

## **History of the Church in Japan - Part 16: 1975-1978: Tokyo Temple Announced; Elder Kikuchi Called**

**By R. Lanier Britsch (Author of *From the East: The History of the Latter-day Saints in Asia, 1851-1996*)**

The seventh in the series of world-wide area conferences was held on August 8-10, 1975, in the Budokan, a large cultural arts facility that had been built for the Tokyo Olympics. Saints from all over Japan, including Okinawa, gathered in Tokyo for the three days of meetings and activities. At the request of President Kimball, the Japanese members prepared an elaborate cultural program for Friday evening, August 8. Songs, drum playing, dances, and brief dramatic performances by over two thousand participants delighted both local people and the foreign visitors.

The next morning, Saturday, August 9, at the first general session, President Kimball spoke to the 9,800 people in attendance. He laid a scriptural background for temple building and then dwelled on the sacrifices and hardships of those who built the Kirkland, Nauvoo, and Salt Lake temples. He then said, "Now I bring to you a matter of great importance to all the people of the Asian world. We therefore propose to you that we build a temple in Tokyo for all the Church in Asia." The announcement of the Church's eighteenth temple deeply moved the Japanese Saints.

On Sunday, a day free from employment, twelve thousand three hundred people attended the last and largest session of the conference. The devoted and attentive audience deeply appreciated the counsel given by their leaders. Elder Hinckley, who had directed the work in Asia for eight years, told the people: "No one seeing what I have seen transpire in this land could deny the workings of the Almighty. He has laid His hand upon this nation; His spirit has brooded over the people. Their hearts have been touched as they have listened to the testimony of His witnesses."

Following 1975, the Church grew more rapidly in Japan. Five new stakes and two new missions were added in the next four years, and the membership increased by close to fifteen thousand. Chapel construction continued in many cities. But of course the new temple received the main attention. Ground breaking was held on April 10, 1978. The local Saints over contributed financially to the building of the temple by many thousands of dollars. Not only Japanese Latter-day Saints but also members from many Asian lands contributed to the fund for the building.

The call of Elder Kikuchi Yoshihiko, a Japanese, as a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy and as Area Supervisor (and later Executive Administrator) of Japan and Korea at General Conference in October of 1977 symbolized the coming of age of the Church in Japan.

Elder Kikuchi, who was thirty-six years old at the time of his call as a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, had previously served his fellow Japanese Saints in a number of important callings, the most recent of which was as president of Tokyo Stake.

The first Asian to serve as a General Authority of the Church, Elder Kikuchi received his call from President Spencer W. Kimball.

During this time, the genealogy program of the Church in Japan was broadened. Japanese microfilmmers were engaged, and continue to be, in photographing thousands of pages of records from registers at civic repositories and Buddhist temples throughout the land.

The Church Education System has operated Seminaries and Institutes in Japan since 1972. By 1978, there were 642 seminary students, 130 regular institute students, and 3,582 individual study institute students enrolled.

In May of 1978, President Ezra Taft Benson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve, dedicated a new seven story Area Administration Headquarters of the Church two blocks from the temple site. And the Japan Tokyo Mission was divided into the Japan Tokyo North and the Japan Tokyo South missions on July 1, 1978. In December 1978, the Church announced that the Mormon Tabernacle Choir would perform in Japan and Korea the next September. In that same month, December 1978, the BYU football team played in Japan, an event that brought the Church recognition among a different Japanese audience.