

## Japanese Participation in the International Congress of the Deaf in 1911

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**Abstract:** Deaf-mutes in Europe often interact with each other and even hold meetings. Two Japanese were recorded to have attended such meetings in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Japanese government sent a delegate to one of them considering it as one of the International Congresses on Education for the Deaf (ICED), which began in 1878. There were such confusions about the two types of congresses not only in Japan but also in Europe. More careful research to determine the facts is needed.

**Keywords:** international congress, deaf-mutes, Japanese

### 1. Introduction

In accordance with the progress of deaf education, deaf adults are aware of their status. It is natural that associations for the deaf are organized regionally and nationally. In Europe, the deaf-mutes often interacted with each other beyond national borders and held meetings almost annually in the late 19th century.

Richard Brill deleted the congress in Paris in 1889 from the list of the International Congress of Education for the Deaf (ICED) provided by Otto Kroenelt, the chairman of the congress in Hamburg in 1980, saying that it was actually convened by the International Congress of Deaf-Mutes [1].

Very little information about the International Congress of Deaf-Mutes is available in Japan, however, some historical materials in Japan reveal some important facts.

### 2. International Congresses of Deaf-Mutes appeared in Japanese articles

#### 2.1 Articles in the Roua Nenkan

“Roua Nenkan” or “Annals of the Deaf” is a 947-page work that was published by Roua Geppousha and was edited by Toshifumi Fujimoto, chair of the Federation of the Deaf in Japan in 1935. In spite of its name, the annal(s) was published only once. Several articles from abroad were translated by Toyoo Fujii, a teacher at the Osaka City School for the Deaf. He was skilled in languages and introduced diverse information to Japan [2].

Fujii compiled a detailed report about the associations of the deaf in each country and region from p.617 to p.677 of the Roua Nenkan.

He also reported about the International Congress of Deaf-Mutes held in Rome in 1911. It was eventually proved to be a copy of the report in the official gazette published in issue no. 8593 on February 14, 1912. The original writer was Bumppei Ishikawa, a young teacher from the Tokyo School for the Deaf.

Fujii also wrote about the fourth and fifth congresses in Liege in 1920 and 1930. Fourth and fifth meant the numbers of the congresses within Liege, not internetind. The fourth congress was held to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> foundation of the Deaf-Mutes Society of Liege. It was the oldest and steadiest association for the deaf in Europe. The association decided to hold such meetings every 10 year, and as a matter of fact, they held the fifth congress

in 1930 when an international exhibition was organized in Liege. Between the two congresses in Liege, one International Congress of the Deaf was held in Prague in 1928. Fujii also wrote a detailed report on the fourth congress (4e Congrès International des Sourds-Muets) in Paris in July 1931 which he himself attended [3]. There was no mention of the first, second and third congresses.

In this congress in Paris, sign language became popular as it made communication with each other easy. To make it a more useful material, research and development of an international sign language was proposed.

## 2.2 The invitation letter

In June 1911, principal Konishi of the Tokyo School for the Deaf received a letter announcing that the International Meeting of the Deaf will be held in Rome, Italy in late August. The letter written in French was originally sent from the Embassy of Italy in Tokyo to the Minister of Foreign Affairs on June 5 with a brochure of the program written in Italian (Fig.1)[4]. It was forwarded to the Ministry of Education with a request to send an appropriate person in this field. The Ministry of Education replied on June 28, saying they would send Bumpei Ishikawa, who was studying abroad in Germany at that time.

The letters exchanged between the two ministries, as well as the original invitation letter, and the brochure can be found on the Internet. [5]

The ICEO was held along with the exposition in Italy in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of its founding. The brochure said that similar preceding congresses were held in Chicago in 1893, Geneva in 1896, Paris in 1900, Liege in 1905, and Munich in 1908.

According to Fay, the 5th and 6th ICED were held in Paris in 1900 and Liege in 1905. Each congress was held in two parts: one part for the deaf and one part for those who could hear. Therefore the part of the deaf was listed as the International Congress for the Deaf by the host organization in Italy. [6]

## 2.3 The report by Bumpei.

Bumpei made a detailed report of the conference in the government official gazette (Kanpo) No.8593 on February 14, 1912 as follows[7]:

Dates: August 22-24, 1911

Venue: Conference room at St. Angelo Castle

Participants: Those concerned with education for deaf-mutes from Italy and other countries  
(including their family members)

Agenda items

- (1) Compulsory education for the deaf-mutes
- (2) Life situation of the deaf-mutes and the art of using knowledge in business, and other vocations
- (3) Legal status of the deaf-mutes
- (4) Protection and support for the deaf-mutes
- (5) Physiological psychology of the deaf-mutes

## 2.4 Opening ceremony on August 22

In his opening speech, President Brunialti mentioned Milan Chicago, Geneva, Paris, Liege, and Munich as the similar congresses. There were 500 attendees including delegates from France, Holland, Japan, Spain, Hungary, Cuba, Paraguay, Uruguay, Russia, and San Marino. They were all given opportunities to express their greetings. A delegate from Spain conveyed greetings from Madrid. A delegate from Hungary greeted the others in Hungarian, French, and Italian. A delegate from Holland conveyed greetings in French. The Japanese attendee, Bumpei Ishikawa, spoke mainly in English and partly in Italian. A deaf government official gave a speech both orally and

using signs. Because his speech could be understood by both deaf people and those who could hear, he was given a rousing applause.

All of the speeches by the guests were oral, but most of the audience was deaf. A professor served as a sign language interpreter so that the deaf people from all the participating countries could understand what was being said.

He reported the characteristics of the deaf there as skillful in speech and lip reading. They used signs among themselves. In this country, people who were able to hear use gestures while talking, which could not be recognized by deaf people at first glance.

Bumpei reported every speech and discussion in detail, mentioning the names of the people, not in Roman letters but in Japanese katakana [7].

### 3. Bumpei Ishikawa and his family

#### 3.1 Bumpei's mission of studying abroad

The principal Konishi required Bumpei to find answers to the following questions [8]:

- (1) After the ban on sign language in 1880, what problems have deaf persons in Germany and France experienced? Do the teachers claim that sign language and finger spelling are more convenient?
- (2) Don't the deaf graduates use any form of sign language? Do they only communicate with each other orally or in written language?
- (3) In cases where sign languages are used, are they standardized across the nation and do they have some printed material of the signs?
- (4) Is it easy or difficult for the graduates to find jobs? What are the main jobs they choose (males/females)?
- (5) Do the graduates have a supportive union? If so, how does it work?
- (6) Who founded the school? Was it established by the nation, state, county, or town authorities? How much of the expenses do they bear?
- (7) Is there a compulsory education? If so, how long does it last?
- (8) Is it possible to buy the books written by Heinicke, De l'Epee and other educators? If so, get photos of them.
- (9) What are the textbooks and materials are being used in deaf education?
- (10) What are the organizations for deaf education and conferences for teachers or principals that exist?
- (11) What preparations are being made for the 100th anniversary of the birth of De l'Epee?[12]

#### 3.2 The timeline of the Ishikawa family and the principal Nobuhachi

In 1875, Nobuhachi Konishi entered the Tokyo Normal School (one of the origins of the University of Tsukuba). After graduation he taught at a high school, a women's high school, became a researcher at a women's higher normal school (now Ochanomizu University), and studied about infant teaching both at home and abroad.

In 1879, Kuraji Ishikawa (1859-1944) graduated from a normal school, and became a teacher at an elementary school in Chiba Prefecture.

In 1882, Bumpei Ishikawa was born in Chiba Prefecture.

In 1886, when the Kunmouain began to be directed by the Ministry of Education, Konishi became its director. He invited Kuraji to teach at Kunmouain, which later became the Tokyo School for the Deaf and the Blind. His wife Setsu accompanied him as an instructor of sewing and a matron of the dorm. Actually Konishi and Kuraji were the only two teachers to teach subjects, while special skills including art, massage and instrument playing were taught by professionals. They took care of 14 blind students and 49 deaf-mute students.

In 1890, Kuraji invented six-dot braille alphabets for the Japanese blind. He was called "Father of Braille" for his invention of the six-dot Japanese braille.

In 1891, a new school building was completed and the school moved to Sashigaya in Koishikawa-ward. The family of principal Konishi and the family of Ishikawa lived next door to each other within the school campus. Their houses were divided only by a wall.

In 1896, Konishi went abroad to study teaching for the blind and deaf-mutes, as well as for the mentally challenged orphans, and the poor. During his time in America, England and Germany for a year and a half, Kuraji served as a temporary principal.

In September 1898, Konishi returned. Dr. Alexander Graham Bell, whom Konishi had met in Chicago, was invited to give a lecture on education of the deaf-mutes. Shuji Izawa, who had learned visible speech from Dr.A.G.Bell and his father, served as an interpreter.

In 1901, Kuraji was decorated for inventing Japanese braille, which means he was granted annuity.

In March 1909, Sano, the wife of Kuraji, quit her job after 24 years of service. In June, their son Bumpei, a graduate of the Tokyo Higher Normal School, came from the Kanagawa Normal School to the Tokyo School of the Blind and the Deaf.

In 1910, the school was divided into the Tokyo School for the Deaf and the Tokyo School for the Blind. Kuraji chose to be a teacher for the deaf. On October 12, Bumpei left Yokohama for Marseilles and travelled through Europe and America for more than three years.

In 1911, the International Congress of Deaf-Mutes was held in Rome.

In 1912, the Tokyo School celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of De l'Epee.

In January 1913, Bumpei returned to Japan.

In 1925, Konishi retired as principal because of illness.

In 1927, Kuraji retired from teaching.

In 1931, Bumpei suddenly passed away from pneumonia :he was survived by his parents.

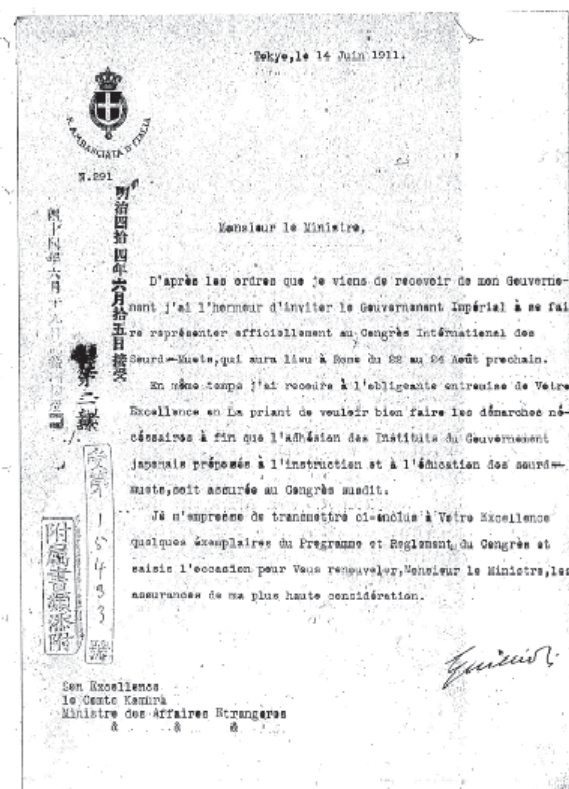


Fig. 1. An Invitation letter

回次	開催地	會期	委員	備考
	リウイジエ	明治三十二年	上野實業学校校長 佐竹岩造	
	リウイジエ	明治三十四年	下 長多加	
	羅馬	明治四十四年	東京高等師範学校校長 石川久平	
外				
務				
省				

○龍年啞救恤萬國會議一件  
(三二一七)

Fig. 2. A document of Ministry of Education

#### 4. Position of the two congresses by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan

##### 4.1 Three congresses in a line

The document (Fig.2) shows that the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered three conferences as a set [11]. The title shows one International Congress on Salvation of Deaf-Mutes: (聾啞救恤万国會議一件) The first line shows the venues: Liege (リエージュ), Colorado Springs (コロラド、スプリング), and Rome (羅馬). The next line shows the year: 1895 (明治二十八年), 1910 (明治四十三年), and 1911 (明治四十四年). The third line shows the status and name of the delegate: a professor of the Tokyo Higher Normal School, an international student sent by the Ministry of Education, OTOTAKE, Iwazo (東京高等師範学校教授 文部留学生 乙竹岩造), nonparticipation (不参加), a teacher at the Tokyo School for the Deaf, ISHIKAWA, Bunpei (東京聾啞学校訓導 石川文平).

The American Annals of the Deaf reported that there were no deaf people present from foreign countries and only one nation, China, was officially presented in the congress in Colorado Springs[6]. Despite their intention, it became not so “international,” Brill did not count it in the list of the ICED.

#### 5. Conclusion

Japanese people have had a handicap in international settings because of the distance from other countries and the language differences. People in Europe and America exchange their information and opinions far more easily because they live close each other and share common languages. In early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the pioneers in the field of deaf education in Japan struggled to take advanced knowledge from Europe into home. In Europe deaf people often got together internationally to hold their own meetings. The topic was not only education but also about their social settings. The meetings were sometimes considered to be a part of ICED and there were some confusion in numbering the ICED congresses among the scholars.

Leonhardt noted that the first meeting of the deaf in Germany was held in Berlin in 1873. After that, such meetings were held partly international venues: Wien in 1874, Dresden in 1875, Leipzig in 1878, Prague in 1881, and Stockholm in 1884[12].

It seems necessary to identify the international conferences for the deaf in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries more carefully. So far, in Japan, such a study was impossible with limited resources. However thanks to digital collections, the possibility now opens up internationally.

#### References

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- [4] JACAR (Japan Center for Asian Historical Records) Ref.B07080316200 (Holdings:Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) 25<sup>th</sup> picture #0454
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- [12] Leonhardt, Anette 2002 Conception and Movement in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> p.222 in Introduction to the Deaf Education (Leonhardt, Anette Konzeptionen und Bewegungen Ende des 19./Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts p.222 in Einfuehrung in die Hoergeschaedigten-paedagogik)