

JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAII
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Reverend Shoten Matsubayashi (SM)

September 12, 1993

At the residence of Rev. Yoshiaki Fujitani

By Atsuko Hasegawa (AH)

Note: This is an English translation of an interview conducted in Japanese with a few English words included. Double parentheses ((?)) mark inaudible or unclear sentences or words. Brackets [] have been added for clarification purposes.

AH: Well, Reverend, welcome today for coming a long way. I have been a little nervous about interviewing you. Please tell me your candid recollections. When did you come as a missionary?

SM: I came to Hawaii as a missionary in 1936, after I received a letter of appointment; which ordered me to come to Hawaii from Hongwanji at Ryuzan, Korea. At the time when I came to Hawaii--I came by boat, of course--as a missionary, I have replenishment money of 300 yen given by our head temple, and they told me to buy a special second-class ticket instead of an ordinary third-class ticket. As I recall, I paid about 200 dollars for a first-class ticket. As for my history since my birth--first I would like to mention that I have no recollections about my transition for that period--At age 13, after I graduated from an elementary school, I became a young Buddhist monk living at Sairakuji [Sairaku-temple] while I was attending a higher elementary school. I have no recollections about how I grew up when I was little, and why I became a Buddhist monk at age 13 after I graduated from an elementary school. I do not think I was sent for a monk because I was a bad boy. However, as I think about it now, that transition was a big plus for my entire life...I fully realize it now. Famous fellow devotee Saichi Asahara used to worship at that Seirakuji. Although he was a disciple of Anrakuji, he never failed to come to worship at Buddhist services held at Sairakuji a few times a year. He was not a big man; he was a small old man. He used to sit at the front on a mat, listening to a sermon. Since I might have looked like a child at age 13, I recall Fellow Saichi said, "Boy, I can bang Kansho [small-sized bell] for you." and helped me to sound Kansho. At that time, Mr. Saichi was not such a well-known person. I remember him worshipping and listening to a sermon in his sleeveless robe. I used to visit him at his house, running an errand for the lady of the temple. I opened the door and entered his house. When I gave him goods from the lady, he said, "Thank you", standing on his geta [wooden clogs]...I can vividly recall the scene even now. I resided at Sairakuji when Mr. Saichi led his quiet life at the time. I fondly remember Mr. Saichi who has become famous since then. I completed my two-year study at a higher elementary school while

staying at Sairakuji for two years...from Taisho 13th to 15th year. Thereafter, it was common for many of us to attend an occupational school...agricultural school, commercial school, and technical school, which is equivalent to middle school in Japan. There were only a few middle schools in the entire Shimane Prefecture, and many of us had no access to the schools. Since I lived in countryside, I had to attend a school close to the temple. At age 18, I completed my education that qualified me as a middle school graduate. Then, I attended ChuButsu...Chuo Bukkyo Gakuin [Central Buddhism Institute] to study Buddhism doctrine.

At age 20, I became Kyoshi that was the lowest qualification level for a Buddhist priest. Then, I was appointed as a missionary at Taiwan Mission. While I was at Taiwan Mission, my job was to run a Sunday school, which had about 100 children. I managed to run the school using several volunteer students. My main job was to gather those children to worship Buddha every Sunday at the temple. About twice a month, I met with our chief missionary, Reverend Gikyo Kuchiba, who later became the fifth Bishop in Hawaii. After working at Taiwan Mission for three years, I saved enough money to study for one year. Instead of going to Hawaii, I went to Kyoto to study. After I completed my study at Fukyo Institute, I was appointed as a resident at Ryuzan Hongwanji in Korea parish. I stayed there for a year and a half. Afterwards, I came to Hawaii as a missionary on August 1936, at my age 24. Soon after I arrived at Hawaii, I came to Wailuku Hongwanji. I was appointed as a deputy missionary at Wailuku Hongwanji. I was in Honolulu only for two weeks. At the time, our chief at Wailuku Hongwanji was Hironori Nishii, who was a bachelor then. He told me, "Since you are also a bachelor, you should go to Wailuku." Thus, I came to Wailuku Hongwanji. Rev. Gikai Harada, who came from Waipahu, used to be the chief there at Wailuku, but he went back to Japan due to his half-year illness. Rev. Nishii was a deputy missionary at the time, and was still young. In the meantime, there existed a religious confrontation between members from Kumamoto Prefecture and members from Hiroshima Prefecture. Those from Kumamoto had something to do with the school [Japanese language school?], and, at the same time, the caretaker at the temple was from Kumamoto. Accordingly, members from Kumamoto recommended Rev. Nishii, who was also from Kumamoto, to be a new chief at the temple. My guess is they appealed to the Bishop to have Rev. Nishii as a new chief. Thereby, Rev. Nishii, despite his young age, became a new chief at Wailuku Hongwanji, and I followed him to Wailuku.

AH: Had you been a deputy at Wailuku?

SM: Yes, I was there as a deputy for three years.

AH: Oh, three years?

SM: Yes, while I was there, I worked at Japanese Language School in the afternoon. At night, I did my missionary work by visiting member houses; which was our job at the time.

AH: I see.

SM: At Wailuku Hongwanji, a ward consisted of around ten members, and ward members got together... not every night, once a month, to listen to our sermon. Accordingly, I was out

at night about half of a month, visiting our wards to give sermon. House sermon was our major job. I was young, but members were 30, 40, 50's who were in the prime of life.

AH: Indeed.

SM: They were our members. Some of them were Nisei, some were Issei. Meeting for sermon was held at member houses in rotation. At night, after they were done for their daytime work, they got together at the meetinghouse. They chanted Shoshinge Rokushu-biki [type of Sutra], followed by a sermon from a missionary for about 30 minutes, and followed by gossiping while drinking tea [green tea]. At the time, our major missionary work was to attend those house meetings. In the afternoon, we taught at Japanese language school. In addition to those temple duties, we helped our members communicating with the Consulate; typically, in filing notification of death... we did many of them. I heard missionaries used to help members in filing marriage report or notice of draft postponement [to the Japanese army]...which was before my time. When I came [to Wailuku], our main job was to deliver death notices [to the Consulate]. Another chore as an agent for the Consulate was to give a tour to a consul or to a guest of the Consulate visiting the island [Maui]. In addition, we missionaries, for the sake of the entire Maui, took charge in sending relief supplies to refugees in Japan after the war.

AH: I see.

SM: In summary, before the war, our task as Buddhist missionary was to teach at Japanese language school in the afternoon, and to visit our member house for missionary work at night. We did not have much office duties...not many death notifications.

AH: I see. They [Japanese] were still young at the time.

SM: Not many deaths we had at the time. I was in Maui for 28 years, three years at Wailuku Hongwanji, and then at Paia Hongwanji. I moved to Paia Hongwanji before the war in 1938 [19] 39 as a chief missionary. At the time, I was married with one child. I was at Wailuku Hongwanji three years in [193] 6, 7, and 8, and became chief missionary at Paia Hongwanji starting in 1939. Paia Hongwanji was in the middle of Paia cultivated land, surrounded by a camp that included about 150 plantation members. There were neighborhood camps such as Lower Paia, Hamakuapoko, Kaheka, Grove Ranch, Haliimaile, Makawao, Pukulani, Kula, and Ulupalakula. Paia Hongwanji had 150 members from the neighborhood camps, and another 150 from Paia camp for the total of 300 members; which were large enough to carry on for the temple. Even after I moved to Paia, I continued to teach at the Japanese language school of Wailuku Hongwanji for several years. I also taught at Japanese language school in Keahua. Then, the Second World War broke out on December 1941. Until then, I had been doing my missionary work while resided at Paia Hongwanji. Since members of the Paia temple were scattered among many neighborhood camps, about 15 different camps, I went out almost every night to visit those camps on equal frequencies and gave my sermon. The farthest was Ulupalakua camp at Haleakala ranch in Maui, 24, 5 miles from my temple. It took about 30 minutes to reach Kula by a car. It was a large area to cover for Paia Hongwanji.

AH: At the time, all of your members were plantation workers, busily working during the day. I think they came to worship at night, seeking some spiritual support.

SM: Probably so...certainly at the time. It was already 50 years or so since our Hawaii mission was first established. It was a time of automobile, not of horse, and all the temples had cars. Thereby, we went camp to camp in a car. Anyway, those Issei and some Nisei were 30s and 40s, in the prime of life. As for their education, even Nisei in the countryside did not have a chance to attend a school. After the war, GI Bill made it possible for them to go to university, and many Nisei have risen to greatness. However, for the period of [19] 36 to 1950 right after the war, situation of Hawaii members were rather grim; even high school graduates was scarce. Around [19] 36, when I came [to Hawaii], there were not many local men who graduated from university or high school. Only few successful [Japanese] men like Judge Yanagi, who used to work as an accountant at Wailuku Hongwanji. Moreover, Mr. Takitani's father, who came to Maui from Kauai Island, was very active Japanese, having owned three theaters, an auto appliance store, an icebox store, and a soda company. Few workers at the plantation attained Luna [supervisor] status. As for working at stores, few became department heads, reporting to Caucasians. It was [harsh] realities of life for Japanese at the time. Consequently, I taught [at Japanese language school] and did my [missionary] service in Japanese. Even young members [of the temple] spoke Japanese, seldom spoke English.

AH: I see. You had been teaching children at Japanese language school. Their parents, lacking education themselves, wanted their kids to be educated. I suppose many of those children have become successful persons in the society.

SM: I think so. Yes.

AH: Some of them were your students.

SM: The situation was the same in Japan. It was costly to be educated at our time, and parents had hard time to pay for it.

AM: Reverend, how much was your salary at the time?

SM: I was...

AH: ... to live.

SM: When I came from Japan, I received 40 dollars from Japanese language school, and another 20 dollars from my temple...for the total of 60 dollars. I grew up in a temple, led my life in a temple in Japan. Then, I worked as a missionary in Korea and Taiwan. However, money had never been a motive for my work.

AH: I see.

SM: Offering was my means of livelihood. When I graduated from Buddhism institute...Chuo Buddhism Institute, our teacher Preceptor Seitetsu Fujinaga told us, "You are about to

graduate from this institute. You will go out into the world to play an active role in various areas, some of you may become a chief priest of a temple. Frankly speaking, you will not starve ever as long as you affectionately follow Buddha. You should keep this in your mind all the time.” This was his farewell words. Accordingly, our salary was not in our head at all. I received my monthly salary of 60 dollars in Hawaii. At the time, the exchange rate between America and Japan was \$30 = ¥100 before the war. Upon receiving 60 dollars, I sent 30 dollars to Japan that was worth 100 yen in Japan. Since I borrowed some money to come to Hawaii, I sent 100 yen to Japan several times, which helped my parents. However, it had never occurred to me that I could send 100 yen to Japan when I took my job in Hawaii.

AH: I see. You came without knowing that.

SM: After all, I mostly thought about the future at my 50s. At my 50s, I had five children. I worried about my wife and her five kids if I died suddenly. This was my biggest worry at my age 40-50. At the time, there was no social security, no pension system at my order. If I died suddenly, my wife and her five children would have to do something, maybe go to her parents for help. I decided to buy [life] insurance for 20,000 to 25,000 yen, and started to pay its monthly premium little by little, which started before the war and lasted for ten years after the war. That was my remuneration to my family. Now, we have social security and pension from my order; truly life like a dream.

AH: That's right.

SM: In contrast with the situation when I was young.

AH: I think young missionaries these days are truly fortunate. They have various guarantees from the beginning.

SM: That's right. Their financial security is guaranteed, either in Japan or in America. They are covered by pension system. It is like a dream in terms of guarantees...truly these days.

AH: You and your fellow missionaries worked hard doing your missionary work and teaching. What did you do for your own enjoyment?

SM: Well, my favorite pastime when I was young was to take my kids...once or twice a year during summer vacation...to beach. I lived in Maui Island, and there was a sandy beach behind a Jodo-sect temple in Lahaina...a very comfortable beach to play. My family and the family of a Jodo-sect missionary stayed together during the war, and we had kept family relationship after the war, having a chance to get together a few times a year. That's about it for my pastime. While my five kids were growing up, I had not had much time to keep in touch with them. I had to be out for my missionary work at night after an early dinner with my family. Moreover, I was oftentimes not at home due to my office work. Now, I rather feel sorry I did not have enough time to be with my children. At present, I live with one of my child who has two children. Talking about the ties between parents and children, I observed my third son has been spending many hours with his

kids...it is really amazing. He frequently goes out with his children.

AH: Reverend, it is a different generation. These days, young wives will become angry unless her husband spends his time doing home service. In old times, wives of missionaries endured for the sake of her children while her missionary husbands were out...

SM: That was really the situation at my temple. As for Sunday schools at our local temples, I ran the Sunday school at Paia Hongwanji, but my wife took the responsibility in running other Sunday schools at Hamakuapoko, Grove Ranch and Makawao...three Sunday schools. In addition, both of us went together to Kula on Saturday afternoon while our children stayed at home until afternoon, eating their Saturday lunch all by themselves. Our missionary work was hard on family cares.

AH: I see. Story by old ((bomori?)) also tells me that it is a different period.

SM: Things are not now what they used to be. Of five children I had, two eldest ones graduated from high school, and, after all, my three eldest children completed their high schools while I was in Maui for 28 years. Then, I moved to Aiea Hongwanji, and my two youngest children entered Aiea High School...studying in Honolulu. I thought it was rather pitiful for small children to change schools halfway, and I had tried not to move as much as possible. I was able to move from Maui to Oahu after my children grew up.

AH: Let me go back a little. Reverend, I think...I recall you said at a funeral, "I give my sermon in Japanese whether or not those present understand. If ten attendees listened to my sermon at a funeral, there would be fifty in four or five funerals. It would be my delight to see eventual increase of listeners, and I work hard for it." I believe that is your belief throughout.

SM: I think so. Since I grew up in Japan to my adulthood, my idea about democracy was very different [from others], and I had forcibly pushed my idea sometime in the past. Thereby, it happened that people at Bussei [Young Buddhist Association] misunderstood me. When I joined Betsuin as a deputy Rinban after Bishop Fujitani asked me to come, I had one wish to accomplish and pushed my idea forward. When we had a funeral service in Betsuin, we only read Gobunsho [a collection of letters written by Rennyo], but gave no sermon. After the war, I talked to then deputy Rinban, "It would be a lost opportunity not to give sermon with so many attendees." When I was in Maui, I always gave sermon in Japanese after finished reading Gobunsho at a funeral. However, in Honolulu, no sermon was given despite so many attendees at a funeral. When I took my residence at Betsuin, I wanted to implement my idea of giving sermon at a funeral. When I first went to Betsuin on [August] 30 and 31 to check my schedule starting September 1, I saw funeral assignments on the blackboard. I rewrote the assignments so that I could attend them. At the first funeral on September 1, I read "Hakkotsu no Gobunsho", and, afterwards, gave a short sermon in Japanese. Then, a person in charge from Hosoi Funeral Service told me, "Missionary, your sermon had no use." I said forcibly, "You say it is useless, but it shall not be your concern when I give a short sermon. I am conducting this funeral, and you have nothing to say about my conduct. It may be only 30 percent out of some 500 attendees would understand Japanese and the rest may be English speaking. Whatever

you say, I can speak only in Japanese, and I will be happy if one or two out of many attendees will listen to my sermon. I am the one presiding over the funeral, and you shall make no complaint.” Thereafter, I continued giving my sermon. At our internal meeting, I appealed my way of conducting funerals to my fellow missionaries, and they had agreed with me. Thus, we have been giving our sermon in Japanese or in English...sermon in English these days for English is our main language.

During the war, I was interned nearly five years, and experienced various hardships. A few years ago, American Government gave reparations of \$20,000 to those of us interned, including children who were born in internment camps. In addition, we received a letter of apology from the President admitting wrongdoing by American Government. I suffered from various hardships at the time, and I would really appreciate those reparations given to us.

AH: Well, those may indicate that America is big-hearted.

SM: Well, that is certainly a possibility. Yes.

AH: Although you were born in Japan, you have been in America for many decades.

SM: Yes, therefore...

AH: This country must be your second home.

SM: That's right. Accordingly, I became a naturalized citizen about 20 years ago. I am very grateful that I, as an American citizen, can spend my remaining years in a peaceful and blessed environment; which was previously unthinkable.

AH: Yes, I think so. You recently lost your wife. Do you feel lonely? How are you spending your time every day after your retirement?

SM: Yes, my wife, whom I married for 56 years, died in March this year at the age of 79. Her last two years was truly painful for her. After lived together for such a long time, I now alone. When ((tsuruuto?)) at night, I have sometimes had difficulty in sleeping...woke up as soon as I fell in sleep, thinking about various events in my life for the past 81 years...this and that...Sweet memories in the past. I am a poor talker and can't express myself properly, and my wife was not a jabber. Therefore, we had not talked about small things such as domestic issues. While she was alive, we were not in a habit talking this and that. I just called her "Oi" and she answered "Hai". Now, I have nobody to answer "Hai" even if I call "Oi", and I feel very lonesome. I have talked and believed that we, as human beings, had to endure living in the bitters of life. Now I am truly alone, and I really feel I had to be strong for living under various difficulties. This is my deep feeling, and I value each and everyday. I stopped playing golf or gate ball for the time being. My everyday pleasure now is to be with nature, going outdoors for 30 minutes to one hour every day. I have been enjoying planting and growing potatoes in a small patch in Pearl City. I was able to harvest many of them this year...digging earth and throwing rubbish in it. It is not that deep, just about one shaku [30.0 cm] deep, adding rubbish, rearing the

plant, waiting potatoes to grow. I can harvest them in ((izen?)) half a year. This is my everyday enjoyment at present.

AH: Although it is none of our business, we rather worried how you are doing everyday after your wife died. I feel relieved when I see you keep yourself neat and clean, live close to the soil, and live happily with your family. Please enjoy yourself, maybe in playing golf or watching Sumo.

SM: Sure. Thank you.

AH: Reverend, in conclusion, what would you like to advise young missionaries...your juniors.

SM: Well...

AH: When you were in Maui, you met various ethnic groups such as Caucasian and Hawaiian. Have you, as a priest at Hongwanji and as a man of religion, had any difficulties in dealing with them?

SM: Well, when I came to Hawaii as a missionary before the war, we were treated with a respect in Hawaii society. I had no ill feelings against other religion, partly due to my own personality, and I was happy to work together [with other religious groups]. In Maui Island, there were various temples of different sects such as our Jodo-sect, Rinzai-sect and Soto-sect. We held our religious events such as Buddha's birthday festival together with Soto-sect missionaries in lower Paia. I also had socialized with other groups, playing golf or discussing social issues with them. As for other religions, I had not... There was a Christian church in Paia, and I sometimes met with a pastor there saying "Hello". I had made no distinction against others. Around Paia Camp, most of them were camps consisted of Japanese workers. There were small number of people from Philippine, and they were friendly to our temple. After I moved from Maui to Aiea, several Filipinos greeted me saying, "You were a minister, eh?" or "You were in Maui, eh?" I think they remembered me at Bon festival dance at the temple [in Maui], having done their shopping and eating there, and felt nostalgic when they saw me [in Aiea]. I have a most vivid impression I still remember: it was about a Kanaka or indigent police and he raised his hand to greet me saying, "Hello, minister" when I was driving in a camp. My life in Hawaii was almost the same living in Japan since I lived among Japanese people. Anyhow, I had treated everybody as equal members whether or not he/she belonged to other sect or religion...other than [Jodo-sect] Buddhist.

AH: Well, Reverend, as you know, there is a concept of Dana [charity or giving?] person.

SM: Sure.

AH: Dana was established more than 20 years ago at the world ((women?)) ...world conference. They have been rendering their service to society with their money. Do you recall such activities in your old times?

SM: Well, there was almost nothing, except some frequent aids to Japan...such as money to Manchuria Incident. Upon an anniversary year of Great Tokyo [Kanto] Earthquake, we were quick to offer our aids to Japanese disasters this year. Our largest effort happened right after the war. We collected money and goods to help [people in Japan]. All of the religious groups and their members in Maui worked together to offer our aids [to Japan]. Beyond these activities, we were rather not to be concerned with other ethnic groups, just like the same situation in Japan, since those in the camp were mostly Japanese.

AH: Reverend, let me get things out of sequence for a minute. I understand there were many well-known people came to visit [Hawaii from Japan] in the old times. They were intellectuals, entertainers, and notable politicians. However, at the time, there was no an entertainment facility or large meeting hall such as today. Therefore, all of those visitors came to Hongwanji most of the time. Out of those you met at the time, do you recall anybody who gave you a vivid impression?

SM: Well, around 1950, four-five years after the war, many prominent persons from Japan made tour [to Hawaii]. They always went around islands. Although Wailuku was a center in Maui, Haleakala mountain was a famous sight, and it was my important job to take visitors to Haleakala since I lived near Haleakala mountain. Among my several tours to the mountain, my most vivid impression was on Mr. Shinsho Hanayama.

AH: I see. Could you tell me about him?

SM: Well, I do not remember what we talked about then. Anyway, I took him to Haleakala. Before the war, around 60 years ago, it was difficult to climb up the mountain. Nowadays, you can watch the rising sun in a plane, 10,000 shaku [30.3 cm] high in the air. At the time, it was not easy to climb 10,000 shake high on the mountain. These days, you can reach to the summit by a car only in two hours to watch the rising sun. The driveway did not go all the way, until its construction was completed in 1935. It was Mr. Sakamoto, a Nisei contractor, who built the driveway to Haleakala summit. Anyway, Mr. Shinsho Hanayama, who acted as a chaplain to the war criminals [in Japan], came to visit [Hawaii] after the war. Although I do not remember anything in detail, he told me his visits to various temples. I took him to Haleakala to watch the rising sun above clouds. As the sun rose moment by moment, he was deeply moved emotionally by the scene, and shouted "Banzai" raising his both hands...that I vividly remember even now. Anyhow, when missionaries and famous persons from Japan came to visit Maui, I took them to Haleakala mountain.

AH: Were there any Japanese style restaurants those days?

SM: Well, no...

AH: Did you take visitors to those restaurants?

SM: Although there was one hotel in Wailuku, we did not put our visitors up at the hotel. We had a plain guest room at our temple, and our guest stayed there. There were one or two restaurants in Wailuku, but they were rather poor. Therefore, we served our guests at our

home; which was adequate.

AH: Sounds like the best treatment.

SM: We could not do anything else. We served meals...dinner at our house. What I remembered most was cooking our meals. I was in Maui for about ten years after the war...from around 1950 to 1964. Most memorable thing during that period was that we shared chicken hekka with our guests for dinners. Chicken those days tasted much better than chicken in the market these days. Chicken hekka today is not tasty as in the old days. At the time, in Maui, chicken hekka was the only worthwhile dish to offer to our guests. Therefore, I had raised chickens behind our house. However, all the men had gone to work and would not have come back until four thirty to five o'clock, but we could not wait for those men to help prepare our meals. Since I could not kill chickens by myself, I asked one member lady, and she chopped chicken's head while chanting a prayer to Buddha, "Namamidabu, Namamidabu". I still remember it; which is one of my sweet memories. Well, I had no other ways to do, and we did it however reluctant we were. We just made do with it.

AH: Well, we have been sacrificing animals for our own living.

SM: Yes.

AH: Reverend, thank you very much for your precious recollections today. My husband is about the same age with you, but I have not had a chance to listen to his story of old times. Your story just gave me a general idea about that period. These days, people could live for a long time, and I hope you would take care of yourself to stay healthy for a long time so that you could keep telling us your valuable recollections. Please take care.

SM: Yes, thank you.

AH: Thank you very much for your good stories.

SM: Not at all. Sorry for my poor recollections.

(End of the interview with Rev. Shoten Matsubayashi)

English translation by JCCH volunteer Ari Uchida, Jan. 2014.