

Agon Shu ocean prayer

Praying for military, civilian casualties in northern sea

When we think of the Pacific War, we tend to think of the land and naval battles that took place in the Western and Southern Pacific between Japanese and Allied forces. But in the latter stages of the conflict — and even after Japan’s announcement of its surrender on Aug. 15, 1945, — Japanese and Soviet forces clashed in areas north of Japan, resulting in many casualties.

In recent years, Agon Shu founder Reverend Seiyu Kiriyaama had been thinking about the war dead on the island of Sakhalin, which lies just east of the Siberian mainland and north of Hokkaido. He had also been developing a strong desire to hold a service there to remember victims of the war.

Founder’s will lives on

Kiriyaama died on Aug. 29, 2016, but the Agon Shu faithful didn’t forget his wish to hold a service to commemorate those who lost their lives on Sakhalin and other parts of the Northwestern Pacific in the closing days of World War II.

In line with this, the association organized a weeklong cruise in the waters north

of Japan to fulfill his wishes.

Prayers for the dead

On June 30, a *goma hōyō* ceremony was held as a departure ceremony at the Agon Shu Hokkaido headquarters in which Kiriyaama was there in the form of his cremated remains. After the ceremony, a group of about 500 Agon Shu faithful, accompanied by Kiriyaama’s ashes, placed in a *bussharitō*, a portable tower containing ashes of famous cremated Buddhism religious figures such as Gautama Buddha, left Otaru for Sakhalin aboard the cruise ship Pacific Venus.

At the same time, another group that left earlier held a Smirnykh *goma hōyō* ceremony in front of the Chishima Monument to the War Dead.

In the waters off Rumoi, Hokkaido, a ceremony was held to pray for the souls of the victims of the August 1945 “three ships tragedy,” in which three Japanese ships carrying civilian returnees from Sakhalin were attacked by submarines.

The group arrived in Korsakov on Sakhalin on July 1.

A *goma hōyō* ceremony to pray for the war dead in Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands and the North Pacific was held on July 2 at a

monument for peace and repose of souls in Korsakov.

On the evening of July 2, the ship left Korsakov and headed into the open sea north of the Kuril Islands. From 2 p.m. on July 3, the Agon Shu faithful were deeply moved and inspired by a memorial service for the islands’ war dead that was held on the deck of the ship. Everyone aboard was filled with a sense of excitement and awe.

A *sange* maritime memorial ceremony for the war dead on the Kuril Islands was held on the ship’s deck. Tens of thousands of pieces of lotus-flower-shaped paper on which followers’ prayers are written were scattered in the ocean. The Agon Shu faithful spontaneously shed tears while watching thousands of paper flowers scatter into the sea.

The area where the ceremony was held is often foggy. But when the ceremony began, the sky became clear, and when it was finished, there was a spectacularly beautiful sunset. The Agon Shu faithful on board were convinced of the success of the ceremony, a sense of protection by the founder and joy for the lost souls they prayed for.

Epicenter to Chidorigafuchi

Reflecting Buddha’s universal message of compassion and enlightenment, from 10 a.m. on July 4, a Bhutanese Buddhist ceremony to pray for world peace was held on the ship. On the morning of July 5, a service to pray for the souls of the victims of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami was held as the ship passed through areas near the epicenter of the quake. The Agon Shu faithful felt a spiritual closeness to the unfortunate victims of that incredible tragedy.

The ship arrived in Yokohama at 9 a.m. on July 6. All those aboard felt a profound sense of accomplishment and spiritual regeneration. On July 15, a deeply moving



A spectacular sunset is seen from the ship in the Northern Pacific Ocean. AGON SHU



memorial service for the souls of the war dead was held at Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery in Tokyo.

This series of rituals, in which souls lost in wars were transferred from the northern seas to Chidorigafuchi, was glorious and reverential, and deeply impressed all those who took part.

The voyage to the northern seas was an unqualified success. In keeping with the wishes of Kiriyaama, the Agon Shu faithful were able to pray for world peace during this history-making maritime mission.



Agon Shu faithful threw tens of thousands of pieces of lotus-flower-shaped paper in a *sange* maritime memorial ceremony in the waters off the Kuril Islands on July 3. AGON SHU



Agon Shu faithful, along with founder Kiriyaama’s ashes, leaves Otaru Port on June 30.

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A ceremony was held on a ship in the waters off Kuril Islands to pray for dead souls.

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A *goma hōyō* ceremony to pray for the war dead was held in Korsakov, Sakhalin, on July 2.

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A memorial service was held at Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery in Tokyo on July 15.

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