

Nichiren Shu News

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1

THE HONOULIULI DRUM

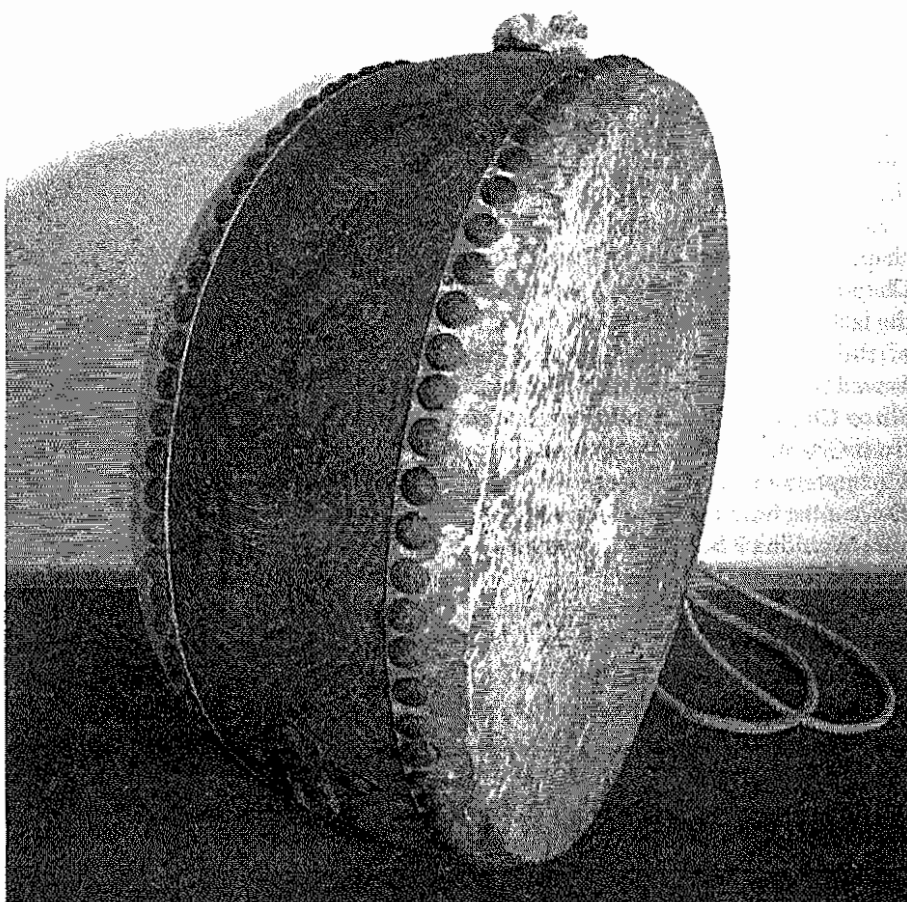
By Rev. Chishin Hirai

75 years ago, Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese Navy. Shortly after that, many Japanese Americans were sent to internment camps. The biggest camp in Hawaii was the Honouliuli Confinement Camp on the Island of Oahu. From the great efforts of Mr. Les Goto, a member of our temple, and others from the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii (JCC), Honouliuli was dedicated as a new National Monument in 2015. This was a huge achievement not only for people in Hawaii, but also for the entire United States.

We have many taiko drums at the Nichiren Mission of Hawaii. One of them was donated by Mr. Masao Sakamoto in 1921. Professor Naofumi Annaka and Dr. Naomi Sasaoka of Rissho University examined this taiko while here doing academic research. Dr. Annaka found an inscription on the bottom of this taiko: "Prayer at Obon Service, on August 15, 1944, at the Honouliuli Confinement Camp." According to Mr. Goto, this is the first time the name 'Honouliuli' has been found on any item from that time. It makes this taiko the only genuine link to Honouliuli and provides more information about the lives of those confined there. We still do not know who took the taiko from our temple to Honouliuli. We also do not know how it came back to us.

According to inscriptions on the taiko, the minister who used this taiko at the Obon Service in 1944 was Bishop Zenkyo Komagata of the Soto Mission of Hawaii. Why would Bishop Komagata use our taiko in Honouliuli?

Here is my theory: At that time, Bishop Kanryu Mochizuki was the head minister of our temple. Bishop Mochizuki planned to have his installation ceremony on December 14, 1941 so he was busy packing his



The Honouliuli Drum in the Nichiren Mission of Hawaii is a historical tie to the Honouliuli Confinement Camp from World War II. The taikodrum was donated to the mission by Mr. Masao Sakamoto in 1921.

belongings at the Kapapala Nichiren Mission on the Island of Hawaii. However, since the attack on Pearl Harbor was December 7, he and his family were sent first to a temporary internment camp on Sand Island and then later to camps on the U.S. mainland. Mrs. Hisako Sakamoto, a temple member, stayed on as the caretaker of the Mission after it was forced to close during the war. She was the wife of Mr. Masao Sakamoto, who donated the taiko. Since her husband donated it, she would have been able to take the taiko to Bishop Mochizuki on Sand Island since nobody knew how long Bishop Mochizuki would remain there. Mrs. Sakamoto would surely have wanted to help Bishop Mochizuki to lead other people at that camp to our faith with the taiko. Shortly afterwards, Bishop Mochizuki and his family were sent to the U.S. mainland. He could have then asked Bishop Komagata to keep the taiko at Honouliuli since there were strict rules regarding what Bishop Mochizuki could take with him. Bishop

Komagata was never sent to the U.S. mainland and stayed at Honouliuli until the war ended. This theory explains why Bishop Komagata kept the taiko of Nichiren Mission, why he used it at the Obon service and why the taiko was then returned to our temple.

I was eager to use this taiko at the Obon service at our Mission to pray for all the people who had faced hardships at Honouliuli. I also wrote *toba* for them. It was very emotional for me to offer a prayer at this service. Since we know about the Obon Service at the Honouliuli Confinement Camp on August 15, 1944, I was also eager to have an Obon Service there on the same day, August 15 of this year, to offer prayers to those who had suffered there. I asked Ms. Carole Hayashino, President of the JCC, for permission to hold this service when she came to our Mission to see the taiko. Two weeks later, she made arrangements for us to hold the service there. My wish came true!

The site of the Honouliuli Confinement Camp is in a gulch at the bottom

of a steep valley, surrounded by tall hills. I was totally horrified to imagine how the internees had lived there with so much uncertainty about the future. Even in those bleak surroundings, it was a wonderful service on Aug. 15th. I was overwhelmed with tears, but was quite sure that all the spirits of the internees gathered there, listened to the sound of the taiko and accepted with great joy the offering of our prayers.

2018 will be the 75th Anniversary of the Establishment of Honouliuli. I believe that all the spirits of the deceased want us to pray for them again. That was why the taiko was discovered now. Our temple should stand close to those people and serve them. This is our duty for which we should be proud.

As you know, we are making many plans for 2021, the 800th Anniversary of the birth of our founder, Nichiren Shonin. Since this taiko was donated in 1921, I believe the donation was to commemorate the 700th Anniversary of our founder's birth. This leads to another understanding for why this taiko was discovered now. It appeared because of both the 75th Anniversary of Honouliuli and the 800th Anniversary of our founder's birth!

The internees at Honouliuli endured many hardships. That is why we enjoy our freedom and peace today. It is quite natural for me to offer our prayers and gratitude for those who faced difficulties there. We should tell people what happened at Honouliuli. We should tell people in the future not to make the same mistake again. That is why we held the service there. If we don't reflect sincerely on the sad parts of our history, there could be internees again and those internees could be us. Honouliuli is not just ruins from the past. It is very easy to return to the site of that camp again and use its tragic story to create a better world. The switch to restart is right here in our minds.



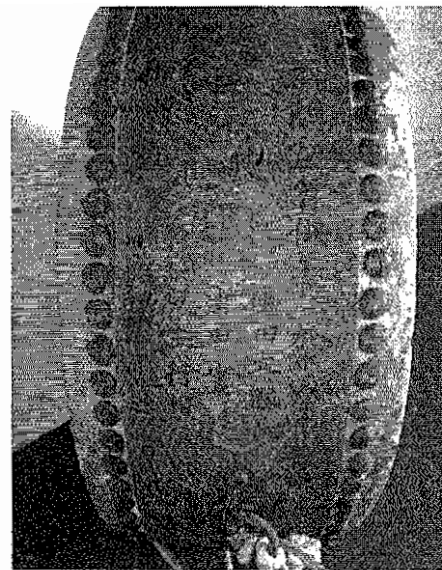
The "ho-na-u-ri-u-ri" inscription in katakana can be seen on the right side of this picture.



Bishop Komagata's grandson talking with attendees after the Obon Service.



Bishop Komagata's great-grandson reads a poem written at the Honouliuli internment camp.



Another view of the drum showing the signature of Bishop Zenkyo Komagata.

REMEMBERING HISTORY THROUGH THE TAIKO DRUM

Dharma Talk by Bishop Hirai, Nichiren Mission
Given February 26, 2017



Good morning, everyone!

I am glad to see you all today. As you remembered, Professor Naofumi Annaka and Dr. Naomi Sasaoka came here to do their academic research at our temple. Professor Annaka also gave us a lecture on the early history of Nichiren Shu in North America. It was a wonderful and meaningful lecture. Then, he found extraordinary items with their research at this temple. Let me talk about one of them today.

I know you all remember what happened here in Hawai'i 75 years ago. There was the Pearl Harbor attack and many Japanese leaders in our community were sent off to internment camps. All Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines were ordered to close. That was an ineradicable darkness in American history. Some of our members actually experienced it and they sometimes shared their vivid memories with us. However, what we found out was that we forgot what we should not forget. One of them was that we had an internment camp here on the Island of O'ahu, Honouliuli Internment Camp. Our fellow member, Mr. Les Goto, and some people of the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i made great efforts to designate it as a new national monument in 2015. It was a huge achievement not only for us in Hawai'i, but also for the entire United States.

There are many *taiko* (drums) at our temple. We use them according to the occasion. Some are too old to use. One of the *taiko* was donated by Masao Sakamoto in 1921. It is about 100 years old and we have been keeping it in our storage room. I knew that it was there and knew that we didn't use it. However, Professor Annaka checked every single item including the old and useless looking *taiko* too. He made a great discovery. He found writings on the bottom of the old *taiko*. It says Honouliuli. Giving a detailed explanation, it says "Prayer at *Obon* Service on August 15, 1944 at Honouliuli

Confinement Camp." It also mentions three people's name and a Chinese poem.

According to Mr. Les Goto, the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i has a Honouliuli Education Center. This permanent exhibition contains many items related to Honouliuli. However, none of them carries the name Honouliuli on it. There are pictures, maps, drawings, items produced at Honouliuli and others, however he has never seen the name 'Honouliuli' written on any of the items. It means that this *taiko* is the only link to Honouliuli and we can prove its genuineness. Also, this finding establishes without a doubt that the Honouliuli Internment Camp did exist. Don't you think this is just great and amazing? I was so excited.

Information on this *taiko* surprised me. Firstly, it says, "Honouliuli Kankinsho." As I said, it was written in 1944. It shows that Honouliuli was called "Kankinsho," "confinement camp," not internment camp at that time. As you might know, many of our temple items have information such as the name of the donor, date and name of the Bishop who accepted the donation. If there was a special event, it usually was written to commemorate such an event. You can find those writings on most items here. When we write messages on items, we write communicating in a formal manner. We seldom write formal messages with abbreviated text. It means that "Kankinsho" was referred to as a confinement camp at that time. Secondly, from the date on the *taiko*, we understand that there were some sort of religious activities at the camp. If there were no such activities, they would never write such a message. Religious activities were not so rare at camps on the mainland U.S. However, this was the first time we are able to confirm that religious activities were a part of their daily life at Honouliuli. And, lastly, there were 3 people's names on the *taiko*. One of them

was Sumida Daitaicho. It meant Battalion Commander Sumida. The other 2 people didn't have a military rank or position—just names. The word 'Battalion Commander' shows that there was a kind of organization for prisoners and its system must have been military at Honouliuli.

We understood many things from the information on the *taiko*. It was wonderful and meaningful. We have to make sure that we never forget what happened before and not do the same things again today and in the future. I really appreciate the ministers and members who kept the *taiko*. I am very proud of this temple. And, of course, I appreciate Professor Annaka and Dr. Sasaoka who discovered our new treasure.

I know that I should treasure this *taiko* and preserve it from now and forever. What I am thinking is that I want to use this old *taiko* at our *Obon* service this year. After proposing the Pearl Harbor ceremony, there are many things happening at our temple. I think the spirits of the deceased want us to pray for them. That is why there are many things happening here. If not, I would not be busy. And, I understand that our temple's important duty is to answer those requests as much as possible. That is also our pride. I hope you realize how wonderful our temple is.

Note: This talk is reprinted with the permission of Bishop Hirai of Nichiren Mission in Honolulu. The JCCH is working with Bishop Hirai, Nichiren Mission and the Buddhist Council to hold a special obon service at Honouliuli on August 15, 2017.

ABOVE: Bishop Hirai with the *taiko* found in the storage of Nichiren Mission of Hawaii.