

Mabuni Hill

Okinawa is the southernmost prefecture in Japan. It is comprised of 363 islands in a chain that stretches over 620 miles. The islands are located about 1000 miles southwest of Tokyo, about 2.5 hours by plane. 71 years ago in 1945, near the end of WWII, the US Army and Marine Corps invaded Okinawa, commencing the only ground combat on Japanese soil. Within a mere 3 months, the Battle of Okinawa (April 1 through June 23) accounted for the deaths of roughly 256,000 people. It is said that about half that number were civilians who sacrificed their lives and one-fourth of Okinawa's total population lost their lives. Due to the ferocity of the fighting and Allied forces' bombardment by warships and planes, the assault to the island made it practically unrecognizable. Thus, giving the battle the nickname in English, "Typhoon of Steel". An American war correspondent described the scene as one whereby all the hells converged on this location.

Prayers for Heaven & Earth

Volunteering for the Konkokyo Okinawa Project to Gather the Remains of WWII Victims

**By Reverend Nobuhiro Kusuki,
the Assistant Director of Konkokyo International Center**

The 43rd Konkokyo Okinawa Volunteer Project to gather the remains of WWII victims was spearheaded by Konko Church of Naha, and carried out on February 20 & 21, 2016. The 161 participants (including 34 friends of the Konko Faith), gathered in the Peace Memorial Park at the "Cornerstone of Peace," a monument in Mabuni, Itoman City, located at the southern tip of Okinawa Island. The search for the remains took place on Mabuni Hill, where the hardest fought Battle of Okinawa occurred and the greatest number of lives were lost. Presently, the surrounding area has been designated the Okinawa Senseki Quasi-National Park, where there are numerous memorials, tombstones and a cenotaph established. And the names of

over 240,000 people who lost their lives are inscribed on the monument.

Reverend Masanobu Hayashi, Head Minister of the Konko Church of Naha, initiated this activity in 1974. The project continues to take place today, over two days, once a year, typically in February. Over 14,000 people

have participated to date, and more than 1,200 remains have been collected. The volunteers are divided into small groups and each group is assigned a specific area to search for, locate, and collect remains. The search area is selected based on the results of a survey made by a voluntary advanced team. An assigned team cleans off mud, sand and other material from collected remains before the remains are placed and





offered on an altar set up in a tent. A memorial service is conducted on the last day of the search and the remains are sent to the Remains Collection Information Center - Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Foundation.

Following the opening ceremony, each participant entered the jungle on Mabuni Hill and headed toward their group's assigned area. The geological feature unique to the area is Ryukyu (Okinawa) limestone. Its surface is very rough. This made the use of safety equipment, such as helmets and gloves, mandatory. While walking around the trackless hillside, Reverend Hayashi's words from the opening ceremony came to mind, "As you walk, please pray for the *Mitama* ancestral spirits to rest in peace, listen for their voices and make an effort to grasp their feelings." The thought naturally came to me that "Now, the *Mitama* ancestral spirits reside underfoot" and it preoccupied my mind.

The passage of time, 71 years since WWII, and the efforts of previous volunteer groups, whether they were from Konkokyo or other organizations, makes it more difficult to spot remains with the naked eye. Each participant tries their best to listen to the voice of the *Mitama* ancestral spirits, imagining those who fled trying to escape the horrors of war. The participants then select a place to search and dig up the soil, or rake around rocks, while focusing all their senses intently, so as not to miss a single remain. When I found a rocky stretch where someone might have tried to hide to save himself, I began my search imagining how this person might have crawled into this tiny space. One group used lights to enter a dark natural trench. Most spaces that could have held large numbers of people had been searched by volunteers in previous years. However, just standing there I felt that so many people had lost their lives in that place. Walking along the rocks near the shoreline, we encountered trash, illegally dumped from the cliff above, making us realize that waste was piling up over the remains.

Near the end of the second day, a woman in our group found remains that appeared to be part of a male foot. Dozens of teammates gathered in the same area and began digging up the soil and turning over rocks. Unfortunately, time ran out before we could exhume the entire remains. As we witnessed the brown remains emerging from the ground, 71 years slipped away and the war became part of our reality. Following our return to the National War Dead Peace Mausoleum, Reverend Hayashi conducted a Memorial Service there.



Reverend Masanobu Hayashi



This Project, for someone like me who does not know the reality of war firsthand, was a precious experience that allowed me to be touched by the Okinawa tragedy. Of course, one cannot experience the real tragedy of the past, here in the present. I could only silently kneel down in prayer and feel “something” indescribable run through my body. I went to Okinawa and was able to access “intuitive” information that you can only gain using yourself as a medium, not the secondhand information that you obtain through books, television or the Internet.

I felt the existence of the *Mitama* ancestral spirits throughout the time I was in the jungle. Believing that the *Mitama* still suffer as a result of the tragedy, made me silent and pray. I touched the soil that the *Mitama* are absorbed in, and using a rake I moved rocks. Each and every action to locate remains became a ritual to respect the *Mitama*. Although I did not find any remains, I always felt the strong presence of the invisible *Mitama*. Why was this unusual and wondrous space manifested in front of me?

Wasn't it because this volunteer project to gather the remains of WWII victims has caused a change in my outlook from seeing Mabuni Hill as a place to view a calm and beautiful sea, to a “Spirit World” where the *Mitama* are manifested? Even if I were wandering around a “Spirit World,” it would not have been odd to encounter a *Mitama* there. My image of the “Spirit World” has not yet been scientifically explained, however, I feel that it certainly exists. When you have faith, you sometimes meet people who open the door to the “Spirit World.” It was Reverend Masanobu Hayashi who invited me to the “Spirit World” this time.

In 1972, 27 years after the war, Reverend Hayashi saw the remains of many lying in the fields and mountains of Okinawa. He was in tears and expressed deep apology and sorrow to Kami (whose body is the universe, Heaven & Earth), and to the *Mitama* who were left exposed in the open fields. In retrospect, this was the beginning of the Konkokyo Okinawa Volunteer Project to Gather the Remains of WWII

Victims that Reverend Hayashi initiated in 1974.

As I wrote previously, today, it is very difficult to find remains on Mabuni Hill. At first glance it simply looks like a jungle. Normally I would feel nothing is amiss while walking there. But while standing there, I felt sorrow and was inclined to hear the soundless voices. I am certain that this sensation was not limited to myself, but was experienced by other participants, as well. It was as if we were caught up in Reverend Hayashi's deeply apologetic and sorrowful feelings that led us to generate endless prayers.

Looking back on his 50 years of propagation in Okinawa, Reverend Hayashi said, “Each day I voiced ‘Why I was sent to Okinawa to serve Kami?’ and ‘Okinawa will not be saved until the *Mitama* are saved.’” Through this volunteer work experience, I feel that the reason Kami sent Reverend Hayashi to Okinawa was to transform the “tragic” Mabuni Hill into a “sacred” place of prayer. For Reverend Hayashi, Okinawa was Kami's Body—“Heaven & Earth,” before it became this “tragic” battlefield. Isn't it for this reason that Reverend Hayashi shed tears upon seeing Okinawa's “tragic” scar in “Heaven & Earth?” In other words, for Reverend Hayashi, wasn't Okinawa's tragedy Kami's sorrow and the tears Reverend Hayashi shed were also tears Kami shed? The “Spirit World” I felt at Mabuni Hill, is “Heaven & Earth” for Reverend Hayashi, and this volunteer effort was Mediation and work that saves people including the *Mitama* who suffered as a result of the Okinawa tragedy.

Reverend Hayashi says, “Everyone has a part in Kami's Divine Will.” Looking back at the relationship between Reverend Hayashi and the Okinawa Volunteer Work, this place that I am now is “Heaven & Earth” and how we recognize the messages that “Heaven & Earth” gives us affects our attitude towards finding the remains. Of course, we cannot “Google” what Kami's Will is. It seems that we need only access “Heaven & Earth” using our own selves as a medium. When we do, perhaps our “deeply apologetic and sorrowful” attitude may be the “key.”

On the KIC's Activities in the Midst of Globalization

By Reverend Masafumi Kimoto, a staff member of KIC

The Konkokyo International Center (KIC) researches and studies how to propagate the Konko Faith in the midst of globalization.

On February 20, 2016, the International Institute for the Study of Religions held a symposium on the theme: "Progress of Globalization and Japanese Religions" at Osaka International University. This is a brief report about the symposium and an introduction of KIC's experimental project planned for this year.

A number of globalization factors relative to Japan were identified at the symposium. They include: the relaxation of acquiring an entry visa to Japan; the weakening of the yen against foreign currencies; the increase of foreign tourists to Japan; and the more welcoming attitude of the Japanese government of foreign workers who fill the labor demand caused by the falling birth rate and aging population within Japan. These factors contribute to a more globalized Japan.

One example of how this globalization has impacted a religious community can be found in the Kiyomizu Temple in Kyoto Prefecture. Unlike most temples in Japan, who rely on member contributions to maintain itself, Kiyomizu Temple has no designated members and gains its income solely from admission fees. Thus, Kiyomizu Temple is a singular religious corporation, without an affiliation to a parent or head temple with a level of freedom to ignore old or traditional customs and accept any and all people who want to worship. This temple is in a unique position to try new things and be flexible. For example, a cosmetic company held an "enlightenment event," preceding the usual Buddhist service, in an effort to increase people's awareness about cervical cancer. The event was held on a stage, known as the "Kiyomizu-no-Butai" and brought greater awareness by acknowledging those who have passed away from this illness.

This is one way a religious institution is able to address a global issue such as cervical cancer, which is not well understood even in Japan. Kiyomizu Temple also provides information on the internet in English, as a way to open the door to worshippers from foreign countries as well.

Another topic addressing the globalization developing in Japan came from Professor Nobutaka Inoue of Kokugakuin University. His research and data collection focused on the issue of Islam in Japan. He asked his participants "Do you feel anxious about a Mosque being established in your neighborhood?" In 2012, 51% of the respondents answered, "I don't mind." However, in 2015, the same question resulted in only 36% of the respondents answering, "I don't mind." That means anxiety to Islam is rising. This decline in tolerance of Islam may be attributed to the news media and its method of coverage leading to a growing sense of anxiety about Islam. This could lead to greater deterioration in Japan's relationships with neighboring countries and an increase in hate speech in Japan. The awareness of this development at the symposium can be viewed as kind of test on how well Japanese religious institutions function in the future.

KIC is planning an experimental approach for international propagation this year. Staff members are planning to begin information gathering and propagation activity to foreign residents in Yokosuka, Kanagawa Prefecture. Yokosuka is a location where Japanese and foreign interaction has taken place for quite some time. It was here that Commodore Matthew C. Perry and his "Black Ships" landed and eventually brought an end to the two hundred year national isolation of the Tokugawa government. After WWII, Yokosuka became the site of a U.S. naval base, with a sizable American population. Today, however, the foreign population in Yokosuka is: 26.6% Filipino; 20.3% Korean; 16.0% Chinese; and 9.1% American. This has also led to the formation of separate communities based on racial and ethnic association. As a KIC staff member, I am planning a grass roots propagation effort in hope of building a useful model for salvation of the Konko Faith for foreigners in Japan and overseas, and hope to share the outcome and effects of these efforts with KIC.

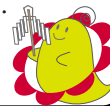
Welcoming the Konko International Gathering 2016 at "Goreichi"

Believers from all over the world and those who are interested in Konkokyo are welcome to join in.

Let's get together to celebrate the Konkokyo Establishment Day at the Sacred Place "Goreichi".

Date: November 14th -15th Place: Konkokyo Headquarters, Okayama, Japan

For further information, please contact KIC.



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