

「Sonjuku Trip to Cuba」

Why Cuba?

We, some members of Shimada Sonjuku alumni of class of 2016, two Shimada juku members and myself, visited Cuba briefly for a few days in March 2017. This trip was planned responding to strong requests of class of 2016 members. Shortly after they have finished our last study trip to Budapest, Hungary, they insisted that they would like to go for a special trip celebrating the graduation of Sonjuku. They unanimously wished to visit Cuba.

Cuba certainly sounded a very interesting place for us to visit. This is because Cuba was a country which was not easy for ordinary Japanese to visit under the sanction imposed by the United States. But since the resumption of diplomatic relations between the US thanks to the historic decision of Obama administration, Cuba is now considered to be one of the final “frontier” for investors and travelers of the world.

Cuba reminds many middle age and older Japanese of the horrifying event which broke out in October 1962, known as “Cuba Crisis.” The incident might well trigger the nuclear war between the United states and Soviet Russia on the issue as to how to handle a bunch of possibly nuclear missiles settled in Cuba by Soviet Russia directing toward the United States. After this event, the US terminated the diplomatic relations with Cuba regarding it as a hostile enemy country.

Cuba: a New Focus of the World

It is amazing that Cuba somehow survived under the severe economic sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies. Moreover, Cuba is supposed to have maintained its unique national culture of loving music, dances, traditional liquors such as Rum, the best cigar known as “Habana” etc. It is widely known that

Cubans still drive old American cars built in the 1950s and enjoying peaceful life under the socialist policies of equal economic and social status of all people, free education, and free medical services even in spite of general low income of the country.

When the rest of the world witnessed the historical resumption of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the US in July 2015, many people predicted and somewhat worried that the unique cultures of the traditional Cuban society would quickly fade away by being overwhelmed by the intrusion of powerful American capitalism. If one wants to enjoy watching and feeling the virtues of traditional Cuban society and cultures, perhaps this is the last time to visit. These are some of the motivations which drove us to visit Cuba this time. If we wait for another year, we may not be able to see and feel much of the traditional nature of the Cuban society.

We planned to visit Cuba in March because it is relatively more convenient than other timing. We started to arrange the trip since later in the fall of 2016. We soon learned that it was not early enough to start. It was quite hard to secure rooms of the hotel for our group of some 15 members. It was not quite easy to secure the seats in the flight at reasonable prices. With considerable effort, we somehow secured rooms and airline seats eventually.

Arrival at Cuba

In the afternoon of March 4, we departed from Haneda/Tokyo International AP. Some members and myself took an Air Canada flight. I usually make it a rule to fly by business class, but the price for B class turned out to be extremely high this time as much as 8000 USD. I therefore took a premier economy class. This is the first experience for me in the recent decade. The seat was not expandable for flat bed like an usual business class seat. I worried if I could survive the flight of taking more than 12 hours. Fortunately, it was not as bad as I worried. I was able

to sleep for a few hours. After changing the flight at Toronto, we arrived at Havana AP of Cuba. It was already late at night. The clock indicated a half past 10.

The process of getting into the country seemed smooth up to the moment when Mr. Ken Fujita, our member, was caught in a trouble. He was not allowed to walk through the examination counter. The officers checked many of his stuff. They eventually focussed on his portable Wi Hi. The rest of us were waiting in the hall near the turn table. Since more than half an hour has passed, I walked to the examination counter where Ken was being checked. We first thought that they did not know what the wi Hi was. Soon we realized that Yi Hi is not unknown in Cuba. Then, why Ken was not released? The officers asked many questions to Ken. They called other offices to check something we never knew.

After a while, a young female officer started to write many things in several sheets of papers. She at almost every step asked her supervisor to check something. I was standing beside Ken. They asked many trifle and seemingly non relevant questions such as the department of the university he graduated. I felt even somewhat sorry about this young female officer. She is apparently innocent. Something is wrong about the system or institutional intent. Eventually, they filled in all the documents and said that the portable Wi Hi will be kept for a month at Department of Communication. Ken is advised to pick it up by himself at the Department after one month. Everything was absurd and incredible.

The process was unbearably slow and inefficient. Ken was released after one hour and ten minutes. The rest of our members had to wait outside of the examination office. This was ridiculous experience. This experience certainly made our impression of Cuba not favorable. However, our bad impression of Cuba at the AP was somewhat mitigated in the nice and relaxed atmosphere of the hotel.

We arrived at the hotel, Hotel Melia Cohiba just about mid-night. The facilities and services of the hotel were quite good except communication by telephone and other IT devices which was virtually impossible. After checking in, we spent

sometime in the bar to take a night cap. Some members and I ordered the Rum, which is well known for Cuba. It was fabulous. I did not know until then the Rum was such a nice liquor. The liquor, music of the small band, and our conversation made us feel quite at home. When we stood up and left the bar, it was already some minutes after 2 o'clock in the morning in Cuban time. It was a long day. We had to leave early next morning.

Visit to Che Guevara Mausoleum

I got up early because we had to leave the hotel at 8 o'clock. The breakfast in the hotel was good. The bus left the hotel punctually. All of us were quite sleepy because we were able to sleep only a few hours. We were heading to Santa Clara, where there was the mausoleum of Che Guevara. This was a long drive of 3 and half hour one way.

Outside of the bus, there spreads fields for sugar canes, woods and scatter of houses. It was cloudy and windy. Quite unexpectedly, Cuba was not as hot as we anticipated. It was rather cool or even cold. Thick clouds indicated that it might rain on the way. We were guided by tourist guide, Elaine. She is small, cute, but quite diligent and efficient. She spoke good Japanese. She said that she learned her Japanese only in Cuba. Amazingly she spoke good Japanese even though she has never been to Japan. After finishing school of Japanese language, she did not have a job for 5 years and obtained the current job only 5 years ago.

The drivers were faithful and reliable. Two drivers were dispatched because the driving was for a long time. The bus was well equipped. This was made by a Chinese car maker. Indeed the most of the bus we saw on the highway and in the town are made of the same Chinese maker. The road was good, better paved than we expected. The driving was monotonous and tiring, but we felt relaxed by their cordial reception.

After having driven 3 hours and a half, we entered the city of Santa Clara. This is the country side city some 300 km away from Havana. The city, however, has a symbolic importance in the contemporary history of Cuba because this was the battle field where the revolutionist force led by Che Guevara finally won against the American coopted Cuban president, Mr. Batista. Because of this historic victory of revolutionists in this place, the mausoleum of Che Guevara, the revolutionist hero, was built.

Shortly before we entered the city, it rained lightly for some minutes. Elaine warned that the mausoleum might be closed. She explained that the mausoleum keeps some bones of Guevara in the best condition. If it is open in the moist air of the rainy day, the bones may be unfavorably affected. For this reason, when it rains, the mausoleum is often closed. When we arrived the mausoleum, we found unfortunately that the mausoleum was closed. It looked that our long drive using almost the whole daytime was in vain. We took some pictures of the 6 m statue of Che Guevara on the roof of the mausoleum.

A Brief Modern History of Cuba

Since the revolution led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara seems so important for the country of Cuba, let me spend some space to review what happened to the country before and after the revolution and until today.

Cuba is a rare and unique country which survived for more than half a century under the severe economic sanctions imposed by the US even though its size is small in terms of land, economy and population and it is geographically very close to the US. The diplomatic relations with the US was cut and economic sanctions have been imposed after the new administration was established by the revolutionists led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara and particularly in the wake of the execution of land reform by the new revolutionist government.

Let me explain why the land reform was critical. We first need to understand the history of US-Spain war which took place toward the end of 19th century. Since the tropical Island of Cuba was well suited for sugar production, the US wanted to have sugar industry in Cuba which was then colonized by Spain.

In those years, native Cubans together with immigrants from Spain have been increasingly motivated by “Cuban nationalism” partly resenting against the colonial policy of Spain, which gave rise to Cuban independence movement. This movement was led by a poet and philosopher, Jose Marti, who has been highly respected by Cubans as the father of Cuba. Jose Marti led the independence war waged by Cubans against Spain in 1895. Watching this turmoil, the US government sent a US navy vessel, “Main” to Cuba claiming that the US needs to protect American companies, mostly of sugar industry, and American citizens.

The US-Spain War and American Control of Cuba

One day, the US vessel “Main” suffered from explosion in Havana port. The US government determined that this was executed by the espionage of Spain, and the US government declared war against Spain. Taking advantage of this incident, Mr. Jose Marti organized civil soldiers, starting from some 2500 which eventually increased to 25000, and fought against Spanish rulers working together US military troops. Spain sent navy vessels and huge military troops amounting to 200000 to suppress this uprising and attacks by the US force. Within 2 months and a half, the Cuban independence force and the US military won against Spain.

Having been defeated by the war, Spain ceded Cuba, Puerto Rico, Philippines and Guam to the US. After the war, the independence force led by Jose Marti declared the independence of Cuba and they established temporary government of Cuba Republic.

However, the Cuba representative was excluded by the US from the participants to the peace making conference between the US and Spain. The

United States changed its attitude to the Cuban independence campaigners from supporting and assisting to suppression. Even after the independence force declared independence of Cuba, the US militarily occupied Cuba for 3.5 years and even after that the US continued to substantively occupy the area of Guantanamo for use for American military base for an unlimited period by formally paying a minimum rent of 2000 gold coins in those days and currently 4085 US dollars, which is roughly 1 cent per 1 square meter. In fact, the US treated the Philippines the same way after the US obtained the country from Spain.

American companies occupied or obtained large portion of land in Cuba where they used as sugar cane farms, and built many sugar refinery plants. Because of the difference of scale and efficiency of sugar production of American firms having mobilizing large amount of capital investments and employing Cuba farmers and producers, most of Cuba farms and sugar refinery plants have collapsed due to incomparable competitiveness. As a result, more than half of entire production of sugar was monopolized by American businesses, and more than 60% of sugar workers were employed by American companies. 80 percent of Cuban export has been Sugar, which was almost entirely shipped to the US. It was a common custom that president of Cuba has to obey the orders of American ambassador to Cuba.

Exploited Cuban Workers

And in 1942, a military general, Fulgencio Batista, tried a coup d'état by the assistance of the US to topple the government, but the cue at this time was not successful. He challenged a second coup d'état with even a stronger support of the US and succeeded to topple the existing government and made himself a president of Cuba Republic. Since Mr. Batista has been supported by the US, he promoted policies which all result in profits for American businesses such as raising telephone charges which mostly end up in the revenue of American telephone company providing monopolistic telephone services in Cuba. In fact, 90% of electric power supply and telephone services, 50% of railway services, and most

of tourism services were provided by American companies.

Cuban workers, who are employed in sugar farms owned by American companies, had to work hard from early morning till evening. Since the sugar harvesting period is only for January to April, Cuban workers employed by American companies had to borrow money from American sugar company which employs them to support their life for the rest of the year. They are obliged to live almost in a slavery life. In most of Cuban farming villages, water supply system was available at most 30%, more than half of family households had no toilets, more than two thirds of children were unable to get school education.

Castro's Attempt of Revolution

It was under such circumstances, young Fidel Castro felt a strong mission to save the life of suppressed workers by toppling the dictator government of Mr. Batista. Fidel Castro was born in 1926. He graduated from law department of Havana University. Since the graduate of law school was able to practice law as a lawyer, he started working as a lawyer largely to help unhelpful clients. At his age of 26, he attempted a "revolution" with his fellow members by attacking Mongada and Bayamo military camps of Batista government. Their attempt unfortunately turned out to be a failure largely due to the lack of training and experience. Fidel was arrested and put in Jail for a few years.

Fidel Castro has a large body but because of his personality and dedication to serve the people, he was much cherished by people throughout his life. Even after he became the highly respected leader of Cuba and even among other socialism inclined neighboring countries. he was loved by people. People called him "Fidel" and very seldom used his family name, Castro. When he died in 2016 at the age of 90, people followed his living will of not leaving any form of monument and the like. As a consequence there remain no statute of Fidel Castro in Cuba for the real hero of the country.

Che Guevara Joined the Revolution

Another important person who joined Castro's revolution attempts was Che Guevara. Let me explain briefly how Guevara has come about to join Castro's revolution movement. Ernest Guevara Delaserna was born in 1928 in Argentina. The name "Che" is a nickname. "Che" in Spanish stands for a very colloquial expression meaning "well" or "hi" etc. Since Mr. Guevara used this expression frequently in his daily conversation, this becomes almost like a pronoun to describe Mr. Guevara.

He has had an asthma since his childhood. He was physically not mighty. Because he had a strong will to overcome such weakness, he practiced sports a lot.. He joined a medical department during college years. He visited many countries of South America by riding a motorbike. Through his experience he had a keen sympathy to poor and helpless people in many of the South American countries.

He joined revolution activities of a few countries including Guatemala where the US government toppled the previous government and established a puppet government. He joined the revolutionist anti-government force to fight the government in power. After such attempts, he fled to Mexico to protect himself. There he met Fidel Castro who was preparing for revolution in Cuba. After having spent hours discussing their own views about suppressed countries and people and revolutions, Che Guevara became a genuine friend of Fidel Castro.

They agreed to prepare seriously for another revolution in Cuba to topple Batista dictatorial government. They practiced military training and acquired comrades and weapons. In 1959, Castro, Guevara and the comrades of 82 got on a sailing boat, entitled "Gran Ma" heading at Cuba. During the sailing they suffered from such hazards as storms, but somehow arrived at the shore of Cuba.

They were attacked by government soldiers but kept fighting against in the forest.

16 days afterwards, the survived members met at a point they meant to meet. The survivors were only 12. However, as they kept fighting against government soldiers, local farmers began to join their camp to fight against government force. The size of the revolutionist troop grew large and their power grew strong. They won against government troops at various battle fields around the central hilly areas including the city of Santa Clara. One day they obtained information that Mr. Batista would dispatch from Havana a train of heavily armed cargo cars on the rail toward Santa Clara station. Che Guevara prepared quickly and carefully to attack the armed train. The revolutionist troop of only 18 attacked the train when they came close to Santa Clara station.

Victory of Revolution

Because of highly effective fight, the revolutionist troop led by Guevara won the battle and controlled 408 soldiers and acquired many weapons and munitions. Having heard this news in Havana, Batista fled away from Cuba. It was found later that Batista took a huge amount of national financial asset with him to take an asylum. In the wake of this victory of the battle of Santa Clara, the revolutionists declared independence. It was 1959.

Incidentally, Che Guevara injured his left arm when he jumped from the roof of the cargo train down to the railway. His wife and comrade, Iruda, gave him her black scarf to hang the arm. Che liked the scarf so much that he kept using the scarf to band his arm even after the arm was healed, and Che with black scarf has become his style. The statue of Che Guevara on the top of the mausoleum therefore hangs his left arm with this scarf while holding a rifle on his right hand.

After having lunch in a nearby restaurant where we enjoyed nice Cuban style lunch and hot rum because of unexpectedly cold weather for this season of Cuba,

we visited a site of the battle of revolution force led by Guevara and the government soldiers dispatched by armed train. Several cargo cars of the train were left there, some lean and some fell sideways. The scene was somewhat deserted and lonesome. After taking a look at this historic site, we drove back a long way to Havana. Let me continue the story of Cuba and aftermath of the revolution.

Land Reform of Cuba

Having established Cuba Republic working closely with Castro, they started to create the new country which provides equal opportunities to all the people particularly to help workers in farms and industries. One of the major policies was the land reform by which the new government takes the huge farm land away from the American companies such as “United Fruits” and distribute it to Cuban peasants. They declared that the new government promotes the “socialist” revolution. This policy angered the US companies and the government. In retaliation, the US stopped buying sugar from Cuba. While Cuba suffered a huge damage by losing most of export income, Soviet Russia offered to purchase Cuba sugar.

In April 1961, The American CIA organized 1500 anti-revolution troop including some Cubans who fled to Florida away from Cuba after the revolution. The Cuba revolutionist government organized 25000 civil militia to counter their attack. Castro and Guevara themselves stood on the top of a tank at the front of their militia force to lead the fight against the CIA force. After the severe battles, the Cuba side won.

Having been defeated in this war, American government then planned in February 1962 to conduct a full-fledged attack by comprehensive military force encompassing navy, army and air force against Cuba. In this process, a memorandum was found by Mr. MaCorn, the head of CIA, that a large number of

missiles were set in Cuba heading at the US. The photos of some 100 pieces of Soviet missiles, of which some are possibly nuclear headed, set in Cuba targeting the US taken by the US scout plane was disclosed on October 16, 1962. The scout planes also found that many Soviet vessel were approaching Cuba loading still more missiles on their decks. President John F. Kennedy decisively ordered the blockade of the sea around Soviet fleet and the coast of Cuba. On October 22.

The Cuba Crisis: A Possible Nuclear War

President Kennedy disclosed this information to the world. This news horrified not only American people but also most of people of the world because this incidence could well trigger a full-fledged nuclear war between the US and Soviet Russia, the most serious nightmare for the human race, if any or both sides fail to handle the case wrongly. I was a sophomore student of Keio University at the time. I clearly remember that we were watching TV, listen to the radio and read seriously the head line news of every morning and evening.

President Kennedy declared to Soviet leaders that the US will not hesitate to attack Soviet vessels if they do not stop approaching Cuba. On October 28, Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev, the first secretary of Soviet Communist Party and the leader of Soviet Russia, compromised to the decisive ultimatum of President Kennedy and decided to withdraw Soviet fleet from the Caribbean sea. The rest of the world gave a sigh of relief. The world was relieved from the danger of nuclear war.

After this event, the US strengthened its ties with and control of various countries in South American continent making use of the OAS(Organization of American States), which was established in 1951, and excluded Cuba out of this organization. The US strengthened economic sanctions by not only the US but also these neighboring countries. Cuba survived this hardship partly with the support and assistance of Soviet Russia. However, after the dissolution of Soviet

Union in 1991 in the rein of Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev who promoted Glasnostch and Perestroika which later triggered a coup de tat leading to the collapse of Soviet Russia.

Even under these hardships, Cuba somehow managed to survive miraculously, and kept providing free school and free medical care services with minimal income differentials which are the ideals of socialism.

Guevara Dedicating for World Revolution

Coming back again to the story of Che Guevara, while he was working with Fidel Castro to build the Socialist Republic of Cuba, the difference between the view and ideals of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro have become increasingly apparent and grown large. Guevara increasingly sharpened his thought about what the man should be like. He advocated the concept of “New Human Being.” By which he means the man completely free from any restraints imposed by old societies. Man should be liberated completely. The best and only way to liberate the man is to pursue revolution.

He thought that revolution is the most desired and noble way of living for a courageous man. Looking around the world, he thought that there are ample cases where revolution is needed. Revolution was needed to liberate the people. With this thinking, the difference between Guevara and Castro is so obvious since Castro is devoting fully to create and maintain good socialist Cuba, while Guevara thinks that he should devote himself to lead the world revolution to save the suppressed people in the world.

Castro realized that he could no longer keep Guevara in Cuba, and Guevara left Cuba to challenge revolutions in various parts of the world including not only South America but also even as far as Africa. He went to Congo trying to help victimized people. He then came back to South America. He joined the revolutionary force in Bolivia who were apparently trying to fight against the

dictatorial government. However, he was betrayed and captured by the government soldiers. Since he was disguising himself not to be identified by his enemies these years, the soldiers who caught him cut off his wrists to test really he was Che Guevara. The body was buried aside the street. It was 1967. He passed away at his age of 39.

Guevara: an Eternal Hero

In 1997, namely 30 years later, his body, in fact pieces of bones, was found. Fidel Castro decided to carry his body back to Cuba. When the body arrived and was carried by a car to the city of Santa Clara, which is the memorial city where the final battle was fought by the revolutionists led by Guevara to defeat the troop of Batista sent there by armed train, which is some 300 km away from Havana, it is said that the citizens and villagers stood uninterruptedly along the road side to dedicate sad parting with their praying. While we were driving back from Santa Clara to Havana by a bus, we imagined that memorable scene of final farewell of Cuban people to their adorable hero, Che Guevara.

At the side of the mausoleum, where bones of Che Guevara are kept carefully, there stood a stone monument which is engraved, "Hasta la Victoria Siempre" meaning "until the day of eternal victory."

While driving, I thought of the things which happened to Cuba and the global environment around Cuba. Having lost the support of Soviet Russia in the wake of the collapse of Soviet system, and having been squeezed by the US with much harder economic sanctions, and has been isolated in the community of South American countries by means of ousted from the OAS(Organization of American Countries) by the initiative of the US, Cuba worked very hard to survive.

Resumption of Cuba-the US Diplomacy

From around the change of the century, however, the geopolitical picture of South America began to change substantively largely by the emergence of socialist inclined and anti-American leaders in many countries, which resulted in the dramatic change of the political inclination of the OAS. They welcomed back Cuba into their organization. With this change, the US turned out to be somewhat isolated in the international community of this area.

There have been changes even in the United States. Demands and requests from business circles to open business relations with Cuba have been rising and increasing stronger. It is because the merits of having business relations with Cuba are so obvious.

It was under such circumstances that President Barack Obama finally made a historic decision to terminate economic sanctions against Cuba and resume diplomatic relations with Cuba. President Obama obviously wished to create the legacy that he is the political leader who finally took the symbolic action to terminate the unfortunate period of "Cold War."

President Obama visited Cuba in April 11, 2015 to meet chairman Raul Castro, for the first time to have the summit of the two countries in 56 years after the cut of diplomatic relations, and in July 2015 asked the US congress to cancel economic sanctions, and reopen diplomatic relations by opening embassies again mutually in both countries.

Great Show in Tropicana

The bus drive was long and tiresome. Finally we reached our hotel, Melia Cohiba. Spending a little while in the hotel to refresh ourselves, and had a dinner together, this time in the hotel. It was partly because to save time for dinner since we plan to enjoy a grand show at the famous cabaret of local dancing and singing,

“Tropicana.” For dinner, we were told that our seats were reserved at a cafe terrace type restaurant where we used have breakfast. When we went there, we were told that our seats were not reserved. In fact, the seats were fully occupied already. We looked around and went into an Italian restaurant where a waiter was so eager to welcome us. The food was good and wines were reasonable. We learned later, though, the price was quite high..

We got on the bus to go to Tropicana. The theater was already quite crowded. Each one of us was given a piece of famous Havana cigar at the entrance, which reminded once again that we were in Cuba. The theatre is open sky style. Luckily it did not rain. Our seats were reserved in a good location. Rather, there was a moon in the sky. Seats were all packed by people, presumably mostly foreign tourists. We took some cocktail and the rum.

The show started. It was splendid. Dancing and singing were very good. They danced and sang Cuban songs together with popular songs of Latin American countries. Dancers danced very well. Apparently they are well trained. I’ve heard that there are good dancing schools where they are trained rigorously. Dances are speedy, rhythmical, and some times even acrobatic. With songs, dances, cigar and the rum with high tempo rhythms of drums and other instruments, we were getting highly motivated and excited. It was a wonderful night. After a long drive to visit Guevara’s mausoleum in vain and thought rather deeply the unique and moving history of Cuba spending a whole day, this wonderful show made us excited, stimulated and relieved.

The Revolution Museum

Next day was fully packed by visiting various tourists’ spots. We drove a bus to visit the center of the old town of Havana city where the National Assembly Hall, the Cathedral, Revolution Square, Havana Club Rum Brewery, the Revolution Museum etc were located. Since we missed the timing to visit the

brewery, we changed our plan to visit the revolution museum first.

Outside of the museum, several old planes the revolutionists used were displayed on the lawn. Aside from them were pieces of wreckage of some plane. They said that this is the wreckage of an American military plane which was shut down during their attack to Cuba in 1961. At the corner of square in front of the building was an old tank. It is the tank which Fidel Castro used to lead the citizens' soldiers to fight against the US force during the critical war of 1961. The museum even exhibits the boat "Gran Ma" at a big show window aside the street, which Fidel Castro and Che Guevara used to sail from Mexico to Cuba in 1959 to fight against government force to obtain independence of the country .

Inside the museum, there exhibited many photos and leftovers of the battles fought by the revolutionists. Because they were not fully equipped nor trained as the government soldiers, they had to fight in many cases in the jungle of mountainous areas. Our guide, Elaine, explained every piece of exhibits earnestly and added her own interpretations. Watching her, I was keenly impressed by her passion, dedication and enthusiasm. It was somewhat beyond her duty as a guide. She seems to be deeply identifying herself with the story she was telling to us.

I felt a kind of envy for her for being able to have such a story of her country to tell foreigners with such a pride and passion. For her, the experience of the revolutionists and the recent history of the country must be indeed very special. I wondered if Japanese young people have their own stories of their country which they can tell with such a pride and passion. I thought that Japan has many great stories which young Japanese should be able to tell to foreigners or even among themselves. However, I have never seen such passion among young people recently.

Music Loving Cuban Hospitality

We visited the rum brewery. After seeing the brewery plant, we went downstairs where a band of musicians were entertaining the room full of tourist visitors. Songs and musics were so joyful, rhythmical and tempting, I went to a small open space in front of the band and danced, and then brought with me a four year old boy, Sosuke, to dance together. Sosuke is very well behaved for only four years old. The audience were excited and joyfully clapped. This is a son of Ms. Mariko Kasai, a member of our team. She works for a large advertising company, Dentsu, which is famous for making employees work hard. It is amazing that Mariko somehow carves out her time to join this kind of trip and even with her very young son.

We left the brewery and walked along the street where many very classic cars were parking along the road side. We took many pictures for memory. We then proceeded to walk through a narrow path in the old town. People walking and sitting along the street, whether tourists or locals, looked all quite relaxed and easy. There we felt a nice smell of some cocktail. There was a small but very well-known bar serving people the famous “Mojito.” Beside the bar counter, there also was a band singing joyful songs with nice musics. I joined them to sing a few Latin American songs which I liked to sing many years ago. They welcomed me. This is a splendid, perhaps a genuine Cuban hospitality.

Legacy of Ernest Hemingway

Since it is close to noon time, we got on a bus to drive to a famous sea side fisherman’s village, “Kojimar” which Ernest Hemingway cherished and lived. He had a large retreat and a good sailing boat. It is this fisherman’s village where he wrote his famous book “The Old Man and the Sea.” When he began to live in this village, he was already a famous writer, particularly for his monumental work, “For Whom the Bell Tolls.” This is a story about the civil war in Spain between General Franco’s force and civil revolutionists force during late 1930s. It is known that Fidel Castro learned a lot from this book about how to fight guerrilla battle.

We took a nice lunch at a sea side restaurant which exhibits a few oil painted portrait of Hemingway. He is said to have liked to come to this restaurant for lunch. There also was a band who played joyful songs and musics. I again joined them to sing a few songs. They welcomed me to sing songs together. After lunch, we drove back to Havana. On the way we dropped by Moro Fortress to take a look at the famous historic site and also buy famous Havana cigars at the cigar shop there.

In the evening we meant to take dinner at a famous sea food restaurant “La Floridita.” Planners of our trip arranged several taxi cabs, all the very classic American cars of the 1950s. Since Cuba and the US cut diplomatic relations since 1959, all such American cars must have been built during or prior to the 1950s. The line up of such cars looked as though we were watching the exhibits of very classic car museum. The cars were apparently repainted and in bright colors such as red, blue, yellow, green and gold etc. They said that it has been quite difficult to find parts to replace old ones. Cuba people are ingenious to use parts of quite different types of cars to make them run. In fact such very classic cars ran well as taxi cabs. We enjoyed driving on such cars along the sea side street where big waves hit street side banks and explode huge splashes.

The Joyful Night in Havana

We arrived restaurant, “La Floridita” The restaurant was filled with tourists and guests. The room was bright and gay. A wide table in the back carpeted space was reserved for us. The dinner was nice. At the corner near the entrance was located a bronze sculpture of a bust of Hemingway. We took picture of the sculpture together with us.

Mr. Yo Yamagishi, a lawyer, a world traveler, and a member of Sonjuku who did not join us this time and a great lover of Cuba, strongly recommended us to visit two more places after the dinner. One is a well known dance and music hall,

“Cafe Taverna” and the other is “Casa de la Musica Miramar.” Since it was already near 9 o’clock in the evening, we went first to Cafe Taverna. It was also packed with people. With some drinks, a fairly large band kept playing Latin American musics joyfully. People were tempted to dance and were excited by dancing. We all danced even a four year old Sosuke. He became a small star of the night. Since it was already quite late at night we were unable to visit another night club. It was because we had to leave the hotel at 4’ clock in the next morning in order to ride a plane leaving Havana AP at 7 am to fly back to Japan via Toronto to arrive at Japan in the evening of still next day, Japan time.

This is a brief report of our very short visit of Cuba. During this trip I was much impressed by two things: One is the image of the United States which looked much different from the view point of a small country just aside of the US located in Caribbean sea, and the other is a joyful, optimistic, open and hospital culture of music loving Cuba people, which was perhaps their strength to survive through incredible hardship imposed on them.

And I was tempted to visit Cuba again together with some wishing volunteers of Sonjuku, spend a week or so in Havana city, live in a shabby room of the old town, stroll around the streets, chat with people in Spanish, join music bands on the street to sing songs together, drink and dance in commoner’s tavernas in the evening. This is my dream emerged in my mind having been attracted much by Cuban way of living.