Japan’s “A50 Caravan” Visits Bloomington to Express Gratitude

The San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951 formally ended World War II in the Pacific and signaled the end of the U.S. occupation of Japan. Since its reentry that year into the world community, Japan’s remarkable growth and development has made it one of the world’s leading democracies, with the second largest economy. The United States has played a critical role in that reconstruction effort.

“The prosperity of postwar Japan owes an incalculable debt to the United States,” says Mr. Hirotsugu Iikubo, chair and CEO of Decision Systems, Inc., and founder of the private initiative known as the “A50 Caravan.” Its primary purpose is to say “thank you” to the United States for its friendship and cooperation by visiting 31 U.S. cities during September to commemorate the past 50 years and to focus on common values that will continue to bind U.S.-Japan relations. In the designation “A50,” “A” stands for Appreciation and America, and “50” for the fiftieth anniversary, the 50 states of America, and 50 years of hope for the future. The A50 Caravan is sponsored by the National Association of Japan-America Societies and the Japan Centers for International Exchange in Tokyo and the United States.

The A50 Caravan comprises 15 teams of 3 Japanese participants each who come from all walks of life—from students to diplomats, business leaders to academics. The A50 team that visited Indiana University Bloomington on September 13 was led by its founder, Mr. Iikubo. He is a 1957 alumnus of DePauw University and member of its Board of Trustees who also has been, since 1993, an honorary ambassador to Japan of the State of Indiana. He was accompanied by Mr. Masayuki Tadokoro, a professor of international relations at the National Defense Academy, and Ms. Tomomi Sukagawa, an intern at the Deutsche Bank Global Investment Banking Division in Tokyo.

During their visit to the Bloomington campus, the team was welcomed at the Lilly Library by George Wilson, director of IUB’s East Asian Studies Center (EASC), and Breon Mitchell, director of the Lilly Library. A videotape produced by the A50 Caravan tracing the history of Japan’s postwar recovery was presented to EASC. In the main gallery of the library was an exhibition, 400 Years of Miniature Books, which included what is said to be the world’s earliest example of printing on paper, a Japanese wooden block print dating from about 770 A.D. The commemoration ceremony that followed included a gift of Japanese books presented to Suzanne Thorin, dean of IU Libraries. The luncheon that followed, presided over by Patrick O’Meara, dean for International Programs, also included guests Theresa Kulczak of the Japan-America Society of Indiana; Richard Rubinger, chair of East Asian Languages and Cultures; Jacques Fuqua, assistant director of EALC; Melanie Castillo-Cullather, director of the Asian Culture Center; and Kenneth Rogers, associate dean and director of International Services, among others.

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