



MINATO TOKYO

# Bulletin

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MINATO UNESCO ASSOCIATION NEWS & CALENDAR

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## About the United Nations University

Michiko Nagai, Auditor, the Minato UNESCO Association

I am always thankful and proud of my membership with the Minato UNESCO Association (MUA), which has lasted for over a decade. It's because the membership has enabled me to cooperate with new and old MUA friends in organizing various programs, including bazars and lecture events. During our joint activities, we could express different opinions, engage in candid discussions and deepen our UNESCO solidarity.



Please allow me to utilize this front-page essay to brief our readers on the short history and current status of the United Nations University (UNU). My late husband, Michio Nagai, was directly engaged in the creation of UNU and, throughout his involvement, held a committed vision of what UNU can do in the future. I presume that, among our readers, there are those who are more knowledgeable and qualified to talk about UNU but I'll do my best

During the 24<sup>th</sup> United Nations General Assembly held in 1969, then Secretary-General U Thant proposed the creation of a "United Nations University." That's the time when my husband started his tireless long-term efforts to locate UNU's headquarters in Japan, to promote thereby Japan's educational reform and demonstrate its contribution to world peace.

There were many candidate nations which wanted to host UNU and the competition was intensified. Under the leadership of then Prime Minister Eisaku Sato, Japan exerted utmost efforts, involving government, ministries, business sectors and academia. Finally Japan could win the race and a tentative office of UNU headquarters was established in Shibuya in 1975. After many twists and turns, the official UNU HQ building was completed in Aoyama, Tokyo in 1992.

Today UNU operates a total of 15 research and training centers throughout the world. It also maintains cooperative relationships with many research institutes, capitalizing on these extensive networks. As a think tank, UNU continues to promote its research functions to support UN in fulfilling the mission to maintain security and peace in the world.

During the UN General Assembly held in 2009, a proposal to establish a graduate school in UNU was approved. In 2012 the first students, who had enrolled in the graduate school and completed the sustainability and peace research course, received their master degrees. Each year the school accommodates master-degree candidate students from around the world who have won a challenging competition as severe as "one out of 50 to 60 applicants." Among those successful entrants, we can find one or two Japanese students each year. In 2012, a doctor's degree course was added to accommodate a few students.

(To be continued on P. 8)

## Why have discussions of happiness become a hot topic? What is happiness?

Date & Time: Thursday, November 28th, 18:30-21:00

Place: Minato City Gender Equality Center

Japan is rapidly maturing into a low-birthrate, high-longevity society. The happiness searching genre is one of the most popular topics in book stores and a variety of TV shows. What is happiness, what is human being aiming for, and how can people seek to lead happier lives in a happier society? If it's necessary for us, as individuals and as a society, to change conventional practices in order to attain greater happiness, what and how should we change? What measures are the country and the local governments planning and implementing to assist citizens in pursuit of a happy life?

Mr. Hiroshi Nagano, Vice President of Minato UNESCO Association (MUA), organized this symposium and also served as a moderator. Prof. Florian Coulmas, Director of the Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien (DIJ) (German Institute for Japanese Studies -Tokyo) gave the keynote address in Japanese. Then, Mr. Masaaki Mezaki, who is the author of "Japan as a Developing Country in Happiness," made a proposal based on his analysis of happiness. Ms. Nanami Nagata, Deputy Director of the Research Institute for Local government by Arakawa City (RILAC), introduced the policy of Arakawa City, Tokyo. The city aims to cultivate happy feelings of residents. It is one of the first such efforts implemented by a regional body in Japan. Subsequent to their respective presentations, the three speakers participated in a panel discussion. The following is a summary of their presentations and panel discussion.



### Keynote Speech: Why have discussions of happiness become a hot topic? What is happiness?

Speaker: Prof. Florian Coulmas

Director of the German Institute for Japanese studies  
(The speech was made in Japanese)

This institute, located in Tokyo, is the largest German research organization that focuses on contemporary Japan. Since 1988, the institute has conducted academic Japanese research and has exchanged views on similar topics with the research institutions of other nations, thereby actively promoting a partnership in international collaborative research.

#### Abstract:

Why have discussions of happiness become a hot topic recently? What is happiness? The answers to these two questions are rather complicated. Let me give a brief summary of my views. In regards to the first question, it is basically a manifestation of the crisis of capitalism. As for the second question, everybody has his or her own answer, i.e., the nature of happiness is subjective. Discussions of happiness have flourished recently, as can be seen in the increasing number of published books related to happiness.



This explosive trend started right after the bubble economy period and the interest in this theme has persisted since. To give an example, a book on the nature of happiness published by the French thinker Alan about 90 years ago was recently transformed into a Japanese comic book and sold an amazing three million copies. What really is this phenomenon?

Previously, gross domestic product (GDP) was thought to be the most comprehensible yardstick to evaluate the overall development level and soundness of a society. However, the limit of such thinking has become increasingly apparent. The following reasons were cited:

- ① GDP neglects the economic impact of activities which are not traded in the market.
- ② GDP neglects to differentiate between productive and destructive activities
- ③ GDP figures cannot indicate how the fruits of economic activities are distributed among the people.

As a consequence, people started to seek a new yardstick that can offset the said problems with the GDP-based rating.

According to the 2012 international ranking, Japan was placed 3<sup>rd</sup> in GDP, 12<sup>th</sup> in per capita GNP, 5<sup>th</sup> in health, and 3<sup>rd</sup> in life security (rated by the number of homicides per 100,000 people). Yet Japan's rank in happiness in 2013 was way down at 43<sup>rd</sup> place.

After World War II, GDP of Japan increased six-fold but the index of life satisfaction has not changed much. In other words, the Japanese people have not grown happier despite the economic growth. A similar tendency can be observed in a study performed by the Japanese Cabinet. On top of this, there is even a report claiming that the life satisfaction level has gone down.

This phenomenon is not specific to Japan but is also seen in most developed nations. An American professor Richard Easterlin has postulated in his "Paradox of Easterlin" theory that the degree of happiness in developed countries stays the same despite economic growth. Thus, many scholars around the world believe that "a new yardstick" instead of GDP is required in the future studies of happiness. Governments of the UK, France, Germany, Japan, China and other countries have all organized committees to identify the nature of happiness. These committees are common in researching this subject from the following three fundamental viewpoints:

- ① How can we examine the level of happiness in people?
- ② What does the research of happiness mean for the government of a nation?
- ③ Is a meaningful cross-cultural comparison possible with the happiness research?

In order to create a valid happiness index, it's necessary to consider in terms of both objective criteria (i.e. comfortable life) and subjective criteria (happy life). Objective criteria can be evaluated by a wide range of factors such as life expectancy, material wealth, educational level, crime rate, health status, family relations, human relations at work, and job security. As for the subjective criteria, it is a troublesome and quite elusive issue as it poses the difficulty to "evaluate people's personal feelings."

Helpful information is available from some published indices such as the international comparison of the degree of happiness and the "Better Living Index 2013" of OECD. According to these data, small welfare states in Scandinavia, which boast a high score in GDP per capita, are rated high in the ranking of life satisfaction. Latin American nations, characterized by low GDP per capita, have nonetheless high scores in terms of life satisfaction and the status of human development index.

What is notable in the case of Japan is the fact that "the index of happiness is low while the GDP is high." In Japan, a big gap exists between the objective index of the quality of life and the subjective happiness index. It seems that this gap constitutes one of the destabilizing factors in this nation. One possible contributing factor may be the fact that the middle-aged workers who are the main pillar of society are somehow yet to fulfill their basic human needs. This is a complex issue which needs to be analyzed academically, and which should be also addressed adequately from a political perspective.

Japan has succeeded in extending the average life span and as a consequence enjoys the longest life expectancy in the world. While longevity is desirable, it has also given rise to some difficult social issues. For example, birth rate has been decreasing on the other hand. Explaining reproductive behavior of people is never easy but it seems that anxieties shared by many people are linked with the observed decline in population.

In a nation that faces these two problems—the increase in aged population while the birth rate declines-- the maintenance of a social security system is not the only problem that needs to be addressed. We must also notice the fact that Japanese society is yet to be fulfilled in terms of materialistic wealth.

After considering the points mentioned above, maybe we need to change our conventional perspective. In other words it may be more appropriate to think that people's happiness index has not fallen despite that many problems have been produced by economic growth, rather than that ordinary people's happiness index has not risen in spite of the attained economic growth.

**Speech 1: A society that facilitates happiness versus one that does not: is Japan a developing nation in terms of happiness?**

Speaker: Mr. Masaaki Mezaki, the author of “Japan as a developing nation in terms of happiness: a proposal on how Japan can be reborn”; an international cross-cultural analyst; and a representative director of J-megasolar Inc.

**Abstract:**

Is an individual's happiness influenced substantially by the country or the society they live in? According to the statistics produced by international research organizations which study the national happiness index, we notice that the degree of happiness in Japan is not so high in spite of its economic growth. Nations, societies and cultures should all exist for facilitating “happiness” of the people who live there. How could we enhance individuals' degree of happiness and thereby build a happier society in the future? I would like to address these themes in my speech.



\* There are three viewpoints concerning the research of happiness as follows:

- ① An approach from the perspective of neuroscience and psychology: About 70 percent of the books about happiness in bookstores are based on this approach. In recent years, it has become clear that the basic mechanism by which people feel happy is the same, regardless of racial, cultural, and environmental differences. That is, people's facial expressions and emotions are universally common, and the most crucial thing is for the individual to connect the subjective feeling of happiness—i.e., “I'm feeling happy”-- with the concept of happiness. This approach falls into the field of positive psychology, where happiness is defined as universal to all human beings and attainable by improving the self.
- ② The “Good Old Days” syndrome and the Gross National Happiness advocated by Bhutan: The comparison of today with the good old days can be called an emotional argument. Although Bhutan (population 700,000) was the first country in the world that actively sought the realization of a nation of happiness, the freedom of its citizens and human rights are yet to be fully respected. Therefore, the happiness discussions from these viewpoints are neither universal nor sustainable.
- ③ Cross-cultural comparisons and influences from social environments: The subjective degree of happiness is substantially affected by differences in culture and social environments and has nothing to do with race, climate, or pervasiveness of religion. In other words, the higher the attainable degree of individual freedom (or tolerance), the greater ease people will have to lead a happy life.

\* The “High Suicide Rate and Low Birth Rate” which symbolize the unhappy national status:

- ① The number of suicides per 100,000 individuals in Japan (men: 33.5, women: 14.6, overall: 23.8) ranks the 5th highest in the world. The nations with high suicide rates are found in the old Communist bloc nations and Asia (South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and China), among which Switzerland is an exception.
- ② The 10 worst countries in terms of low birthrates are found in old Communist bloc nations and



Asia (Japan, Singapore and South Korea) plus Germany and Malta.

From these two statistical findings, we notice one commonality between Asian countries and former Communist bloc countries. Nations in both regions are characterized by "authoritarian" and "collectivism" culture where "individual freedom" is belittled. In both types of societies, there are more people than elsewhere who opt to exit voluntarily from society while the regime wants to intentionally discourage people from participating in social activities.

\*Japan's happiness status is rated high when compared internationally, in terms of externally visible figure data (life expectancy, per capita GDP, adult literacy rate and school attendance, etc.). But, according to various international statistics, different indices of internally perceived happiness in Japan are low: 43rd place out of 97 countries; 60th of 146; 75th of 143; and 90th of 178 – all astonishingly low!

Also, Japanese society is internationally placed at the top level in terms of freedom in the overall political and societal system but the gender equality index is in 101st place among 143 nations. In addition, the index of people who feel that they are leading a free life as they wish ranks near the bottom. Likewise, the percentage of people who attach importance to fun time and those who respect creativity, are rated close to the bottom.

\* Based on what I mentioned above, I would like to propose "Social Individualism" as a way to facilitate a happier society. It is basically an upgraded version of individualism: while we expect from others respect for our autonomy and uniqueness as an individual, we must also respect other persons' freedom and rights. The individual pursuit of happiness in this manner will naturally result in each person finding what only he or she can do (best). In such a society, individuals will be linked up with spontaneous bonds.

In order to realize a society of social individualism, one can approach the issue from both societal and individual perspectives as described below:

- ① At the political level, it will be necessary to reform and create a society which will protect diversity mainly through law.
- ② At the level of individuals, it will be necessary to renew one's awareness. It should be taken for granted that if you are asked, "What do you live for?" you can respond "For happiness, of course." Such a mindset should be shared by all citizens as the societal platform.
- ③ Each individual must not sacrifice one's happiness as a result of facilitating the benefit of others. Instead you should live in such a way that the extension of your pursuit of happiness will naturally lead to the happiness of others. This kind of lifestyle will enable to make more people happy.

Such reforms will surely raise the happiness of individuals within Japanese society, but perhaps - more importantly - we maybe at a necessary and unavoidable juncture in history for the Japanese people to learn to accept diversity in lifestyles and values, and to respect each individual's freedom to make choices.

## **Speech 2: Happiness League and the Total Happiness of Arakawa City (Tokyo) residents ( "Gross Arakawa Happiness" is abbreviated as "GAH" )**

Speaker: Ms. Nanami Nagata, Deputy Director of the Research Institute for Local government by Arakawa City (RILAC)

### **Abstract:**

What is happiness for human beings? That has been an important question from time immemorial. After World War II, Japan accomplished an incredible economic growth. However, the rise in GDP has not been accompanied by a corresponding gain in the happiness index of the people, according to some data.

Taichiro Nishikawa, the Mayor of Arakawa City who took office in November 2004, immediately declared that "the key role of a local government is to establish a system which will make residents happy." What this meant was that, in addition to seeking economic efficiency and material wealth (reflected in GDP), the truly important duty for the city government was to make sure that each and every resident could feel happy from the bottom of their hearts, based on measures to facilitate mental richness and human networks. With this in mind, a project team was formed within the city administration in 2005 to study and establish a happiness index of the residents named the "Gross Arakawa residents Happiness (GAH)".



Subsequently, the Research Institute for Local Government by Arakawa City (RILAC) was established in 2009. Under this institute, a GAH study group that included outside experts, as well as a working group comprising the city staff who work at the forefront of the day to day administration, were organized. They have since held discussions from extensive and practical viewpoints.

One of the initiatives of the GAH study group is to create an index to measure the happiness of the residents. The purpose here is to understand what is needed to increase the happiness while minimizing the feelings of unhappiness and anxiety. A set of indices would be created for each of the following six categories: health & welfare, child care & education, industry, environment, culture, and safety & peace of mind. This information would then be used to conduct a questionnaire survey, the results of which would be analyzed and reflected in new policies to facilitate residents' happiness.

Another important effort of GAH is to promote "regional power". Such power, which derives from mutual help and networking with others within the region, is indispensable for improving the feeling of happiness. We are working together to promote the unity of people and organizations within the city to achieve a region-wide happiness.

We thought the word "sharing" is the key to such a movement. The point is to break away from a society where competition is everything, focus on sharing and mutual help, and thereby increase happiness for all in the region.

Through these efforts, we hope to expand our local culture of mutual help as well as our regional power, which have been the pride of residents in Arakawa City. Our aim is to decrease whatever is making residents unhappy while increasing general happiness level, in order to eventually create a gentle community where everyone will feel really happy. This endeavor is possible because we, as a basic municipality, are located closest in hierarchy to our residents.

\* Efforts to promote GAH are undertaken by the following specific measures and researches:

- ① Measures to decrease unhappiness: child poverty alleviation and crime prevention
- ② Measures to decrease anxieties: disaster prevention, providing care for orphans
- ③ Unemployment support: forming a re-employment support division, a special subsidiary support, providing employment training for people with disabilities, etc.
- ④ Measures to promote regional contribution: a point system for governmental recognition for volunteering, city flower bed projects, support for neighborhood association activities, promoting community colleges, etc.
- ⑤ Health promotion: to design and serve healthy menus at restaurants within the city, develop measures against obesity, develop physical exercises to prevent falls for elderlies.

\* The following is a summary of the efforts by Arakawa City to increase the happiness of all residents:

- The fulfillment of the residents' happiness is a worthy challenge that should be addressed by none other than municipal governments.
- If everyone within a community can share the awareness that "making full use of one's abilities" and "contributing to society" will also advance one's own happiness, then the circle of sharing will

expand, resulting in a compassionate society.

- A truly, resident-centered governance is born only when efforts are concurrently focused on increasing the happiness of residents.
- By reducing unhappiness and increasing happiness one issue at a time, we will aim to achieve a society in which every single resident can truly feel happy.

\* The Happiness League – a municipalities’ association which aims to improve the “happy feeling of residents”:

On June 5, 2013, Arakawa-City became the founding representative of the Happiness League, calling upon municipal governments across the nation to set the improvement of residents’ happiness as the basic goal of governance. As of November 2013, a total of 58 municipalities have joined the League from 28 prefectures, along with Tokyo, Kyoto, and Hokkaido. The aim of the league is to provide a cooperative network in which the member municipalities that share similar challenges can learn from each other, give aid where needed, and encourage each other to improve the quality of services offered to residents in respective regions.

### Panel Discussion

The ensuing panel discussion was moderated by Mr. Nagano, MUA Vice President. For the contents of the discussion, as well as comments expressed during question-and-answer session, only the gist of them is listed below:



- \* We heard from your talk that Arakawa city is working on decreasing Unhappiness of its residents, but wouldn't the robust presence of a safety net that ensures basic livelihood be the most important indicator of Happiness?
- \* People say the index of Japan's happiness is low, but is the way the media is handling this issue really appropriate?
- \* I think that happiness is a subjective issue that really depends on one's attitude, after all. So how do we go about changing our attitude? If happiness has to do with an individual's sense of fulfillment and allowance of the individual freedom, is the way Arakawa City is tackling the happiness problem really correct?
- \*I think it is an amazing effort by Arakawa City. Are there any wards within Tokyo that are engaged in similar activities?
- \*I heard that Japanese suicide rate was the 5th highest in the world. From Mr. Mezaki's point of view which stresses individualism, could it be said that a suicide is an expression of individual freedom?
- \*Mr. Coullmas told us that despite economic growth, happiness of the people did not decrease. Please tell us the details.
- \*If one looks at the relationship between happiness level and age in Europe, a “U” type curve where the young and elder generations are happy while the middle aged people are not is commonly observed. However, in Japan, the happiness level hits a low point for people aged 40-50 years and stays low for older people as well. Is this related to the demographic composition of our aging society?
- \*When asked what she or he lives for, very few Japanese people are likely to answer “For happiness.” How many of you in this audience would answer similarly?
- \* When studying happiness, do you look at each gender separately?

\* Looking towards the future of our society, should we just omit GDP all together and focus solely on happiness index?

\*Residents' needs vary by region. I think it is important that each municipality consider the specific nature of its own region, always comparing the present with the past as it moves forward in its efforts to increase happiness.

When MUA decided to pick a rather abstract theme of "happiness", I was a little apprehensive about how focused the discussion was going to be. However, thanks to wonderful lecturers, it turned out to be a very interesting discussion. From this panel discussion, we were able to recognize that living happily requires a change in each individual's thinking as well as social reforms. From the administrative side, it was good to know that Arakawa city is already working on specific initiatives to increase happiness and that this movement is now spreading throughout Japan.

By wishing to attain a happy life full of "love, hope and peace" and transforming oneself, we can continue to heighten happiness locally, socially, and world-wide. That is an encouraging piece of news, indeed.

*(Written by M. Takai, President, MUA, for the International Science & Culture Committee, and translated by Y. Sakashita, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)*

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**(Continued from P.1) About the United Nations University:**

It won't be long before we will see those, who graduated from the UNU graduate school, engaged in various borderless UN missions in every corner of the world. I trust that they will demonstrate their specialized and advanced knowledge, trained skills as well as their strong commitment to ideals.

In the spring of 2013, Dr. David Malone became the sixth UNU Rector. In his inaugural address, he emphasized that he would strengthen research activities at UNU, as expected in its original think tank mission, along with the fostering of competent human resources. To achieve these objectives, he stated that he would make all-out efforts to win understanding and cooperation from the entire Japanese society. Although what Dr. Malone expressed may sound only natural, it seems to me that I have not heard such a clear message in any of the inaugural speeches made by former UNU Rectors.

I was reminded of the days when my husband had great difficulty to work out financial solutions in the face of cutbacks in annual governmental subsidies. From this experience, I'm sympathetic about what Dr. Malone might go through, including the shrinkage in governmental subsidies as well as the challenge to secure scholarship fund for graduate school researchers.

In its publicity effort to promote more visibility of what UNU does, the Aoyama-based headquarters offer a variety of open and free lectures to the local community. I hope that MUA bulletin readers will look into UNU's website and find interesting events which they want to attend. Their participation in UNU activities will be a great support for the Rector and his staff.

*(Translated by Tanahashi, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)*



The World Cooking Workshop Series  
**Armenian Christmas Dishes**

Date: Saturday, November 23, 2013

Place: Minato City Gender Equality Center

For this year-end Christmas workshop, we had the pleasure of having Ms. Karine Harutyunyan as our instructor. She has been a trainee student in the faculty of economics at Nihon University, based on a fellowship sponsored by the Japan Foundation. She generously accepted our request to be our instructor despite that she was very busy preparing for her return to Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, in the following month.



Armenia is a country of 3.1 million population and is surrounded by Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Turkey as well as the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. The people are proud of the historical fact that in 301 Armenia became the first country in the world that designated Christianity as the state religion. Even today we can see many unique churches, symbolic of the history. In food culture, the positive effect of the *nerina* bacteria, found in Armenia, has attracted worldwide attention. In 1991 Armenia became a republic, independent from the former Soviet Union.

The day's menu included the following typical seasonal dishes:

- **Blinchik** (Harumaki-like crepe) : Put baking soda during the process of making crepe, which will be the wrapper. This generally prevents failures. After you wrapped up frizzled minced meat and onion by the crepe, heat it up momentarily in an oil-moistened frying pan.
- **Smile Salad** : It features pickles added to ordinary potato salad.
- **Rolled Eggplant Salad** : It's mayonnaise-dressed garlic and crushed walnut, rolled up in sliced eggplants.
- **Carrot Salad** : It features garlic, barsamico and Armenian seasoning added to sliced carrots.
- **Grape-leaf Dolma** : It features grape leaf wrapping. Mix up peas, lentils, ground barley called Bulgur, oil-fried fine chopped onions and wrap them up in a grape leaf, and boil it. If you use boiled cabbage as the wrapper, it will make stuffed cabbage. Karine-san was kind enough to bring Lebanon-made bottled grape leaves for us. All of us were impressed with the unexpectedly plain taste.

Karine-san is originally a science-major student who loves visiting manufacturing plants. The first job she took in Armenia was diamond cutting. Indeed, diamond processing is a major industry in her home country. She remembers how demanding Japanese customers were in terms of workmanship. She hopes that she will engage in a business which interconnects Armenia and Japan.

We'd like to reiterate our hearty thanks to Karine-san for providing a timely workshop on Armenian Christmas dinner for us. I trust that all of our attendees enjoyed for the first time the authentic Armenian taste.

*(Written by K. Matsuzaki, the World Cooking Committee, and translated by S. Tanahashi, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)*

## The Republic of Azerbaijan - 23 years of independence

Date & Time: February 3, 2014, 18:30 – 20:30

Place: Minato City Lifelong Learning Center

We had the pleasure of having His Excellency Mr. Gursel Qudrat oglu ISMAYILZADA, Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the Azerbaijan republic to Japan. Ambassador ISMAYILZADA is a doctoral graduate from Tsukuba University as well as Sophia University, and thus, delivered an impassioned speech in fluent Japanese in an effort to offer the audience a sense of affinity on his country. The audience apparently deepened the understanding on the current situation of Azerbaijan thanks to his passionate speech with humor. His mother, who happened to visit Japan, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Kimitada Miwa, Honorary President of MUA and Professor Emeritus of Sophia University, who used to be Ambassador's teacher at the university, were present at the lecture.



Ambassador first sent a salute to Tokyo being selected as the place for the Olympic Games in 2020, and also, to “Washoku (Traditional Dietary Cultures of the Japanese)” being registered as Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO. He then began his speech by introducing the history of his country. Azerbaijan was divided into north and south by the treaty entered between Russia and Iran back in 1828. In May of 1918 right after the Russian revolution, the country gained its independence as a democratic republic country. Unfortunately, the independence lasted only 2 years and in 1920 Azerbaijan was incorporated to the Soviet Union in April of 1920. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, it regained its independence as a democratic country on October 18, 1991, and become what it is today.

Azerbaijan is located in the South Caucasus and is the crossroads of Europe and Asia. It is bounded by the Caspian Sea to the east, Russia to the north, Georgia, Armenia and Turkey to the west and Iran to the south. Population is 9.5 million. The area is 86 thousand square kilometers (equivalent to Hokkaido). The language spoken is Azerbaijani similar to Turkish. 95% of population is Muslim, but is a secular country. 2 million Azerbaijanis live in Russian territory and 25 million in Iranian territory. A total of 50 million Azerbaijanis reside in the world.

Then, he explained about the colors used in the national flag. Current national flag is the same as the one adopted at the time of independence in 1918. The flag is a tricolour featuring three equally sized fesses of blue, red, and green. The blue symbolizes freedom and democracy, the red symbolizes Azerbaijan's Turkic heritage, and the green represents Islam. White crescent and an eight-pointed star are centered in the red.

The first part of country name “Azer” represents fire, and the latter part “baijan” nation or place, and Azerbaijan is known as “Land of Fire.” The earliest evidence of human settlement in the territory of Azerbaijan dates all the way back to the late Stone Age. Thereafter, Alexander the Great, Muslims and Mongolians came in. It is located at the crossroads of Western Asia and Eastern Europe on the Silk Road. Before it was Islamized, Zoroastrianism prevailed in the area. There remains a sacred spot in the capital city Baku.

Azerbaijan is very unique in Muslim world. It is the first democratic county among Muslim countries. Women were granted voting rights for the first time ahead of some Western countries, an opera house was built for the first time and ballet was performed for the first time as well.

Oil development was started along the Caspian Sea in 1990's. GDP of the nation amounts to U.S. \$69.2 billion which is U.S. \$7,490 per capita in 2012. Growth rate is 2.2% (9.9% for the non-oil sector). Foreign exchange reserve is U.S. \$46 billion and inflation rate is 1.1%. Rate of dependence on the oil was as high as 90% in 2000. However, it decreased down to 50% in 2012 with the efficient development in other sectors.

Oil and natural gas produced in the country are exported to Europe. Pipeline was built through Georgia and Turkey, bypassing Russia and Armenia due to political reason, and shipped out of Black Sea or Mediterranean Sea.

After the independence in 1991, it joined the United Nations as a member of the European countries, and became a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council in 2012 and 2013. It succeeded in the launch of space satellite in 2013 with the technical help extended by France and the USA.

It is indeed regrettable that the country failed to gain the position for hosting the Olympic Games to be held in 2016 and 2020. But Baku will host the first European games in 2015. I really wish that many Japanese people visit my home as it has a lot of historical remains which were registered as world heritage, beautiful natural environment as well as such good-tasting food as caviar.

Questions and Answers:

Q: How would you expect to build relationship with Japan?

A: We enjoy excellent relationship with Japan. There exist a lot of things that we need to learn from Japan. We plan to send as many students as possible from Japanese Language Department of Baku State University to universities in Japan.

Q: How would you evaluate the current relations with neighboring states?

A: We are maintaining a good relationship with Russia and Iran. We have excellent relationships with Turkey and Georgia, as well as Iran. On the other hand, our neighbor Armenia occupies 20% of our land, and we are still in the state of war with them.

Q: What are your political system and diplomatic landscape?

A: We are a presidential republic country. The term for presidency is for five years. In 2013 we had presidential elections and His Excellency Mr. Ilham Aliyev, the President was reelected for the new term. The term for 125 assembly members is also five years. In terms of diplomacy, we are in good relations with Russia, EU, The USA and Iran. Azerbaijan already contributes to the World energy security.

Q: How do you cope with the destruction of environment at the Caspian Sea?

A: The concept on the maritime border does not fit among five nations surrounding the Caspian Sea which all attained independence after disintegration of the Soviet Union. We all agreed that no hostile action be taken, but, have not yet reached to a point where environmental issues be discussed.

Q: Do you have any idea on the regional integration?

A: We have a framework called "GUAM." It is the aggregation of the capitol letters of Georgia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova. In addition to this, there is a movement toward building a cooperative framework among Turkey, Azerbaijan and four Central Asian countries.

*(Written by M. Shiose, the International Science and Culture Committee, and translated by Y. Suda, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)*



## The Hands-on Workshops of Japanese Culture

### (1) Japanese Tea Ceremony

Date & Time: Saturday, January 25, 2014, 13:30-16:00  
Place: Minato City Life-long Learning Center

We had a turnout of 25 participants who come from Canada, China, Dominican Republic, Germany, Hungary, Korea, Libya, Serbia and USA (including children aged at 5, 9, and 12).

Contents: (1) An explanation about a bow, sit straight, manner of walking, how to take Japanese-style confection, and how to drink Japanese powdered green tea  
(2) A demonstration of the formalized manners by an instructor  
(3) Having Japanese -style confection and Japanese powdered green tea  
(4) An experience in a part of the formalized manners of the tea-ceremony

A large number of people attended. The latest Japanese culture boom may have influenced. It was all done amicably from beginning to end. We were pleased to know that the number of foreigners, who are interested in the tea ceremony as a traditional Japanese culture, is increasing.



### (2) Japanese Calligraphy

Date & Time: Saturday, February 8, 2014, 13:30~16:00  
Place: Minato City Life-long Learning Center

We had a turnout of 8 participants who come from France, Germany, and Italy (including a 5-year old child).

Contents: A brief explanation of the history of the Japanese calligraphy as well as the tools and materials. A practice of the basic strokes on “Hanshi” paper. Pick out characters one likes and practice their strokes. Make a fair copy (Add one’s name). Take a commemorative photo with one’s calligraphy.

Impressions from the participants: “I was happy to experience Japanese calligraphy.” “It has been a while since I practiced calligraphy at primary school, so I enjoyed it this time.” “In the future we would like to experience the Japanese art of flower arrangement, Origami, and tea ceremony.”

On the workshop day, the Tokyo area was hit by a rare heavy snowfall for the first time in 20 years. Nevertheless, we were encouraged to have such a gratifying turnout of enthusiastic people. It was a good opportunity to renew our awareness that people from foreign countries have a deep interest in Japanese culture.

*(Written by K. Hirakata, Standing Director, the Youth Committee, and translated by N. Masuda, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)*





## My volunteer activities experienced in Leyte Island, the Philippines

Many Japanese people must have been motivated to have serious renewed thoughts about hardships and turning points in their lives since the Great East Japan Earthquake struck us on March 11, 2011. I was also motivated that way. We were exposed to media reports on disaster damages, nuclear station accidents, and the increasing number of casualties each and every day. I was scared to think of uncertainty about how long these uneasy days would last.



During such a period, I received a package of canned food and bottled water, attached with a handwritten message to encourage me. The sender was a Taiwanese friend of mine. The message was written with large letters and stated, "Our thoughts are with you." This experience caused me to drastically change my sense of gain & loss. I therefore took action without any hesitation to visit & help the Philippines as soon as I knew the media reports on the damages caused by Typhoon No. 30 in November 2013.

A close schoolmate of mine lives in the Philippines. I met him while I was studying in France. I was so shocked and lost for words the first time I watched the extensive damages caused by the typhoon as broadcast in the news and TV visuals. Then I wondered what I could do for help. I concluded that I should bring food and water to the stricken area and remain there as a volunteer. Thus I left for the Philippines.

It turned out that my friend actually lived far away from Leyte Island, so he and his family were all safe, fortunately. Although I finally arrived at the stricken area via Cebu, Ormoc, and Tabango, there were only limited things I could do for the disaster areas. I didn't know for sure whether I could be of any help to the local people. However, I wanted to tell them, "You are not alone." With these words I wanted them to share the same kind of deepest gratitude I had felt when my Taiwanese friend gave me their kind support after the Great East Japan Earthquake hit our country.

Even today there are many people who are still confronted with great hardship, in the Tohoku region as well as in Leyte Island. Even though we may not be able to offer hands-on local assistance, we can help them by starting a fund-raising drive or working as a volunteer. I think the most important thing is that we don't forget about the disasters and people who are still suffering. Let me repeat my message, "You are not alone." I pray for the soonest possible reconstruction of Leyte Island.

*(Written by S. Sato, a member of the Youth Committee, and translated by N. Masuda, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)*

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### Urgent Fund-raising for the Victims of Typhoon No.30 which hit Leyte Island, the Philippines

MUA donations were delivered to the Embassy of the Philippines

The biggest ever Typhoon No.3 hit the Philippines with full force on November 8, 2013, and areas centering around the main part of the country suffered from a great deal of serious damage. Especially Leyte Island was devastated by destructive storm as well as seismic surges, and many houses and buildings were washed away by muddy stream. The land was covered by piles of rubble and many people died. Many people are still forced to have a difficult life.



Volunteers of MUA called for urgent donations for the people of Leyte. As the result, 38 people kindly donated in response to the call, others donated at the occasion of MUA symposium, amounting to the total of Japanese ¥160,000. Three representatives visited Embassy of Philippines in Tokyo on January 30, 2014, and delivered the donations to Mr. Brian Dexter Lao, Second Secretary and Consul. I am most proud to report that he extended his utmost appreciation for the goodwill of those who participated in the donation.

Mr. S. Sato, a junior member of MUA, visited Leyte to take part in the rescue activities as soon as he learned about the damage through news reports. I have been very encouraged by the positive attitude as well as behaviors of young people.

*(Written by M. Takai, President of MUA, and translated by Y. Suda, the PR, Bulletin & Internet Committee)*

## UNESCO study shows effectiveness of mobile phones in promoting reading and literacy in developing countries



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UNESCO has published a report explaining how mobile technology is used to facilitate reading and improve literacy in developing countries. The report was published today, 23 April, on the occasion of World Book and Copyright Day. The report, *Reading in the Mobile Era*, highlights that hundreds of thousands of people currently use mobile technology as a portal to text. Findings show that in countries where illiteracy rates are high and physical text is scarce, large numbers of people read full-length books and stories on rudimentary small screen devices.

The report, the first-ever study of mobile readers in developing countries, provides valuable information about how mobile reading is practiced today and by whom. Worldwide 774 million people, including 123 million youth, cannot read or write and illiteracy can often be traced to the lack of books. Most people in Sub-Saharan Africa do not own a single book, and schools in this region rarely provide textbooks to learners. Yet the report cites data showing that where books are scarce, mobile technology is increasingly common, even in areas of extreme poverty. The International Telecommunication Union estimates that of the 7 billion people on Earth, 6 billion have access to a working mobile phone.

UNESCO's study of mobile reading was conducted in seven developing countries, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Drawing on the analysis of over 4,000 surveys and corresponding qualitative interviews, the study found that: large numbers of people (one third of study participants) read stories to children from mobile phones; females read far more on mobile devices than males (almost six times as much according to the study); both men and women read more cumulatively when they start reading on a mobile device; many neo- and semi-literate people use their mobile phones to search for text that is appropriate to their reading ability. The study is intended as a roadmap for governments, organizations and individuals who wish to use mobile technology to help spread reading and literacy. The report recommends improving the diversity of mobile reading content to appeal to specific target groups such as parents and teachers; initiating outreach and trainings to help people transform mobile phones into portals to reading material; and lowering costs and technology barriers to mobile reading.

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Minato UNESCO Association is a citizens' voluntary membership organization that promotes Japanese traditional culture, holds cross-cultural workshops and presents multicultural events and international symposia for world peace. For any questions or comments about our articles, please contact our secretariat office at:

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