

In cooperation with groups of women with foreign roots living in Fukushima.

"Multicultural Fukushima" where people meet and connect.

After a year from the Great East Japan Earthquake, I interviewed a Korean woman who is married to a Japanese at a city hall in the disaster-hit region. At first, I was asking her about her current situation in Japanese. Then my partner, a Korean researcher, asked the women, "So, how were you when the earthquake struck?" At that point, Korean words started pouring out from the woman's lips. She spoke about "that day," and "since then," wiping off tears that kept pouring down from her eyes. She spoke of her experience of the earthquake and tsunami – something she would never experience in Korea – and the fear she felt then and the agony that followed. She kept talking for more than one hour. Finally, I asked, "What kind of support do you want from us?" She answered, "I don't need support now, because I was able to speak to you (in Korean) as much as I want about that day."

The 3.11 Great East Japan Earthquake inflicted serious damages, not only on Japanese people, but also on foreign-born residents living in Japan. And even after three years from that day, there are still many foreign-born residents, especially immigrant women, who are left behind in rebuilding their lives. This is something we came to realize during a joint research with local governments of Miyagi Prefecture, NPOs, and researchers. Many immigrant women seek a "place to study Japanese" (78%). They also want a "place to study for jobs" (75%). These are "hopes" common among immigrant women of all disaster-hit areas.

Furthermore, immigrant women living in Fukushima are in an extremely difficult situation.

According to a 2012 investigative report by Fukushima International Association based on an interview with 100 foreign-born residents, 40% said they knew what "nuclear accident" is before the earthquake, whereas 50% said they did not. In regard to "radiation," 43% said they knew what it is before the earthquake, whereas 42% said they learned about it after the earthquake. Among the specific items asking about their current fear against radiation, 87% said they were either "afraid" or "little afraid" of another nuclear accident; 73% said the same about the level of radiation left in the environment, 70% said the same about the safety of water and food, and 79% said the same about the effects of radiation on health. ("Influence of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Nuclear Power Station Accident over Foreign Residents in Fukushima Prefecture" by FIA, 2013).

Foreign-born residents are made to be afraid because they are in a situation that makes it difficult to get a hold of real and accurate information.

Meanwhile, in such a situation, new communities of immigrant women were formed everywhere after to the earthquake. Though these groups are still small and are scarce in number scattered throughout the disaster-hit areas, they are a self-help organization formed by the immigrant women's wisdom and experience gained through their 10 to 20 years of living in Japan.

By joining hands with these women's groups, as well as local Japanese support groups and governments, we will carry out various programs, in hope that they will become an opportunity for the people of the local communities to meet and connect with each other to build a wonderful "multicultural Fukushima."

Nobuyuki Sato

Refresh Program "Nikko Bus Tour"

A bus tour to Nikko was held on March 30. It was a special tour considering how EIWAN staffs had many hopes and thoughts for the tour. We hoped that the bus tour would be a great opportunity for all of us to get out and have fun, instead of just gathering in the office to study Japanese. It would also be a great way to learn Japanese language, that is, by actually visiting the famous historical sites and seeing the real thing. But above all this, we really wanted the participants to get away from Fukushima, where there is still a kind of negative atmosphere and people still suffer from anxieties, and refresh themselves. So, we took a day trip to Nikko. The staffs and participants met at either Fukushima station or Shirakawa station and were picked up by the bus that took us all the way to Nikko.

Unfortunately, it was raining all day. In the morning it was raining only slightly but by the time we arrived Shirakawa, it was really pouring! But inside the bus was like a party! Participants included women from the Philippines who live in Fukushima and Shirakawa and participate in Japanese Salon, women from China who are the members of Sukagawa-Tsubasa Japan-China Half support group (正式な英語名?) and their husbands and children. Local supporters, Ms. Seino and Ms. Yoshida, also joined us to help proceed with the tour. Mr. Sato gave his opening speech as we all sat in our seats eating the snacks that Ms. Maeda, executive director of EIWAN, brought for us. Then each of the 37 participants introduced her or himself as the bus headed for Nikko.

Though we were running slightly late, we arrived safely at a restaurant in Nikko shortly pass noontime. The meal was full of yuba, which must have been unusual for many participants. After we finished eating lunch, we headed for the Nikko Toshogu shrine. Even in the rain, there were tourists from all over Japan and abroad. As the participants listened to the local tour guide, they paused occasionally in front of places like the famous carvings of the three wise monkeys and the sleeping cat, and gaze at the brightly colored wooden construction. They seemed overwhelmed by the shrine, which is one of Japan's world heritage sites.

Finally, we went to the Kegon waterfall. Thought the temperature had dropped considerably, everyone seemed eager to see the waterfall so they got on the elevator that took us down to the viewing station. There, the participants took pictures and shopped for souvenirs. Before they knew it, it was time to head back home. The bus stopped by Shirakawa and when we arrived Fukushima station, it was already pass 6 p.m.

The bus tour was the first such program by EIWAN. Although it was a short trip, if it had served as an opportunity for everyone with different nationalities living in different places to get to know each other a little better by eating the same food and watching the same thing, I think it was worth the try. For us, the staffs of EIWAN, we would be happy if the bus tour served as something like a "spring break" for all participants who continue to face many hardships in their daily lives.

by Kumiko Tsuchida

The many things we learned through a 500-yen-trip
by Karina (スペル?) Matsumoto (Shirakawa)

I joined the EIWAN bus tour on March 30. It was my very first bus tour, but unfortunately it was a rainy day.

I was five minutes late for the time we were supposed to meet, so I felt bad for making everybody wait. But Ayako-sensei was waiting for us in the rain. I was really happy. And that is why I have been able to be on time since that day. This is the one thing I learned.

When we got on the bus, a teacher told us, "This is not a day for studying but for refreshing yourselves." Those words also made me happy.

At the restaurant, I was really surprised at the exquisite Japanese meal they served us since we had paid only 500 yen. Lunch-time was also limited, but we were able to finish eating on time and return to the bus. This is something that cannot be done in the Philippines, so I was surprised.

By the time we arrived the Nikko Toshogu shrine, the rain was coming down even harder. I was in trouble because I didn't have an umbrella. But there were umbrellas ready for tourists and that made me realize, this is Japan's "omotenashi," a way to welcome tourists.

Although I have been to Nikko before, I did not have a good impression because back then, I could not understand the Japanese tour guide. Now that I can understand Japanese better, thanks to EIWAN, I was able to learn more. I hope to continue participating in EIWAN events in the future.

The participation fee was cheap, and there were all kinds of snacks and croquettes ready for us to eat on the bus. I am truly grateful to the staffs of EIWAN who set up the bus tour for us. Thank you!

Bulletin report on Japanese Salon, Fukushima (January ~ April, 2014)

* New Year Gathering at Japanese Salon

On January 19, 2014, a New Year gathering was held at Japanese Salon, Fukushima. Since it was after the Japanese language proficiency test, which was held in December, salon participants (from the Philippines) and their families together with staffs and volunteers were able to relax and enjoy a time of chats over Japanese sweets and maccha green tea. We also played traditional Japanese games played especially during the time of New Year.

*Heavy snow, snow, snow and EIWAN healing program

February started with heavy snow that left Yamanashi Prefecture isolated with the snow blocking the roads. The same snow also had some serious effects on Fukushima Prefecture. The city bus stopped, main roads remained congested overnight, people were unable to get their cars out of the garage, and so the first Japanese Salon had to be called off.

February 23 was the day when salon participants gathered with the results of the Japanese language proficiency test in their hands. As reported in Vol. 1 of EIWAN News, 15 salon participants from both Fukushima and Shirakawa took the test and 13 passed. The four participants from Fukushima, who passed the test, came to the salon with some snacks for everyone. They were all able to prove their abilities, and as we all shared their joy, it felt as if the bonds between EIWAN and the immigrant women who come to the Japanese Salon became stronger.

On the same day, a "healing program" by Tokyo YWCA volunteers was held. Together with some women from the local community, salon participants, and supporters, we all received stick moxibustion treatment and had a chance to meet new people.

The Japanese Salon was held on March 16 and 23. Number of local supporters increased to five. They come to the salon once or twice a month to teach the immigrant women Japanese language. Because they are the same age or older than the learners, they have become the kind of persons who can listen and talk with the immigrant women about their problems, such as education and family problems.

* Setting up EIWAN office

For a year until the end of March, EIWAN was using YWCA's activity space, Carlo Fukushima, free of charge to hold its Japanese Salon meetings, regular meetings, and events. In April, EIWAN opened a new office to hold all the activities there. We are grateful to YWCA for letting us use Carlo Fukushima.

* Class on do-it-yourself jell nail

On April 13, a one-day course on do-it-yourself jell nail was held as part of EIWAN's "Learn in Japanese course series." We invited a local professional manicurist to teach us ways to enjoy dressing up our nails. People who had never participated in the Japanese Salon were also invited. Apart from the Japanese Salon, we plan to offer more of these courses by inviting local instructors so that participants can have fun, meet people, and refresh themselves.

* The challenge of learners and supporters

On April 27, the first Japanese Salon was held at EIWAN Fukushima's new office.

Between January and April, we had 34 learners and 42 supporters (including staffs) in total. We hope to continue appealing to immigrant women the importance of studying Japanese language and have more people join us at our Japanese Salon.

For the next Japanese language proficiency test held in July, six Japanese Salon participants from both Fukushima and Shirakawa are planning to apply. Each person has a different purpose for taking the test, such as: "I want to become a translator at a public office," "I want to become a unit leader at a factory," "I want to be able to write detailed work reports," "I want to be confident with my Japanese so that I can join a course in obtaining qualification," "I want to master basic Japanese reading and writing," "I want to know what my level of Japanese is," etc. Although their purposes vary in wide range, we want everyone to know that they can challenge themselves by taking the test though they may not be transfer or training students from abroad.

by Keiko Maeda