

My travel journal: *Encounters with nature and people in Europe
in June, 2010*

I visited Denmark and Germany from June 1st to 10, 2010, and entered into my journal: "Visiting the setting of literatures in the world". I began writing this after my retirement. The literary works I have covered until then included, "Don Quixote", "Gone with the Wind", "Anne of Green Gables" and plays by Shakespeare. In November 2009, I visited Italy, to cover the setting of "Romeo and Juliette" and "Merchant of Venice".

In 2010, the first place I visited was Kronborg castle in Denmark, the setting of the novel "Hamlet". Next I went to Odense City to see the house where Andersen was born and is his museum.

In Germany, I went to the backdrop of the works of Brother Grimm, Goethe and Hesse and I took Rhine river cruise where the untold story of Loreley was written.

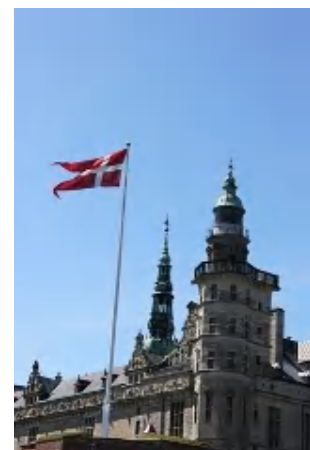
Spring was the most beautiful season of the year in Europe. Fresh green leaves were changing into thick green, while the humidity was low. It was very comfortable. Because it was just before the summer solstice, there was daylight from 4 o'clock in the morning and the streets remained bright almost until 10 o'clock in the evening. I saw many majestic and beautiful buildings that had on them inscribed and inherited the history for the last several hundred years. In the rural areas I fancied the vast plains, green woods and the many houses with red colored-bricks on the roof-top. Wherever I went, I was tempted to take pictures of these beautiful sceneries

I had so many pleasant encounters in this trip. From here on now, let me introduce ten of these to you.

Encounter No.1

**I profoundly appreciate the help offered to me
on a train.**

The train I was on was going towards north from Copenhagen, my first place to visit in Denmark. I was on my way to the Kronborg castle, the setting of the novel "Hamlet". In the midst of the journey, a conductor came around through the coaches to check the tickets of the passengers. To my surprise, the conductor scolded me for boarding the train without a ticket, thus breaking the rule. He wanted me to pay a fine. I



Kronborg castle

was at a loss. “I surely had bought my ticket at the Copenhagen station. What on earth happened?” I muttered under my breath.

When I was about to reason with the conductor, a gentleman who was sitting in front of me interfered saying, “Did you insert the ticket into the machine box at the platform at the Copenhagen station in order to print the time you got on? Anyway, Mr. Conductor, he is our guest from Japan. He came all the way from Tokyo, and arrived our country just yesterday. Why can’t you just let him pass this time?”

The conductor took this advice into his consideration and said to me smilingly. “Ok, have a nice trip in Denmark!”

I was so pleased and felt relieved by their words and I expressed my appreciation to both of them. I could not be more grateful for the cordial kindness and consideration I received in this foreign country. Thanks to this incident, I even subsequently opened an interesting dialogue about the works of Shakespeare with this gentleman sitting across from me.

The above story appears in detail in my website, on the page: “My visit of the settings of the literature in the world”.

Encounter No.2

Are you a person who favors “quiet worlds” or “bustling worlds”?



The old port of Copenhagen

On the third day of my European tour I visited Odense, the second largest city in Denmark. It took me 80 minutes by express train. I sat on seat #61 in the standard coach. There were sets of four seats facing each other across a table. Each seat had a headrest to secure the passenger’s head. The area was comparatively spacious, similar to the business class seats on an airplane.

The passenger who was sitting across the table from me was a Danish lady whom I assumed to be in her 30s. I refrained from looking at her directly because her breasts were full and the cleavage between the breasts was widely opened. She stretched her legs out to the other seat and then took out a red covered book. The title of the book was “Hegel”..

“It seems to me that you are reading a difficult book. Are you a student or are you working?” I asked her curiously

“I am a high school teacher. This book, “Hegel” is very interesting. I am just on my way to the University in Odense”

It was an interesting coincidence. So I said, “To be frank with you, I was also a high school teacher about 40 years ago”.

I was overcome with emotion that she and I were living in the same world and I began to talk to her with a slightly excited loud tone. Instantly, she made in a flurry sign of “Please be quiet”, putting her index finger at her lips.

When I looked around, I noticed a sign, “Stillezone=Silence zone” over the aisle in the coach. I also heard an announcement, “Please try to be quiet in the coach. Those who want to talk please do it in another room.”

I see! I see! The customs of each country may be different, indeed. Isn’t it? Usually, nowadays, in the coach compartment of commuter trains in Japan, the passengers would be sleeping, reading newspapers or sending emails from their cell-phone, aren’t they?

The situation in Latin America, where I stayed for a long time as a newspaper correspondent, was totally opposite. It was bustling in the buses and trains. I would hear merry and loud music in a bus, the outside of these buses was painted with brilliant colors. I can never forget the words that a member who had visited Japan to participate in a training course expressed. He said:

“Japanese were very polite wherever we went. But in Tokyo the city was deadly silent.”

It is quite possible that those who visited Japan from Latin America had such an impression in Tokyo when they observed that the streets and trains were incredibly quiet compared with those in Latin America. The behavior of people from regions brings out the differences of people’s culture and their way of living.

As the train was going on and on through the green plain, carrying me in it, I was filled with deep emotions.

Encounter No.3



As I was taking pictures of beautiful young girls, my “camera’s heart” was pounding,

“I am a photographer from Tokyo”. This introduction occasionally brought out an unexpected role from me in my tour.

I was a correspondent of the Seikyo Shimbun in Panama for about 10 years. In fact, I believe I became quite skilled at writing articles, while, I was not so good with photography. This time, however, I brought with me a high-quality single-lens reflex camera that I bought before my departure. “I am expected to participate in the Rhine cruise in Germany this time. I will need a telephoto lens, too.” I convinced myself. With my new

toy next to me “I am a photographer from Tokyo!” came out almost automatically from my mouth.

Once, a lady at the reception of the Andersen Museum unexpectedly handed me several pamphlets and an entrance tickets and said, “Then you needn’t pay the entrance fee.



The Andersen Museum

It’s free.” I was grateful and surprised! She also told me that I might take pictures inside the museum without a flash. I was then able to take a lot of pictures using the new camera with great appreciation, “Alright! Then maybe I can become a publicity man for the Andersen museum in Japan when I return home ? ”

I have another interesting story. When I was taking pictures outside the museum, a gentle voice called me from behind. “Can you take a picture of us?” I looked back to



find a group of eight young girls. They were very cute and beautiful. They told me that they were high school students from town. I told them jokingly, “Certainly, I am happy to take your picture. I am a photographer from Tokyo. All of you are so cute and beautiful. Your picture may appear in the cover of some magazine in Japan”.

They posed with smile for my camera
never expected to be taken. This was also one of the most pleasant encounters in my trip.

They posed with their magnificent smiles for my camera. That was one photograph that was

Encounter No.4

I cooked while covering the setting of a novel.

I am a member of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI). SGI has a culture center in Denmark at Copenhagen. So I visited there also as a SGI member from Japan. The culture center was located in a residential area, within a 10 minutes’ walk from the Nordhan train station. The center was a big white-colored building. Its white walls matched well with the green garden and the trees around it. According to Mr. Kamio, ex-general director of the SGI Denmark, people in the field of education in Denmark have strong interest about the Soka Education system nowadays. One of the high schools in Copenhagen honored Dr. Ikeda, President of the SGI, for his work in the field of education and named the school-park after him. There are currently educational exchanges between the Soka University and the Soka High school and Danish counterparts.

After taking pictures of the Culture Center, from inside and outside, and flowers and trees in the garden, I had a chat with a young women's division's member who was on duty to take care of the Center on that day. She told me that she was preparing dinner in the Center for the two staffs who were editors of the monthly magazine.

"I will prepare dinner for you; too, it will be my honor. Is it OK?" she said.

To this generous gesture, I replied, "Thank you so much. I am very grateful. Then let me help you. To be frank with you, I am very good at cooking as I went to a cooking school for one year after my retirement", I advertised myself rather humorously.

I began to help my new acquaintance in cooking while following her directions. We busied ourselves cutting vegetables and frying meats and sausages.

The ingredients of the dish were chicken, green beans, SGI Culture Center pimientos and coconut oil. The dish we prepared turned out splendid.



Taking hold of a cooking knife in a foreign country while I was visiting the setting of novels was a wonderful experience for me. To be able to prepare a dish with a young beautiful Danish lady made it even more memorable!

Encounter No.5

I was very fortunate to encounter a "Buddhist God" at the reception of a hotel.

I went to Frankfurt in Germany from Copenhagen in Denmark. In Europe, where the railroad system was well developed, it would be very pleasant to travel by rail. However, I couldn't afford such luxury, so I went by airplane instead. The plane-ride was one and a half hour long and it took me 15 minutes to go from the airport to the Central train station of Frankfurt. Then I reached the hotel in three minutes on foot from the station.

There were many places in Germany that I wanted to visit. I made this plan while I was in Japan. So it was imperative for me to buy train tickets as soon as I arrive in Germany. Although English is understood by most German, the signs of the stations and ticket are all printed in German. Under such situation, I was expecting some difficulty in arranging my trip. However, I was very fortunate to meet a very capable lady, around 40 years old, at the reception of the hotel. She was Japanese but she managed German well and was well informed about the condition of the country. She helped me arrange

the train itinerary. She used her computer to purchase tickets for all my trips, including the Rhine river cruise.

If I were to do it myself, it would have been impossible. According to her, she was employed by several hotels in the area and she would go to another hotel the following day. In fact, I was hoping to see her at the reception desk at the hotel during my stay. That way, I could have thanked her for her kindness and assistance to me.

With sincere appreciation, I wanted to talk with her, perhaps to ask her why she came to Germany and how she was living then, or to inquire about her career, but the chance never came. Even so, may I just say that this was probably an encounter with the “Buddhist God” (A function that works favor for a Buddhist) in my life?

Encounter No. 6

Mystic encounter with a doctor from Mexico.

Speaking about Japanese, there were nine Japanese among about 100 passengers on the Rhine Cruise ship on June 5. They were a group composed of four families, two couples, a young person, an elderly fellow, and myself. The 100 passengers came with groups that were arranged by several tourist offices. My group that left from the Frankfurt station by bus consisted of about 30 tourists. On our way to the port to embark, the guide on the bus led every passenger to introduce him/her, telling each other our country of origin.

We found out we were from: Norway, Denmark, Finland, U.S.A., Mexico, Chile, Philippines, Malaysia, New Zealand and Japan. The group was very international. The Japanese with another group on the ship assembled together at lunch time. They began to exchange their impression about the tours, not only in Germany but also in other countries in Europe.



The deck of the Rhine Cruise ship

“What kind of goods do you recommend as souvenirs from Germany?”

“Which destination was the most impressive among the places you have visited?”

A man of 70’s expressed his feeling. According to him, one of his daughters was living in Germany and invited him to her house. He said:

“I played golf so many times during my stay. Both the golf goods and the green fee were very cheap

compared with that of Japan. I could fully enjoy my stay in Germany. I am totally satisfied”

A young couple seemed to have come up from South Italy. They expressed their impression.

“There are many differences between the character and the culture of Latin and that of German. Where we came from in Italy, our lives were merry and carefree, we feel as if everything is heavier and stronger here in Germany.”

When it comes to Latin, I met a typical Mexican couple. I estimated their age to be about 60's. The husband had a dignified coalman mustache and he wore totally red colored shirts. They were talking in Spanish, a language that was familiar and nostalgic for me. So I tried to talk to them.

“Soy de Tokio (I am from Tokyo). Where are you from in Mexico?”

“Somos de Veracruz (We are from Veracruz) in the coast of the Gulf of Mexico”

“You said, “”from Veracruz””? I visited there, too, several times, but it was almost more than 20 years ago.”

Actually, I visited there when I was a correspondent for the Seikyo Shimbun in Latin America. Mexico City, the capital of Mexico, is located 2,400 meters above sea level, so the climate is comparatively cool and the humidity is low. Contrary to that, Veracruz City is situated on the coast and both the temperature and the humidity are very high. Owing to these conditions and to my body condition (I was too tired with work at that time), I experienced a strong stomach ache and diarrhea. I had to consult with a doctor.

When I referred to my memory, to my surprise, the man said in a loud voice, “ Soy medico, tambien (I am also a doctor.). I entrusted the attending of patients during my absence to my son.”

There are many doctors in Veracruz City and, of course, he was not the doctor who took care of me 20 years ago. I was so glad, however, to know the coincidence that he was from Veracruz and he was a doctor. Under such a situation, the chat between us grew livelier even more. It is a small world, isn't it?

Encounter 7

I am thankful to the kind attention of a Japanese female violinist.

Let me refer to one more Japanese who was living in Germany. I visited by train first, Hawnaw (where the Grimm Brother were born) and secondly Kassel where the museum of the brother was located. I got off at the Kassel station. While I was checking the way to get to the museum at the information desk, the bus to the museum just left. I had no other way. So I sat on a bench of the station trying to find another way to get there. When I was checking the city map I heard a gentle voice from behind me.

“Are you Japanese from Japan? May I help you, sir?” It was spoken in polite Japanese. I looked back to find a young lady holding a violin case.

“Yes, I am just checking the map as how I may get to the Grimm Brothers’ museum.”

Glancing at the brochure shown by me, she said.

“If you want to go by bus, you will have to wait for many hours until the next bus departs from here and it is pretty difficult to move around here by bus if you don’t understand German. So I would like to recommend you to take a taxi there though it may cost a little more than the bus.”

This was an accurate advice to me. Thanking her for her kind attention, I asked her also about Kassel City and the motive of her staying in Germany.

According to her, she has been living in Germany since 3 years before and she is now working as a violinist in an orchestra in Kassel City.

“That’s something really admirable, but isn’t it possible to do the same in Japan?”

“Yes, it will be possible of course also in Japan. However, there are many orchestras in Germany and opportunity to work and to study.”

“That’s great! Then, good luck! Please take care of yourself!”

I tried to encourage her as if she had been my own daughter.

It was only about for ten minutes, but some kind of tender

affection arose in my heart. She started a conversation to unknown Japanese and tried to help me. How tender and kind she was! I was very grateful to her. I left Kassel with a strong wish: “My dear young Japanese lady, I sincerely pray for your good health and happiness in future.”



Encounter 8

The world is moving towards “Mutual Intermingling”.

I was on my way to Culw town where Herman Hesse was born and raised. In the express train, a dark colored couple was sitting in front of my seat. The husband had a thick beard and the wife had a red dot at the center of her forehead. So I assumed in my mind, “May be they are from India” and spoke to them reservedly.

“No, we are from Sri Lanka. I am working for a company for watches in Switzerland.”

“Then why are you now in Germany?”

“Today is my holiday so we came to visit our family members who are living in Germany.”

It seemed to me that they are traveling freely in the European continent, from one country to the next. When it comes to the freedom of moving in the European continent, I can remember my own case. When I entered Germany from Denmark, nobody asked nor directed me to show my passport to the authorities nor did anyone check my baggage along the route. I heard that from the time when countries in Europe entered the European Union, once a visitor enters a member country in Europe he/she can travel to another country just as freely as within it.

It was amazing, like a dream for me, contrary to what I experienced when I visited the Latin American countries about 20 years ago as a correspondent. The free movement of the couple from Sri Lanka in the European continent has come from such an environment, I imagined.

I surely believe that the world is advancing toward one in which nations and races are mingling with each other. Under such a situation, I thought, we, Japanese, who generally are closed mind, should be aware of this and be prepared for the coming era.

Encounter No. 9

They can take their bicycles even onto the trains.

On my way to Culw, I changed trains, from the express to the ordinary train. The train I got on had only one coach and it was colored red. It was rustic. In that train, I happened to witness an interesting scene. Some of the passengers went on to the train with their bicycles. There were two rows of seats in one side in the coach section and there was only one row of seats on the opposite side. There were not so many passengers at that time, so the seats on one row were put away and the bicycles were standing at the vacant spaces.



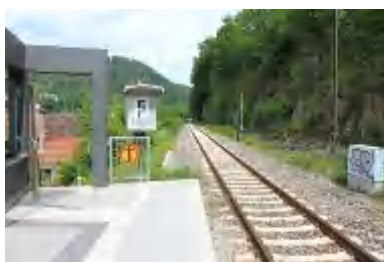
While I was observing them with curiosity, one of the bicycles toppled down at the moment when the train was swaying a lot. Small articles fell and were scattered around. I posed with Herman Hesse on the floor. In an instant, a gentleman who seemed to be the owner of the bicycle, talked to a lady who was sitting near the bicycle. I couldn't understand the chat in German between them but I was able to grasp what they were talking about judging by their gesture.

“I am so sorry. Are you ok?” “Are you injured?”

“Not at all. I am quite OK.” “I am glad you are not hurt.”

I thought I have also seen the lady bringing her bicycle onto the train at other occasions. Sometimes I noticed people carrying their bicycles at the Frankfurt Station

also. It seemed to me that bringing a bicycle into the train was permitted in rural trains in Germany, although they might not be permitted in the express trains. The elevator at the station is utilized also for carrying bicycles.



that bringing a bicycle into the rural trains in Germany, be permitted in the express trains. The station is utilized also for carrying bicycles.

According to what I observed, Denmark is a country where bicycles are very popular in people's daily life. Although this might have been true for Germany also, it did not seem to be as common as in Denmark. I imagine this system is very convenient for many common citizens.

From that time on, not a single bicycle has fallen down on the trip. The train was running up smoothly among the beautiful mountains, although still occasionally swaying a little.

Encounter No. 10

A dreadful comment from a taxi driver referring to the "World Cup".

On my last day in Germany, I visited Goethe House in Frankfurt City in the evening.

Unfortunately it began to rain, so I took a taxi from the hotel I was staying. I told the taxi driver where I wanted to visit. The Goethe House is one of the most noted sightseeing locations. The driver began driving the car while humming, "It's quite easy to get there". He was an African German. His English had a typical accent and his gesture was exaggerated. So I spoke to him with interest.

"Where are you from?"

"I'm from Ghana, Africa. I have a strong expectation for this coming World Cup. It's the first time to be held on the African Continent. My country is on the same land as the country South Africa. I am too excited."

Talking about the World Cup, yes, the game was going to be held just after my return to Japan. TV, newspapers and peoples in Japan were talking about it before my departure. According to the time table, Japan was to face the Cameroon team. So I asked the driver his prediction of the game, out of curiosity.



The Goethe House

Then he said. "It's quite natural that the Cameroon team will win. It is almost decided already because the teams' ability is totally different. Although I don't see much separation in points, my prediction of the score will be 2 to 0, in favor of

Cameroon. I imagine it will be impossible for the team from my country, Ghana, to lose if it ever faces the team of Japan.”

It was a clear favoritism toward his fellow members in Africa. While I intended to ask him the predictions of the match between Japan and Holland and between Japan and Denmark, I was taken back by his comments.

“The Holland team is one of the favorites for the championship. It’s difficult to estimate the score or the difference in points. The team of Denmark is far stronger than the team of Japan. It’s incomparable. The score will be 5 to 0, favor to Denmark.”

What insulting words they were to Japanese team! I was a little bit annoyed by his word but I reconsidered, “There will be no value in giving him an objection. There will be no need to argue”. Anyway, the country where I am staying is one of the football-crazy countries. The World Cup was held here just four years ago. Taking these into consideration, I decided to refrain from further comments.

Remembering such a dialogue, however, I was on my way back to Japan by plane, still maintaining hope that “Okada Japan” would disprove his one-sided predictions.



The outcome of the games between Japan and Cameroon, Holland and Denmark were just as you saw on TV.

“Hey, Mr. Conductor from Ghana, surely, the team from your country was strong enough to be included in the top 8 teams. I would like to ask you, however, please take another look at the Japan team and change your opinion about us from now on!”