

COLUMN

The Ties That Bind: Strengthening Japan-U.S. Relations through Japan-Hawaii Sister City and Friendship City Exchanges

Do you know how many sister city and friendship city relationships there are between Japan and Hawaii? There have been as many as 30 relationships of this kind, with long-lasting, active exchanges. Some exchanges were initiated based on hometown associations established in Hawaii by Japanese immigrants and their descendants, while others were initiated by a mutual desire for peace and security after the harsh experience of World War II or tragic maritime accidents. As these examples show, the sister city and friendship city relationships between Japan and Hawaii have a long and deep history of camaraderie that began with the arrival of Japanese immigrants in Hawaii over 150 years ago.

Although sister city and friendship city exchanges are indispensable parts of the Japan-Hawaii relationship, in-person exchanges were suspended for a while due to the spread of COVID-19. Later, once COVID-19 had subsided in Hawaii, representatives from 22 Japanese local governments with sister city and friendship city relationships with Hawaii gathered in Honolulu on July 27 and 28 for the first “Hawaii-Japan Sister State & Sister City Summit” with the aim of strengthening the bonds that have been established and developing new ties. A cumulative total of 400 people attended the Summit, including the governors of six prefectures and mayors and



Group photo of the Hawaii-Japan Sister State & Sister City Summit (July 27, Hawaii, U.S.; Photo: JASH)

their representatives of 16 cities and towns from Japan, as well as the Governor of Hawaii and the Mayors of Honolulu, Kauai, Maui, and Hawaii from the State of Hawaii. The local leaders of Japan and Hawaii met in-person for the first time in a long while. They discussed the possibility of expanding the sister city and friendship city exchanges that have been conducted on a one-on-one basis in the past, and exploring multilayered cooperation between relevant cities to make the exchanges more effective in the future. Additionally, panel discussions were held inviting leaders in the fields of sustainable energy, education, sustainable tourism, as well as business and economy, which are common issues to Japan and Hawaii.



Ainu dance of Hokkaido performed at the commemorative reception at the Consul General's official residence (July 27, Hawaii, U.S.)

The Consulate General of Japan in Honolulu cooperated with the host organization, the Japan-America Society of Hawaii (JASH), in preparing for the summit, and played a part in the coordination work between the Hawaii and Japanese local governments. In addition, on July 27, a commemorative reception was held at the official residence of the Consul General, inviting the Summit participants. The reception featured performances of Ainu dance from Hokkaido and *Shishimai* dance of Okinawa, providing an opportunity to showcase the charms of Japan's regions to people active in various fields in Hawaii. Furthermore, six local *kenjinkai* (associations of people from a particular prefecture) in Hawaii exhibited booths,

providing an opportunity to interact with representatives of local governments and contributing to the strengthening of the Japan-Hawaii relationship.

The “Hawaii-Japan Sister State & Sister City Summit” became one of the largest Japan-related events in Hawaii following COVID-19, symbolizing the resumption of exchanges between Japan and Hawaii going forward.