagement when, in 2018, I was privileged to launch the Australian Open Global Ballkids Program in Delhi. This program enabled one thousand children in Indian schools and clubs to participate in a Ballkid training program, before some 10 lucky youngsters were selected to represent India as Ballkids at the 2019 Australian Open.

When we had them join us at Government House during their stay in Melbourne, I was left in no doubt as to the enduring effect upon them and their schools and their families, of the relationships that had been forged.

Let me come to the arts sector. I have specifically left it to last, even though, arguably, it ranks first when it comes to international relationship building. No single activity – no single sector – can help us unlock the commonalities in the human condition as readily as the arts.

How clear was that during the COVID lockdown? We saw a marked 'flight to the arts', welcoming dance, music, play readings, even 'iso-comedy' from artists' homes into our loungerooms. Borders were no barriers to the enjoyment and the comfort that they were able to provide.

For centuries, much has been said of the centrality of the arts in enabling the human condition to flourish. I defer to the great Leonardo da Vinci's description that:

'Art is the queen of all sciences communicating knowledge to all the generations of the world.'

I think why the arts matter so much – and why they resonate so loudly when it comes to relationships of an intercultural kind, is that they show us just how small is the margin of difference between us, while unlocking the charm and the wonder that lies within that margin.

The role of the arts in international relationships is not novel, I know. Indeed, any history of Australia's engagement with Asia would necessarily feature the arts as what we would now call an 'early-adopter'.

During my time as a Trustee of the NGV, I saw exhibitions that were proof in themselves of trust and connection, for example in 2015, when Beijing's Palace Museum made available some of its greatest treasures for the NGV's *Golden Age of China: Qianlong Emperor* exhibition.

I have also seen many examples of these connections during my time in this role.

In 2017, we represented Victoria in Indonesia's Special Region of Yogyakarta, for the exchange of a Memorandum of Understanding. Our shared interest in art, history and culture was an important part of the MOU, seen by both the Sultanate and the Victorian Government as a foundation upon which to deepen broader economic and political connections.

It was significant that the Sultan invited the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra to perform at the UNESCO listed Prambanan Temple.

I know I promised I would try not to be parochial, but I am the proud Patron of the MSO, so I cannot resist noting that it is the oldest professional symphony orchestra in Australia, and it was the first Western orchestra to perform outdoors at this magnificent site in its history of more than 1160 odd years.

I am particularly proud that the MSO has forged many such paths and, just as it did in Yogyakarta, is now expanding into West Java, by teaching and collaborating with local musicians. It is not surprising that trusting friendships between jurisdictions grow from such authentic intercultural experiences.

In India, we attended an event that showcased Victorian 'culture' of a different kind. Our produce and talent were featured in the beautiful garden of our High Commission in Delhi. The 'talent'? *Masterchef* star, Gary Mehigan. It was readily apparent that this chef from a popular TV cooking

show – an Australian product – was lauded as a cultural icon! There was no doubt that his participation helped to highlight our premium Australian produce.

It's interesting that last year, to mark the 40th anniversary of the successful Sister-State relationship between Victoria and Jiangsu Province in China, an Artist Exchange was chosen as the official gift for the occasion.

An artist from each state – Xu Fei from Jiangsu and Dane Lovett from Victoria – undertook an exchange, each producing an artwork to be formally gifted to their host state, as a creative testament to the success of the Sister-State relationship.

Each artist enthused about the opportunities the exchange had offered – for concentrated research, professional development and intercultural awareness.

I know that two people key to this organisation – Carrillo and Ziyin Gantner – have been ahead of the curve in steadfastly advocating for cultural links in the region, noting that artists '*make great ambassadors,*' with '*a voice beyond their numbers...*'

Finally, can I say that it is not lost on me that I have had the honour to deliver this Lecture at a sensitive time.

At a time complicated by the challenges of a global health crisis.

At a time of uncertainty, when the changing tides of political power and complexities within significant international relationships and alliances are front of mind.

And at a time of discourse about the role of sub-national governments in Australia's international engagement.

All of that has made me mindful of how I have framed my observations this evening.

None of it, however, has dissuaded me from the view that our nation's prosperity, culture and security depends on looking outwards, nor made me shy of reiterating how much we must continue to foster Australia's relationships within our region.

And certainly, nothing can undermine my conviction that the choppiest the seas that we encounter, the more we need the life-raft of strong and enduring relationships.

In saying that, I look around this room at an august collection of raft-builders! Most of you are people who, in your own way, have surfed the waves of these relationships, in government, science, business, the arts, sport and so many other sectors.

And so allow me to finish with a word of thanks.

To Asialink, for the central role it plays in Australia's and especially Victoria's long-term relationships in Asia.

To you gathered here who have in so many ways been such an integral part of Asialink's founding and its flourishing during the last – or better put, its first – 30 years.

And beyond just Asialink, to all of you who have invested your time, your resources, your ingenuity and your hearts in both the macro and the micro relationships between Australia and Asia.

You have much of which to be proud, and much to celebrate this evening. Thank you for enabling me to join you in the celebration.