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MASONRY IN JAPAN

Bro. Brian McKibbin,
SW Jerrabomberra Daylight Lodge No. 1001 UGLNSW
formerly of Sinim Lodge A.F. & A.M., Tokyo, Massachusetts Constitution

Beginning of Masonic Activities

There is no doubt that the spread of Freemasonry around the world was largely due to the enthusiasm and pertinacity of members of Military Lodges who carried with them the seeds of Masonry to countries where stationary Lodges were established and in many cases still flourish.

Thus was the beginning of Masonic activity in Japan, when in 1864 a detachment of the British 20th Regiment of Foot (Lancashire Fusiliers) arrived in Yokohama for garrison duty under the terms of a Treaty of Peace and Amity signed between Japan and the United States on 31 March 1854 at Kanagawa.

The Regiment brought with it Sphinx Lodge No 263 under the Grand Lodge of Ireland. Meetings held by this regimental Lodge led the Brethren of the foreign community to consider the formation of a local Lodge. Many of these Brethren had arrived in the newly laid-out town of Yokohama, since the ratification of the Treaty, from various port cities in China where several Lodges already had been established.

In addition to serving in Japan, the Regiment had also been stationed in India, China, South Africa and Mauritius. It arrived at Yokohama from Hong Kong but due initially to the lack of a suitable room, did not meet until 27 January 1865 to mark the first Masonic meeting in the country. The occasion was possible through a facility being made available by a T.W. Walker at 72 Main Street in Yokohama's foreign settlement.

From January 1865 to March 1866 Sphinx Lodge held 33 meetings and conferred 67 degrees, including the Master Mason degree on 24 military and civilian candidates, with several Masons from other Lodges becoming either joining or honorary members. There was an average of 22 members and two visitors present at each meeting.

On 28 March 1866 Sphinx Lodge met for the last time in Yokohama for the purpose of closing the Lodge prior to departure to Hong Kong. A vote of thanks was proposed to T.W. Walker for the use of his facility as a meeting room and there was a vote of thanks from the civilian members of Yokohama for the kind hospitality of Sphinx Lodge while in Japan (minutes, final meeting.)

Earlier, on 17 September 1865 a preliminary meeting of resident Freemasons decided to petition for a Charter under the Grand Lodge of England. The unanimously carried proposal was that it was desirable that a Masonic Lodge under the Constitution of the Grand Lodge of England be inaugurated in Yokohama.

A petition drawn up in the form provided in the Book of Constitution was sent to the Grand Master in England with a request that he grant dispensation to work until a warrant of Constitution be received from England.

On 26 June 1866 the first regular meeting of Yokohama Lodge, No 1092, E.C. was held. The charter, dated 30 January 1866, was read and the Lodge was duly consecrated by W. Bro. Cartwright, PPGM for Western India under the Scottish Constitution.

The seeds of Freemasonry were now sown in Japan.

Membership today

Since the formal beginning of Freemasonry in Japan in 1866 with the consecration of Yokohama Lodge, there are now 24 craft lodges. Eighteen are under the Grand Lodge of Japan; one under the Constitution of England; two of the Scottish Constitution, one, Massachusetts Constitution and two under the Philippines Constitution. York and Scottish bodies are also well established.

Membership varies from about 30 at Hokkaido No 17, in Northern Japan, to Okinawa Lodge 118, under the Philippines Constitution, with a membership of about 683 - a large membership by any standards, having reached this number during the US military administration, after the occupation. While the Ryukyu Archipelago, of which Okinawa is the largest island, has reverted to Japanese administration, the Lodge retains most of its US military members as at least non-active, but subscribing members.

Overall Masonic membership in Japan today fluctuates between 2,000 and 4,000 at any one time due to the fact that since its inception in Japan, membership has been mostly expatriates. While a great number are permanent residents, there are many businessmen and diplomats who become joining members during their posting periods. There are nearly 500 Japanese brethren who are members of lodges in Japan.

"Offshore meetings"

While it is acknowledged that the British 20th Regiment held the first Masonic meeting in Japan, offshore meetings were reported as early as 1853. These were said to have been US Commodore Matthew G. Perry's American Expeditionary Forces "Black" fleet in territorial waters of Japan. There is no authentic historical records to provide details. But Japanese history indicates that there were some meetings among Americans using Masonic symbols and implements.

A probable explanation of the supposed "Masonic meetings" on board Perry's ships as reported by uninformed visiting Japanese (who up to that time had more than 200 years of virtual isolation from the rest of the world) were probably some uniformed officers in the chart room where navigational instruments such as compasses, squares, rulers and maps would be observed. Also there was no evidence that a Lodge warrant or charter was in the possession of anyone on Perry's ships.

Early growth

Following the consecration of Yokohama Lodge, Otentosama Lodge No 1263 was formed by 12 members in Yokohama on 29 July 1869,

Next, Lodge Hyogo and Osaka No 498 was consecrated in Kobe under the Grand Lodge of Scotland and a second Scottish Lodge, Lodge Star in the East No 640 in Yokohama in 1879. Both these Lodges continue to flourish today along with the sole surviving English Lodge, Rising Sun Lodge No 1401, Kobe, consecrated in 1872.

Desiring a Warrant for a Royal Arch Chapter to be attached to Yokohama Lodge, the Brethren petitioned for a third English Lodge, after Yokohama and Hyogo and Osaka, and Nippon Lodge No 1344, Tokyo. It was consecrated on 27 May 1871, thus providing a third reigning Master for a Royal Arch Chapter principals chairs.

But it was not until 17 June 1875 that the Chapter could be consecrated, for each of the Principals in turn was removed, by transfer or death, and the Warrant each time had to be returned to Grand Chapter for alteration.

On 15 August 1874, a District Grand Lodge was opened at Yokohama under a patent dated 6 June 1873, granted by the United Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of England.

Rising Sun Chapter, Kobe, was consecrated in 1902 and Otentosama Chapter, Yokohama, in 1912. Tokyo Chapter, attached to Tokyo Lodge No 2015, followed on 5 January 1924. The consecration was in the Corinthian Hall, Kobe, for all Tokyo and Yokohama lay in ruins as a result of the Great Earthquake of 1 September 1923.

The earthquake

The earthquake devastated Tokyo and Yokohama and was described as the worst natural calamity in history. The earthquake, aftershocks, tidal waves, landslides and fires, killed more than 140,000 people (Buisch, pp 51, 147). The Yokohama Masonic Building was destroyed (one of the first all-stone structures in Japan, which had withstood the 1870 earthquake) and several resident Masons had died.

Not even the incendiary raids of March 1945 or the fires started by the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki equalled the devastation of the earthquake.

Flames over parts of Tokyo reached 300 feet in height and large patches of burning material were swept five miles into the air in the uplift caused by the intense heat.

Lodges in Yokohama and Tokyo lost practically everything and in Kobe the true spirit of a mason's charity was clearly evident. Brethren opened their houses and welcomed refugees and their families from the north, clothed them, fed them and gave them funds and lodgings.

Sixty-nine Masons attended a specially convened Masonic Earthquake Relief Fund meeting at the Corinthian Hall, Kobe, on 15 September chaired by the Deputy Grand Master G.H. Whymark. The fund was subscribed to by all Masonic groups. The Earthquake Fund communicated with the Grand Lodges of England and Scotland and with several Grand Lodges in the US to appeal for relief funds. It also compiled a list of all deceased, missing and distressed Masons and families so prompt relief could be supplied.

As a result of fund raising Tokyo Lodge was able to return to Tokyo one month after the earthquake and met at the San Yen Tei Restaurant, but the Yokohama Lodges continued to meet in Kobe. It was not until August 1924 when the manager of the American Trading Company made a room available, that the Yokohama Lodges could return.

In 1925, E.W. Frazer rebuilt a warehouse and designed the second floor for Masonic meetings. Meanwhile, a new site was purchased in Yokohama for 30,000 yen and the Grand Lodge of England provided 87,750 yen for a new Masonic Hall with the stipulation that the shareholders be restricted to English Masonic bodies (Haffner, p 186).

The new building was constructed of reinforced concrete and built in an Egyptian style with acanthus capitals on the porch and concave cornices. The Lodge room was described as spacious, 50 feet long and 24 feet wide. The anteroom afforded an ideal location for the Tyler and an excellent provision of rooms for examinations, dressing, robing, storage of regalia and paraphernalia and a large dining room with kitchen and pantry attached (Catto, p14). It was dedicated by District Grand Master S.E. Unite on 12 February 1927 and Yokohama Lodge held the first meeting there on 16 February (Haffner, p 188).

Attacks on Craft

During the 1920s and 1930s, anti-Masonic material began to appear in Japanese language newspapers, magazines and books, written by university professors and military officers receiving guidance from Professor Tsuyanosuke Higuchi of the Army Staff College and Lieutenant General Nobutaku Shioten.

The first documented attack against Freemasonry was in June 1921, when Jiro Imai, Assistant Professor of the Literature Department of Tokyo University, published "On the Worldwide Secret Society" (Peck, p 103). When Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany in 1936 and later with Fascist Italy, much of their anti-Masonic and anti-Semitic material was translated and disseminated in Japan.

The Masonic Lodges in Japan continued meeting under an agreement with the authorities that fraternal activities would be conducted without ostentation, public display or advertisement. Tokyo Lodge No 2015, which did not have a regular place to meet and used private dining rooms at various restaurants, was informed by the management of one restaurant that they could not hold their meetings there while wearing Masonic regalia.

In 1938, the Japanese Government ordered the Rotary Club to be dissolved because it was "*an agent of Freemasonry*". The Boy Scouts of Japan was ordered disbanded because in the eyes of the anti-Masonic militants, the Scout pledge was the origin of the Masonic obligation. Typical of the propaganda was this extract from the April 1938 Japanese Chronicle:

"The secret league of Freemasons is an object of world-wide suspicion, and together with the KKK is struggling at the back of the world revolution...it is an object of fear to the human race...a mystic secret guild with centres in Tokyo, Yokohama and Kobe...many Japanese and Chinese are said to have joined lately which has made the authorities very nervous...it is a Jewish conspiracy...it should be feared as the Russian Revolution originated from it.in England the authorities thought it a danger and tried hard to check it...the headquarters of the Freemasons are in Moscow...it is said they are connected with the Russian Third International.many American Jews are feared to be among the Freemasons in Japan..."(Haffner, pp 206-207).

World War II

After the outbreak of World War II in Europe, conditions deteriorated rapidly between the authorities and Masons in Japan (Johnston, pp29). Several prominent foreign businessmen, including Masons, were taken into custody for interrogation and held for several weeks.

In 1940 the English Lodges in Kobe went into recess, Lodge Hiogo and Osaka No 498 did not meet after 1 May 1941, and when US and British assets were frozen, many of the foreign residents departed Japan. At the annual meeting of the District Grand Lodge of Japan, held at Yokohama on 6 April 1940, it was noted that HRH and the Duke of Kent had been installed as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England with 12,000 Masons in attendance. There was no statement regarding the problems facing the Lodges in Japan, only a comment that English relations with the Scottish Lodges continued to be most cordial.

With the approach of the Pearl Harbour attack, Masonic harassment increased and Otentosama Lodge No 1263 had its last meeting on 2 July 1940. Lodge Star in the East No 640 continued to meet and had scheduled a meeting on 9 December 1941, the day after the Pacific War began (Japan time). Although the authorities confiscated the Lodge charter, the Lodge secretary, C. Rodriguez-Jimenez, who was the Consul-General for Venezuela, was able to enclose the Lodge minute book with his official papers. The Lodge buildings at Yokohama and Kobe were sealed and existing records and regalia seized.

During the war several exhibitions of the confiscated material were exhibited at department stores in Tokyo and Yokohama similar to the practices in Germany and Italy.

Despite Japan's rapid modernisation, its traditional attitudes or isolationism, insularism and distrust of foreigners, combined with militarism and World War II, were negative factors which precluded the acceptance of Freemasonry. (Johnston pp 30)

Occupation of Japan - Bro Gen. Douglas MacArthur

Japan officially surrendered on 2 September 1945. In a radio broadcast announcing Japan's defeat, Emperor Hirohito told his people they must endure the unendurable that he was not divine and that the Japanese spirit must adjust to defeat and occupation.

But this was not to be an occupation of the traditional kind, for the US Government, working through the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers in Japan, Bro General Douglas MacArthur, set itself the task of creating a new Japan.

Bro MacArthur was a Philippine Mason and many of the senior echelons of the military powers occupying Japan were also Masons, carrying with the occupation the ideals of American democracy, fair dealing and charitable motives that are capable of crossing racial barriers and appealing to the oriental mind.

MacArthur expounded on the necessity of spreading Masonic principles throughout Japan and thus reforming the ideology of the Japanese people (Haffner, p 303). He saw Freemasonry as one of the means at his disposal to enable Japan to break from the past.

In a letter dated 29 July 1949, to his Scottish rite in Tokyo, MacArthur said: *"In the progressive revival of the work of the Masonic bodies in Japan since the surrender has been found one of the strong spiritual bulwarks supporting the occupation. For, from these immutable precepts common to Christianity, to Democracy and to Freemasonry has emerged the philosophy underlying occupation policy."*

The MacArthur convictions became the foundation of occupation policy and in the seven years to 28 April 1952 when the occupation came to an end a new Japan had emerged strongly influenced, knowingly or otherwise, by Masonic principles.

Post-war revival

Immediately following the cease fire in 1945, craft members of the armed forces (mainly Americans) formed a club, the Tokyo Bay Masonic Club. The club set about revival of Masonry in Japan. Many of the members of Lodge Star in the East No 640 SC joined and shortly afterwards, four boxes containing records of English and Scottish lodges were found. Amongst the contents was the charter of Star in the East.

Bro General Eichelberger, Commanding Officer of the 8th US Army, had the old Tokyo temple restored and a plaque was installed to commemorate the restoration. Star of the East resumed labour on 9 April 1946 and from then on had more work than it could cope with, even holding four meetings a month.

In searches for pre-war Masonic items, a magnificent clock from the Tokyo temple was found in the office of the Yokohama Chief of Police. It was identified by a small engraved brass plate which the late "Hiram" Miyakawa, the temple caretaker, had removed and attached to a less noticeable place. Miyakawa San, whose father had preceded him in his duties, also saved the records and jewels. The old organ was found in the home of the police sergeant who had been in charge of masonic prosecutions during the war.

Amongst the host of stories about the reinstatement of former lodges in Japan, the loss during the war of records and regalia and the destruction through bombings and fires of masonic buildings, is one concerning the loss of the warrant of Rising Sun Lodge No 1401. The Australian Commander of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces, Bro Colonel Lord, assisted a lodge member Bro A. N. Petersen, to contact the Grand Lodge of England to obtain a duplicate warrant to enable the lodge to re-start.

On 5 February 1946 Grand Lodge granted a warrant of confirmation, which was received through BCOF. With the assistance of Australian and American brethren of the occupation forces, and those brethren who had returned to Japan after the war, Rising Sun Lodge was resuscitated in 1947. Bro Petersen became the first post-war master and remained one of its guiding lights until he retired from Japan in 1965.

Nazi room

When Kobe was bombed by the Americans on 5 June 1945, the Corinthian Hall was destroyed. The relics of the NE corner had disappeared by the time a digging expedition could be organised after the surrender. All other property had been disposed of during the war by the enemy property custodian.

After the release of a member, Bro Levy from jail, he immediately concerned himself with the reestablishment of the Kobe Lodge. Bro Otis W. Rhodes, US Consul, reentered Japan with the occupation forces and was able to restore the charter of Lodge Hiogo and Osaka No 498 SC. Bro Levy then sought an interview with Bro General MacArthur. He was referred to General Eichelberger who gave him a letter of procurement to the Military Governor in Kobe for the Lodge to use the former German Club, Concordia, with the words: "You will have the Nazi Room in Kobe for your Lodge meetings." On 24 March 1946, the Kobe Base Masonic Club came into being.

This in due course led to the reinstatement of meetings under the banner of Lodge Hiogo & Osaka and later by Rising Sun Lodge.

Failure of English Masonry

The war and the surrender produced many changes in regard to Masonry, some good, some unfortunate. Amongst the unfortunate results, the near extinction of English Masonry was the most notable. Nine lodges went out of existence as well as three lodges of instruction. This left Rising Sun Lodge as the sole survivor of the institutions of the English Constitution. Why this English Masonic disaster in Kanto (the area around Tokyo and Yokohama) should have occurred is something of a mystery. There were far more English people in Kanto in the immediate post-war period than there were in Kansai (the area around Kobe and Osaka).

One explanation offered by Bro W. Lackie in his History of Rising Sun Lodge was that the brethren who would have been eminently capable of reorganising English Masonry in Kanto were engaged in duties in connection with the UK Liaison Mission and the reconstruction of their firms that were so onerous that they had no time for other activities. However, in contrast, both Scottish lodges in Japan were reactivated.

Another possible explanation is that the top echelons of the military powers occupying Japan were Masons of the Philippine Constitution, or of American jurisdictions which worked a ritual similar to that of the Philippines, thus the rapid spread of the Filipino craft. During the period 1947 to 1957, 17 lodges in Japan were issued either a Charter, or a Dispensation, by the M.W. Grand Lodge of the Philippines.

Grand Lodge of Japan

However, the situation again changed when on 16 March 1958 the Grand Lodge of Japan came into being. For some years members of the Philippine Lodges in Japan had informally considered the idea of an independent Grand Lodge of Japan.

Also the increasing membership of Japanese and American Masons, the expanding number of Lodges being established in Japan, the translation of the Masonic Degree rituals into the Japanese language, realisation that 50 per cent of the Japan lodges' annual income was being sent to the Grand Lodge of the Philippines in the form of per-capita fees and various assessments and awareness of the formation of the independent Grand Lodge of China which had evolved from the District Grand Lodge for China under the Grand Lodge of the Philippines, all created impetus among Japan Masons for independence.

An overwhelming vote for independence by Japan lodges was duly accepted by the Grand Lodge of the Philippines although it meant a 25 per cent loss of its membership and pre-capita income.

First Japanese initiates

While a number of Japanese became Masons during residency in other countries in pre-war years, a significant date for Masonry in Japan was 6 January 1950 when at Tokyo Masonic Lodge for the first time in Japan, Japanese men were admitted to Freemasonry. That evening five Japanese, including the speaker of House of Councillors, Naotake Sato, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Etsujiro Takahashi, the Editor of The Nippon Times, Kimpei Sheba, the paper's city editor, Tamotsu Murayama and Etsujiro Uehara, received the first degree. Congratulatory messages were sent from Generals MacArthur, Almond and Walker, and the Philippine Grand Master, Esteban Munarriz.

But the first step to the initiation of Japanese nationals in Japan was not accomplished without some difficulty. In a report on the historical background of Freemasonry in Japan to the Grand Lodge of the Philippines by Bro Tamotsu Murayama, the first Japanese national to be raised in Japan, said:

"Some American Masons strongly opposed it on the ground of religious issues. The arguments were that Japanese candidates must be Christians...I learned that Mr (sic) John Cole in Washington drew the final conclusion that the holy Bible should be used in the place of all other sacred scriptures in taking the obligation in as much as the Holy Bible is the great light of F.M. and a guiding light for all human creatures."

However, it should be noted that Cole's decision was contrary to the spirit of the Craft as expressed by the jurisdictions of the British Isles. He would no doubt be interested to hear of a Singapore lodge, or of the Grand Lodge of India, where six different VSLs are displayed together, being those of all faiths represented by members of the lodge or Grand Lodge.

Why Cole's decision had any effect on the working of Philippine lodges in Japan is not clear. But its blinkered insensitivity marred the otherwise happy event of the opening of the portals of the Craft to Japanese nationals.

It was 16 years before this decision was reviewed. In the *Quarterly* of August 1966 published by the Grand Lodge of Japan is a brief statement headed "Alter (sic) Bible": This Grand Lodge authorises our Constituent Lodges to Obligate Candidates on the Bible (sic) of any qualified Faith of their choice which represents to them, their way of paying homage to The Supreme Being.

Imperial Naval Officers club

At first, Tokyo Masonic Lodge met at the Tokyo Hotel and Kaijo Building, then in an effort to have permanent meeting location, it went into negotiations with the Japanese Government to acquire in 1950 the Suikosha facility, the former Imperial Naval Officers Club, consisting of 105,972 square feet of land and a three-storey ferroconcrete building which escaped damage during the bombing raids.

The cost was \$US200,000 which seemed a gigantic sum at the time. The ownership was disputed by the post-war Japanese Navy in 1966, but the Tokyo District Court upheld the rights of the Tokyo Masonic Association, Zaidan Hojin.

Impressive Masonic Centre

In the late 1970s the building was demolished and on the site now stands one of the most impressive Masonic centres in the world. It was dedicated in 1981.

Known as the Tokyo Masonic Building, it is operated by the Tokyo Masonic Association, a non-profit charitable foundation, and is the centre for Masonic activities in the Tokyo area. The handsome glass and stone building comprises two ritual halls dedicated to the work of the Scottish Rite and Blue Lodges.

In addition to these bodies, the York Rite, Shrine, Demolay, Eastern Star and Rainbow Girls have equal access to the facilities. Each Ritual Hall is large enough to seat 125 people comfortably and there are dining and meeting areas than can accommodate 100 persons.

On the first basement level are offices for each body that has requirements for a small space, while on the second floor is the executive conference room which was exactly reproduced from the original Japanese building using many of the original artifacts.

The beautiful Scottish Rite Hall and Blue Lodge Hall were designed and crafted by dedicated professional Masons who spent more than three years studying such edifices around the world.

The Tokyo Masonic Building is a monument to the impressive growth of Masonry in Japan which survived persecution, a devastating earthquake and war since its beginning 130 years ago to the present day world-wide recognition of the Grand Lodge of Grand Lodge.

Sinim Lodge - a personal experience

Post-war Masonry in Japan was well and truly established when I arrived in Tokyo in 1964 as a correspondent for Reuters News Agency.

Determined to continue my Masonic career (I was initiated in Commercial 39, SA Constitution (1959), passed in Lodge Brotherhood 872, NSW Constitution (1959) and raised in Lodge Literature 500 NSW Constitution (1960) and had been an active visitor to US Craft Lodges during a 3 1/2 year posting in North America before arriving in Japan) I became a joining member of an American Lodge in Japan, Sinim Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of the Commonwealth of

Massachusetts. I retained membership for some time after my final departure from Japan in 1980 and then called-off due to the high US dollar cost of retaining membership.

Sinim Lodge was consecrated on 2 December 1903 in Shanghai, China, and by special dispensation it transferred to Tokyo in 1952. Sinim operated in Shanghai until the invasion of China by the Japanese. Its name came from the 49th Chapter of the Book of Isaiah and is generally understood to signify China, or the land of silk.

The lodge went into darkness for a period after the Japanese invasion but later resumed work. The next closure of the Lodge was infinitely more drastic. The communist takeover of Shanghai in 1949 caused the ejection of all things and institutions not to the liking of the new government.

Out from the shores of China went commerce, industry, customs and people that did not conform to the communist dictates. Brethren of Sinim were thus scattered by force of circumstances to various places of the world and some to Hong Kong where the original charter and the safe keeping of the Lodge proper was restored to those brethren who reached Hong Kong. Most other documents remained in China or were destroyed.

In 1951 several Massachusetts Masons living in Tokyo whose Lodges had been in China met and started a club with the objective of transferring one of the Massachusetts Lodges to Tokyo. Sinim was the Lodge of choice and on 16 September 1952 more than 350 persons attended an open installation of officers at the Tokyo Masonic Building and banquet at the American Club.

The Lodge Secretary wrote that *"there was never before an open installation ceremonial or more sumptuous Masonic Party in Japan (History, Sinim Lodge)"*.

The opportunity for me to work with such dedicated Masons, in particular with some of the old China hands who had been through so much and who had lost practically everything except their Lodge, was a rare privilege.

A lasting impression which I brought back to Australia was that of the dozens of young GI's who regularly flew into Tokyo on a week's rest and recreation leave from Vietnam to be initiated, passed and raised in Tokyo lodges.

I asked one young soldier what induced him to want to take the step, he replied: "Well, Sir, I'm with an outfit in which a lot of the guys wear what I didn't know then, but I know now to be Masonic rings and badges. Before I knew that though, I was just impressed by them as being good men and I wanted to be just like them. Well, here I go. I hope I make it."

I am sure he did.

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