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‘The Flower of Culture’
By HO GOKU

As the Soka Gakkai youth embark on their summer sports meets, Shin’ichi Yamamoto reflects that the Gakkai must never become ‘rigid or confining, turning into a monolithic organization devoid of variety and diversity.’

In the sports meets planned and organized by the youth, Shin’ichi Yamamoto sensed their resolve to create a renaissance of humanism based on Buddhism. He sensed their spirit to infuse society with solidarity and shared purpose. And he anticipated that continuing and developing these annual sports events would give rise to a new, meaningful youth movement.

While serious efforts to spread Buddhism and earnest dedication to Buddhist study are important, it is equally vital that the Soka Gakkai not become rigid or confining, turning into a monolithic organization devoid of variety and diversity.

One reason that Shin’ichi supported the sports meets was that he wanted the young members to appreciate that the Soka Gakkai was like a big family, that the members were gathering for a sports outing in a cheerful, energetic, pleasant atmosphere.

That year’s first sports meet — or Festival of Youth as the meets had come to be known — was held in the Chubu region. On Aug. 12, 35,000 Chubu youth gathered for the event at the Mizuho Track and Field Stadium in Nagoya. The young men’s gymnastics team packed the field, arranging themselves to form the Chinese character for *tide*, and the young women’s dance team performed a special number for the audience. Their bright, spirited performances were sublime expressions of harmony and vitality.

Shin’ichi attended the meet, and when an adapted spoon relay began — in which two teams, red and white, raced to a goal while balancing basketballs on badminton rackets — he rushed in and joined the red team. With some help from Shin’ichi’s leg-power, his team far outdistanced the rival white team and won. Applause rocked the stadium.

On Aug. 24, Shin’ichi attended the Chugoku Sports Meet, and on the following day, he viewed the first Kansai Swim Meet. Then he attended the Kansai Sports Meet on Sept. 2. That day, sports meets were also being held in Hokkaido, Tohoku and Shikoku, all events that overflowed with the strength and energy of the young men and women of the Soka Gakkai.

On Sept. 4, the ground-breaking ceremony for the new Soka Gakkai Headquarters was held. The new facility was being built to replace the old one, which the Soka Gakkai had used as a Headquarters for nine years since its move from Nishi-Kanda to Shinanomachi in November 1953. Although Josei Toda had with considerable difficulty purchased the original building, an old Western-style structure, and had it remodeled, it only had a floor space of 7,300 square feet. Because of the Gakkai’s sudden growth, it soon became too small for large meetings.

There were already plans to rebuild the Headquarters during Mr. Toda’s lifetime, but he had always given priority to the construction of the Grand Lecture Hall at the head temple and to the building of branch temples throughout Japan. Shin’ichi had done the same, concentrating on the construction of the Grand Reception Hall, branch temples and finally local Soka Gakkai facilities.

The old Soka Gakkai Headquarters was far too small and cramped for an organization with close to 3 million member households. The building itself was very old and rickety, making it potentially hazardous for large numbers of members to gather there.

It was decided to purchase the adjoining land, tear down the old building, and put up a new, larger Headquarters in its place. A modern steel-and-concrete structure four stories high, with one story below ground, was planned. The lot on which it would be built measured about a third of an acre, of which the building would occupy 10,000 square feet.

The demolition of the old Headquarters began on Aug. 10 and was completed before the end of the month. The Headquarters offices moved to the nearby Seikyo Shimbun building for the duration of the construction, which was scheduled to last until the end of August 1963.

It was raining the morning of the ground-breaking, which got under way at 11:00. The ceremony site was enclosed with the traditional red-and-white-striped curtain used to mark such occasions. Some 200 people were gathered, including President Yamamoto, the directors, special guests and construction company representatives.

Facing the Gohonzon that had been set up, the participants joined in a ceremonial gongyo and chanted daimoku. This was followed by the ground-breaking and brief speeches by construction company representatives, Soka Gakkai General Director Koichi Harayama and several others, and, finally, Shin'ichi. After thanking everyone for their efforts, Shin'ichi shared his thoughts:

“This Headquarters is where the Soka Gakkai staff and members will work for the sake of the people. And it is the Soka Gakkai’s tradition that its leader, its president, work hardest of all. The spirit of our presidents has been to stand in the vanguard of our movement for kosen-rufu, in the vanguard of our work to lead people to genuine fulfillment and happiness, continuing to do so until the last moment of our lives.

“Since we have so much work to accomplish, our Headquarters must be practical and functional. I ask all the architects and builders on this project to make every effort to ensure that this Headquarters is convenient and easy to use for both our staff and members. A great many members will visit the Headquarters, so I ask that you pay the greatest attention to making the new building safe.

“This new Headquarters is scheduled to be completed around this time next year. Let me conclude today by saying that I look forward to seeing you all again at that time, when we will view and celebrate this wonderful new building.”

The new Headquarters would not compare in scale or grandeur with the Grand Reception Hall. Yet, to the Soka Gakkai members, it was a great source of joy and hope.

(To be continued)