

Japan Pilgrimage 2011

Note: I decided to write this detailed diary which basically covers the 5 days in Kyoto (May 13-17) as the Hawaii Federation BWA President since I represented Hawaii at the various official meetings but in addition, could not help to include my personal journey with Moilili Hongwanji. I did this primarily because during the first evening after leaving Kyoto on the tour, I accidentally deleted all of my photos from my digital camera. I don't know how or why but with a press of the wrong button, I lost all of my photos of my immediate relatives in Hiroshima and Kumamoto and most sadly all of my Kyoto photos (750th service and 14th World BWA Convention). I know this is a Dharma Gift of sorts and non attachment is the lesson here but my imperfect self is still grieving. Please forgive my rambling at times....

May 13 (Friday)

After visiting with relatives for two weeks, I left Hiroshima by Shinkansen and met Joy Fujita a member of the Moilili Hongwanji tour at Kyoto Tokyu Hotel where we checked in and then went by hotel shuttle bus to Kyoto Station for dinner. We returned to the hotel and met the Bell Captain who said that the Hawaii group was expected at 8:00pm but we thought that was too early and agreed to meet instead at 8:30pm. While I was in my room (434) working on a "Welcome to Japan" sign, the door suddenly rattled startling me. It was my roommate Cynthia Ogasawara. I shouted "Oh, no." She thought she was in the wrong room. I rushed out and saw others near the elevator rushing to their rooms. I called out, "Knock on room 431 and get Joy." She had fallen asleep but awoke because of the clatter. I barely took photos of the group members and never saw so many others. The last person I saw was Lois. Joy and I had failed to meet the group as they arrived at the hotel as we intended. Boo Hoo!

May 14 (Saturday)

The next morning we profusely apologized to the group as we met them for breakfast showing them our "Welcome to Japan" sign. Following breakfast we were notified that the registrations bags were delivered to the hotel lobby. It was for the 750th Memorial Service. Inside the large blue plastic bag was a white canvas bags with the program booklet, blue nametag and a few other items including a blue plastic bag to hold our own shoes when we go to the service. There was also a red nametag for those attending the 14th World BWA Convention and several cards for message writing. The Moilili group spent Saturday sightseeing in Kyoto.

May 15 (Sunday)

Everyone met for a grand breakfast in the hotel (luckily all breakfasts were included in the tour cost) and then met in the lobby to walk over to the Honzan. The ten of us who were going to be part of the procession, wore our aloha attire including the orange lei. We were so pleased to meet Bishop & Tamayo Matsumoto, Rev. Takata and the Jikoen group (who came in on same plane) and finally the Hilo group. We took our official group photos then split up. The *Engi* procession folks (30) went to a practice session at the nearby Annon Den building. All the overseas groups from BCA, Canada and South America were there too and thanks to Rev. Nishiyama who explained the process in English, we practiced walking, bowing, etc. Left foot, right foot, left, together. The others entered the Goeido (Founder's Hall) by 9:30am and to their assigned seats and listened to the Dharma talk.

The procession finally began. Starting at the Amidado building we proceeded slowly to the Goeido in procession style marching to the beat of a large drum heard in the distance. Bishop Matsumoto and the

other Bishops from Overseas were part of the procession too. Although all of us were being recorded by live camera, most of us could not smile since we were seriously concentrating on our footwork. At the Goeido we walked past Tamayo Matsumoto and Rev. Takata and were ushered to our seats which were directly in front of the other Hawaii group members. We participated in the *Shuso Sango Saho* (Musical Service), which we had practiced back in Hawaii thanks to Rev. Muneto and other ministers. It was most impressive and we could see everything clearly thanks to the many television monitors. Messages were delivered by Monshu Ohtani and Shinmonsama. Each of us from Overseas had an Instant Translation device for English or Portuguese which worked perfectly. Near the end of the service a special monetary collection was made for the victims of the Tohoku disaster.

After the service some of us proceeded back to our nearby hotel to change clothes. Others walked around to other venues set up for the attendees – Monzencho “Goenmachi” area (entertainment session, craft booths, etc.) Anne Kawabata and Jeanne Watari were the only two members from Hawaii who participated in the Affirmation Rites (getting their Buddhist names) in the Amidado. Janet Honda and I went back to the hotel room to organize our omiyage for the Hongwanji leaders and for the Representatives at the afternoon World Representative meeting. We met Fred Nonaka who also had some gifts to pass out. Thanks to Rev. Takata and Bishop Matsumoto, arrangements were made to have the International Center deliver all of the gifts and to bring our omiyage over to the Honzan Administration building where our meeting was to be held later. The three of us (Fred, Janet and I) relaxed over a cup of coffee in the hotel lounge.

At 12:30pm we gathered for our Annon Bento which we had pre-ordered from Hawaii. Everything was well organized by the Japan folks and our lunch was an enjoyable experience in a pre-fabricated shelter constructed in the back parking lot of the Monpo Kaikan for just this occasion. We saw the other Hawaii groups as well as other overseas groups. We also did some shopping there and at the Monpo Kaikan bookstore. Since I had Mrs. Saito bring a copy of “May Peace Prevail” CD, I asked the Honzan personnel to play it over the loudspeakers. Following lunch and during free time, the group members dispersed visiting scenic spots in Kyoto City as well as going to nearby Buddhist shops and to the Ryukoku Museum which displayed Shinran Shonin’s life history and teachings.

The World Federation Representative meeting which is held every two years was held from 4:00 – 5:30pm in the Honzan Administration building nearby. Representing Hawaii were Bishop Eric and Tamayo Matsumoto, Rev. Koho Takata, Rev. Shindo Nishiyama, Janet Honda and I. The other overseas groups included BCA (5); Canada (4) and South America (4). Japan made up the rest of the group including President Machiko Kitamura, 2 VPs, 2 secretaries and several advisors. Sitting in the front table included Lady Noriko Ohtani, Governor General Shoshin Tachibana, Bishop Rigaku Mitsuoka, Rev. Sammi Kiribayashi (head of the Hongwanji International Center) and two BWA Advisors. Also included were 3 members of the International Center staff who did the translating. They were Rev. Gene Sekiya, Masako Sugimura and Tabitha Kobata.

Our red nametags, meeting agenda and program booklet including the 14th World bag were placed at our assigned seats which were arranged in a rectangle shaped arrangement. To save energy the AC was not turned on. Because we could see that there was not going to be the usual break, we hurriedly began to distribute all of our omiyage before the meeting began. We too received many gifts from the overseas groups and several Japanese individuals.

We began the meeting with a short service and address by Lady Ohtani. She welcomed us to Japan and made special note about the delegates from Northern Japan who still made it to Kyoto for this occasion.

Following the agenda, and primarily using Robert's Rules of Order, President Kitamura conducted the meeting. The unfinished business included the report of the resolution committee. During the new business, although Canada shared plans for the 15th World Buddhist Women's Convention, there was still a sense of incompleteness. We also adopted the Convention Declaration. It was strange that Reports from the districts were not included in the agenda although Hawaii's report was submitted to HHMH HQ well before I left for Japan.

The meeting was adjourned and we returned to the hotel to quickly venture out again this time by taxi to the Hyatt Regency Hotel for dinner (6:30). Since we were all going to the same place, I shared a taxi with the BCA group.

Preceding the dinner were messages from Lady Ohtani and Governor General Tachibana. Lady Ohtani expressed great joy on the arrival of her new grandson. We had a fine dinner and relaxing fellowship.

May 16 (Monday)

Those who could make it attended the early 6:00am service at Honzan. The Amidado was packed but our group somehow squeezed in. Some of us sat on the tatami floor while others sat in the back of the hall. Following this service, the group quickly proceeded to the Goeido for a second service. We later returned to the hotel for breakfast.

During the next two days, during the time the 14th World Convention was going on, I understand the non-BWA members of the group had a grand time sightseeing (and tasting) in Kyoto and even beyond to Himeji.

While the group members participated in other activities in the morning (touring Hiunkaku, visiting nearby shops, etc.), Cynthia Ogasawara and Rev. Midori Kondo were interviewed about Project Dana and other matters. For several hours, Hawaii BWA Minister Advisor, Rev. Shindo Nishiyama and I represented Hawaii and joined 8 others from BCA, Canada, South America and Japan and made courtesy visits to the Mayor and Governor of Kyoto at their office buildings. Mayor Daisaku Kadokawa shared that he was invited to participate at the recent Honzan's yearly cleanup and said that he would participate yearly if he could. He was dressed in traditional Japanese clothing (hakama) because he felt that Kyoto was a very traditional city and he wanted to share the same feeling. He also talked about his visit to Northern Japan disaster area. In contrast Governor Keiji Yamada met us in suit and tie. He sincerely welcomed us to Kyoto and after accepting gifts from Mrs. Kitamura, and formal picture taking, presented us with gifts too. This is the first time I learned that Kyoto is not a prefecture like Hiroshima or Fukui. (Tokyo-to and Osaka-fu and Kyoto-fu and Hiroshima-ken, etc.) This time Rev. Nishiyama and Rev. Michael Endo (BCA) provided the translation.

After our return to the Honzan Administration Building, we met the new President of Ryukoku University, Tesshin Akamatsu. When I mentioned that I was from Hawaii, he commented that Tamayo Matsumoto was his former student. I wonder what he meant. Later, I saw the display of "Letters to Shinran" in the front lobby of the same building. Our own Hawaii Betsuin Mrs. Mitsuyo Saito's entry was one of 13 letters selected for display out of a pool of 1364 entries. I later heard that she read her letter to the group from Hawaii who visited the display with her earlier in the day. What a wonderful

honor! Mrs. Saito was interviewed by one of the Hongwanji press about her experience. Her entry will be published in several different publications throughout the year including the Hongwanji Japanese website.

By the early afternoon, most of the Hawaii delegates went by Shuttle Bus (located in front lot of Monpo Kaikan) to Pulse Plaza. This was about a 20 minutes bus ride. It was at Pulse Plaza that delegates could pick up their 14th World BWA bag, program booklet and other items. Because they went early, several members were able to attend various workshops, even dressing up in kimono, making origami, sampling fragrances and doing calligraphy. Others relaxed by taking in Japanese dance and musical quartet shows in the huge upstairs hall. Outside there was also a magic show going on. Near the front entrance of the main hall, the Hawaii booth was located. Two graduates from PBA, now studying at Ryukoku University and their friends helped to man the booth along with Fred Nonaka and Rev. Takata. They sold the hikari nenju from Hawaii and even sold some of the extra orange yarn leis (given with a hug and kiss by Fred) thanks to Mililani and Jikoen Hongwanjis. Originally the booth was for a Capital Fund Drive for PBA's new facilities, but this was changed. All proceeds were donated to the Japan Relief Fund. Realizing that the workshops were not a required event of the 14th World, Hilo Hongwanji chose to tour Kyoto on Monday since they arrived one day later to Japan. After having my late lunch at Monpo Kaikan I too went to Pulse Plaza by shuttle. Besides the Moiliili group, I did see Hilo's Rev. Midori Kondo as well as Mrs. Tsumura who lives in Japan as well as resides in Puna. I knew that Jikoen's Doris Oshiro was also busy meeting the entertainment coordinators for Monday evening's program.

We finally entered the main ballroom which was arranged in round tables for our dinner fellowship. There were also two large screen monitors and a beautifully decorated stage. Two other rooms were also reserved for the overflow crowd and connected via closed circuit TV monitors. Again Hawaii's tables were situated near the front left part of the hall. Several of the Japanese assigned to the table were from Toyama ken and arrived late so other Japanese delegates came to exchange "gifts" and messages with the Hawaii members. There was a special treat for the Overseas members on the table too. Lady Ohtani and Shinmonsama joined the dinner fellowship. Shinmonsama greeted the delegates with a speech. The dinner was a fabulous two layer bento and fine umeshu wine. I understand that this was the first time the Hongwanji used the Pulse Plaza facilities and the bento was also the first of its kind with these large numbers.

Once that it was announced that Shinmonsama and his wife were now the proud parents of a baby boy, many many people began to come up to offer their congratulations and also wanted to have their photos taken with them. It was impossible to control the crowd because it was never announced to NOT gather in the front. Lady Ohtani graciously had her photo taken with many many members also.

The evening's entertainment began with a professional Japanese dance troupe followed by the four overseas groups and then Japan.

Soon the Hawaii entertainers went backstage to get ready because they were the first on the program. To get into the Hawaiian spirit, I presented leis to Lady Ohtani and to Machiko Kitamura, BWA President, who always wore a gorgeous kimono but was more than happy to accept the lei. The Hawaii number, "Spread a Little Aloha" was introduced by a young Mitsuyo Saito and the dance led by Doris Oshiro from Jikoen went on so well. There were 12 dancers in all. I was so proud of them. Governor General Tachibana made many complimentary comments about Tamayo Matsumoto and when I looked over to

Bishop Eric's table, he was smiling away. After the close of their number, the group came over to the stage's edge and congratulated Shinmonsama. It was a beautiful gesture of aloha.

BCA members danced two numbers, Canada and South America sang songs. Each performed their numbers superbly too and the final number was Japan doing the dance to Onamaeyobeba. It was a wonderful fellowship. I did not do any "gift exchange" with anyone on my table since everyone had been at the previous meetings, however I understand that Janet Honda gave two pairs of koa hashi to Shinmonsama and he was extremely happy.

At the end of the evening we filed out to our one bus, dropping off the Jikoen group (Hotel Vista) first and then the Hilo group (Hotel Hankyu) and finally the Moiliili group at Kyoto Tokyu. I guess Bishop and Tamayo Matsumoto and Rev. Takata found their own way back to Rhiga Royal Hotel.

May 17 (Tuesday)

After another good breakfast, we were picked up by our chartered bus arranged by JTB. The Jikoen and Hilo group were already in the bus and we proceeded to the Pulse Plaza. Lois Ohta and Sally Tayama rushed out of the bus quickly since they had a dress rehearsal for those offering the flowers and lights as part of the Opening Ceremony. This time the ballroom was arranged theatre style for 4,000 delegates and everyone was in the same room. Hawaii was grouped all together, again near the front left of the hall. We organized ourselves and even had time to quickly take a group photo in front of the stage. On each chair was the device for instant translation. Wonderful. Definitely better than our radios in 2006.

The Monshu and Lady Ohtani joined other dignitaries on the stage including the 4 overseas Bishops for the Opening Ceremony. They both gave messages to the group including words of sympathy to those affected by the East Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami. World and Japan BWA President Machiko Kitamura also spoke. It was an emotional time for her since her hometown is Sendai. Following the service was a special presentation by Mrs. Mitsuyo Ohira. She was interviewed by a fantastic interviewer (BWA member Kisumi Hidaka from Shiga Prefecture). Her story was so heart wrenching because of her own difficulties but triumphing at the end and finally becoming a good member of the society. She was even a deputy mayor of Osaka and presently an author of children's books.

We then broke from lunch. While some Japanese delegates ate their bento at their seats, the overseas delegates were taken to the 2nd floor and were seated at round tables. At first we might've had a miscount because Rev. Takata, Rev. Nishiyama, Janet and I sat with the Hawaii group instead of going with Bishop and Tamayo Matsumoto to the "other" room. But I apologized and all in all more bentos were brought and we enjoyed our fellowship together. During lunch we were informed that Lady Ohtani would be soon arriving to have her photo taken with the various Overseas groups. We lined up some chairs and arranged ourselves for the photo. We even gave some leis to her again (which I took back when she was taking the next photo with Canada). I hope we can get a copy of that photo because not too many of us took that photo with our personal cameras. The Governor General even asked me for a lei for Rev. Mitsuoka also which I did later in the main hall. The Moiliili group took their photo first and the second group consisted of the Jikoen and Hilo members.

After lunch the five panel presentations were held. Each person had 10 minutes including translation. Lily Horio of Jikoen Hongwanji did us so proud with her message. She hi-lighted the Jr. YBA's effort to start a Peace Day in Hawaii, the Pacific Buddhist Academy's focus on peace and Miles Okuma's start of the Peace Parade in rural Honokaa.

The stage was refashioned to include the Officers and Representatives of the World districts for the General Meeting. Once again the business included the report of the Resolutions, the upcoming 15th World Buddhist Women's Convention in Toronto Canada and the Convention Declaration.

Closing ceremony which included the Welcome to Toronto in 2015 video featuring a traveling monk walking the streets of Toronto, words of greeting by new Bishop of Canada Grant Ikuta and the final exchange of the World BWA flag from Japan BWA President Kitamura to Canada President Noriko Ikuta. The flag is huge and awfully heavy too.

The finale included the robust singing of "Onamaeyobeba," a song written by Lady Noriko Ohtani. This song has a definite bon dance beat and you are surely going to hear it again and again.

After a brief rest, we finally left the hall for our bus. Although we heard thunder and saw flashes of lighting and heard the sounds of a huge downpour earlier it was only drizzling slightly when we left. It was strange because many of us in our Moiliili group still had our orange yarn leis on. We probably would have given it away to our new friends, but we were asked to "save" it since we were going to meet up with a singing group in Kanazawa later for fellowship. However, everyone waved their shaka signs and wished us well. It was a heartwarming convention.

Jikoen members after leaving the bus first, lined up in front of their hotel and waved and bowed to those of us remaining in the bus. Hilo Hongwanji members did the same. It was a great feeling of comradery and respect. We were so proud of each other's effort to come on this pilgrimage to Japan. Minasan arigatou gozaimashita.

Donna Higashi, President, Hawaii Federation of BWAs
Moiliili Hongwanji group member