

Our Global Community

Third in a Series of Six Articles • Linda Grier Pulliam

The Asian Camp *Connection*

Mongolia — conjuring visions of Genghis Khan and his horsemen conquering the Eurasian empire — is not a likely locale for a gathering of camp leaders eight centuries later. But the inaugural meeting of the Asian Camping Fellowship in July 2004, found over seventy camp leaders from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Mongolia, Japan, and Australia gathered at Nairamdal International Children's Centre to develop their vision of creating a better world for children through camping.



Recollections of Sixty Years of Japanese Camping

Sachiko (Sako) Tanaka's earliest memories of camp were of hard labor, hunger, bullying, and deprivation. As an eight-year-old, she was evacuated from Tokyo during the final year of World War II and placed at an inn in Nagano with other children from her school. The children had little to eat and worked in the nearby forest, moving stones and trees as a part of the war effort. During that year, children left the camp only to go to Tokyo for funerals of their parents. These memories contributed to a national sentiment that there should be no more wars.

Although it was a sad chapter in her early life, Sako soon learned the joy of a real camp. When she returned to Tokyo two days after the end of the war, all of the public schools were closed, but her mother was able to arrange her enrollment in a progressive private school — so progressive that the teachers felt that summer camp should be a part of the school's curriculum. There, Sako experienced the positive aspects of camp which has led to a lifetime love of the outdoors. She became involved with the Tokyo YWCA and worked at Camp Nojiri for the next half century as a counselor, housekeeper, kitchen helper, and later taught boating, camp craft, and singing — still returning each year to help with staff training. After graduating from Tsuda College, she studied at UCLA — the first Japanese to receive a MS degree in recreation and outdoor education — and later as a Ph.D. candidate in psychological and leisure counseling.

Sako has recently retired from Tsuda College after thirty-two years as a professor of recreation and outdoor education, but she has not slowed her pace. As one of the founders of the International Camping Fellowship, she enjoys traveling around the world, attending the American Camp Association Conference nearly every year, the Asian Camping Fellowship organizational meeting in Mongolia, ICF Steering Committee meetings, and the UniCurl Association in Sweden, where she was recently elected president of the organization. She is also a board member of the Youth Hostel Association and the National Recreation Association of Japan. She laughingly calls herself “the grandma of non-political organizations” and firmly believes that camping is a path to world peace.

hundred. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) of the HKSAR Government subvents twenty-two residential camps and three water sports centers. Other camps are operated by the Girl Guides, Scout Association, YWCA, YMCA, Caritas, religious organizations, and other social services agencies. Other water sports centers are operated by national sports associations, nongovernment organizations, and private organizations.

The temperate climate and ease of transportation allow most camps to operate year round, with special programs during school holidays. In most of the camps, three and five-day outdoor education programs for schools are subsidized and licensed by the Education and Manpower Bureau and recognized as a regular part of the curriculum. To provide quality camp services to the general public, the LCSD serves in an advisory role to offer appropriate and constructive advice to the camps. Since 1998, camp operators have also been required to obtain licenses from the Home Affairs Department under the Hotel and Guesthouse Accommodation Ordinance aiming at reaching statutory standards in building and fire safety.

Anthony Po of Camp Caritas describes the challenges facing directors as being essentially the same as those facing other local service industries — increasing competition, shortage of resources and revenue, and changing lifestyles of the Chinese peo-

ple. Risk management has evolved as a major concern after some serious camp accidents, and directors are devoting greater attention to staff qualifications, insurance, education, equipment inspection, food hygiene, and sewage discharge.

The newly established Camping Association of Hong Kong was founded with the goals of providing training opportunities and enhancing the image of camping to the public. In celebration of the new organization on August 1, 2002, five thousand campers throughout the country were presented with traditional Chinese red eggs to symbolize good fortune for the “new-born baby.” As campers hung their written wishes on a “wishing tree,” the theme song of the International Camping Fellowship, “As the Butterfly Flies,” was played to spread the messages of protecting the natural environment and greater understanding among all people.

Building Peace Together Through Camping

Before returning to their homes in Japan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Australia, the members of the newly-formed Asian Camping Fellowship assembled to join with the five hundred departing summer campers for their closing ceremony. As if perfectly orchestrated, the moon rose between two distant hills, framing the silhouettes of three Mongolian horsemen galloping across the steppes to ignite the huge bonfire. During

the ensuing silence, each of the camp leaders paused to contemplate the significance of the camping movement throughout Asia and around the world. While there is tremendous variation in the settings, activities, facilities, and philosophies among the camps in Asia, the motto of Nairamdal—“Building Peace Together”— will continue to remind the Asian Camping Fellowship of their role in this effort. ■

Photos: Courtesy of Shin Takahashi.

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