

Kokusai Bunka Foramu Tsushin

No. 100

公益財団法人

国際文化フォーラム

THE JAPAN FORUM

日本国際文化交流財団

일본국제문화교류재단

Feature

Interviews with
Japan Forum
Secretary Generals

The Decisions We Made

Interviews with
Japan Forum Secretary Generals

The journey of the Japan Forum(TJF) began on June 22 1987. What course has it taken since then? We spoke with the individuals who, in the post of secretary general, have captained TJF's ship since then, and asked them to reflect on the path TJF has taken. We also asked them about how they arrived at some of the decisions they made.



Ichihara Tokuro

June 1987–December 1990

Building from an Idea

Main programs during term as secretary general: Preparations for establishing the foundation and activities leading up to its launch. Youth Japanese-language Contest in Beijing and other China-related programs; participation in "Europalia 89 Japan in Belgium"; inauguration of *World Plaza*, a bimonthly magazine of information on international cultural exchange, and TJF's house bulletin, *Kokusai bunka forumu tsushin* (The Japan Forum Newsletter).

It was February 1987 when I was assigned to the planning team that was working toward the establishment of the Japan Forum. People in other countries were studying Japanese in increasing numbers, and the country needed more private foundations to promote and support international cultural exchange. Our project got started in response not so much to a proposal, exactly, but more like an urgent call

from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs addressed to the Kodansha publishing company. The previous head of the company, Noma Shoichi, had concentrated on international exchange through the culture of publishing and had contributed greatly to the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU). His successor, Noma Koremichi (fifth head of Kodansha) wanted to contribute to

international cultural exchange from a different perspective. At a board meeting of Kodansha in July 1986 Noma Koremichi proposed an international cultural exchange foundation centered on Japanese language and culture, and the meeting approved it.

At the time, I was head of Kodansha's advertising department. In January 1987, president Noma called me in and asked me to be chief of preparations for establishing the foundation. The assignment seemed too much for me. Immediately I tried to decline, saying that at my age, over fifty, I could not handle dealing with English. But he urged me to accept the job, saying that everyone I would be working with, whatever their nationality, could manage very well in Japanese and that this was a job we needed to do to let the world know more about Japan. There wasn't much more I could say—I agreed to take on the job.

There were five on the team, but only three of us working on the project full time. I convinced the foreign ministry that we would never get the foundation going by May and we moved the target date to June. It was decided

that besides Kodansha, other firms would be involved, so first we needed to decide which companies would be called upon to donate. We then allotted each its share of the 300 million yen endowment we were planning to form, drew up a mission statement and articles of association, decided the project plan, and made a draft budget. We also had to commission officers, recruit supporting members, and decide the name of the foundation. We had planned to name it Foundation for International Cultural Cooperation (Kokusai Bunka Kyoryoku Zaidan). But it seemed awfully conventional, and just before the inauguration we changed it to the Japan Forum (Kokusai Bunka Forumu).

Then, on the very day our preliminary application to set up the foundation was at last approved, Noma Koremichi, president of Kodansha, died. I felt completely bereft. An inauguration party had been planned for the following week and 400 invitations had been sent out. We had no choice but to hold it as planned. The documentation all had to



Volume containing 10 years of Japanese language examination questions jointly drawn up by Japan and China.

be revised to reflect the changed name of the foundation's head and get it approved. The approval came out just one day before the party, on June 22. We had worked desperately but things fell into place.

Off into a New Horizon

We launched the new foundation with an international Japan studies symposium called "Is there Really a 'Japan Problem'?" and an international Japanese language symposium, "The State of Japanese Language Education in Other Countries: Prospects and Problems." We held the symposium on language teaching together with the Japan Foundation. The foreign ministry was eager to hold the one



Mr. Ichihara, as Secretary General presents a collection of dictionaries and books to the Europäisches Übersetzer-Kollegium in Straelen, Germany, in 1993. Left, Regina Peeters, then chief librarian at the Library.



Japanese language proficiency exams were held during the Youth Japanese Language Contest in Beijing. The photo shows examinees checking to find their test location.

on Japan studies. Wanting to respond to the Japan-bashing, they invited Japanese opinion leaders and Japanese studies scholars from other countries to be panelists. The ministry thought such a symposium would be one way to increase the world's understanding of Japan.

Subsequently, the Japan Forum held exhibitions and lecture meetings to introduce Japanese culture in China, South Korea, Thailand, the United States, Australia, and countries in Europe. One of my most cherished memories is the time in 1991 when we collaborated in the "Visions of Japan" culture festival held in London. Crown Prince Naruhito visited the exhibition hall, and I had a chance to tell him about TJF's regular programs. The Crown Prince congratulated us on our efforts and said he hoped we would continue our good work. We felt immensely honored and deeply appreciative.

Another goal was to promote international exchange in various parts of Japan. That meant finding and supporting the people who would take charge of those activities, and so the Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up an information center and began talking about putting out a

bulletin. We immediately took up the idea, and that was how *World Plaza* got started. It gave information on and publicized international exchange events within Japan and information gathered from Japan's embassies around the world. The foreign ministry bought up only 950 copies and we had to finance the rest, so it was hard and eight years later, we decided to stop publication.

Towards Independence

At the beginning we were in constant consultation with the foreign ministry, but TJF ran the Japanese-language projects in China by itself. One of the projects I enjoyed the most was the annual Youth Japanese-language Contest in Beijing, which we held together with the Beijing Youth Federation. Each time it was held I would go before 2000 people to deliver greetings, while a very competent Beijing University student acted as interpreter. One year I started my address, as I always did, with "Ni hao," and during the intermission one person said to me, "Mr. Ichihara, you've got it wrong. When you are speaking to many people, you have to say "Nimen hao." This, after having said it the

I became keenly aware during this program of the importance of continuity in international exchange.

same mistaken way for three years! All sorts of things happened. The contest was held annually for ten years. I became keenly aware during this program of the importance of continuity in international exchange. I think our activities with China were really very good.

In 1991, just when the bubble burst in Japan's overheated economy, we decided to stop using staff borrowed from Kodansha's International Exchange Promotion Office to run programs, and in effect TJF became independent. Noma Sawako, then president of Kodansha, asked us how much endowment we needed, and I answered we needed 2 billion yen. The endowment of the JAL Foundation was 2 billion yen and that of the Toshiba International Foundation was 3 billion yen, and at that time bank deposits were getting more than 5 percent interest, so if we had 2 billion yen, we thought we could run our programs based on the funds generated by interest on the endowment.

Five years after we began planning, we had built a foundation out of an idea, our policies were in place, and to some extent we had instituted several smoothly running programs. At that point, I thought, it would be perfectly all right to add some new programs, and phase out others. It was time for the next person to take over leadership.



TJF exhibit at Europalia 89 Japan in Belgium in 1989. Visitors looking closely at display of Japanese ex libris bookplates used to indicate book ownership. At the top is an ex libris seal produced by TJF. Copies were distributed to visitors.



Ushijima Michihiko

January 1991-March 1998

High Schoolers as Ambassadors

Main programs during term as secretary general: All-China Japanese Speech Contest for Junior and High School Students of Foreign Language Schools; Teacher Training Program for Junior and Senior High School Teachers of Japanese in China; Japanese-language teaching support program in the State of Wisconsin in the United States; book donation program; survey of Chinese and Korean language education in Japanese high schools.



Japanese Speech Contest for Junior and High School Students of Foreign Language Schools held in Nanjing, 1994.

After I became secretary general we moved rapidly on a number of plans that had been in the offing up until then.

We needed our own full-time staff to handle the programs, rather than using people assigned from the Kodansha publishing company. They needed to be people who would be genuinely committed to international cultural exchange, and I hired four, though they lacked experience, because of their passion for our vision. Looking forward to working and learning together with these younger people energized by the same aspirations, I was ready to devote myself completely to international cultural exchange.

Second, we had to do a review of our programs. There were limits to what a small foundation like ours could do, so I thought we needed to define our focus carefully. I wanted to concentrate our overseas Japanese language

education programs on China, Korea, the United States, and Australia. As for age groups, we would narrow our attention down to junior high and high school students, those who would be active in society in the twenty-first century. The results of our efforts, I felt certain, would be seen in ten or twenty years.

Third, we had to take a fresh look at our founding philosophy. The foreign ministry was promoting the teaching of Japanese language overseas, but I thought it would be a mistake for TJF to advocate Japanese language learning unilaterally; it ought to be offered in the context of learning from each other. Shouldn't Japanese high school students, too, be learning the languages of the countries where we were teaching Japanese? That was why we first launched our Chinese language education program in Japan.

As we tackled those three tasks, I steered TJF

firmly in a new direction. One personal goal I had was to create an "ideal" workplace. The recently passed Equal Employment Opportunity Law had made the promotion and advancement of working women a big topic of discussion. I wanted TJF to be a place comfortable and attractive for women to work. That meant employees should use all of their paid vacation time, and I wanted an office layout comfortable to work in and a management system that supported women with children. We began making it possible for our staff to work at home at certain times. The heart of TJF is ideas, creative approaches, etc., so it was important to provide the time and environment to support that kind of work.

During my first four years after joining TJF, I frequently consulted people at the Japan Foundation and active on the front lines in Japanese and Chinese language education and

other fields, receiving much valuable advice. When I became secretary general, therefore, I felt bound to set an example and be the best leader I possibly could. The donor companies were generously supporting us, and in order to reward the people who had given me so much advice, I was ready to work 365 days a year.

One of the big reasons for my commitment was the sudden death of Kodansha president Noma Koremichi 10 days before the official launch of TJF in 1987. How disappointed he must have felt to die before the object of his aspiration could take shape.

Confidence Gained from Winning Understanding

For me, the most unforgettable program was the All-China Japanese Speech Contest for Junior and Senior School Students of Foreign Language Schools (1992–1995). This event brought together students from six of China's top foreign language schools (in Shanghai, Shenzhen, Changchun, Zhengzhou, Nanjing, and Wuhan). The speeches were admirable, all of them, but I began to feel that the contest was different from what I had envisioned. The students competed very hard among themselves, but the competition among their teachers, for whom the honor of their school was at stake, was especially intense. The students had prepared to such a painfully meticulous degree that we decided to try something different. For the event in 1994, we decided not to let them know the topic of the speech until they arrived for the contest. As soon as we announced this new policy, however, the students went to work trying to predict what the topic would be and then prepared not one but four or five speeches, hoping one would fit the subject matter. And they memorized all of them! And then, if their prediction was off, their speeches

were a shambles. I will never, never forget the sad, crushed faces of students and teachers who were not among the winners. It had become a cruel burden for both students and teachers.

After the fourth speech contest was over, I shared my concerns with Mr. Liu Yuan Song, principal of the Changchun Foreign Language School, who helped launch the speech contest, and discussed with him my idea for the fifth, which was to make the event into a teacher training workshop. He understood completely and was sympathetic to my belief that supporting teachers was a way of encouraging students, too.

I learned a great deal from the China speech contest program and from Mr. Liu: his stance as an educator toward students; his greatness as a human being. His understanding of my commitment gave me greater confidence that

The speech contest program gave me greater confidence that TJF could make a difference through international cultural exchange



The story manga *Teenage Tokyo* takes a look at the everyday life of a Japanese high school student.

TJF could make a difference through international cultural exchange.

The speech contest also gave me a glimpse of the tremendous inner strength of China. The sheer willpower that I saw in the participating students and their teachers was one hundred times stronger than anything I had foreseen.

A Momentous Decision

As we worked on narrowing down our programs, the hardest decision was to suspend publication of *World Plaza*. When it was launched as a bimonthly magazine on international exchange, there was nothing else like it, and I think it was valuable for the information it offered.



When it came time for TJF to make the leap into the digital age, we realized we could not both computerize our work and keep the magazine going. We got desktop computers for each member of the staff and had them hooked together into a network. Certain that the Internet would soon enough take over the role of *World Plaza*, I decided to end its publication.

Unfinished Aspirations

We donated a large number of books (some 180 donations to 60 countries for a cumulative total of about 81,000 volumes). But we could not go so far as to consider which books would be really needed, select and send the books and materials that seemed best suited to the needs and circumstances of the recipients so that they

would encourage a generation of high school students to become ambassadors of Japanese culture and language around the world. Even now, I'd like to finish that project if it were possible. If TJF were to make more strategic book donations today in this age of electronic books and magazines, there are great possibilities.

Another program I wanted to develop was Japanese language education in the Russian Far East. In 1992 the foreign ministry pressed us to start a program there and we sent assistant Japanese language teachers to Sakhalin. From the second year, we entrusted this work to another agency, but I think that if we were to do it today, we could do it very well.

For me, book donation and Japanese language education are simply means to the



Exhibits at the Building for Kids Children's Museum in Appleton, Wisconsin, of photos showing "A Day with Kentaro" and of the standard school satchel, a pencil box, and other articles elementary students use every day. Left, Executive Director Takashima Nobukazu. Right, U.S. Representative Ito Yukio in 1997.

end—nothing can take the place of person-to-person interchange.



Takasaki Takashi

April 1998–March 2003

My Contribution to the TJF Commitment

Main programs during term as secretary general: Compilation of the "Deai: The Lives of Seven Japanese High School Students" photo teaching resource; Lives of Japanese High School Students: Photo and Message Contest; Teacher Training Program for Junior and Senior High School Teachers of Japanese in China; editorial cooperation in production of Japanese language textbooks for junior and senior high schools in China; programs to support Chinese and Korean language learning for Japanese high school students.

One of the first problems I faced as soon as I became secretary general was funding. The endowment had been set in 1987 at 2 billion yen based on the assumption of interest rates at between 5 and 8 percent, the prevailing levels since the beginning of the 1980s. However, by the time I took up my post in 1998, Japan was already well into its fabled "lost decade" and interest rates were close to zero. In order to avoid dipping into the endowment itself, we had to find more supporters besides the donor corporations already on board. The Mitsubishi Bank Foundation (now Mitsubishi UFJ Foundation), for example, and the Tokyo Club were candidates. So we put forth a plan outlining, for instance, our friendship programs designed to teach Japanese to Chinese children, which was audited and was effective in attracting additional financial assistance.



Even the donor corporations were having difficulties maintaining their support for TJF. The collapse of Japan's "bubble" hit the publishing industry very hard. I dreaded the approach of the budget-making season. TJF executive director Takashima Nobukazu and I worked on negotiations with the corporate donors, but I understood all too well the position they were in. It was then that I recalled the words, "Commitment is power."

These were the words of the late Noma Sawako, then Kodansha president and TJF chairperson. When I started in as secretary general, she had remarked to me, "This is a very small-scale foundation, but the programs it conducts are solid. It is well worth keeping it going, and commitment is power." I can hear her saying that, even now.

Very Trying, Extremely Rewarding

My first foray abroad for TJF was a trip to northeast China in July and August 1999, to Jilin, Heilongjiang, and Liaoning provinces where we were holding the Teacher Training Program for Junior and Senior High School Teachers of Japanese in China. All Nippon Airways had shipped the original teaching materials that the staff had painstakingly prepared, but they were held up in Dalian, Liaoning province, because of customs duties. China



Pouring drinks for each other, the distance between us shrinks.

For genuine cultural exchange, isn't it better to use the language of the country you are working in?



The teacher network JAKEHS was born out of the training programs for teachers of Korean language in Japan.

Photo album including prizewinning works from the Lives of Japanese High School Students: Photo and Message Contest from 1997 to 2006.

places tight controls on published materials. In China you cannot simply print something and distribute it as you wish. I could understand the situation to some extent, as I had worked with Chinese copyright law before coming to TJF, but I was quite unprepared to find that the rules applied to a mere 150 copies of a text to be used in a teacher training program. We ended up having to reproduce copies of the texts on cheap newsprint after arriving in Dalian.

In the course of the teacher training programs, we found that the Japanese language ability and level of familiarity with teaching methods of the Japanese language teachers in China was not up to I had expected. For the teachers, furthermore, there was no way to get training, and they had very little to rely upon in the way of teaching materials. In such circumstances, the TJF training program was invaluable. The teachers' gratitude for the program was palpable.

The following year we were to start a training program in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region as well, and so in December 1999

I set off for China to prepare for the upcoming training session. It was very cold there — 30 degrees below zero centigrade — and they had flooded the schoolyard, creating a rink where I ice-skated with teachers and students. I also enjoyed time spent over drinks with the key people in education. In China, especially in the provinces, if we want to work with people, we have to take every possible opportunity to get to know each other and be able to talk as friends.

Respect for Each Other's Language

The Japanese language boom of the 1980s had subsided, and even in China the number of schools teaching Japanese had decreased. This was happening worldwide and could not be helped. Still, I wonder about the wisdom of teaching only English as a foreign language. And this goes for Japan, of course. When people from many different countries gather in one place to accomplish something, they have to have a common language, and for occasions

like that, I think English is the natural choice. But for genuine cultural exchange, isn't it better to use the language of the country you are working in?

TJF also launched its Korean language education programs teaching Korean to Japanese high school students. In my opinion it was long overdue. Compared with the long-established, much-studied relationship between

Japanese and Chinese languages, the relationship between Japanese and Korean has not received much attention. I remember talking with the staff and how quickly we agreed that something needed to be done about that situation. Speaking of neighbor countries, we also thought about the Russian language, but unfortunately we just did not have the manpower or finances.

I purposely did not involve myself too much in TJF programs. We had experienced staff who did their jobs very well and had accomplished a great deal. Learning from the staff, I had a good understanding of TJF's principles and aims and I could give advice when needed, but I believed we would develop into a stronger and more confident organization if I did not try to micromanage.



Nakano Kayoko

April 2003-March 2011

Connecting People, Connecting Cultures, Building Society

Main programs during term as secretary general: *Hao Pengyou* textbook for learners of Japanese in China, Foreign Language Curriculum Guidelines 2012, "Tsunagaaru" international exchange website for middle and high school students



Visiting an elementary school in the U.S. state of Wisconsin.

I joined TJF part-time in 1990 three years after its launch, having been asked to advise the foundation based on my previous work with international cultural exchange. At that point TJF was run by Kodansha employees and

other affiliated staff, but a little later in 1991, when the organization was relaunched and its personnel policies, finances, and projects overhauled, a call was put out for directly hired staff and I turned full-time.

I will never forget the March 1993 meetings of the board of directors and board of trustees that radically reset the course of TJF projects. TJF's founding mission was to conduct international exchange focused on language and

culture, which at the time meant the bulk of our programs had to do with promoting Japanese language and culture overseas. I believed that exchange should flow both ways, not one; if we were going to encourage Japanese language education abroad, then by the same token we should also encourage the study of foreign languages in Japan. I proposed to our secretary general, Ushijima Michihiko, that as part of our exchange initiatives we should include language education aimed to enhance cultural understanding among young people. I remember going around with him to the directors and trustees to brief them on the draft resolution. The experience was an important point of departure for me in terms of my later career as program director and then secretary general.

It has been wisely observed that cultural exchange is all about people, from start to finish. Cultural exchange involves people sharing with one another how they live, what they think, what they find beautiful, what their values are. Connecting people, and getting them to be connected—that's the crucial thing. And since language is at the core of culture, we can

say that the ultimate goal of foreign language education, too, is to create understanding and ties. Elements like cultural understanding and personal interaction must be built into language learning before it can become cultural exchange, as it rightly should.

While at TJF, I always wanted us to keep up the spirit of pioneering new programs grounded in solid vision and ideals that weren't being done anywhere else. We were small, but I wanted us to do big work. Being privately run and therefore flexible does give TJF more freedom to act on novel and unprecedented ideas, and I tried to make the best of that strength.

As Secretary General

Once I became secretary general in fiscal 2003, the weight of my duties shifted away from programming more toward administrative and financial concerns. TJF is able to maintain its activities solely through the generosity of corporate and other sponsors, and our responsibility toward those benefactors was something I felt very keenly.

I also became more conscious about developing our staff. Because TJF is so small, the

Elements like cultural understanding and personal interaction must be built into language learning before it can serve as cultural exchange.

abilities, talents, and motivation of each and every person have a tremendous bearing on its activities as a whole. I tried as much as possible to accept ideas by the staff and to be interactive about shaping projects.

Ever-Evolving Programs

The three projects that were particularly after my own heart were the 2001 “Deai” photo resource kit, the 2009 *Hao Pengyou* Japanese textbook, and the *Foreign Language Curriculum Guidelines 2012*. For the second and third of these I was already secretary general, but I got myself fully involved with the feeling I was there right on the team. You could say that the fruits of my own growth over the course of my previous projects, I plowed back into “Deai” and *Hao Pengyou*, which in turn culminated in the *Curriculum Guidelines*.

“Deai” aimed to achieve the three goals of language learning, cultural understanding, and human understanding through materials designed so that learners could, in the process of getting to know the seven featured Japanese high school students, also become familiar with the Japanese language and with



With Wang Yunqing, then-deputy director of the Dalian Education Bureau, at the 2005 opening of the Center for Japanese Education Research inside the Dalian Institute of Education.

the larger culture lying behind the individuals. *Hao Pengyou* was a pioneering attempt to build intercultural human relationships through language education incorporating the OECD key competencies, the standards now sweeping education around the globe. And the *Curriculum Guidelines*, which calls for “discovery of others, discovery of self, and the creation of ties,” seeks to take foreign language learning out of the bounds of the classroom and turn it into a means for students to connect with other people and with the surrounding society. This last document gives concrete shape to our ideal of language learning as intercultural exchange.

The Trust of Many People

I will never forget the many people I met who gave their trust to the Japan Forum and joined in working to make our dreams a reality. The events surrounding *Hao Pengyou*, it being the combined Japanese-Chinese effort that it was, were particularly dramatic and amazing. It all

began in 2005, when TJF invited education officials and teachers of Japanese from Liaoning province to Japan in a bid to somehow stem the alarming drop in the number of Chinese schools with Japanese programs. Among the delegates was deputy director Wang Yunqing of the Dalian Education Bureau, who, when I remarked I wanted to encourage our two countries to each teach the other’s language so that we might bridge ties between our young people, gave me his warmest agreement. “Let’s both of us start out by trying to do what we can within our power,” he said. “If as a result our children on both sides of the sea are able to come even a little closer, then that will give meaning to my work, and to my life.” So the *Hao Pengyou* project was born.

Language Education and Community Building

When TJF moved to promote foreign language education inside as well as outside Japan, it

was for the sake of intercultural exchange, and today I’m convinced we have entered an age where the demand for people suited to multilingual and multicultural societies is greater than ever.

Over my years of working with foreign language education for young people, I began to have a certain vision. If Japan, China, and Korea are to come together into one East Asian community, then to build a foundation for that we will first need to share and understand one another’s languages and cultures. Could not the three countries, then, be called upon to institutionalize this sort of learning within their educational systems and work together toward its support? To some the idea may sound like one on the government level, but I thought it might be possible for a private organization like TJF to dig the first well, so to speak, and demonstrate a prototype. Before I left I believe I was able to lay a base and point to certain directions, so I’m very excited to see how TJF takes it from there.

I hope TJF will continue to be active in drawing together the resources of like-minded groups and individuals, and in reaching out to administrative bodies as well. As a foundation with a presence both in Japan and abroad, TJF is sure to have contributions that it is in a unique position to make.



Complete with 192 A3-sized photo sheets, a booklet, and two CD-ROMs, the “Deai” photo resource kit weighs in at more than ten kilograms.



Mizuguchi Keiko

April 2011 - present

Work It Out Together

Main programs during term as secretary general: Junior and Senior High School Students Learning Each Others' Languages Exchange Program, teacher training workshops for facilitating use of the *Foreign Language Curriculum Guidelines 2012*, *Hao Pengyou* textbook, and Click Nippon website.

The *Foreign Language Curriculum Guidelines* and the *Hao Pengyou* textbook are two embodiments of the TJF vision. Establishing their use in education was one of the first projects I wanted to pursue after becoming secretary general. Their goals could only be achieved by assuring their use in the classroom.

I also decided that we should expand the *Guidelines* to apply to all foreign language teaching. When I was in charge of the Chinese language education programs, I had realized the great value of support for Chinese and Korean language education that was not being provided by other organizations, but after becoming secretary general, I realized that it was wrong to limit its advice to just those two languages. That was why it was published with "A Proposal from Chinese- and Korean-language Teachers" as the subtitle. These are guidelines, I believe, that can form a common

foundation for teaching of all foreign languages in Japan. Our first step toward guidelines for all foreign language teaching was the symposium held in the summer of 2011; bringing together people from Spanish, German, French, Russian

and other language education, it marked a vigorous start to this project.

Since fiscal 2013 we have been holding master-class seminars in applying the *Guidelines* in the teaching of many different languages. The purpose of the seminar is to increase the ranks of teachers who have mastered the *Guidelines* and can teach its applications, enabling us to hold seminars in different parts of the country.

To Fulfill Our Mission

In this era when people of diverse cultural backgrounds and speaking different languages come together to create something or to solve common problems, TJF's mission is to help young people acquire the capacities needed for such endeavors: to communicate, cooperate, utilize information, and collaborate. Learning other languages is an extremely effective means of cultivating these abilities. The important role that TJF can play is to create opportunities through which young people can go beyond just language learning in the classroom to connect with others using the language learned. These opportunities have to



The *Foreign Language Curriculum Guidelines* published in 2012.

Going beyond language learning in the classroom to connect with others using the language learned.



The participants present their dances at the "Dance Dance Dance in Seoul" reporting session.

incorporate activities for participants to present their ideas and views to others and negotiate and coordinate with each other in order to make something new or accomplish some goal. With the advice of specialists in language education, exchange studies, and information-related education, the Summer Camp for Japanese and Chinese Students Learning Each Other's Languages, the Japanese and Korean Secondary School Students Exchange program, and the Development of Programs for Fostering Mutual Collaboration among Young People incorporate various kinds of collaborative activities.

The cooperation of teachers of Japanese overseas is also indispensable. TJF's Click Nippon website contains a growing archive of materials about Japan featuring a broad spectrum of voices. We look forward to meeting teachers in Australia, China, Korea, New Zealand, the United States, and other countries who utilize the Click Nippon website in lesson plans designed to cultivate their students' abilities to think and express themselves.

Looking Ahead

My term as secretary general began at the same time that TJF was designated a public interest incorporated foundation. The responsibility

that comes with the designation is heavier than I had anticipated. If we were to err in our responsibilities, the foundation would be disbanded and its endowment forfeited. We had to think anew about what constitutes the public interest and what it means to work toward that goal.

TJF is a small organization. Since the staff can be affiliated with particular programs continuously, they can accumulate knowledge and know-how and dedicate themselves to improving the quality of the programs. At the same time, this may cause a tendency to get into a rut as far as approaches and ideas are concerned. By getting involved in other programs, too, I hope, they can acquire fresh perspectives and use their capacities to the full.

Our position as program staff is rather different from that of research specialists or teachers. We cannot just do whatever we want, but must be ready to learn and to work together with others of similar aspirations in order to steadily advance our programs enabling young people to learn language and culture and collaborate among themselves.

Editorial Note

We are pleased to present lively profiles of the staff members working behind the scenes at TJF and interviews with the former and current secretary generals who have led our programs over the years. These interviews and profiles show how our programs have changed with the times and with social conditions as well as the consistent philosophy and ideas behind our endeavors. These executive and office staff and others affiliated with the foundation are the links between TJF and those who share and support our mission. We all have different fortes, and different ways of thinking, but we share the same goal. Small in number though we may be, it is because we are people of such commitment that we can adapt to changing times and shoulder the new challenges to come. We look forward to your continued support, advice, and goodwill.

Mizuguchi Keiko

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from Pokhara, Nepal, by Oki Shigeru

Feature

Interviews with Japan Forum Secretary Generals





Feature

10×10 +10...

TJF's current secretary general and nine other staff (plus the president and executive director) reveal 10 things about themselves.

My Special Passion

I now regularly carry my things around in a backpack. When I went to study in Beijing in 2005, I noticed that quite a few students lugged their heavy textbooks around in backpacks. It seemed like a good idea so I bought one myself. And it made me wonder why I'd never used one before. The one I'm using now is my third. Even when I'm in a suit or a coat, I carry my backpack. My wife used to complain that it was an eyesore but she's given up now. On a recent occasion when I had to wear formal morning attire, though, I decided not to take the backpack with me (laughs).



5

I'm Second to None in ...

I'm able to get along with people who are usually considered odd, those who can't fit into groups and those who others avoid because they're quiet and don't easily open up. I think I'm skilled in creating harmony so that such people can live up to their potential.

9

6

My Embarrassing Moment

I haven't had a chance actually to use the Chinese that I spent four months at Peking University studying so diligently. Probably what I should simply say is that I don't have the courage to use Chinese.

If I Became Secretary General

I would promote programs for Japanese language education among Russian high school students at TJF! Then, I would promote Russian language education for Japanese students. As one of our neighbors, I think that the Russian public has a deep interest in Japan. I've noticed this sort of interest in Japan since the time I served as the Japanese ambassador to Russia from 1994 to 1997.

10

2

Lunchtime to Remember

A bento lunch I had at our previous office in Shinjuku with 10 exchange students from Peking University. I'd studied Chinese at Peking University's School of International Studies for four months. I was already in my seventies then, but I went out of a desire to gain a deeper understanding of China, our neighbor to the west. Every day I struggled with the four tones of Chinese and the simplified ideographs of Mandarin. Professor K took extremely good care of me during my stay, tending to my admissions paperwork and even finding an apartment for me. And it was a group of Professor K's students from Peking University on an exchange program at Waseda University with whom I had that lunch here in this office. I have very fond memories of it.

8

This Was Me, Once Upon a Time

This is a photo of me when I was working as a diplomat overseas. I think foreign diplomacy was my true calling. In my next life, I'd still want to be a diplomat.



Coauthor of the Japanese edition of
Engaging with Russia: The Next Phase.

1

My Best Piece of Writing

My message in our Annual Report 2005-2006 was written at a time when Japan's relationships with South Korea and China were tense. I related a story I heard from an acquaintance. He'd been at a restaurant in a hotel in China, chatting with a girl who looked to be in first or second grade of elementary school. With a straight face she said to him, "I was taught that Japanese people are 'devils' but you aren't like that." That encounter was an example of true grassroots diplomacy—we need more of opportunities for exchange and encounter of that positive kind.

Those Tears That I Shed

It was at our 20-year anniversary reception that I realized that TJF, as small an organization as it is, has been a real pioneer, meeting the hopes and expectations of those who attended the event. I was deeply moved.



7

Me in One Kanji

It's important to honor harmony in an organization. It's something I've always aspired to.

和
harmony

3



Watanabe Koji
President

4

Caught by Surprise

I was taken aback that so many people attended our symposium commemorating the release of TJF publication "Gaikokugo gakushu no meyasu" (Foreign Language Curriculum Guidelines), held on March 3, 2012. I, too, read the publication when it was completed, but it was fairly dense and not easily understood. To be honest, I was worried that only a few dozen people would show up. But when I got up to give a few words at the start of the symposium, I realized the venue was packed with over 200 people. It was a truly pleasant surprise.



3 Those Tears That I Shed

When I received this corkboard covered with photos from the participants of the "Dance Dance Dance in Seoul" program.

2

Lunchtime to Remember

I went to lunch near the office in Otowa soon after being appointed to my present post at TJF with a director and the secretary general. It was an unbearably hot day, and the three of us, without consulting each other, each ordered a beer... That afternoon, I was reading over the organization's rules and regulations and number 13 made me freeze. It said, "Those who apply to the follow conditions will be suspended and may in some cases be forced to leave their post: 1. Intoxicated or otherwise at risk of disrupting discipline and order." Whoa.

謝

Me in One Kanji

Whether it's the 謝 of 謝罪 (apology, regret) or the 謝 of 感謝 (gratitude), who knows.

7

4

Caught by Surprise

When I found out that the Japan Forum is actually an education-related organization.

9

I'm Second to None in ...

Finding good restaurants in a new city. At one time, I had a favorite pub near every station on the JR Yamanote train line. I have my 159 favorite Tokyo restaurants in the contacts list of my smartphone. I also have information on my phone for 180 of my favorite restaurants in other cities like Kyoto, Munich, and Paris. I don't know whether or not that's a lot. Most of the restaurants I found by exploring on my own, the reward of my having taken a chance with restaurants based on their appearance and menus.

8

This Was Me, Once Upon a Time

This is the train pass I was issued for the Mannheim city train when I was there taking a short-term language course. I, too, was once young.



10

If I Became TJF Secretary General

I'd hold overnight training camps, so that we can discuss things until we're blue in the face. I know it sounds naive.

My Embarrassing Moment

The fact that I introduced myself in Korean at my first meeting at TJF. I had no idea that the staff were all so skilled in foreign languages, and was embarrassed when I found out. I should've done it in German instead, with a south German accent.

6

1

My Best Piece of Writing

The copy I wrote for the bellyband of Professor Tosaku Yasuhiko's book, "Nippon 3.0 no shohosen" (A Prescription for Nippon 3.0), which calls attention to the value of social networking for Japan and role in nurturing people. Whether you like the PR copy or not, I hope you will have a look at the book.



My pet hamster, named "Nanamu."

Naito Hiroyuki

Executive Director



5

My Special Passion

I like to collect coins and bills from the countries I've visited. I'm especially fond of the smallest denominations, and find myself tickled by China's two jiao banknote and euro coins. Euro bills are the same across the EU, but the back sides of the coins differ from country to country.

When I travel, I also like going to markets and department stores to check out rare foods—especially seafood and mushrooms—that you can't find elsewhere. There's skilfish, manybar goatfish, sail-fin poachers, Japanese mitten crabs, dilate piddock—these are all seafood. Among the rare mushrooms I've come across are morels, larch boletes, and black tiger paws.

The number of countries and regions I've visited comes out to twenty-four: Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Britain, France, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Latvia, the Soviet Union, Russia, Hungary, Turkey, South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Canada, and Guam. I've lost count of the number of times I've been to German-speaking areas, but I've never been to the U.S. aside from Guam—not even Hawai'i.

Hakutsuru, Yuzuru, Hatsukari, Akebono, Hokuriku, Sunrise Izumo, Kii, Ginga, Asakaze, Sakura, Mizuho, Fuji, Hayabusa, Akatsuki, Naha, Suisei, Myojo, and Kinsei. These are all overnight sleeper trains that are no longer running, but I cherish my memories of them. Even with those that I wasn't able to ride in, I made sure to take photos of their headsigns.





Mizuguchi Keiko

Secretary General



9

I'm Second to None in ...

I think I can say, in my knowledge of everything there is to know about Chinese language education in Japanese high schools. I know how to read the difficult names of schools involved in Chinese language education, like Kozukata Senior High School and Kunijima High School. I've met at least 300 Chinese language instructors (maybe I'm exaggerating?). Some teachers call me a "bulldozer" but I like to think of myself as a "supporter."

My Embarrassing Moment

In the winter of 1996, I went on a business trip to three cities in northeast China. At a reception I attended in the first city, Dalian, we were served *baijiu*, a Chinese distilled drink with 38 percent alcohol. I had about one or two small glasses there. Then at a reception in the next city, Shenyang, I had about three or four larger glasses.

Finally, at a reception in Yanji, the capital of the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region in Jilin province I was surrounded by 10 tablemates, all of whom just kept on pouring *baijiu* into my glass. Only later did I realize I'd exchanged "cheers" with everyone at the table, because the next thing I knew, I was looking at the ceiling. I had no recollection of the latter half of the reception; it was the first time I'd lost consciousness from drinking too much. After that incident, my colleagues started calling me Sakaguchi—literally, "sake mouth," punning on my surname Mizuguchi, which is written with the characters, "water mouth." The following day I promised myself I would never repeat the same mistake ...

6



4

Caught by Surprise

Before I started to work at TJF, I was on the staff of a research institute. There I was once in charge of a report that was commissioned by TJF. When I visited the TJF office to submit an interim report, it was a male staff member who brought me coffee. Since at that time women were always assigned to that sort of task, I remember being most pleasantly surprised.

Those Tears That I Shed

In my third year at TJF, it fell to me to compile a report on high school Chinese language education. It was a challenging job, entailing everything from writing the actual text to managing its editing and publication as a book. As the deadline approached, though, I began to suffer writer's block and panic would set in. Sometimes I was completely at a loss as to what to write, and when everyone was gone, tears would pour down my face. It was thanks to the support of my more experienced colleagues that the report finally made it into book form. The tears I shed when I held the completed book in my hand were tears of joy.



3

7

Me in One Kanji

There are two main meanings to this character. One is “cheery and jovial, having a cheery and loud voice.” That’s a very accurate description of me. But it is the other meaning to which I aspire: “pure and clear, untarnished and crisp.”



Clear, bright, cheerful, sunny

8

This Was Me, Once Upon a Time

I’ve known my husband since we were in college. I was a lot more charming back then, don’t you think? My husband and I have been together for 35 years now. As a working woman, he is my greatest supporter.



My Best Piece of Writing

The first installment of the column “Nihon no koko ni okeru Chugokugo kyoiku no genba kara” (Chinese Language Education in Japanese High Schools). The piece appeared in number 22 of *Kokusai Bunka Forum Tsushin* (March 1994) to launch a series that continued for 24 installments over six years, with a title change at one point to “Ajia no kotoba o manabu” (Learning Asian Languages). I visited schools, took photos, and wrote the articles, and that first article was the first I had ever had published with my byline. It took me hours—no, days—to write up just those 900 characters but it’s still the best writing I’ve done to date.

1

Lunchtime to Remember

Oysters in Tottori. It was almost time for our bus to Kobe, but my boss then was bent on eating oysters in season and ran to the basement food section of a department store. She came back with oysters, the local specialty *chikuwa* fish cakes, and beer. Delicious!!!

2



Publications put out by DeAGOSTINI Japan.

10

If I Became Secretary General

Ideally, we would have TJF offices outside of Tokyo, too. Since that’s not very realistic, I’m hoping we can set up temporary SOHO-type spaces in areas where we’re doing work—spaces where we can brainstorm as we carry out our day-to-day tasks.

5

My Special Passion

The fatty parts of ham. Ever since I was little I’ve always eaten that part of ham first. My favorite ham is the kind made with pork loin because of the large proportion of that fatty white part. Why? Because it tastes good! But there’s no doubt that years of enjoying that taste is responsible for my rising cholesterol levels. I just can’t give it up, though.



© Atsugi Ham

喜

joy, happiness

Me in One Kanji

The things I live for are all interesting, fun, or delicious.

7

I'm Second to None in ...

When it comes to explaining things in simple terms, and pursuing things that I'm interested in to the end.

9

If I Became Secretary General

I'd make it unbearably exciting to come into the office every day. I'd make the organization even more dynamic through a structure of delegation of power, responsibility, and evaluation.

10

Lunchtime to Remember

I think set lunches at your favorite spot are the best for weekdays. I recommend the *zha qie he* (fried eggplant pockets) at the Chinese restaurant Nagasakasho near our office. It's a dish from northern China and looks like sweet potato tempura. But when you chomp down on it, you get delectably textured layers of wrapper, eggplant, and pork. And hidden in the very middle of it all is a sweet filling that leaves you wanting more!



My Favorite Food

2



1

My Best Piece of Writing

I have great memories of researching and writing the "Japanese Culture and Daily Life" column for *Takarabako*.

▼"Manga Cafes"

I visited manga cafes in Shibuya and even appeared in accompanying photos.

<http://www.tjf.or.jp/eng/content/japaneseculture/27mangakissa.htm>

▼"From Akiba to the World!"

This article featured "Akiba-kei" and Densha Otoko. Akihabara was all the rage.

<http://www.tjf.or.jp/eng/content/japaneseculture/30akiba.htm>



Fujikake Toshiya



Those Tears That I Shed

From 1997 to 2006, I worked on “The Lives of Japanese High School Students: Photo and Message Contest,” featuring photos and essays taken and written by high school students about a friend. There was one pair of friends—one always the photographer, the other the subject—who entered the contest in three consecutive years. The first year, they captured the world of just the two of them, enveloped in a secure sense of friendship. The second year, that same world was filled with smiles. But the photos that we received from them the third year, showed the subject smiling with other people at their school festival. When I saw those photos, I had to excuse myself because I couldn’t keep back my tears. I have no idea what difficulties the two had been through, but having seen the evolution of their photos over the years, I could tell that whatever it was, they had overcome it and started on their respective ways toward the outside world. I was just delighted to have witnessed the growth of those two students. I came away from the contest with an understanding of the enormous power a feeling of acceptance can have.



This Was Me, Once Upon a Time

I played little league baseball when I was in elementary school. I was small, slow, and not very skillful. I was so bad that my father volunteered to coach the team, which meant I wouldn’t be able to quit even if I wanted to. I was so happy when it rained on Sunday mornings and practice got cancelled. I don’t have an ounce of interest in baseball. I prefer indoor activities.

My Embarrassing Moment

NHK was going to announce the “Lives of Japanese High School Students: Photo and Message Contest” on television. And I was supposed to be at the office to be on hand for any inquiries from viewers, but I ran late. Because of my tardiness, the announcement wasn’t aired. I basically let the good will of the various people that had made the arrangement possible go to waste. I was disappointed in myself and embarrassed and didn’t know what to do, so I went to the barbershop and had my hair cropped really short. Upon seeing my haircut, my family coolly said, “Trying to show your remorse by getting a haircut is something kids do.” Of course, this happened a long, long time ago.

Coffee Time



My Special Passion

To prepare and drink coffee with the spirit of a tea ceremony master and the mind of a scientist. Boiling the water, grinding the coffee beans, and pouring coffee for my partner and me. It’s the most indispensable, relaxing part of my day.

Caught by Surprise

I experienced a series of culture shocks on a farm in Hokkaido when we were creating “Deai: The Lives of Seven Japanese High School Students,” TJF’s photo teaching resource published in 2001. Dairy farming is a tough business. The first thing that surprised me was how sensitive the cows are. The moment I stepped foot in the barn, they all looked straight at me, the outsider, with their black eyes like large grapes. A veterinarian told me, “All the cows that produce milk have been artificially inseminated. And unless we milk them once in the morning and once at night, they will die.” My mind went blank. I was overwhelmed by the rawness of the whole operation, and struggled to take down notes. Hokkaido was a big place where I faced my own smallness.

Muronaka Naomi



2

Lunchtime to Remember

I loved the 2000-yen sushi lunch at the Hyatt Regency Hotel's Shuko Omoroto restaurant, near our previous office in Shinjuku. When I was upset about something or felt exhausted but still had a lot of work to do, I'd treat myself to lunch there, clearing my mind by gazing out at the greenery in Shinjuku Chuo Park while waiting for my order to arrive.



My Embarrassing Moment

Back when I was still in my twenties, I was talking to someone in a high position in their field who also worked with TJF as he described what he was doing, and without thinking blurted out, "My goodness, you're the éminence grise of that world, aren't you?" A very uncomfortable silence ensued. What was I hoping to hear in response? Whenever I recall that incident I feel the agony of my embarrassment. Of course, that very forgiving and generous person is still a big supporter of our endeavors.

6



1

My Best Piece of Writing

The "My Story" essays from "Deai: The Lives of Seven Japanese High School Students," our photo resource published in 2001. I followed high school students around, visiting them at their schools and homes and at times even having the girls stay overnight at my home so that I could interview them. My subjects were all teenagers, and I could tell they were constantly trying to figure out whether I could be trusted, and whether they could end up getting hurt by talking about themselves. I realized that unless I opened up first, the students wouldn't feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings about personal relationships or their real hopes and fears for the future. It was a fascinating experience, though there were times I felt discouraged about my inadequacies. I feel sure the deep connections I made with various people through that project helped me grow as a person.

Caught by Surprise

It was probably the fall of 1999. I was in New York for the first time. Then secretary general N and I got out of our taxi in Manhattan, and as other yellow cabs whizzed by against a backdrop of picturesque buildings, I remarked, "It's like we're in a movie, isn't it?" I turned to N...but she was gone! Looking around frantically, I found her running down the street in the middle of traffic. I had no idea what was going on, but began running after her. N was surprisingly (sorry!) quick, and it took me—a former short-distance runner—a while to catch up. It was almost time for our first appointment and I began to panic. Suddenly, N stopped running. She approached a taxi waiting at a red light, banged on the window, and the trunk popped open. She'd forgotten her paperwork inside the trunk of our cab! Days later, N laughingly recalled the incident, "Muronaka-san came running after me!" What else could I have done?!

4



This Was Me, Once Upon a Time

Aspiring to develop the ability to express myself not only through words but with my body, I've tried my hand at a lot of things—*taiko* drumming, Ryukyu dance, Okinawan *sanshin*, Japanese folk dance, Chinese dance. Not that I ever succeeded...

8

The Tears That I Shed

I'm always getting angry, laughing, or getting over-excited about things at work but I don't cry much. Maybe I'm not very sensitive. With age, though, I'm getting a bit weepy. When I see high school students hugging and sobbing, reluctant to part on the last day of an exchange program, I get teary, too. Youth is wonderful.

3

9

I'm Second to None in ...

My love of maps. Whether it's a map of Japan, the world, train lines, or a flight map, I can stare at them for hours with a grin on my face, enjoying a panoramic view of some terrain or reading the names of small towns.



Me in One Kanji

Ever since I was a child, I've always enjoyed time spent in cars, trains, planes, and boats. And while it hasn't always been my own choice, I've moved from Kagoshima to Hyogo and Osaka, then to Tokyo, China, and back to Tokyo again.

7



movement, shift, transfer

My Special Passion

Using the edge of a piece of paper to scrape out the dust that gets stuck in the sliver of space between the frame and lens of my glasses. I'm struck by a small sense of accomplishment and joy whenever I get the piece of paper to slide into the groove at an ideal angle and shovel out a chunk of dust.

5

10

If I Became Secretary General

Taking the utmost advantage of technology, I'd like to make it possible for us to work from home, cafes, or anywhere else. But that doesn't mean I'd prefer to be working 24/7.



8

This Was Me, Once Upon a Time

I was on the competitive ballroom dancing team during just my freshman year of college. At our first competition that year, I was a finalist. I joined the ballroom dancing team thinking it was a “cultural” club, but turned out to be a hard-core athletic sport!



Those Tears That I Shed

Oh, so many tears. At the completion ceremony for the training program for Japanese language teachers at Chinese junior and senior high schools, I cried out of joy with the volunteer teachers who had helped us make the program a success—we were so sorry to part. I have also shed tears of frustration and confusion. The Chinese education officials and Japanese participants at an exchange event become so close, almost like family, and yet there is still so much tension between our two countries. There were tears of relief when a Japanese participant of a Chinese summer camp that I chaperoned recovered from a sudden illness. Our work at TJF involves heart-to-heart connections and offers so many opportunities for us to be who we really are. That’s the genuine thrill of what we do.

3

Lunchtime to Remember

The *unagi kamameshi* (grilled-eel-on-rice pot) from the Kamatora delivery service. Now a staple at TJF’s lunch meetings, it is popular among our Chinese visitors. Its appeal is easy to see—it’s served hot, tastes good, is served in an iron pot (a bit of a novelty) is packed with nutrients, fills you up, and the ingredients are very “Japanese.” Besides, the broth of the accompanying soup is very rich.

2

9

I’m Second to None in ...

Lacking a sense of direction—though it is nothing to brag about! I started to question my sense of direction after I started college. Our campus was large and we had to bicycle from classroom to classroom, and I would always get lost. I have a license to drive, too, but I’ve come to realize that I’m just not cut out for it so have become a driver merely on paper. I can’t even remember the roads to get to my parents’ house. My poor sense of direction affects me in my work but I take it in stride by looking up detailed directions, frequently asking for directions while en route, and giving myself plenty of time to get to my destination. Yes, I’m Nagae Haruko and I’m navigationally challenged. Please beware!

10

If I Became Secretary General

I’d abolish time cards and make it possible to bring children to work.

Me in One Kanji

In my teens, I lamented that I’d ever been born. In my twenties, I was overcome by pessimism and restlessness over where I was headed. I spent my thirties hurtling through life with no time or space to mull anything. Now, I stop to think about my everyday life. I realize that I’ve come this far only because of the people I’ve met and gotten to know. Each encounter has been *en* 縁, giving me life, keeping me going, tempering and strengthening me. Filled with gratitude, I’ll go on entrusting myself to these connections.



chance, fate, connection

7

1

My Best Piece of Writing

The article I'm most proud of is the one I wrote for the official TJF Facebook page. The page was visited 862 times, marking the first time one of our posts received more than 500 visitors. The article reports on a lecture I gave at the University of Tsukuba in April 2013 titled "Gurobaru jidai no Nihon o ikiru" (Living in Japan in the Global Age). I was impressed by the many astute questions asked by the students after the lecture.

Caught by Surprise

A taxi I was riding in on a business trip to Harbin was hit by an oncoming car. Fortunately, I wasn't injured. But since then, whenever I encounter a driver who speeds, I make sure to gently ask him to slow down, saying that otherwise "I get carsick." I think nothing of white lies when it comes down to protecting my life!

4

6

My Embarrassing Moment

I got sick from eating abalone on a business trip to Beijing. It made my face all puffy, and kept me from leaving my hotel for two days and from my duties interpreting for my boss. That's how I figured out I'm allergic to abalone.

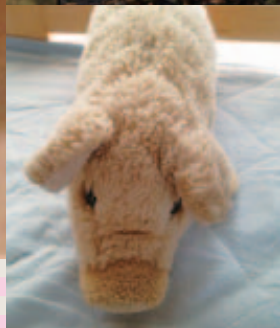


★ Nagae Haruko

5

My Special Passion

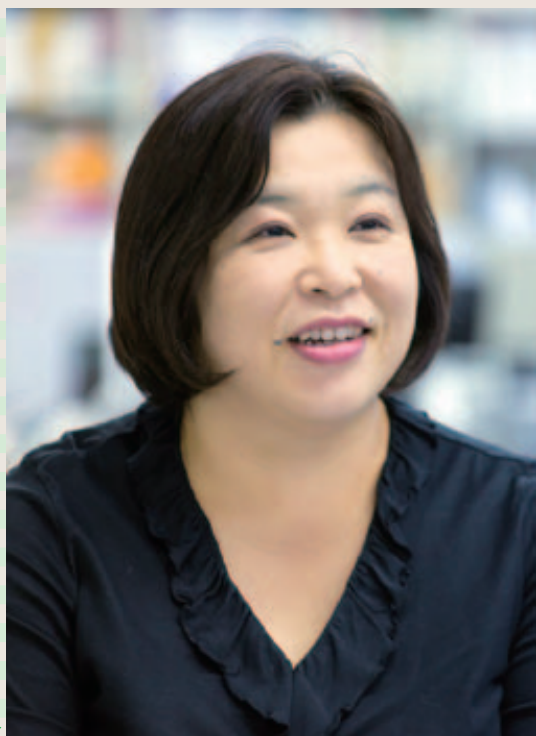
Collecting plump, cute-looking stuffed pigs and pig ornaments. It might have to do with a childhood memory of my father making me a very realistic toy pig out of a sponge. I have pig ornaments in the entryway and bathroom of my home, as well as several stuffed pigs on my bed.



1

My Best Piece of Writing

For an article in the “My Way Your Way” series of our website Click Nippon, I interviewed Ryota, a third-year junior high school student. He’d written a poem entitled “Dear Fukushima” a year after the Great East Japan Earthquake. After reading the article, his mother wrote to me praising the tenderness and sensitivity with which I had communicated his story. This series tries to communicate the subject’s innermost thoughts, and after the interviews, I sometimes felt inadequate to the task, so such a message was extremely encouraging.



★ Chiba Miyuki



6

My Embarrassing Moment

At a dinner party I attended during my first business trip to China, there was a speech by the leader of our hosts and then a toast. Then there was a speech by our side and another toast. Then came dinner and conversation with those around us. As usual, I kept drinking beer every time my glass was refilled. Toward the end of the party I was suddenly informed, “Chiba-san, you’re not supposed to drink unless someone gives a toast.” Oh, no! Why didn’t anyone tell me beforehand?! I was so embarrassed that I turned bright red.



I’m Second to None in ...

In my tape transcription skills, perhaps? I transcribed 13 hours worth of recordings from interviews with past and present TJF secretary generals for this publication. An hour of recording usually comes out to about 10,000 characters. The free software Okoshiyasu (a play on the Japanese word for “welcome” and “easy transcription”—I love the pun) is helpful. Try it yourself!

9

2

Lunchtime to Remember

They may not be especially memorable, but I really enjoy the *bento* I bring to work and eat while reading or chatting with my colleagues. Of course, now and then I don’t mind going out for something special. I’m open to invitations!

7

Me in One Kanji

My hands are always warm. I’m always being told, “You know what they say about people with warm hands. They have icy hearts.” That’s just not true!



warmth



3

Those Tears That I Shed

Compiling the 20-year history of TJF was tough—especially the section of data on all TJF's publications, programs, and projects. It involved organizing and presenting in a consistent format a massive amount of information. Alone in the 26th-floor office of our old Shinjuku office, I grappled with the editing and cross-checking. Consulting the designer by telephone as we pushed ourselves to the limit, trying to harness all the data, until we both began to feel faint . . . I'll never forget that experience.

I cried my first tears of joy when a former participant of our Japanese language instructors' training program held in China told me with tears in her eyes that she had developed real pride as a Japanese language teacher because of the TJF program.

If I Became Secretary General

I'd like to create a space for junior high school and high school students to learn outside of school.

10

There was a stall here selling the white birch branches.



This Was Me, Once Upon a Time

Not many people know this, but I majored in Russian in college. Here I am in front of a bathhouse in Moscow. I'm holding a bunch of white birch branches, which we used in the sauna to improve circulation. At the time, Gorbachev was in power. That was my first and last visit to the Soviet Union.

8

My Special Passion

Multiplying 27 by 2, then the resulting figure by 2, and so on 2 times 27 is 54, 2 times 54 is 108 . . . eventually you get 432—I smile at that neat figure. Continue doubling and you get to 3,456—how's that for a cool figure, I'm happy to think. I'm always doubling two-digit numbers to see if there are any that give me more satisfaction than 27.



27,54,108.....

5



4

Caught by Surprise

On a business trip to Australia together with colleague A to make a presentation on Click Nippon, we were staying, along with Ms.O, an expert on Japanese language teaching, in a university condominium. The night before O was to return to Japan, I couldn't get the shower to stop running. A smiling O came to the rescue and turned the faucet with all her might. But suddenly the shower was spewing a torrent of hot water on us! The faucet had come right off! A security guard came right away, but we continued to be drenched. The guard called another guard, who appeared with a smile and searched all over for the water valve, including the crawl space above the ceiling and the yard. Meanwhile, water began to seep into the bedroom. In the end, the super transferred us to the condo next door. I was amazed at the generosity we were shown throughout the ordeal; no one sounded annoyed or gave us any grief. Australia is so big-hearted, I thought. A slept soundly through the entire brouhaha. She doesn't sweat the small stuff. . .





This Was Me, Once Upon a Time

I used to play trumpet in my high school brass band. This photo is from the Ginza Silver Parade and we're playing our standby song, "St. Louis Blues March."

8



Lunchtime to Remember

The best lunches are the treats of senior colleagues. Thanks so much! Now some might consider that response a bit pathetic, so I'd like to tell you about one of my favorite restaurants near the office: Sanukiya. Next to the Gokokuji police box, it serves authentic Sanuki *udon* noodles. On days you really want to eat *udon*, try the "shittoku udon," which is the name for their "special" of the day.

2



My Special Passion

Senbei crackers are better after they've absorbed some moisture than when they're so fresh that when you put them between your teeth, the sharp edges dig into your gums. I'd say it's best to open the package and leave it for two or three days. When your teeth hit the cracker, it should be of the texture that tells you, "Oh, it's gone soft." But when your jaw bears down, your gums don't suffer the unbearable pressure, but the sound is a dull crack. It shouldn't be any softer than that—there's no satisfaction in a wilted *senbei*. It's the catharsis that counts. Some folks equate such softened *senbei* with damp *senbei* and crackers, but that's as silly as comparing a crisply deep-fried pork cutlet with the pork-cutlet on a *katsudon* pork bowl. That's all I have to say as a softened *senbei* fanatic.



Senbei

5

3

Those Tears That I Shed

Learning that participants in our programs have continued their language study or have come to Japan to study Japanese makes me so happy I could cry.

If I Became Secretary General

I would bring together the knowledge of all our staff to create a nationwide gourmet map database of great restaurants where we can take our guests from overseas as well as comfortable spots where you just can't resist drinking a little too much.

10

7
風

wind

Me in One Kanji

Wind. Or so I thought. But maybe it's kite? Whether there's a tailwind or headwind, kites (and I) fly high.

風

kite

4

Caught by Surprise

I went to check out Hanmadan Hall at the Korean Cultural Center, where the TJF-co-sponsored speech contest "Hanashite miyo Kankokugo" (Let's Speak Korean) was to take place. In exchanging greetings with the staff there, I was told that a certain Mr. Chung had come to X university in Japan to study music. The story sounded familiar, so I asked for Mr. Chung's given name and instrument. As it turned out, he had been in the orchestra I joined when I was an exchange student in Korea. "Is that you, Chul-soo?" I asked from the stage through a microphone, using his nickname, and to everyone's surprise he responded, "What are you doing here?" What an emotional moment. I had heard he'd gotten a job in Japan, but who knew we'd meet again here! Although we were reunited, we once again lost touch with each other. Then recently we ran into each other again at a friend's wedding in Seoul. "Why are we running into each other here, when we haven't seen each other in Japan?" we said.



6

My Embarrassing Moment

Of the several times that all phone and Internet lines in the office have been disconnected, one of them was due to an error I made in setting up the equipment. I'm sorry. I'll never let that happen again.



9

I'm Second to None in ...

Making any photo look good.



Mori Ryosuke



1

My Best Piece of Writing

What you are about to read.



2

Lunchtime to Remember

Lunch at Azzuri, an Italian restaurant in the Kagurazaka district of Tokyo. The servings are huge. When I ordered grilled pork, I got three pieces of pork loin each the size of my palm! Plus they have all-you-can-eat bread! The lunches there are a steal. I recommend going when you're starving or want to impress someone.

10

If I Became Secretary General

I'd make month-long vacations possible.



I'm Second to None in...

My knowledge of cats. I come from a family that could never leave abandoned cats alone, so we always had them in our house. Our neighbors thought we just really, really liked cats, so people just kept leaving more cats at our home every year. Whether it was boxes previously used for produce or something else, there were always boxes in our yard filled with kittens. We raised a lot of cats to adulthood. With kittens that still had their umbilical cords attached, we'd feed them warm milk and give them hot water bottles that would sub in as their parents.

We'd play with them to help with their emotional development, too... At our peak, we had over 20 cats. We (my mother) even gave insulin shots to diabetic cats. Because of our commitment to cats, most of my paid vacation days were spent at the vet. And that's how I've accumulated all this (mostly useless) knowledge of cats. I have no regrets, though!

9



Cats that have taken over my room.



Shibata Mikiko

4

Caught by Surprise

The size of our previous office in Shinjuku. Surprised by the sparsely populated office when I came in for my interview, I asked if a lot of people were out that day. I was shocked when I was told that all the staff were there.





scatter

Me in One Kanji

My mind is scattered right now and I can't focus on anything.

1

My Best Piece of Writing

I wrote a Facebook post about the release of "Gaikokugo gakushu no meyasu" (Foreign Language Curriculum Guidelines). When 3,000 copies of the publication were delivered to our office, I seriously wondered if they would all sell. But not only have we been able to sell them to people in person, we've also received orders online from all over Asia and as far as Egypt, and the mountain of books is getting smaller by the day. This tangible sense of people's support for our work is wonderful.



A crystal elephant ornament.

7

My Embarrassing Moment

The office phone rang when I'd taken mine apart to clean it. I proceeded to talk into the receiver for a while even though it was disconnected from the phone itself.

6

8

This Was Me, Once Upon a Time

I caught the Italy bug when it was all the rage in Japan and traveled there every year. I fattened up on every trip, stuffing myself with scrumptious prosciutto and enjoying plenty of delicious wine (and even sneaking into a college mess hall).



3

Those Tears That I Shed

I was preparing address labels for our new year's cards on an Excel sheet. The list of addressees came out to over 20 Excel sheets. It was just so much data that Word and Excel kept freezing on me. The rest of the world seemed joyful since it was Christmastime, but I was reduced to tears as a result of looming deadlines and tendinitis in my wrists.

5

My Special Passion

Japanese grass lizards (*kanahebi* or *kama-choro*). They play dead when they're caught. But their thin skin continues to pulsate to breathe, and it makes me very aware of their life force. They're quite cute when they're relaxing in the sun, but unfortunately you don't see them around in Tokyo.

8



This Was Me, Once Upon a Time

This is when I was in grad school in Melbourne, Australia. I spent a year living with housemates. It's been over 10 years since I quite smoking, but back then I loved to have a smoke while gazing up at the Southern Cross from the yard.

2

Lunchtime to Remember

The salad bar at Kodansha's company cafeteria. At a physical exam, I was instructed to eat less rice and more vegetables. Having been raised to eat not only side dishes but to finish my rice as well, I've been stumped. It's hard to eat a lot of vegetables. But with the salad bar, I have no problem. I love salad bars.

Caught by Surprise

My first project at TJF was a training program for foreign language teachers. I'd been told repeatedly that the lecturer for the program couldn't stand cigarette smoke and had informed the hotel about it, but the hotel room that had been secured turned out to be a smoking room. I panicked. It was a mistake on the part of the hotel, but I was horrified that something had gone wrong on my first project. While the hotel prepared a new room, the teachers and I went out for a meal. When a customer sitting near our group lit up soon after we were seated, I couldn't believe our bad luck. Smoking was permitted in the restaurant. I frantically searched for another restaurant. This happened the day before the training program.

4

Those Tears That I Shed

The "Dance Dance Dance in Seoul" program, an exchange program for Japanese and Korean junior high and high school students during the 2012 fiscal year, attracted a lot of attention—enough to be covered by a Korean newspaper. I won't forget how the young reporter and I worked and reworked the article up until the deadline so that it would make the students proud. From that experience I learned how difficult it is for something to be the subject of an article without being used for political motives.

3



Tears spilled from my eyes when I was congratulated by the heads of the event's Japanese and Korean host organizations, teachers, and others involved in the event for my work with the reporter. I was struck by both joy and relief. I don't think I ever continued to cry for that long over anything else. We were celebrating the success of the program, so I wanted to be cheerful, but I couldn't help myself. I was both embarrassed and apologetic...



10

If I Became Secretary General

I'd institute a sabbatical system and encourage staff to develop their expertise and skills, work on self-improvement, or take creative breaks for periods of six months to a year!

I'm Second to None in...

My really good luck when it comes to people. I can hardly describe how much I've been helped through the people I've encountered. I'm always hoping that I can be the one to help others, but it just doesn't happen that way. I'm not happy about it, but a close friend of mine argues that I should just accept this as my fate. Recently I've been trying to think of things I'm capable of doing for other people. But it's always tiny things that people probably need no help with.

9

Nakano Atsushi



My Embarrassing Moment

I've made many embarrassing mistakes, but one that I'll never get over is the time we had to pay a cancellation fee because I forgot to cancel our reservation for a training program venue. It was the first time in my life that I wrote an official letter of apology at work. Mistakes that could ruin the reputation of an organization are mortifying.

6

My Special Passion

I have a favorite coffee cup. It just makes all coffee taste better than when it's served in any other cup. For me, there's an optimal volume and shape for coffee. Volume is obviously about the size of the cup. Shape, meanwhile, is about how much of the coffee is exposed to air. It's a delicate balance. Also important is how the cup feels against my lips. The cup in the photo is my favorite at the moment. Do you have a favorite cup?

5



My Best Piece of Writing

The article "Gaikokugo kara 'ringo' e" (From Foreign Language to "Neighbor Language") that I wrote for the August 2013 installment of the series Tagengo Sekai e no Manazashi (Toward a Multilingual World) in the *Eigo kyoiku* magazine for English teachers. The objective of the series is to help English language teachers develop an interest in other languages. I think it was a good time to introduce our Korean and Chinese language education programs for Japanese junior high and high school students, and Japanese language education programs for Chinese and Korean students, while putting forth the notion of foreign languages spoken by neighboring countries as "neighbor languages" (*ringo*).

1

Me in One Kanji

I want to be as free as possible from various ideologies, value systems, methods, and tools. I am (or aspire to be) like the clouds in the sky, which without set shapes or locations, are free.



clouds

7

9

I'm Second to None in ...

In my tendency to get a bit carried away at times. My "career anchor" is "challenge," so I try to start something new every year. Then I just end up repeating the same cycle: meticulous and enthusiastic research, total absorption in the pursuit of whatever it is, then putting off others with my overly exacting ways, and then mourning when I haven't been understood. Two years ago it was making Indian food; last year, it was cycling. I bought a road bike before the Golden Week holidays and biked 100 kilometers every weekend in August. In September, around the time I was basking in a feeling of accomplishment from biking 200 kilometers in 15 hours in the rain, others were starting to give me nervous smiles and keeping their distance. I moved closer to Chiba because the Boso Peninsula is a good place to bike, but nobody wants to listen to my stories ...

I Love Cycling



If I Became Secretary General

We ought to enjoy the differences in culture and values, debate and discuss things, and not resort to exclusion or violence. This may all seem obvious, but I feel that our reality is far from it. By the time I'm Mizuguchi-san's age, I'd love it if we could hold a festival of peace and tolerance at Yoyogi Park, and other kinds of programs to reach youth. The "Ringo kinenbi" (apple/neighbor language anniversary) donation project is a step in that direction. We look forward to your contribution!

10

Those Tears That I Shed

Sometimes I find tears running down my cheeks. When I see young people prompted by some chance experience stepping out into a new world, I know why I love my work, and the tears just come naturally.

3

7

Me in One Kanji

I sense, observe, consider, infer, reflect, gain insight, and make plans for the future (all actions that include the kanji 察). I constantly repeat these words, like a mantra in my head. I'm pretty shy and reserved, but I make a great team with people who rush headlong into things, acting as "brake" or "brain." Anyone looking for a potential partner?



consider, observe, infer, sense

This Was Me, Once Upon a Time

At age 23, I volunteered for a month at Mother Teresa's Kalighat, the Home of the Pure Heart (previously Kalighat Home for the Dying Destitute). One of my jobs was putting the laundry out to dry on the tin roof.

8



1

My Best Piece of Writing

The article “*Bento: Packaging Good Food and Human Warmth*” in *Takarabako* no. 28. *Bento* have attracted attention from around the world in recent years. If we do not do away with the perception that Japan may be “cool” but is hard to understand, we cannot shorten the distance between ourselves and the rest of the world.

I had tried to write an article that would help young readers overseas get excited about making cute, colorful *bento* themselves and feel a connection with people living in Japan, and it seems to have succeeded!

4

Caught by Surprise

My first paycheck.



My Embarrassing Moment

During a business trip to the United States, I went to sleep without setting an alarm, and was woken by a phone call from the hotel lobby five minutes after I was supposed to have been there. After traveling on my own for three weeks I had joined two senior colleagues just the night before. They were not people I expected to indulge me, but I must have let down my guard knowing I wasn't alone anymore...

6



Ando Madoka



2

Lunchtime to Remember

On a visit to an Australian high school, the kangaroo meat the teacher barbecued for us was unforgettable.



5

My Special Passion

I love 30-centimeter rulers. Of course I keep one at the office, and for some reason in every room of my home. What I consider a “handsome” ruler meets specific criteria as to material, thickness, scale markings, and unit (centimeters, inches, or both). I buy them even at 100-yen shops, but a surprisingly good source is souvenir shops. I still use a ruler with a photo of Ayers Rock that I bought on a trip to Australia when I was 20.

Despite my typical blood-type O personality, I'm fond of measuring things precisely, whether for DIY projects, crafts, or cooking, so I'm particular about my measuring spoons and cups and weighing scales, and become spellbound when using them.

8 The People of



This was Me, Once Upon a Time

I was a cheerleader—a position everyone longs for—for our field day in junior high school. I had a deep tan and everyone laughed at how dark I was. It was the thing back then to write scribble on our photos. It's kind of embarrassing but takes me back to those days.

“Saki shinken”
(Saki means business!)

Caught by Surprise

The other day, I found a document from 1994 stuck in the very back of my cabinet. Apparently it had been there for 20 years! To think . . . I was only four years old at that time. It was kind of exciting—as if I was in touch with TJF's history.

5 My Special Passion

Soda-flavored Mintia breath mints. I don't think I could live without them.

I'm Second to None in . . .

Probably in my closeness with my mother. I'm often asked what I do over the weekend, and usually I just hang out with my mother at home. We might just lounge around or chatter about things. We're together so much we sometimes wonder if we're different from other mothers and daughters.

If I Became Secretary General

By the time I'm secretary general, the office may have naturally evolved into a SOHO setup (laughing).

My Embarrassing Moment

A senior colleague brought coffee beans back from the U.S. I figured it would be nice for all of us to have some freshly ground and brewed coffee, so I opened up one of the packages, ground the beans, and turned on the coffee maker as usual. After one sip, though, everyone complained that the coffee was weak. As it turned out, the individual packages of coffee were for a single serving each, but I'd brewed the contents of only one with seven times the amount of water. I didn't notice because I'd put sugar and milk in my coffee . . .



Me in One Kanji

Though I was born in the summer, I don't stand the heat well. I still love summer (and the energy that fills the season), and more than anything, I love the comedic duo, Summers.

summer



I keep chili pepper with me at all times. I love hot food.

TJF: Ten Q&A

10×10+10...

Miyagawa Saki



My Best Piece of Writing

1

I wrote my first article while I was still in school (only a few months ago), after being asked by a TJF staff member to write about my experience as a foreign exchange student in Shanghai. I wrote about my reasons for going abroad, what I felt, and what I experienced. I was lucky enough to subsequently join TJF, and my first article as a member of the staff was about a Saturday Chinese course in Chiba co-hosted by TJF. I'm happy to have had the opportunity to write for TJF both as a student and as a staff member within the span of less than a year.

Lunchtime to Remember

Everything has been delicious so far, but perhaps the best was the lunch that I had with my senior colleagues at the Kodansha company cafeteria my first day at TJF. It was a day of firsts: the commute, the work, Kodansha, the company cafeteria, and lunch! I remember the menu that day, too. It was a vegetable pot au feu with carrots, potatoes, onions, and pork. More than anything, I remember the kindness of the senior staff, who tried to put me at ease.

2



3

Those Tears That I Shed

Helping out with a TJF exchange program for Japanese and Korean junior and senior high school students held in December 2013, I witnessed the students' passion for participation in the program and attraction to Korea. As a high school student, I had travelled to China for the first time to participate in TJF's first summer camp there for Japanese students. The students in the Japan-Korea exchange program reminded me of myself at their age, and I was touched by everything the students wrote in their applications. Had I been alone when I read the students' answers to the question why they were applying to the program, I'm sure I would have been in tears.

Kokusai Bunka Foramu Tsushin

TJF Q&A

No.100



Feature

10×10+10...

公益財団法人
国際文化フォーラム
THE JAPAN FORUM
日本国際文化交流財団
일본국제문화교류재단