

Shimada sonjuku trip to Sri Lanka

2017.2.9~2.13

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1. Why Sri Lanka?

We, some members of Shimada sonjuku and myself altogether 14, visited Sri Lanka from Feb. 9 to 13, 2017. This is an optional trip as part of the annual program of Shimada sonjuku. It was a wonderful trip in many aspects, which I will write in what follows.

I would first like to write as to why we chose to visit Sri Lanka this time. The story goes back for a few years when our cherished friend and a member of Shimada-juku, Ms. Suzuki, Katsura, brought with her her friend Mr. Mark Danjel, a Sri Lanka businessman who conducts a broad range of businesses including investment, family office, real estate business, consulting etc both in Sri Lanka and Switzerland. Incidentally, Katsura also provides family office business based in Switzerland as well as research and consulting.

They earnestly talked about the attractiveness of Sri Lanka both as sightseeing spot, leisure land, and as object of real estate investment. They visited me at my office in Tokyo twice and as a result, I was increasingly interested in Sri Lanka. I finally determined to visit Sri Lanka with interested members of Shimada sonjuku after the class of 2019 of shinjuku started. It was because I got acquainted with Mr. Hayakawa, Ryotaro, as a member of the class.

Mr Hayakawa(hence forth let me refer to him by his first name, Ryotaro) has quite a unique career. He is a young business man of age 33. Having finished high school,he went to the US to joined University of Kansas as a student. Since he was well trained in base ball as a pitcher he joined the base ball club of Kansas University. His recorded the ball speed of 148 km per hour. Some of his club mates are now playing baseball as professional major leaguers.

Upon graduation he returned to Japan and joined Orix Co. where he worked for 6 years and then engaged in hotel and real estate business which his father has been running. One day, his father's friend solicited them to visit Sri Lanka. Ryotaro went to Sri Lanka with his father and was increasingly interested in Sri Lanka. Sometime later, he secured a land to build a hotel working jointly with Sri Lank businessman, and he also participated to credit and cashing card business based on a Japanese model as a board member of a company named "Smart Metro" run by Sri Lank businessman.

Acquainted with Ryotaro, I proposed him to organize a tour of Shimada sonjuku to Sri Lanka. He worked earnestly to arrange a trip for us, which turned out to be excellent, enjoyable, exciting and fulfilling. When I solicited the sonjuku members to participate to the trip, Mr. Yamagishi Yo opted to join. He is a senior member of the sonjuku, a well established lawyer and notably an incredibly devoted world traveller. Since he has visited Sri Lanka once and is deeply in favor of culture, scenery and above all people of Sri Lanka, he kindly prepared a long essay and photos to give us kind introduction of Sri Lanka. We can learn about Sri Lanka with his deep affection to it.

II. Brief Introduction of Sri Lanka and its History

Sri Lanka literally implies a shining island. It used to be called Ceylon, which means a lion island. Because of the beauty of the island, it has often been called "a pearl of Orient." Because of the shape and location of the island, it is sometimes called an eye drop of Indian sea.

Sri Lanka is a small island as a country. Its width is slightly smaller than Hokkaido, and yet inhabited by 20 million people. It is respected by Buddhists as holly land of Buddhism. Among Buddhists, often Buddhism calendar is used, which starts 544years earlier than Christian calendar, commemorating the end of

Buddha's life in the human society. According to Buddhism calendar, this year is 2567 rather than 2017 of Christian calendar.

Inhabitants are consisting largely of Sinhari tribe who compose the majority and came from northern India and of Tamil tribe who came from southern India. Sinhari people tend to be relatively tall, white and with sharp nose, while Tamil people tend to be short, brown, and round nose.

Sri Lanka has been colonized for a long time since 15th century. For about a century and a half, it was colonized by the Portuguese, and since about the mid-17th century it was under the control of the Dutch. And from 1815, it was governed rigorously by the British. During the colonial period of the Portugal and the Netherlands, not the entire Sri Lanka has been colonized. The kingdom of Candy kept its independence. However, the Candy kingdom surrendered to England in 1815 under strenuous attacks by the British.

The British launched coffee plantation since about 1850. However, the coffee plantations were caught in a serious trouble of diseases of coffee trees and quickly diminished. It was about this time, Mr. Taylor, a young British entrepreneur experimented to grow tea trees in those plantations. He is often called a "father of black tea." Since he died early, his endeavor has been succeeded by Mr. Lipton who developed tea plantation and tea processing to have achieved a great success, and is often called as a "king of black tea." Thanks to his effort, Sri Lanka, then called Ceylon, has become a major producer of black tea in the world and made black tea drinking a cherished custom of the British.

The tea plantation business by the British, however, brought to Sri Lanka a difficult racial problem. It is because the British introduced massive number of Tamil people particularly from southern India, and later treated them with much favorable conditions in social hierarchy relative to the original majority inhabitants of Sinhari people, which gave rise to bitter confrontation between Sinhari and Tamil and eventually resulted in harsh domestic war since 1980s.

In 1948, Sri Lanka obtained the independence as a member of British commonwealth. Since Sinhali people occupied the large majority of the population, and also reflecting the frustration of Sinhali people during the British control which favored the minority Tamil tribe, the newly organized Sri Lanka national government has been dominated largely by Sinhali people, and Tamil people has been subordinated. This attitude of the national government in return gave rise to increasing anger on the part of some radical Tamil leaders.

After having experienced a few decades of “democracy,” anger and frustrations held by Tamil group exploded in the form of violent resistance against the Sinhali dominated national government. Since Sinhali people are Buddhists while Tamil people are Hindus, the conflicts appeared as religious confrontations. But the strife reflects also the deep rooted confrontations between the two tribes which had been stirred up repeatedly by insensitive treatments of British controllers during the colonial age.

The domestic war broke out in 1983. The war did not take form of apparent major battles. It continued in the form of sporadic attacks of radical resisters against common citizens. While the daily life of the society looked more or less terroristic attacks against citizens and students gave the society dark and uneasy horror, which persisted a long time. A friend of Mr. Hayakawa told his observation to Mr. Yamagishi that schools had to change the time of classes in order not let the terrorists attack the students going home from schools. This kind of uneasiness must have given irritating and painful psychological burden on citizens.

Mr. Rajapaksa, the leader of Sinhali dominated national government, fought sternly and thoroughly to overcome such violent resistance movements. It took more than two decades and eventually in 2009, the resistance forces were terminated completely. The domestic war took as long as 26 years. While the domestic war gave much destructive impacts within the society, it also gave serious

negative effect upon foreigners' image of Sri Lanka. Some people point to the fact that still somewhat reluctant attitude of Western countries seem to reflect this negative image of social stability of Sri Lanka even though the Sri Lanka society is completely safe and stable since the end of the domestic strife in 2009.

Having settled the national issue of domestic strife, President Rajapaska launched major initiatives for economic development of the country. Such initiatives included:

- 1 infra-structure investment and development service industry,
- 2 agriculture development such as tea, rice, rubber, coconuts etc,
- 3 light industry development such as textiles, weaving etc,
- 4 logistics investment particularly port facilities,
- 5 solicitation of foreign direct investment into Sri Lanka
- 6 natural energy development particularly untapped energy sources in Indian sea
- 7 tourism as a strategic industry to lead economic development.

While we were traveling by bus visiting inland world heritage one after another, we were impressed by well paved not only highways but also local roads. Much of this pavement is said to have been done during five years since the end of the domestic turmoil thanks to strenuous effort of President Rajapaska.

We were impressed by a feeling of emergence of people's energy and unfolding of enormous opportunities for economic development for the coming years. This feeling reminds us of the powerful energy which many Japanese people embraced in the wake of the defeat of the Pacific War to rebuild their country.

Sri Lanka certainly seems to have great potentials for its new development in the areas such as tourism, sea and beach resort, cultural world heritages, good preparation of infra-structure such as roads, ports, hotels and communication. We were particularly impressed by cordial and friendly attitude of local people. Whenever they meet, they first normally greet with each other by putting their

laps together under the face saying “Ayubowan” meaning wish you a long life. What a nice expression for greeting!.

Sri Lank people seem to be well equipped with mathematical talents useful to be engaged in computer and IT businesses. Indeed, the proportion of IT workers in the UK is reportedly quite high for Sri Lanka workers only next to British natives.

Japan has been providing ODA for Sri Lanka for a long time, which is highly appreciated by Sri Lanka government and the people. Recently, China has been making large scale investment particularly in port facilities. China’s aggressive investment in Sri Lanka obviously has strategic intention relating to their major project of “One Belt and One Road,” by which to develop grand infra-structure of pair of ocean naval routes and pair of inter-continental roads. And Sri Lanka is perhaps the most important strategic pivot of the “One Belt.”

In fact, this aggressive Chinese initiative into Sri Lanka seems to have had a grave impact to Sri Lank politics. President Rajapaska, who has ended the long lasted internal strife and promoted energetically and successfully development policies of Sri Lanka, lost his position in the election last year vis a vis the current president Siricena largely due to his and his family scandals relating to China money.

Because of its critical geopolitical positioning of Sri Lanka in the center of Indian sea and just at the edge of Indian continent, the island is being targeted by such major powers of China, India, and even the US and Russia. The leaders of Sri Lanka, whether they like or not, are bound to be involved in this international game, and required to handle carefully and skillfully for their national interest. While investments from major western powers have been somewhat slow so far largely because of the negative image of Sri Lanka due to long lasting internal strife and terrorism, Sri Lanka seems to offer tremendous potentials for Japanese businesses. In this sense too, Sri Lank appears to be a land of huge and attractive

possibilities.

III. Episodes of Our Trip

1 Feb 9, Thursday:

We took off Haneda AP taking UL(Sri Lanka Air) no.455 leaving 11:20 heading for Colombo. This was a long flight taking nearly 10 hours. I got on board carrying a bunch of materials and books to read to understand Sri Lanka. At the UL counter at Haneda, I was given a leaflet of questionnaires which turned out to be several pages of questions I had to fill out on board. However, accommodation of the plane, food and services were all excellent. I read much of the materials I brought with me, and enjoyed the flight very much. We arrived at Colombo AP shortly before 18:00 Colombo time. Landing the country where never visited before is always exciting. I was excited in the forthcoming excursion of the island with 15 members of sonjuku team.

Ryotaro was already in Sri Lanka and waiting to welcome us at the airport with his partner and interpreter, Mr. Sumedha Wimalarathna. He is a Sri Lanka native and spoke perfect Japanese. Mr.Sumedha got interested in Japan when he was young and went to Japan to study Japanese in 1999. Since the life was not easy, but he told me that he was well supported by many Japanese and continued to learn Japanese while earning money by casual jobs, and returned home in 2009, when the nasty domestic warfare was terminated.

Having driven for a while, we arrived at the prestigious “Galle Face Hotel,” well known for the most traditional hotel of colonial era where many world celebrities stayed. A banquet was organized by Ryutaro. He invited his local friend, Mr. Sujeewa Wijayanayake, who is currently an area manager of a hotel management co. located in Kyushu. He became a good friend of Ryotaro with the baseball connection. He worked as an only foreign judge in 2015 Koshien high

school baseball tournament, and wish to work as a judge in 2020 Olympic games. Ryutaro also invited his close friend, Mr. Perera Rowan, who knows a lot about Japan as having worked in Sony as an engineer for development of an electric card system, and also studies in University of Tokyo. He serves as the most knowledgeable and experienced expert to bridge Sri Lanka and Japan. He met Mr. Yamagishi during the daytime, but unfortunately unable to join us in the dinner.

Ms. Katsura Suzuki and Mr. Mark Dangel also joined us in the dinner. While I was sufficiently tired because of the long day, I enjoyed the dinner and conversation. The dinner table was set in the broad dining space supposedly facing the ocean. While we felt a good breeze once in a while, we were unable to see the sea because it was complete darkness.

Late at night, which was perhaps around 3 am in Japan time, I went to my room. The room assigned for me earlier was changed to supposedly better room by request of Mr. Sumeda. It was because I was somewhat disappointed the quality and location of my room when I first brought my luggage when we arrived. The layout of the old hotel was quite complex. Since the numbering of the rooms was not systematic, it took time to find it. The room I found was not comfortable due to creaking sound of wooden floor uncovered by carpet etc. The room Mr. Sumada secured for me was better. But I was disturbed for a few hours by noises and voices leaked from the next room. I thought I would need to adjust to the life of a century ago.

2. Feb. 10, Wednesday:

I got up early and went to the dining room where we dined last night. Now, we were able to see a widely extending Indian ocean directly from the dining room. Between the broad dining room and the seashore, there extended a broad garden covered with lawns and equipped sporadically with comfortable tables and chairs. We enjoyed walking leisurely and chatting. During the early morning, the sea was

not clearly visible due to the morning fog. As time went on with the rise of the sun, the scenery began to change minute after minute.

When we started dining, fog was away showing us clear sky and shining broad Indian Ocean. The scene was magnificent. I realized that this is the Sri Lanka beach which ease people's mind and give joy to them. In the room at the side of the dining, there hung many portrait pictures of famous people including Japanese Emperor Hirohito when he visited here in the early 1920s, a famous revolutionist, El Che Guevara (Ernesto Rafael Guevara de la Serna), and many pronounced political leaders, actors and actresses and novelists etc. These pictures show us how distinguished this hotel is. This hotel must be a great cultural asset for Sri Lanka.

After taking photo of us together in front of the hotel, we got on a bus to drive to the famous Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage. The driving was expected to be two hours and a half. The first half of the driving was on a highway, but the rest would be a country road. We thought the driving along the country road would be rough and tough. Quite contrary, the road was well paved and driving was quite smooth. Since the driving was long, I spent time with talking with team members particularly Mr. Yamagishi. Mr. Yamagishi gave us well organized introduction of Sri Lanka history, cultures and politics on the way.

At around 9:20, we arrived at the elephant orphanage. Many elephants were either walking or resting in groups. The elephants who are in this orphanage have some problems of disability so that they cannot get along together with wild elephants. While the day was hot, many of them were relaxing in and around the river going through the orphanage. The guide told us the elephants commute almost every day from there they to the riverside. While they are walking along the street of commuting twice a day, shops along the street close their shutters. Indeed, elephant is regarded and treated in Sri Lanka as a sacred animal as often shown as sacred figures in Buddhist temples and pictures. They also help life and activity of people everywhere.

We went to a restaurant nearby and had a good lunch. After the lunch, we drove to Dambulla Cave Temple, which is often called “Golden Temple” because many of the temple buildings such as Pagoda, and more importantly, the buddha images are covered by gold. The temple is famous for its five caves in which golden buddha sculptures are kept. The caves are on the top of the hill. It was quite a labour to walk up the hill under the hot sunshine. At the top of the hill, we are asked to take shoes off and have to walk with barefoot. There are five caves. They were built to contain Buddha images at different historical stages from 2000 to 200 years ago.

From the top of the hill, we were able to see in far away Sigiriya Rock, which we will visit and climb tomorrow. We drove the bus to Habarana Village where we will stay over the night. As we approach Habarana Village, the Sigiriya Rock grew large as though it dominates the whole space nearby. The hotel is just at the foot of the Rock. It exciting even to think of climbing the steep rock tomorrow.

Since we arrived there a few hours earlier than our dinner time. Having unpacked our luggages in our rooms, we had some relaxing time. The Habarana village was made largely of country side cottages surrounded by trees, bamboos and welcomed by small animals such as birds and monkeys. The whole area, the complex and the cottages were well designed where we really can feel relaxed. Mr. Asano, a participant, and myself enjoyed swimming in a cozy pool in the garden. Many of other members took Sri Lank style body care to relax.

We planned to have dinner at Hesitance Kaldalama Hotel. This is a worldly well known hotel because it was designed by a pronounced Sri Lanka architect, Mr. Geoffrey Bawa. It took an hour or so to reach his hotel from our hotel. The hotel was located in the mid slope of mountains. The road to reach the hotel was not really smooth. However, once we stepped in the hotel and started having dinner, we were completely overwhelmed by the magic space of great Mr. Bawa.

The entrance of the hotel does not really look like the entrance because it is to

go through huge rocks. Take a look outside from the lobby which is really open to outside air, we realize that we are in the natural space rather than in a man-made so-called room. Looking the hotel from the garden, we learn that the hotel with 2 to 3 stories high spread widely in the slope of the mountain. The day we visited the hotel was the day of full moon, which is called “hoya day.” Incidentally, it is prohibited to drink alcohol in hoya day. People make it a rule to visit temples to pray. We were able to enjoy a beautiful full moon from the table prepared in the garden in front of the hotel building where we also can enjoy a great view of woods extending to far out Indian Ocean.

Food was nice. I was particularly impressed by the way food was prepared and served. Preparation of food was done in the center of wide dining space. The whole dining looked as though the joyful market of down town. People walk whatever way they like and pick up foods and chat with others. A famous Japanese architect, Mr. Kengo Kuma, wrote in his book entitled “Tropical Architect: Adventure of Geoffrey Bawa” that in the history of modern architecture where the main role shift back and forth between the garden and the building, Mr. Bawa created and represents the most contemporary world of architecture which newly interprets the role of the nature or garden in the total space of architecture making creative use of the splendid nature of Sri Lanka.

What impressed me most here is that the hotel in the mountain which is not conveniently located attracted visitors and tourists from all over the world. Mr. and Mrs. Yamagishi told us that they stayed in this hotel earlier and advised Ryotaro to try to make us stay there. Ryotaro worked hard but was unable to reserve rooms so that we ended up dining here. I asked myself if we can think of a hotel in Japan to attract such attention in the world and filled up by global tourists simply by its charm of creativity of an unique architect. I thought I have learned something very valuable by our visit of this hotel in Sri Lanka.

3. Feb. 11 Thursday:

The morning in the country side cottage was quite comfortable. Trees and bamboos send us nice breeze, and birds were singing. We, members of sonjuku, had a nice breakfast occupying a large table facing the garden and trees at the side of the main dining room. After breakfast, we got on a bus and left the hotel early, around 7:30, heading at igiriya Rock. As we approach the rock, it stood high in front of us just as though trying to reach the sky.

It took a while to climb up the rock. In fact, there are well carved steps along the wall of the rock so that walking up the staircases was not quite hard. Mr. Yamagishi and myself, the old pair of our team, went much ahead leaving the younger ones behind. Somewhere at the midst of the rock wall, there is a side way which leads us to the famous painted figures of "Sigiriya Ladies." It is amazing that a dozen or so of figures of ancient ladies painted on the rock wall were preserved perfectly for 1500 years. These ladies looked slender and with modest smile. People hypothesize the models of these figures such as lovers of the king or lady servants at the palace.

We took some rest near the rock carved out in the form of huge lion nails. They say, there was the head of the lion. I was watching the area where they say the lion head existed leaving a plastic bottle of water. When I look back, a monkey is seizing it firmly and angered fiercely when I reached my hand to take it back. He was trying to drink water from it without knowing how to open the cap of the bottle. We again walked up to the top of the rock, where there was a rock palace once upon a time. We enjoyed a nice view from there and walked down. It was wise that we climbed the rock early. On the way back, rock stairs were filled with people while leaving a long line waiting even to reach the stairs. As the sun rose high and shining, we were wet with sweat.

We drove for an hour or so to visit Spice Garden and the restaurant nearby. At the spice garden, we were welcomed by a sales guide. He is a very slender nice young guy. He spoke good Japanese yet fast. He told us that he learned Japanese

in Sri Lanka. After showing us a dozen or so trees and plants of spices, nuts for oil, and seeds for drugs etc, he guided us to a room where a table of pile of such items for sale. He explained each of several dozens of such items fluently in Japanese.

Amazing was that several groups of foreigners who were visiting the spice garden at the time were all given the similar campaigns in their own languages. I can not think of a sales shop in Japan where attendants explain sales items in so many foreign languages with this level of proficiency. Since we became sufficiently hungry by this long sales campaign, we ate lunch well now with wines.

When we got on a bus, many of us fell asleep fast. This ride takes supposedly a couple of hours, but because of heavy traffic jam caused by road constructions, it took a couple of hours more. Sri Lank trip was coming close to an end and only a day left before we leave Sri Lanka. I was reminded of the homework to prepare for my task after returning to Japan. Taking advantage of this prolonged bus ride, I spent time to prepare notes.

As we approached Kandy city, the land scape began to look increasingly hilly. Many houses are on the slope of rather steep or mountainous hills. The scenery looks as though a cozy mountainous resort town. This is the area where Kandy kingdom prospered prior to the colonization by the British in the early 19th century.

The ride delayed nearly a couple of hours relative to our original timetable. We originally planned to visit Temple of the Tooth Relic and then to see the Kandy Dance show. Ryotaro made a wise decision to visit the temple early tomorrow morning when it would not be crowded.

Skipping the temple, we went to the theatre where Kandy Dance was to be presented. The Dance was a traditional folklore dance with traditional instruments. It is the show consisting of dances of 10 or so of themes. Some

dancers used also fire. It was fun. Impressive was the shape of female dancers. They all have rather fat belly. I was reminded of the shape of CAs on the UL. They were also of similar shape. Since these ladies are well trained and prepared to show us a performance or provide service with their best shape. Their shape may be thought to be the best shape for these professional people. If it is, it is a lot different from the norm of Westernized Asia such as Japan.

The hotel we stayed this night was a good westernized hotel “Earl’s Regency Hotel” which is of the kind we are used. I was relaxed with a westernized bathroom accomodation. We took a nice dinner together within the hotel.

4. Feb.12 Sunday:

I got up early in the morning. I felt comfortable not only in the room, in the hotel but also in the whole setting of surroundings of the hotel which is located in a resort like atmosphere of hilly Kandy city. Early birds of us got together around a large tale outside of the kitchen enjoying a clean air, nice views of a broad lawn garden in front of us and surrounding hills in addition of course to nice breakfast.

We left the hotel early to visit the Temple of the Tooth Relic. Again, we learned that it was a sensible decision of Ryotaro to visit the temple early morning where it was no so crowded and not hot. We spent an hour or so taking a look around the temple buildings and showings.

Sri Lanka is regarded as sacred land of traditional Buddhism, partly because of the existence of this temple. It is believed that Buddha visited three times this island some 2500 years ago. When he passed away, some of his tooth relics were brought to this island where they were preserved carefully and respectfully. Whether this was a true fact or not does not matter. What matters is that Sri Lanka people and devout Buddhists of the world believe it and respect it firmly.

Kandy province was a kingdom which kept independence while all other areas of the island was colonized by Portuguese and the Dutch, until British invaded finally into this area. Kandyans were and are particularly proud, partly because of their history of maintaining rigorously the “Hinayana” Buddhist tradition.

Having learned about the sacred zone of Hinayana Buddhism, we got on the bus to drive to Colombo. Again it was a long ride of more than 3 hours. I took advantage of writing memos for my task which I have to promote after returning to Japan. The trip was quite productive for me because I was able to look around and learn about Sri Lanka and at the same time I was able to do some of my homework using the time of riding on the bus.

Shortly after noon, we arrived at Colombo, where we had a nice and gorgeous lunch of crab dishes at the famous crab restaurant by the name of “Crab Ministry. “ Ms. Katsura Suzuki and Mr. Mark Dangel and Ryotaro’s friend as well as business partner Mr. Sejeewa Hendawitharane joined us. Mr. Sejeewa is CEO of Smart Metro Co. where Ryutaro serves as a member of the board. His company tries to diffuse the Japan’s “FERICA” card for use by transportation system for benefits for consumers.

Lunch was nice and tasty, but our association with heterogeneous friends and insightful and stimulating conversation among us is even more exciting and enjoyable . After the lunch, some of us enjoyed shopping and we went to Colombo airport to return to Japan.

Our trip to Sri Lanka was a great success thanks to earnest effort of planning, arranging and guidance of Ryotaro Hayakawa and many others who helped us. We are very grateful for their help and support. The trip was enjoyable and educational. I hope that this trip will serve as a beginning of some future developments of us and Sri Lanka.