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Recollection of an episode while at Colegio de Mexico

Kimitada Miwa, Honorary President of the Minato UNESCO Association



On October 1 this year, the modern China as the People's Republic of China will observe the 70th anniversary of its foundation. The driving force behind China's national development was Mao Zedong (1893 – 1976) whose life had been characterized by both praise and blame. While his contributions in beating Japan during the last war was conspicuous, he was to blame for the Cultural Revolution which precipitated the newly born China into fathomless chaos.

In this connection, I had an intriguing experience while I worked six months (September 1969 – March 1970) as a visiting professor at the Colegio de Mexico (COLMEX). Dr. Michio Nagai, then the Minister of Education, newly opened a Japanese culture course at COLMEX and asked me to be the lecturer for the course.

Dr. Nagai suggested that I lecture on the history of Japan's modernization efforts since the Meiji Restoration. It was the time when Japan had just observed the centennial of the Meiji Restoration. Japan had been regarded as a successful model in modernization. In contrast, China then was in a total chaos as the result of the Cultural Revolution which had been driven under the leadership of Chairman Mao.

In those days, there was a rising trend in universities in the U. S. to study modernization from the context of comparing Japan and China. A central figure in such an academic trend was Professor Marius B. Jansen of Princeton University. I earned my doctor's degree in historiography at Princeton with Professor Jansen as my mentor and returned to Japan in time to take part in the inauguration of the Institute of International Relations at Sophia University in Tokyo.

Upon the centennial of Japan's Meiji Restoration, the country was hailed for its peerless accomplishment of modernization in East Asia, rather than being labelled as a modern nation which had undergone defeat and failure in the Pacific War. It waded a sharp contrast with the ailing China then.

In Japan, academics engaged in historiography denounced the aforementioned pro-Japanese attitude as "Reischauer offensive to strengthen Japan as U.S. ally." It was the time when Dr. Reischauer, a Harvard University professor, was just appointed as the U. S. ambassador to Japan. Japan was expected to follow the footsteps of the U. S. and become a "New Japan hailing democracy and freedom," departing from the old image of a "Militaristic state with a criminal record."

In those days, most of the China-hand scholars evaluated highly the Cultural Revolution as

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The 2019 MUA Annual General Meeting

Date: Wednesday April 24, 2019

Place: Minato City Life-Long Learning Center

The 2019 annual general meeting of MUA was held at 6:00pm on April 24th in Room 304 of Minato City Life-long Learning Center. As Mayor Masaaki Takei of Minato City, was not able to be present due to the official duties, Mr. Yasuhira Aoki, Superintendent of Education, attended the meeting in Mayor Takei's place and read the mayor's message on his behalf. We also had the honor of the presence of Ms. Noriko Kinoshita, Manager, Mr. Kenji Shoji, Assistant Manager, and Mr. Sugio Kokuyama, staff, of Minato City Education Board. The meeting was moderated by Ms. Yukari Miyashita, Vice President of MUA.



Mr. Hiroshi Nagano, President of MUA, gave the opening remark summarized below:

After touching on the current situation and the outstanding challenges of MUA, he stressed the importance of obtaining the participation of younger generation, and therefore, MUA shall strongly push through the interchange and collaborative relationship with Mita High School as well as Roppongi High School. Then, he talked about the forthcoming UNESCO activities. The

one is the general meeting of National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan to be held in September in Tokyo and the other is Kanto-BLOC UNESCO Activities Study Meeting to be held in Saitama Prefecture in October. At last, but not the least, he emphasized that the peaceful world is inevitable for Japan to stay peaceful, and that we need to continue our utmost efforts toward creating and maintaining the peaceful world based on the network with people in the world.

Then, Mr. Aoki read the message from Mayor Takei:

I would like to express my respect for MUA which has made great efforts in introducing and promulgating Japanese culture in Minato City where a number of foreign embassies are located and 20,000 foreign nationals from 140 countries reside. Under such international circumstances, Minato City plans to promote such a measure as multilingual system among others.

After the speech, Mr. Nagano was elected as the chairperson, and activity reports and settlement reports of fiscal 2018 were approved, followed by the approval of activity plans and annual budget for 2019 including the inauguration of Ms. Ritsuko Sato as a Standing Director. At the end of the meeting, Mr. Nagano presented that Mr. J. Inoue, the former Secretary General, resigned at the end of February, and Mr. H. Tsuno took his place starting the beginning of April.



Mr. S. Kokuyama, who kindly stayed till the end of the meeting, stated on behalf of the Board at the end, that the Board is committed to firmly support MUA's operation and activities.

(Written by H. Tsuno, Secretary General, and translated by Y. Suda, the PR & Internet Committee Associate)

(Continued from P. 1) Recollection of an episode while at Colegio de Mexico

“Another approach to modernization.” They reported that what the revolution had addressed was not a large-scale industrialization, as in the case of Japan’s Yawata Steel, but rather an “Individual citizens’ efforts to produce pans or iron kettles in their backyards.” The only exceptional academician among China experts, who made a different interpretation about the Cultural Revolution, was Professor Mineo Nakajima of the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. He secured a residence in Hong Kong and observed carefully the development of the revolution. He reported that every day many dead bodies were drifting into waterways around Hong Kong from the continental China. I recall that the total number of the victimized Chinese nationals, as announced publicly by the Chinese government, topped 30 million. It was regarded as a part of the aftermaths brought about by the Cultural Revolution.

As mentioned above, China’s Communist Regime will mark the milestone 70th anniversary of the national foundation on October 1 this year. It is reported that Chairman Mao’s popularity has been emerging again recently. It is also reported that his image this time is totally insulated from his leadership in the Cultural Revolution and is perceived as a “Nice figure with a simple and moderate personality,” whose way of life seems to assimilate successfully with the ordinary citizens. It seems that Mao’s said image will work as a successful model of a leader with great personal integrity, in tune with the anti-corruption campaign hammered out by President Xi Jinping, China’s top most leader today.

Now let me get back to what I experienced at COLMEX. A few weeks after I started my class, a Colombian student named Celestino raised hand and opined: “The history of Japan’s modernization efforts during the Meiji period is irrelevant to Latin American students like us. Rather the Cultural Revolution under way in China seems to provide many positive lessons to us.” And he continued, “By all means, I’d like to receive a lecture on China’s Cultural Revolution.”

How did I respond to his request? I immediately contacted Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and requested the officer in charge, saying “Would it be possible to send Professor Shigeaki Uno of Seikei University? He is the only academician I knew who could lecture on China’s Cultural Revolution.” To my great pleasure, my request was accepted and promptly realized. The motivation behind my action was an experience while I was working as a visiting professor at my alma mater Princeton University. After the campus turmoils which had raged at universities worldwide during the late 1960’s, there came a temporary period of peace. That’s when Princeton undergraduate students requested that their class read Herman Hesse’s *Siddhartha*. The faculty responded favorably and took a necessary action to modify the syllabus. I was impressed with the faculty’s response which created added value to the course.

The episode at COLMEX may sound like a somewhat archaic and overly peaceful incident. Still, judging from the urgent need for reforms emerging at higher education institutions in Latin America, the faculty’s response seems to be quite appropriate. Only several months before the incident took place, the police had come into the campus and resorted to gun shooting to put the student riot under control. Indeed, on the surface of the thick glass wall of the 6th floor classroom which faced the street, I could see here and there the vivid traces of bullet penetration, about two centimeter diameter holes.

On one occasion I saw a large-size portrait of Fidel Castro pasted on the inside face of the door to the room for a young political science instructor. On another occasion a young Japanese-Mexican female instructor said to me, “Caucasian instructors are all concerned about the possibility that poor Mestizo farmers in the suburbs, armed with scythes and plows, may swarm into urban areas to wage a class struggle, counting intellectuals among their enemies.” That was a cross section of the social conditions in Mexico in those days. (March 3, 2019)

Note: Dr. Kimitada Miwa is a professor emeritus of Sophia University where he was formerly the Director of the Institute of International Relations.

(Translated by S. Tanahashi, the PR & Internet Committee)

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The 3rd Hands-on Tea Ceremony Workshop

Date: Monday, March 25, 2019

Place: Minato City Life-long Learning Center

This was the 3rd workshop of the 3rd course since we started the initial course in June 2018. The objective of the course was to provide more opportunities for those who want to learn the basic of tea ceremony, in addition to the traditional once-a-year workshop.

We had the pleasure of having Ms. Sokei Ono, a full-time instructor of the Ura-Senke School, for this workshop. First the participants reviewed what they had learned in the 2nd workshop. Then they were taught how to fix tea on the tray as beginners.

For your information, the participants learned the following lessons in previous workshops:

- 1st Workshop: How to behave properly as a guest (greeting, walking, sweets-eating, and drinking “Matcha” tea.
- 2nd Workshop: Review of the 1st workshop lessons. How to handle the small “Fukusa” silk cloth, the “Natsume” container, tea whisk and tea cup.
 - Each time sweets and “Matcha” were served to the participants.



Major comments from the participants:

- The spirit of the “Cha-no-yu” is so deep and difficult to attain but I enjoy the practice all the more.
- The two-hour workshop is so worthwhile and gets rid of my work stress.
- I wish to continue the cultural learning efforts.

Comments from MUA staff:

This course was started in response to the emerging need among citizens to learn tea ceremony as a traditional Japanese culture. We intended to make it a casual program for easy entry. Because the workshop is held during the evening hours, most of our participants are business people, male accounting for 50%, who drop by on their way home. Some of the attendees had participated in the 1st and 2nd courses. Some decided to join the MUA during the process. Each time we prepare and rent utensils for the workshop but some attendees bring utensils they personally bought. We are very happy to know their enthusiastic attitude.



(Written by K. Hirakata, VP, and translated by S. Tanahashi, the PR & Internet Committee)

Minato UNESCO Association is a citizens' voluntary membership organization that promotes Japanese traditional culture, holds cross-cultural workshops and presents multicultural events and international symposia for world peace. For any questions or comments about our articles, please contact our secretariat office at:

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