ALetter

Vol.

Published by The Niigata International Association (NIA)









Images and Messages by our featured young people about our multicultural world.

On the Cover . . .

International Student Exchange Club Member, University of Niigata (Top left)

Prefecture, Jin Yan Pin

(Top right) International Student Exchange Club Member, Nagaoka University,

Gombo Solongo

(Lower right) International Student Exchange Club Member, Niigata Sangyo University,

Rahman Md Atikur

(Lower left) Cross-talk guest, Erika Shinoda

Contents



Cross-Talk: Multicultural Co-existence

Mutsuko Sato, Secretary General, Joetsu International Network, Erika Shinoda, Student, University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB)

■We're coming to visit you! Let's check out a company

^F ujii Corporation Co., Ltd.	Rajkumar Khumukcham	5	õ

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Multicultural Co-existence

Multicultural Co-existence

People with different nationalities or ethnicities recognizing each other's differences, and striving to form close relationships and live together.

(Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications)

As foreign residents increase in Niigata Prefecture, how should the region accept and create an environment that promotes mutual understanding? We talked to Prof. Sasaki, Ms. Sato, and Ms. Erika Shinoda, all active in international fields, about the key word "multicultural co-existence" and touched on topics such as cross-cultural understanding and tips on how we can contribute to the realization of a multicultural society in the future.



"Discovering your true self-identity is the first step to self-affirmation"

佐々木 寛

Sasaki Hiroshi

Professor, Faculty of International Studies, Niigata University of International and Information Studies

Q: Please share with us your activities and initiatives.

Prof. Sasaki: I teach courses related to international studies to undergraduates at the Niigata University of International and Information Studies. I am also involved in the international facilitator project* headed by the NIA. We send college students into elementary, junior and senior high schools to learn together by sharing information. Many questions in international understanding studies do not have clear answers, so the college students become a driving force and use facilitator techniques to explore cultures and exchange views in a fun setting.

※ Since 2005, in cooperation with 5 universities in Niigata, NIA trains students as facilitators for international exchange and understanding, and dispatches them to various schools for workshops on international understanding.

Ms. Shinoda: I just finished my sophomore year at the University of California at Santa Barbara. I was born and raised in Niigata, and lived in Minami Uonuma city through high school. I am now studying Communication and Theater at college. My parents work at IUJ, the International University of Japan, also in Minami Uonuma, so since I was very young I have been involved with people from other countries, and have seen close up how foreigners in this area are living. Currently I am active with an NPO called Ryugaku Fellowship, which gives workshops to junior and high school students about the possibilities of studying abroad.

Ms. Sato: I am the Secretary General of Joetsu International Network, which started out offering Japanese language classes. The Association used to fall under the prefecture and city governments, but became independent 15 years ago, and is now a Public Interest Incorporated Association. We offer cross-cultural

exchange opportunities such as World Camp and various education programs for the people of Joetsu. We also support foreigners in the city with Japanese language classes and consultation services. Furthermore, we provide a place for all kinds of people to gather – it is said that this place is for people who are unique, myself included, to get together.

Q: Foreign residents in Niigata are increasing. In 2015, 13,493, or 0.58% of the population were from overseas. In 2018 that number rose to 15,810 or 0.7%. In just 3 years, Niigata's population has decreased by 2% but the number of foreigners has grown 14%. Have you felt any changes?

Prof. Sasaki: NIA's facilitator project has had many workshops with the theme of "outside of the border". Students are beginning to realize that the international community is something very close to them. Students are taking their own initiative to meet people and to develop more workshop materials. Slowly but surely the idea of which has been common in Japan, having a clear line that foreigners are outsiders, is fading. I have also noticed that in the convenience stores, more and more non-Japanese people are working part time.

Ms. Shinoda: In Minami Uonuma, a place for IT companies to gather was created. People with strong backgrounds in sciences and IT related companies can come together to collaborate, and it is very near my home. So now you can see foreigners that are not associated with IUJ in the area. Often the foreigners in the area bring their families too, and it is fun to see children from all over the world playing with each other.

Prof. Sasaki: It has become commonplace to see at least one non-Japanese student in the class where the facilitator projects are run.

Ms. Sato: In Joetsu City as well, the same can be said, however the trend took a deep drop after the Lehman Shock. Prior to the Lehman Shock we had many foreigners coming as spouses of local people (migration through marriage) and newcomers from Brazil and Peru (arriving after the 1980s). These newcomers have a wide network and share information about where it is good to live and work, etc. More recently many are coming in with companies. With this, areas that are not used to having foreigners near are finding problems within the schools, neighborhood associations, etc. We have stories of people seeing foreigners near the garbage stations

and become afraid to take their garbage out, or concerns about foreigners not handling garbage properly themselves. I feel that the local people probably have changed more than the newly arriving foreigners with the increasing presence of foreigners.

Q: Shinoda-san, you had a relatively international upbringing through high school and are now studying abroad. Has your impression about what studying abroad would be like changed from before going and now?

Ms. Shinoda: Looking different in Japan gave me a bit of a complex, but in the US it is much easier being different. While in Japan, I felt my hair was too curly and too brown. Just because I can speak English better than others I stood out, and people would stare at me just because I was shopping with my mom. I thought, when I was little, that living here is a little uncomfortable. But when I became a high school student, even the local grocery store starting carrying spices and ingredients from overseas and it started to feel like more and more acceptance for differences was coming. Now, studying overseas, I am seen as a Japanese girl, and not as an American. I thought maybe the same thing would happen: me being different from others and stand out negatively. However, the University of California Santa Barbara, where I am now a student, has many Japanese Americans, and people of all different heritages. So it didn't matter where I was from, or what I looked like, I was able to be seen as an equal from day one. I really felt this aspect is different than here in Japan. When I was a little girl, I was seen as a half American kid and told that I was different from everyone else. Because I heard it a lot, I could not help think that about myself as well. But then I thought about my Mom's American roots, and I knew it was important not to just throw that part of myself away. But when I went to the US I felt "Oh maybe I truly am fully Japanese!" My heart wants to stay with Japan. In the US, we talk about how your identity is determined – racial background, environment you are raised in, etc. But I don't hear things like that being talked about in Japan.

Prof. Sasaki: In the US, everyone is known as a "something" American. Almost everywhere else in the world, it is unusual for the nationality to associate with the roots of their ancestors. That is because people are mobile. But still in Japan, people think that you



"Be courageous to communicate: Even just a single word is good. We want to hear you!"

信田

Shinoda Frika

Born in Minami Uonuma, Niigata Prefecture, graduated from a local high school, and now studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, on a scholarship supported by the Yanai Tadashi Foundation. Her mother is from the USA. (Cover photo · lower left)



"Find strength from foreign people. Thanks to them, we can feel free to express our own heartfelt opinions."

佐藤 睦子

Sato Mutsuko

After working as an elementary school teacher, a junior high school teacher, an international exchange volunteer, and a Japanese language volunteer, Ms. Sato is now the Secretary General of Joetsu International Network.

are born and raised here, stay here, and things are consistent. It is as if we are living in a barrel or an invisible bubble. Some young people are diversifying though. While some jump out, others want to stay in the secure bubble. The latter are still more common. These people are becoming more introverted and shutting out things that are different from themselves. This is a worry point about the Japanese society and young people today.

Ms. Sato: Good point. Here there seems less of an opportunity to think about your own path. I wonder if this is a bi-product of an island nation.

Q: Building toward a society of multicultural co-existence is important. But what happens next?

Prof. Sasaki: As Shinoda-san mentioned, there are many layers of who you are inside of yourself. You are not just one identity. For example, those from the same Niigata prefecture are different if you are from Joetsu or Shibata. For example, I was born in Shikoku, but I grew up in Kanto and then came to Niigata, and now I identity as someone from Niigata. If you think like that, living with "foreigners" is not new, as we already live with lots of different kinds of people. If you don't first recognize that, you will not see that those around you are different than yourself. So it is important to see the diversity within yourself as a first step. Doing so makes room for you to not only accept your differences, but also the differences in others and that can lead to multicultural existence. This is called "inner internationalization" and that will be our challenge going forward. As we talked about earlier, Shinoda-san is still seen as a special person, but she should just be part of the norm as our world globalizes. But the deep concern is that not only in Japan, but across the globe, the tendency is to keep within our comfort zones, shutting the world out. But as we look at ourselves, we must acknowledge that we are always changing, and we must stay open to that and allow our identities to be recreated now and near future.

Ms. Sato: This is a wonderful idea you shared with us. To be able to evaluate ourselves, find our self esteem, and see how we are different than when we were young, and to find value in who we are.

(continued on the next page)

Prof. Sasaki: Each one of us is a unique person on this earth, and we cannot fit into any one category. In the future, I believe we will live in a society where we will all see each other as a very special and unique individuals.

Ms. Sato: I wish to get rid of the notion that I am safe if I am the same as everyone else. Just because you are the same as another, doesn't mean everything is OK. I think there are too many people who feel they have to go to school, or have to be like those around themselves and grow up denying who they really are.

Ms. Shinoda: The seeds for that are planted from elementary school. We have to wear set uniforms, yellow hats, carry the designated school bags. And if a friend has a new cute pencil box, everyone else would want that too. When it feels impossible to be different, you want to fit in by having and doing the same as others. If kids could have the opportunity to choose more freely, this could change. For example, recently kids have more options to choose the color of their school bag to show some of their own individuality. My local store is beginning to sell halal * food, and a local hot spring inn is caring for religions that cannot show much skin. I wish that local people could realize that local places are beginning to accept foreigners, and feel more natural in accepting different cultures coming in. My mother always says that asking a foreigner "where are you from?" as the very first conversation just makes that person feel like an outsider. It is hard, as you may be curious of their nationality, but it is better to start the conversation like "it's a nice day today" or something that you usually talk about with Japanese people. Then, maybe ask their nationality. I hope someday, Niigata prefecture and Japan becomes a society that does not draw a line between insiders and outsiders.

In Islamic law, items permitted to be eaten are called halal. Foods with alcohol, pork or pork-derived ingredients, and those that have not been processed according to Islamic law are called halam and are prohibited, so beef or chicken without a Halal certification cannot be eaten.

Ms. Sato: In Joetsu, there is a phrase "Tabi no Mon" – meaning a traveler. I am from Tochigi Prefecture, so I am a traveler. Indeed, it would be wonderful if we could start a conversation with something besides "Where are you from?"



Prof. Sasaki: Yes, we can say people are travelers, or rather unique people, but I want to say that we are all world travelers. Then when we meet each other during our travels and can simply greet each other with a hello. It would be nice if we could come together that smoothly.

Q: Please share your message to young people heading into their future.

Ms. Sato: Recognize the diversity within you. I want you to experience many things in many ways. I want you to meet lots of different kinds of people. Make friends with foreigners. Part of multicultural co-existence is making at least one foreign friend. Then, you will feel that we are the same. Our role is to create a place for such friendships to be able to grow.

Ms. Shinoda: I think young people now have a bigger problem with communicating than with judging by appearance. A lot of Japanese people think they have to be perfect when they talk, and if they make a mistake with language they will feel ashamed. This is a big barrier. It is okay if your English is elementary or middle school level, and it is okay if it is not perfect. Just use the words you know and try. I am sure the person listening will help figure out your meaning. Or, just try speaking to them in simple Japanese and it will make the difference. Don't try for perfection in communicating, but have the will to want to communicate. I think if you go to a foreign country to live, you will want people to talk to you. Put yourself in the other's shoes and try to feel how it would be like to be a foreigner here in Japan. In this way I think you will naturally become aware of what you can do.

Prof. Sasaki: I want to say that the world is bigger than you can imagine. You might think that adults are like this, and the world is like that, but the world is so so much bigger than that. So break out of your shell and go see the world. As Shinoda-san said, go out, meet people, talk to them, and you will find yourself and grow as a person. You will find that a new and exciting life is waiting for you. You can choose to either hide in your shell, or break out of it and explore – it's one or the other. There is no middle ground. In order for you to find a happy and rewarding life, break out of your shell and toss away your preconceptions, close your eyes and jump into the world and diversity. I just know you will have a better time.

Ms. Sato: So many different kinds of people are coming from overseas, and they are so energetic! We can get power from them. It is okay if you feel that when you are with them something is a bit different and that you are not the same. For many Japanese, saying that a person is different is implying a negative image. After I started to work here, I could open my heart and feel comfortable saying that different is okay. You don't need to go abroad, but you can try to look at things objectively. It is great to just get out there, challenge something new. Try a new thing -even a small one- and the world will become bigger for you!



In this column, we interview foreign nationals employed in companies in Niigata. We look at the cultural differences in work cultures, how the person is fitting in to the company and the community as an individual, and see their hard work in action. As multicultural adaptation is the theme for this issue, we learn about how they spend their working days and holidays as they feel engage with multiculturalism.

Introducing Rajkumar Khumukcham, from India and

his company Fujii Corporation

Q: Please tell us about your current work.

I joined the company in 2017 and work as a Sales Engineer in the Business Unit to learn about Fujii's special machines. At first it was very hard to work in a Japanese language setting. I had to learn the specialized kanji used in machine maintenance and routine checks. I worked on my own or on a small team. The senior employees helped me when I found difficulty. When I was a student, I studied IT, Chemistry and International Relations, so I found the work very enjoyable with the machines right in front of me.

Q: How did you come to Japan?

My grandparents told me that Japan is a good place, and Japanese people are very smart. So I was interested in Japan from an early age. As a high school student, I volunteered as a guide for Japanese tourists. After graduating from university in

my hometown, I entered the University of Delhi (Japanese Language and Culture course for 1 year). I visited the Japan Foundation in Delhi and saw a brochure about the International University of Japan (IUJ) in Minami Uonuma. I applied!

Q: What surprised you about Niigata?

The snow!! I saw snow for the first time in Niigata. My dorm room on campus was on the first floor, so the windows were covered by it. And I love the beauty of Niigata's various towns.

Q: Tell us about your time at IUJ.

I was awarded a scholarship by IUJ to study there, and worked on the weekends. I read the NIA LETTER all the time! I also went to a high school in the area and helped with a cross-cultural studies class. It was fun to learn about the various parts of the world with the students. I still meet my

host family from this time. I was interested in Japanese education system, and they kindly took me to visit an elementary school.

Q: Please give a message to others wanting to work at a Japanese company, and share with us your future goals.

The most important thing to work in Japan is to learn Japanese and about Japanese culture. In the future, I would like to do an exchange activity between the northeastern part of India and Niigata.

If I have a chance, I'd like to hold a cultural exchange event with the people of Imphal in India and Japanese people, with our historical relationship as the background. I would like for us to grow closer. And most especially, I'd like to help with the development of our economic relations going forward.



Thank you for your kindness

We appreciate the support for this article provided by Fujii Corporation employees Mr. Kazuo Shimizu, General Affairs Division Senior Adviser, and Rie Morita, Public Relations, System Management.

Fujii Corporation manufactures snowplows and specialized machines to allow workers to work at considerable heights. The machines are exported to 18 countries. At company events, the foreign employees often cook dishes from their home countries. The first foreign employee was from Bangladesh, and naturalized about 2 years ago. Now, the company employs three employees from overseas. Mr. Shimizu





stated "We would like to hire people in accordance with our HR needs, without considering nationality."

Photo Top left: A sign at the entrance to the head office, pointing to export destinations

around the world

Exterior of the head office in Tsubame

City, Niigata Prefecture

Photo Lower left:

Photo riaht:

From left Mr. Shimizu, Mr. Rajkumar, Ms. Morita

International Student Exchange Club Member

"Team BEGIN" ~ What We Want You to Know ~



Learn more

International Student Exchange Club Members who have left their hometowns to live their student life in Niigata should have daily opportunities to experience "multicultural co-existence." In this issue, three of International Student Exchange Club Members on the NIA LETTER editorial team, share their experiences.



Bangladesh

Rahman Md Atikur

Senior at Niigata Sangyo University, Faculty of Economics (Cover photo: bottom right)







Mongolia

Gombo Solongo

Junior at Nagaoka University, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Econ Management (Cover photo: top right)













A friend living in **Bangladesh** talked about university life. It seemed to be busy and fun. University club activities include sports clubs, culture clubs, computer clubs, pharmacy clubs, and debate clubs. After school on days when there are no club activities, they play sports such as cricket with friends and watch movies. Cricket is the most popular sport in Bangladesh. There are also students who work part-time at the university as tutors. Some participate in festivals with their classmates. They seem to have a fun student life.

Team BEGIN

The Tree of us have been thinking: We want to take on a new challenge for the Committee and the people of Niigata. We want to take that first step with you.

Question 2

What word in Japanese

When I talk with my friends I

use the words "Maji?" "Usojan!"

do you use a lot?

Mongolian universities start their new semester in September, which is different from Japanese schools. The first semester is from September 1 to the end of December. January is winter vacation. The second semester starts around February 5th, after the Tsagaan Sar holiday, which is like Japan's New Year holiday – it marks the Lunar New Year. Classes are scheduled to start after that. Summer vacation is for two months, July and August. Some Mongolian university students study in the library, while others are found in the cafeteria poring over a thick textbook while eating. Others go to grassy areas and slowly read their books during their free time. Not only Mongolian students but also the foreign students study hard as well.



China

Jin Yan Pin

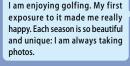
Sophomore at University of Niigata Prefecture, International Area Department (Cover photo: top left)



Chinese students seem to be living a very free university life. When I talked to friends studying there, they tell me that because they get pocket money from their parents, very few of them have part-time jobs like here in Japan. In recent years, the number of people who go to graduate school after graduation is gradually increasing. There are days when you are forced to study hard for exams, but there are also days when you can escape from studies and have fun with friends. Everyone seems to be living a fulfilling university life.

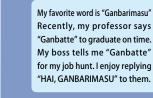
Question 1

What do you like about your university



First of all, the teachers are kind and they can teach in an easy-to-understand manner even when foreign students are having difficulty. I also like having a training room. I think help for keeping fit is good for students and faculty alike.





and "Yaba!" a lot.





2019 Niigata Cup Japanese Speech Contest in Jiamusi, Heilongjiang



○ Date: 2019 / 6 / 24 (Mon.) 13:20 ~ 17:00 ○ Place: Jiamusi University Conference Room

(Jiamusi, Heilongjiang)

O Participants: 13 university students in Heilongjiang

studying English

O Viewers: Approx. 150

Speech Topics and Judges' Results

- ① 「The Beauty of Heilongjiang We Wish to Share with the People of Niigata」
- ② 「Things I Am Immersed in Now」

Based on the judge's results, the three highest scores took first place. The three winners were offered given a travel voucher as a prize, and Niigata has invited them to visit this fall.



< First Place Winners >

(Speech Topic 1's Main Contents)

"My recommendation is the pickled Chinese cabbage. Every household makes a lot of it before the winter, and through the whole winter it comes to the table tasting just like it did at home."

 ${\bf Mr.~Xiong~Qi~/}$ Harbin University of Science and Technology, 2nd Year, Pictured on the right

"We're both snow country, and Heilongjiang has delicious rice (Wuchang rice) like the kind that is made in Uonuma. Harbin had two new Shinkansen lines added last year, and its developing more and more."

Mr. Zhang Ji Tong / Heilongjiang University, 4th year, Pictured on the left "I would like to tell Niigata about the passion and humanity of the people in my hometown. An older man who made shoreimen in the night market near the college spoke kindly to me."



Contest Overview

This was the first time this speech contest was held in Jiamusi. Jiamusi is about 300km northeast of Harbin, the capital of the Heilongjiang province. It is the frontline of development on the Sanjiang Plain, which began about 40 years ago. Jiamusi has had a long relationship with Niigata, starting with Mr. Tozaburo Sano who worked in the development of the plains. Approximately 150 people gathered to view the contest, primarily students, and their interest for learning Japanese could be felt. The passion of youth connected to the thoughts of those who had built the relationship between Heilongjiang and Niigata before them, and will surely continue to nurture goodwill in the future.

International Understanding Presentation Contest 2019 Accepting applications from junior high and high school students!



We are holding a contest for presentations about study or activities related to cultural understanding in your school or area.

Please create a presentation as a team of 3 to 5 about a global issue, intercultural living, problems in relationships between Japan and other countries, or some other issue, as well as what your thoughts and actions you would like to take. The team with the best presentation in each category will be sent on an overseas study tour. We look forward to your application and please do your best.

Date and Time: 2019 / 12 / 21 (Sat.) 12:00 \sim 17:00 (Tentative) % Rehearsals in the morning **Place:** TOKI MESSE, International Conference Hall, Marine Hall

Categories: Junior high school, High School

A team is composed of 3 to 5 students and one or more adult as an instructor **Application method:** Please downloaded the guidelines and application from our website, fill in the necessary information and mail in to the address below.

Application deadline: All applications must be received by 2019 / 9 / 30 (Mon.)

- The following items have changed since last year. Please read the guidelines and FAQ section on the website as shown on the bottom right before applying.
 - ① We will be accepting up to 20 teams total (combined for both categories), so if there are a high number of applicants we will select participants via applications.
 - ② A team must be composed of three to five students.
 - ③ Videos and recordings used in the presentation must be under one minute.

[For Applications and Inquiries]

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TEL: 025-290-5650 FAX: 025-249-8122 E-mail: nia21c@niigata-ia.or.jp

[International Understanding Education Presentation Contest Home Page]

http://www.niigata-ia.or.jp/jp/ct/000_precon/index.html



国際理解教育プレゼンテーションコンテスト



International Understanding Seminar 「Get to Know Asia!」 2019



—Learn the beauty of Asia near you!



All lectures are free to attend! /

Date and Time	Speaker and Topic	Location	Contact Information	
9/15 (Sun.) 13:30 ~ 15:00	Mr. Hiroyuki Oba, Asia Craft Link, Manager 「Modern Myanmar and the People who Live There」	Niigata University Satellite Campus Tokimate Lecture Hall A		
9/22 (Sun.) 13:30 ~ 15:00	Dr. Hiroyuki Seto, Niigata University of International and Information Studies, Associate Professor 「War and Peace in Laos」	Toki Messe Small Conference Room 306 • 307		
9/29 (Sun.) 13:30 ~ 15:00	Dr. Eiko Tomiyama, Graduate Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies, Regional / International Vice President, Graduate School of Entrepreneurial Studies Professor FLearn the countries of Asia through SDGs!	Toki Messe Small Conference Room 203 • 204	Niigata International Association Tel 025-290-5650	
10/27 (Sun.) 13:30 ~ 15:00	Mr. Peter Iori Kobayashi, Niigata University of International and Information Studies, Lecturer, Faculty of International Studies 「More! Taiwan」	Niigata University Satellite Campus Tokimate Lecture Hall A		
10/18 (Fri.) 19:00 ~ 20:30	Ms. Zhan Xiujuan, Niigata Sangyo University, Honorary Professor Recent Events in Taiwans	Kashiwazaki Shimin Plaza, Study Room 201 · 202	Kashiwazaki Area International Association Tel 0257-32-1477	
11/ 1 (Fri.) 18:30 ~ 20:00	Mr. Kishichiro Amae, former consultant to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs FEast Asia's International Relations: Comparing Cultures and Histories	International University of Japan MLIC Hall, 3F	International University of Japan Research Institute TEL 025-779-1471	
11/ 2 (Sat.) 14:00 ~ 15:30	Dr. Yutaka Nakai, Niigata Agro-Food University, Vice President, Department President Discover Vietnam's Varied Food Culture	Niigata Agro-Food University Tainai Campus, F Building, Room 102	Niigata Agro-Food University Tel. 0254-28-9855	
11/16 (Sat.) 10:00 ~ 11:30	Mr. Fei Mingyu, Northeast Normal University, Art School Professor 「Changes in Modern China, as seen from Changchun」	Joetsu Shimin Plaza, 2F Meeting Room 1	Joetsu International Network Tel 025-527-3615	

A foreign exchange student introduces one of their experiences during their life in Japan through manga 🗦

[Matsutake] – Matsutake Mushrooms – Vol.3

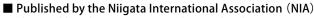
Japan Animation & Manga College (JAM) Manga Illustration Master Course Pen name: **Kohane** (Malaysia)











Niigata International Association Website