What's New, KitaQ?

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Newcomers to Kitakyushu may not realize that the skies above this city were not always blue and the water not always clear. An industrial city since ancient times, Kitakyushu shifted from coal mining, shipping and sword/armor making to industrial scale steel manufacturing, cement and chemicals industries in the beginning of the 20th century. The site of Japan’s first modern steel plant, Kitakyushu’s economy soared while environmental pollution increased just as rapidly. By the 1970’s Kitakyushu had become one of the most polluted spots on earth with yellow water and a sky painted seven different colors.

Through unprecedented cooperation between residents, the local government and local industries, strict environmental controls were put into effect that superseded the mild mandates that the national government had stipulated at the time. Massive clean-up efforts were undertaken across several fronts and over the next few decades the natural environment was slowly restored to its present state.

**Model Environmental City**

Moving beyond the Kyoto Protocol, former Prime Minister Fukuda, during a policy speech, set forth the goal of creating an international precedent and leading the global community in the conversion to a low-carbon society. As part of this prerogative, the national government called for the submission of plans for the implementation of environmental protections, low-carbon systems and the creation of an environmentally-conscious society. Six municipalities including Kitakyushu were chosen from among 82 submissions to become environmental models for not only the nation but the rest of Asia and the world.

Having been selected a model city, the City of Kitakyushu is moving forward by creating an action plan to lay the groundwork for new efforts while increasing our current efforts. The City’s new projects focus on reducing carbon emissions through the implementation of five pillars: 1) creating a resource-reusing society, 2) gathering production facilities in one industrial cluster to increase efficiency, 3) educating the populace about low-carbon living, 4) allowing for a rich livelihood through low-carbon living and 5) helping to create a low-carbon society throughout Asia.

**Walking the walk**

The City is working with local industries to create districts within the city that will last for at least 200 years. The facilities in these neighborhoods
also employ the latest in green technology such as 100% solar power grids and low-carbon materials (little carbon was released during their manufacture). More than just materials, design is a huge part of the planning as these neighborhoods are being created to be comfortable for both the old and young.

Alternative approaches for energy are already being implemented throughout the city. Along the northern coast of Wakamatsu Ward, a long line of wind-power stations take advantage of the constant sea breeze to provide power for residents and businesses. In another first for the region, the City is working with local manufacturers to retrofit their factories with technologies pioneered in the Eco-Town project in order to collect the heat and waste produced during normal operations and reuse them to produce electrical power for the factory and surrounding neighborhoods.

As for education, the City has built the Environment Museum in Yahata Ward next to the Museum of Natural and Human History. The Environment Museum offers photos, interactive dioramas and actual footage from Kitakyushu’s polluted past to educate visitors on Kitakyushu’s turnaround regarding the natural environment as well as highlight the importance of environmentally-conscious living. Kids and adults alike can also have fun while learning at the several hands-on workshops available inside the museum. The Eco-Town recycling combine offers tours of the various recycling facilities located within along with a host of information detailing the research and actual implementation being accomplished there. Every year in October, the City also hosts the Eco-Life Stage event to raise awareness of environmental issues and popularize low-impact living.

International environmental cooperation, the last of the five pillars, is being realized in a major way. The success of Kitakyushu’s Eco-Town Project caught the attention of the Chinese government and now Kitakyushu is involved in helping build and get running two eco-town recycling combines, one in the city of Tianjin and the other in Qingdao. The Kitakyushu International Techno-cooperative Association or KITA [see the interview on the next page] is an organization that works closely with the City and with the Japan International Cooperation Association (JICA) to offer technical training in “smart” manufacturing and environmental engineering as well as an understanding of the relevant policy approaches to trainees from other countries. As of last year, over 10,000 people from 130 countries have come to Kitakyushu to participate in such programs!
Did you have any experience in international relations before you came to work at KITA?

Before I came here, I had worked in management and accounting for most of my life at Yawata Steel (now Nishitetsu Steel Corp.) so my experience was rather far from international affairs. I had known of KITA, but I never imagined I would work there... then when I turned 63, I retired from Yawata and looked for something else to do. I realized that I was now much older and that this was probably the last job I would do so I wanted something that suited me international affairs seemed right.

When and why did KITA come about?

Kitakyushu’s economy was based largely on its historical predominance in the steel industry. In the 70’s when the oil crisis brought a major downturn in the steel industry, Kitakyushu stagnated. It was the members of local businesses who got together and decided to make use of Kitakyushu’s manufacturing prowess and experience in dealing with environmental issues to turn the city’s situation around. By 1980 the idea evolved to become a volunteer organization that accepted trainees from abroad and dispatched experts to not only help people of various countries but to raise awareness of Kitakyushu’s technical expertise. Thus KITA was born. The important thing to know is that KITA is a private organization comprised almost entirely of volunteers who are retired former employees of local technical firms. The organization was started through large and small donations by average residents in Kitakyushu.

How are KITA and JICA (the Japan International Cooperation Agency) different?

In short, JICA is a national organization and they recruit the trainees from abroad and dispatched experts to not only help people of various countries but to raise awareness of Kitakyushu’s technical expertise. Thus KITA was born. The important thing to know is that KITA is a private organization comprised almost entirely of volunteers who are retired former employees of local technical firms. The organization was started through large and small donations by average residents in Kitakyushu.

What kinds of projects does KITA undertake?

About 70% of our work is accepting and training participants from abroad. The other 30% consists of dispatching experts from Kitakyushu to other countries to offer on-site training and technical assistance and conducting surveys to find out what places are looking for what kinds of skills/training.

How does KITA’s work fit in with Kitakyushu’s Environmental Model City Plan?

Kitakyushu made its environmental proposal to the national government and was selected last year. Of course, we needed something special in order to stand out and international environmental cooperation became that “sales-point.” [laughs] You could probably say we are the cornerstone of the City’s program! Also this organization is broken into 5 sections, one of which is the KITA Environmental Center where 7 people from the City have been dispatched. Learning technical skills is not enough; it is important for our trainees to learn how to work with local authorities to make things go smoothly.

What kind of influence do you feel your training programs have on the participants?

It is a hard but rewarding experience to live for an extended period in another country. While they are here in Kitakyushu we try to offer participants opportunities to mix with residents and learn about Japanese culture. We work with the International Association to arrange short home stays so they can get the feeling of home life in Japan.

What kind of merit do you think KITA’s projects have for the people of Kitakyushu?

Firstly, Things go both ways and the interaction with people from many, many countries is great internationalization for residents here in Kitakyushu! Secondly, the people that usually come to take part in our programs are in their 30s and usually come from the private sector or government officials so they are great connections for businesses here in Kitakyushu.

In what direction would you like to take KITA in the future?

I would like to put more effort into expanding into other fields. So far we have concentrated on our two historically strong areas of environmental and manufacturing skills but I feel we need to offer what the age demands such as energy conservation.

Do you have a message for the readers of Bridges?

What I would like most for people to understand is that none of what we do would be possible without the incredible cooperation of our local businesses here in Kitakyushu. Even amid this shaky economic period, they are very accommodating and allow us to offer real hands-on experience for our trainees rather than just lectures.

*This interview was conducted in Japanese and translated into English by the Bridges Editor.
Sister-city Celebrations

2008 marked the 20th anniversary of Kitakyushu’s sister-city relations with Incheon, Korea. As some may know, 2008 also showed a downturn in relations at the national level between Japan and Korea due to the dispute over an island that lies right between the two countries, but relations between our two cities have never been better and to commemorate the anniversary, both cities arranged a series of events.

Among those events was an exchange project between the Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art and the Incheon Municipal Museum of Art. The Incheon museum put on a display of many traditional items such as children’s kites and items used in festivals. Here in Kitakyushu, our museum featured work from artists in Incheon as well as historical photos and paintings depicting Incheon’s development over the years. To celebrate the opening of the exhibit, the City invited a famous troupe of traditional musicians from Incheon to come and perform in front of the museum. The project turned out to be a smash-hit as tens of thousands of residents turned out to check out the exhibit and learn a little bit about the history of their sister-city.

Both cities also issued awards to residents of the other city that were deeply involved in cross-cultural exchange and humanitarian efforts. Representatives from Kitakyushu went to Incheon to award three of their residents and representatives from Incheon visited Kitakyushu to award active residents here.

Speaking of sister-city relations, this past November, a college student from Kitakyushu’s sister city of Tacoma, Washington (USA) came to Kitakyushu to inquire about and study the nature/effectiveness of said relations in person. In his last year at a private university in Tacoma, Daniel Addler devoted a semester to travel to Tacoma’s various sister cities, including Kitakyushu, to learn of how each City approaches the relationship and get a feeling for the effectiveness of such relationships in so far as they can be a base for building both friendly and economic exchange.

Here in Kitakyushu, he was able to spend time at City Hall meeting with many representatives from the International Relations Division, the International Policy Division, the Environment Bureau, and the Seaport and Airport Bureau to learn about their respective projects and if/how sister-cities factors into their efforts. Daniel was also able to visit the International Association and meet with several local volunteer groups that put on international events. While in Kitakyushu, Daniel was also able to stay with a host family and experience a slice of Japanese family home life!

With 2008 being the 20th anniversary of Kitakyushu’s relations with Incheon, Korea and 2009 being the 50th anniversary of relations with both Tacoma and the City of Norfolk, Virginia (USA), sister-cities exchange is certainly at an all-time high here! Check out the article above for more on last year’s festivities with Incheon and stay tuned for our KitaQ-Tacoma-Norfolk 50th anniversary coverage coming in the next issue of Bridges!
Japanese winters are colder than I expected. The ambient coldness is bearable but the sudden chills that come feel really cold. Amid the coldness of winter is the onsen [hot spring] which rejuvenates and brings warmth to everyday living.

In Japan, most onsen are split into men’s baths and women’s baths (clothes are forbidden at onsen) and apparently the facilities regularly switch which side is designated for which sex in order to keep the balance of yin and yang. Sometimes people traveling through Japan do not know of this system, which can lead to unexpected encounters.

Once, I have heard of a family that was staying at an onsen resort and everyone went for a bath in the evening. By the time they woke the next morning, the baths had been flipped and the elder of two brothers found his way to the (new) men’s side to relax in the sauna. Upon opening the door to leave, he noticed his younger brother’s wife sleepily entering the (now) men’s side of the onsen and promptly hid back inside the sauna. Eventually some other men came into the onsen causing the sister-in-law to realize her mistake and flee allowing the elder brother to stumble out of the sauna.

While this story is funny for third-parties, you can be sure the elder brother was not laughing after having been stuck in the sauna for over half-an-hour!

Hong Miyuk works for the International Policy Division at City Hall and comes to Kitakyushu on an exchange program from our sister-city of Incheon, Korea where she also worked as a government officer.

This is the second of a two-part introduction to the local dialect of Kitakyushu! For those who have not read the last issue of Bridges “go check it out!” That said, the various prefectures of Japan and even some individual cities have their own unique dialects! While some dialects can honestly be considered separate languages, Kitakyushu-ben (dialect), along with Oita-ben, are close to standard Japanese and sound more like what’s heard in Tokyo than the other dialects of Kyushu.

This issue’s lesson will focus on some common grammar points used mostly in Kitakyushu and sometimes also in Fukuoka.

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\text{chi \ っち can be tacked onto the end of most nouns and verbs in place of “desu” or used to replace the “te-form” of verbs: tabete 食べて (please eat) = tabechi 食べっち}
\]

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\text{ke/ken け・けん replaces “node” and “kara” to mean “so/since/because” 話してくるけ、ちょっと待っち (I’ll go talk to him/her *so* just wait a bit)}
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\[
\text{toru/tou とる・とう can replace the “teiru” (ている) verb conjugation. For example the verb している (doing), becomes しとる or しとう}
\]

\[
\text{yoru/you よる・よう can likewise replace the “teiru” form}
\]

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\text{zo ゾ can replace the plain form of “desu” which is “da” For example: そうです (that is so) becomes そうぞ which, thanks to classic Japanese cinema, is a style of speech associated with the underworld and/or gruff, tough characters}
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One little known secret of Kitakyushu is the traditional Kokura Ori (fabric). The area’s weaving prowess may not be that famous now, but it was apparently legendary during the feudal era. Capable of being both tough and soft, the versatile material was used for many things but most notably for the making of samurai’s  

hakama (robes) and obi (belt). Members of the warrior class had to be constantly ready for a fight but at the same time, full suits of armor were too impractical to wear all the time. Robes made of Kokura Ori were tough enough to save the wearer from getting roughed up on hard journeys or to even catch/deflect arrows but light and flexible enough for everyday wear.

The style and weaving technique was almost completely lost by the beginning of the 20th century until it was rediscovered by the artist Tsuiki Noriko who has breathed new life into the traditional folk-craft by reimagining the fabric as the center for a new style of fashion. Together with the company Shima-Shima she draws upon the traditional pattern which employs only straight lines and turns the fabric into everything from handbags and scarves to hats and laptop computer cases.

The 90s saw a lot of activity in Asia as the fall of communism and increasing internationalization lead members of the region to come together to form various new alliances. Among these was the Pan Yellow Sea Economic Sphere which refers to the area containing Eastern, Korea and Southern Japan. In 2004, local government and business leaders from 10 cities within the region gathered in Kitakyushu to establish the Organization for East Asian Economic Development. Member cities from Japan include Fukuoka, Kitakyushu ‘of course’ and Kitakyushu’s neighbor to the north, Shimonoseki. The other members include Incheon (Kitakyushu’s sister-city), Ulsan and Pusan Cities from Korea and Yantai, Tianjin, Qingdao and Dalian Cities from China.

Kitakyushu maintains a leadership role keeping everyone informed through the web, while the organization’s efforts are broken down into four parts. Issues related to manufacturing are overseen by Yantai while Kitakyushu is in charge of environmental topics, Tianjin heads up logistics and Pusan leads the discussion of tourism. 2008 saw five conferences and programs be implemented and with more and more activity happening every year, things are heating up in the yellow sea region.
Gardening Galore!

Tucked into the oft-ignored backside of Moji Ward is the Shiranoe Botanical Garden. Upon entering, visitors will find that the garden is more like a giant park which is divided into different regions, each representing a different and distinct style of gardening. On one end there are wooded and bamboo forests and on the other end, both dry and wet style traditional Japanese gardens and all manner of flora in between. One of the facility’s treasures is its 400+ years old “Satozakura” variety of Cherry trees which date back to the beginning of the feudal period.

There are several walking courses that will take visitors throughout the park, one of which leads up a small mountain to a lookout perch on top which offers a magnificent view of the ocean! Speaking of which, just outside the gates is the beach! Those tired of flowers can try the waves!

There are a number of events held at Shiranoe throughout the year including educational activities, mini festivals and, of course, events for gardening gurus!

Access is possible by bike or car or by shuttle bus from Mojiko.

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Kitakyushu in a FLASH!

- **Designated as Japan's model environmental city**
- **POPULATION**
  - 1 million/13th largest city in Japan
- **SISTER-FRIENDSHIP CITIES**
  - Tacoma, Washington, U.S.A.
  - Norfolk, Virginia, U.S.A.
  - Dalian, China
  - Incheon, Korea
- **CITY FLOWER**
  - Azalea
  - Sunflower
- **CITY TREE**
  - Taxaceous Oak
- **INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION**
  - UN Global 500 Award for Environmental Cleanup.
  - UNCED Local Government Governmental Honors.
  - Earth Summit 2002 Sustainable Development Award.
- **INDUSTRIES**
  - Traditional Base
    - Steel & metal, ceramics, machinery, chemicals, shipping.
  - NEW INDUSTRIES
    - Computer software, environmental technologies, robotics, automotive, assistive technologies
- **URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS**
  - Hibiiki Container Terminal
  - Kitakyushu Airport
  - East Kyushu Expressway
  - Kitakyushu Science and Research Park
  - Kitakyushu Eco-Town Project
  - Murasakigawa, My Town, My River Project
- **UPCOMING EVENTS!**
  - *Sports festival feat. Local town mascots from all over Japan* (March)
  - *Commencement of Mojiko Sightseeing Train* (April)
  - *Kit[Q] – Tacoma – Norfolk 50yr Anniversary Celebrations* (Summer)

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