



EAST-WEST CENTER
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EAST-WEST CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Sumi Makey Interview Narrative

11-14-2005 interview in Honolulu, Hawaii

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The **East-West Center Oral History Project** strives to capture the Center's first 50 years as seen through the eyes of staff, alumni, and supporters who have contributed to its growth.

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Sumi Makey

11-14-2005 interview in Honolulu, Hawaii

Personal Background

I was born on Maui, the youngest of five children. My parents came from Kumamoto, Japan, and they settled on Maui, where I was born and raised. After high school I left to come to the University of Hawai'i in Honolulu.

At the University of Hawai'i, I majored in psychology and sociology, hoping to get into social work. But they didn't hire anyone with only a bachelor's degree at that time. You had to have a master's degree in social work. So I went to Lanai to teach for two years.

At that time, they were taking people with a bachelor's degree to teach in the elementary schools. So I taught for two years and saved enough money to go to Teachers' College, Columbia University, for my master's degree.

It was a very big change. Can you imagine someone from little Maui going all the way to New York City? And I didn't really know anyone there either. The interesting thing is they treated us like foreign students. We were invited to the orientation for foreign students. This was in the early '50s, and so it was a very different time.

At any rate, I spent a year there getting my master's degree in counseling and guidance and worked for a year at the University of Illinois, and a year at Ohio State University, doing residence hall counseling.

Life Before EWC

Work in Washington, D.C.

Then I came back to Honolulu and worked for a couple of years as a counselor in an elementary school, and then went back to Washington, D.C., with my sister who wanted to go to college after working for some years.

So she and I went to Washington, D.C., and I worked for a year as an elementary school teacher, but it was extremely difficult. I was not trained to be a teacher, and I felt I wasn't doing a good job. So I took the federal exam to get into government and worked for the government for nine years.

At that time my name was Sumi Yoshizawa. There were a number of African-Americans in the class, and they had such a difficult time pronouncing Yoshizawa! After teaching, I worked for the government at the Bureau of Ships in the Navy Department, the Labor Department, and finally, I worked in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. And that's where I was engaged in programming AID participants from Asia. AID is the Agency for International Development. They brought students from Asia and around the world to study at various colleges and universities in the U.S. I was assigned to work with students from Asia, monitoring their progress and generally looking after them while they were in the U.S.

While working in Washington, D.C., I met and married my husband and in 1963, we returned to Hawai'i to meet my family. My husband is from Michigan and it was an eye-opener to experience Hawai'i for the first time.

Interest in EWC

We spent a couple of weeks visiting my family on Maui, and spending time in Honolulu as well. While in Honolulu we explored employment opportunities for us. Since I had been working with participants from Asia, I thought, the East-West Center would be an interesting place for me to visit. While visiting there I met Helen Hawkes who was in charge of field study in the Institute for Student Interchange (a.k.a. ISI). She was interested in my background and experience and wanted to keep in touch with me. I met her the following spring when she was on a business trip in Washington, D.C., and suddenly in the summer of 1964, I was offered a job at the East-West Center.

Life at EWC

Institute for Student Interchange, Mid-'60s

After weighing the pluses and minuses, we decided to move to Hawai'i and I accepted the job at the East-West Center, working there from 1964 to early 1988, almost 24 years. We don't have children but I always felt that the students I worked with were like my children here at the East-West Center. The first of the students are retired and they have children of their own. And I encourage the children to apply to the East-West Center. When I first came to the Center I worked in the field study office in the Institute for Student Interchange. At that time in the '60s, almost all of the students went on what was called field study. The Asian students spent time on the mainland U.S. Some enrolled in a university for a semester or a quarter. Others traveled around the country on tours conducted by a professor from the American Studies Department at the University of Hawai'i.

Dr. [Seymour] Lutzky was in charge of the program, and he conducted seminars here in preparation for their trip. The American students were sent either on research or study to Asia.

The field study office made all the arrangements for students to go to the mainland or to Asia. Helen Hawkes was in charge at that time, and I was hired as her assistant. But during the first year that I was there, she suffered a stroke and was unable to return to work and I took over the field study office.

In the '60s, there were three institutes. The Institute for Advanced Projects, the Institute for Technical Interchange, and the Institute for Student Interchange or ISI, where we had hundreds of students here at one time. At one point, it might have even reached almost 600. ISI was responsible for the student program.

Best Memories, the '60s

Probably the '60s were the most exciting, because we were developing all the programs. It was a time when you could experiment, you could develop new programs and try new ideas to enrich the students' experiences. It was a fun time and the students were so enthusiastic and eager to learn and experience new things. Even living together in the dormitory was a good experience for them, as each had a roommate who often became a lifelong friend.

This is why I think the '60s alumni are so devoted to the Center, because for them, the Center was such a different experience. And as I said, many say it changed their lives totally both personally and professionally. And the nice thing for us as staff members was to see the growth and changes in the students. During the two years to four years at the Center, you could see the students' growth and the change in their view of the world.

We could see the changes in these students when they came back from attending school and traveling on the mainland. They always appeared more self-confident and with greater self-esteem. It was truly a wonderful experience for them.

Institutional Transitions

Program Coordination Office, '60s

I began in the field study office. And then there was a reorganization, and we called it the program coordination office where program coordinators worked with groups of students, from Japan, from the Philippines, from India, etc. Later I was put in charge of that office.

It was a very different time in the '60s. Students came from the mainland with little knowledge or experience in Asia. I remember one student from Boston who had never been west of the Mississippi before she came to the East-West Center. That sounds funny now when students come with many different experiences, such as the Junior Year Abroad.

This was a totally new experience. It was a wonderful and an eye-opening experience. It changed their whole lives. This is what the '60s alumni repeatedly say.

There were quite a few international marriages as well. And, it was just a wonderful experience for those students. And it was a wonderful experience for me, too, because I was still fairly young then, and I hadn't traveled to Asia or the Pacific. It was wonderful to meet people from different countries and it made me much more sensitive to the different cultures in Asia and the Pacific.

Separation from UH

The Center became independent in 1975 after a struggle. But once the Center became independent, I don't think that affected the students' programs. Rather it affected how the Center operated. The East-West Center operated with its own international board, etc. Whereas up to then, the University would have to approve personnel changes, etc. With independence, the Center established its own international board of governors, it could raise funds of its own, could sign agreements with outside agencies, and have a direct relationship with the State Department.

President Kleinjans and his staff worked hard to achieve independence for the Center. But as staff members we were not that greatly affected except for our employment status. And therefore they struggled on it, I'm sure, for a while. It didn't affect us so much. It did affect some terms of our employment status perhaps.

Up to 1975, as part of the University, we were State employees, but when the Center became independent, people hired were under TIAA-CREF [*retirement plan*] and were no longer State of Hawai'i employees. But for those of us who were here before 1975, we had a choice. So I stayed with the State and retired as a State employee.

It was definitely a good decision to become independent, to be able to raise funds, to be able to get grants from agencies, as an independent organization, not a part of the University. Not everybody would want to give to the University but they may give to the East-West Center as an independent entity.

We just built on what we started and others carried on and made the Center what it is today.

Intellectual Innovations

Open Grants Program

In the late '60s and early '70s, the Center changed over to the problem-oriented institutes, under President Kleinjans' leadership. The three institutes (ISI, ITI and IAP) were replaced by institutes that focused on Population, Communication, Culture Learning, Technology and Development, and Environment and Policy. Each institute had its own students but the Center decided to maintain a unit called Open Grants to provide flexibility to the Center primarily to take students whose interests did not mesh with the institutes. At first it was intended to be a temporary unit to see how it was going to work out. But Open Grants developed its own mission and purpose in the '70s, and it continued on until I left.

Yes, the education program could have had its beginnings then. In 1979, I was appointed the Dean of Student Affairs and Open Grants, and I still had a unit called Open Grants when I retired in 1988. After I left, I believe it slowly changed, but Open Grants was important then to enable the Center to take students who didn't fit into the institutes, but who showed leadership potential. In fact, we were freer to take people in various fields in Open Grants, unlike the institutes which accepted students in fields related to institute projects and interests.

So Open Grants brought students in the sciences, in religion, philosophy and history, in fields not often represented in the institutes. We had an interesting group of very good students in Open Grants. In 1979, then President Kleinjans asked me if I would take over an office that would encompass some of the student services, alumni, awards, etc., in addition to Open Grants and I became the Dean of Student Affairs and Open Grants. For

a few years it even had groups of fellows conducting research and working with Open Grants students.

As dean, I was also in charge of the program representatives in the various countries, who did the preliminary recruiting of students for the Center. Then they would send us applications for each of the institutes which were then processed by the awards office. The applications were first sent to the Graduate Division of the University, then sent to the various departments at UH, and the final selections were made by the institutes and Open Grants. Finally, as dean I was in charge of the Alumni Office which began developing programs with the EWC alumni and Participant Services which provided services to the students in health matters, assisted students with activities, etc.

I think, the nurturing of Open Grants was to me something that I was proud of because it met a need and we brought so many wonderful students in Open Grants. I had to fight for it and then nurture it, and it continued on, which meant that it was indeed something that was needed.

First Students from Bhutan, China

And the recruitment of students was interesting and challenging. I went to Bhutan and opened the door for Bhutan to send students to the Center.

Well, I went to China first, and we brought the first students from China in 1980, I believe. The Minister of Agriculture had visited the East-West Center, and he seemed interested in sending students, so he invited the vice-president and me to go to China as guests of the government. Back in 1980, China didn't have the fancy hotels they have now. They had only the Friendship Hotel. Initially, they put us up in the Summer Palace because I guess they didn't have anywhere else to put us.

We had many interesting experiences there, and it was wonderful to be able to start a program like that. The first two students we had were not very proficient in English, and it was very difficult for them. They were professors in China and were unable to earn degrees, but at least they were able to take courses at UH. Since then, of course, many more students have come from China.

The other interesting place was Bhutan, which was a somewhat closed country then. In 1986, I was invited to Bhutan through the brother of a former student who worked for Save the Children, an international organization which had offices in Bhutan. During my visit, I met with officials from various ministries and offices.

The guide who was assigned to me from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was a young man who took me to the various appointments and even took me sightseeing. His name was Kunzang Dorji. He spoke very good English and had been educated in India because there was no higher education in Bhutan then. He had three years of education in India and did not qualify for graduate work at UH.

So when I came back here, I pleaded with the graduate division to accept him because they have to accept him first before we could give him an award. I even took a letter he wrote to me to show them how well he wrote. The Graduate Division finally decided to accept him on a provisional basis where he would have to take prerequisites for one year before he could work for a degree. So that started the program in Bhutan, and I understand we have had some students from Bhutan.

It's a wonderful country. It's the only country I visited where there was no Western influence, in architecture, dress, etc.

Kunzang went back to Bhutan and was working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I am not sure what his position is at the present time. After Kunzang, there was a girl who worked in the library who came here as an intern and went back to work in a library there.

Contemporary Issues in Asia and Pacific Seminar

One concern especially in the '80s was how we could get the students involved in the institute projects and activities. Students were chosen by the institutes and Open Grants and the intent was to get as many of them involved as possible in the institute projects with the research staff. But it was often very difficult because of limited staff in the institutes. Some of the students wanted to get involved, but they didn't have the opportunity and were frustrated. So we formed a Deans' Committee with representatives from each of the institutes to see how we could get the students more involved. We met for many months but the issue was never really resolved.

Of course, students spent a great deal of time, working for their degrees, and time was limited for involvement. But my feeling always was that if they were just going to study at the University of Hawai'i, that wasn't the East-West Center experience. And I felt that involvement in the institutes and the Center was an important part of the students' experience here because that's what made them East-West Center students.

During the '80s, then, when President Victor Li was here, he asked me to set up a seminar looking at contemporary issues in Asia and the Pacific. He felt it was important not only for a student to get a degree, but also to learn about the different perspectives and the problems that are facing people in Asia and the Pacific.

He is the one who stimulated this seminar. It may be a little different now, but the whole point of it was that he felt strongly -- and I agreed with him -- the experience should be more than just getting a degree at the university.

In the past too they had participant activities. They put on the International Fair every year, and celebrated each country's national day. But the seminar went beyond that. Because just to get the degree was important, but it shouldn't be the whole experience. I believe some of the students may have been involved in EWC research projects, but now it's more formalized with certificate programs. That's what was probably needed in the '80s, where we might have given various options to students. Some of the students probably didn't spend that much time at the Center or get to know the researchers. If they weren't too involved, maybe they saw them once in a while. And I felt strongly that more involvement in the Center was very important, and that's what we struggled to improve in the '80s.

Each institute had a group of students with whom they interacted and were responsible for. But if you weren't involved in institute projects, you could still be involved in other Center activities, so it didn't mean that your experience wasn't rich. You still had the dormitory experience, you still had the participant association, and you still had other activities in which you could participate.

Ties That Last

Alumni

I would say that the students have done extremely well. Many are in leadership positions in government as well as in academia. I am very impressed by their accomplishments

since leaving the Center. Every year there are alumni who visit Hawai'i and we are able to meet and hear about their experiences back home.

Recently a couple from Chicago visited the Center. He is an American who married a student from Japan. They met here as students in the '60s, and they've done exceedingly well. They are also very committed to the Center, making significant financial contributions to the Center.

Last summer, a student from Laos visited here with her husband and family. We brought undergraduates from Laos in the '70s because Laos didn't have any undergraduate program at that time. And, of course, with all the problems in Laos in the '70s, they never went back. In fact, it was dangerous for them to go back. So they remained in the U.S. and have been most successful in their careers. Tian who visited from Oregon is a vice president in a bank. Saichay, another Laotian student, is the head of the Maunalani Nursing Home here in Honolulu.

A few months ago, we saw a student from Afghanistan whom we have not seen for about 25 years. She settled in California, and she brought her husband and two children to visit Hawai'i for the first time since leaving the Center. It was wonderful to see Layla as a mature and happy mother and a wife who worked hard to build a life in a foreign country.

Another student who visited earlier this year was an American who got his master's degree in public health through EWC, and then went on to get a medical degree.

He practices in Baltimore and has his own clinic there.

He brought his wife and two children here to visit, so we got together to meet his family.

The East-West Center will always be a part of my life.

Sometimes students return to Hawai‘i primarily to visit their host families. This was the case with a student from Korea who came to see her host family last summer. Her host family was so good to her and became very close friends. She is still in touch with the mother who is now in a nursing home. In the '60s and '70s, host families played an important role in the students' lives.

The Mission

As the Center changed over the years, I am sure the mission statement has also seen some changes. But I believe that the basic mission of promoting better relations and understanding among the people of Asia, the Pacific and the U.S. remains the same. The difference over the years is primarily in the various ways the Center has chosen to achieve the basic goal.

With all the changes in the world, I suppose the Center has to change as well. But I think the basic mission of bringing people together for study and research still remains the same, and I think it's still important in this world where we have so many wars and conflicts to promote better relations and understanding.

I think it's only through living and working together and studying together that people are more sensitive to what others are thinking. They form friendships that often last a lifetime. You can resolve problems more easily in an environment where you have respect for each other and respect for other cultures. So from that viewpoint, I don't think the mission statement has changed that much.

The original mission was to bring people from various cultures to come together, to study, to conduct research, etc. and it's still doing that, isn't it?

EWC's Impact

On Career

I was doing fairly well in the government in Washington, D.C. I had a good position, and I enjoyed working with foreign students from Asia. Last year, I had letters from students whom I had programmed in the '60s. They were from Vietnam living in California and still remembered me after over 40 years!

I also decided to return to Hawaii for family reasons as my mother was still living at that time.

The EWC experience has certainly enriched my life. I really loved working at the Center and working with students from throughout Asia, the Pacific and the U.S.

I enjoyed coming to work, and I was able to travel extensively throughout Asia and the Pacific as well. We also met many interesting people who visited the Center and added so much to my knowledge and experience. The East-West Center gave me much more than I contributed to the Center. My life would have been far less exciting and interesting had I remained on the mainland.

The original mission of the Center focused on Asia, Pacific and the United States, with two-thirds of the students from Asia and the Pacific and one-third from the U.S. So the Pacific focus was there from the beginning

But I think that might've changed in the last 10 years, I'm not sure.

On Students

I think the most striking changes in international and American students when they come here and then by the time they leave is in their attitude toward other cultures, and the way they treat someone from another country.

I really think they've become so sensitive to other cultures that they're able to then operate in an international community. So a number of alumni have joined international organizations. Also, consciously or subconsciously their view and perspective of the world have changed.

Also the EWC provides a common bond so even individuals who are strangers at first become friends when they learn they were both at the Center. The barrier is immediately broken.

I think the academic programs were very important to them. But I think even more lasting is their sensitivity to other cultures, and their ability to live and work with people from different cultures. It's amazing how many lifelong friends from other countries the students made while at the Center. They formed very deep and lasting friendships.

It's a little like living in an international house at a university. But then this is such a diverse community here with so many people from different cultures. And when you live closely together in the dormitory and you engage in the different activities and you're always in contact with each other, you can't help but be affected by the experience.

On Perspective

Because I was working with foreign students for several years prior to coming here, it wasn't totally different at that point. But of course the Center experience still broadened my whole perspective of Asia and the Pacific and working daily with these students deepened my understanding of their cultures.

For example, I began to have an appreciation for the Pacific Islands as we began having students from the various islands. I developed a much better understanding of their customs and values and their struggles when they first arrived in Hawai'i as young

students. And of course there were so many interesting people that passed through the Center that we heard in seminars, etc. It's not just doing paperwork, but it's the people you meet who are fascinating and interesting and you learned so much from them. I couldn't have had a better job. It was truly a wonderful job.