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Multicultural Disaster
Risk Reduction
—A Matter for All to Consider

Circumstances of Foreigners in Japan

The number of foreign residents in Japan is increasing with each year, making up about two percent of the total population of Japan at present.

For many foreign residents, learning a different culture and system and trying to master the Japanese language is not easy. In times of disaster how will aid be assured of being provided, especially to foreign residents and tourists who may be unfamiliar with the Japanese language?—this is one of the most urgent and important issues to be addressed. Meanwhile, the number of foreign residents making active contributions as aid has also been increasing.

Utilizing My Japanese Language Skills to Communicate What I Have Learned about Disaster and DRR

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I used to study Japanese at a Japanese language school in Malaysia. In April 2015, I came to Japan to study at Tohoku University. When I was a sophomore, I joined Tohoku University's volunteer circle "SCRUM" as the first foreign student member in order to learn more about Japan. SCRUM carries out its activities in Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima, three prefectures affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake. In my country, Malaysia, few natural disasters occur. Therefore, it was a meaningful experience for me to witness damage from the earthquake and its recovery, and to directly listen to what victims were thinking. As a member of SCRUM, for about two

years I engaged in planning study tours of earthquake-affected areas to respond to many foreign students' requests. Last June, SCRUM organized a volunteer tour to a coastal area in Sendai City so that the participants could interact with many local people through activities.

Last April, I registered as a member of the Sendai International Students Exchange Committee at SenTIA*1. Since then, I have engaged in providing support, for example, in holding events for interaction between foreign residents in Sendai and local people. I also serve as an interpreter in disaster drills. For foreigners, including myself, from countries where natural disasters rarely occur, it is very important to have an opportunity to learn about DRR. I believe, in the event of a large disaster, the provision of multilingual information and support can make international students and other foreigners in Sendai feel reassured. I would like, also in the future, to engage in encouraging international exchange and helping foreign residents in Sendai by utilizing my language skills and experiences. In addition, I am eager to make my incalculable knowledge about the earthquake and DRR, which I acquired in Japan, known to Malaysian people and many others around the world.

*1 SenTIA SenTIA is Sendai Tourism, Convention and International Association. SenTIA appoints international students, who vigorously participate in local international exchange programs and provide foreign residents in Sendai with support, as Sendai International Students Exchange Committee members. The committee members get involved by providing interpretation support in disaster drills, disseminating multilingual information, and holding exchange events.

Sending out Sendai's Efforts in DRR and Disaster Mitigation to the World

The City of Sendai takes advantage of every opportunity to communicate directly and internationally, the state of the City's reconstruction and its efforts in DRR. The City of Sendai broadly publicizes its efforts through participation in international conferences and workshops.

In the special event "World Tsunami Awareness Day" at the 2018 Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in July 2018 in Mongolia, the City of Sendai delivered a speech on the following topics: tsunami risk reduction measures grounded in lessons and experiences of the earthquake disaster, and inclusion in DRR. The speech introduced Sendai's efforts in placing prime importance on those somewhat vulnerable to disasters, including women, children, and people with disabilities, grasping their needs and involving them in DRR efforts. The audience enthusiastically listened to the speech.

The Sendai Framework for DRR features DRR efforts made by various stakeholders. By pressing ahead with these efforts, the City of Sendai will continue to make further contributions to help advance the world's DRR.



▲ International Disaster and Risk Conference Davos 2016 (IDRC)(Davos, Switzerland, 2016)



▲ 2017 Global Platform for DRR (Cancún, Mexico, 2017)



▲ 2018 Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 2018)



Community Activities to Connect Chinese Women in Sendai



Kyu Tetu ichi

**Miyagi Chinese Women
Community Group Chairman**

▲ Study tour to Ruins of the Great East Japan Earthquake: Sendai Arahama Elementary School, held as a workshop for Multilingual Disaster Support Volunteers

I came to Japan from China to study at a Japanese university and have been living in Japan for 27 years. The Great East Japan Earthquake caused panic all over Sendai City. For me, exchanging information about evacuation and essential utilities with my neighbors was a great help. However, foreigners who had just arrived in Japan must have felt great anxiety.

I used to be involved in providing support for foreigners living in Japan. What was particularly striking was that, in a field hearing conducted after the earthquake, the questioned foreign residents in Ishinomaki and Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture, answered that the language barrier had been a very serious issue. They said that they could not understand terms used in the evacuation information, including tsunami and *takadai* (higher ground), which are not everyday terms. This made me realize the difficulty in sending out information to foreigners in times of disaster.

When you count the number of foreign residents in Sendai based on country of origin, Chinese people come out on top. After the earthquake, I desired to build a community for Chinese women living in Sendai. In October 2016, I established the Miyagi Chinese Women Community Group. Our community group utilizes SNS to disseminate a wide variety of information, resulting in lively interaction among the group members. They appreciate the use of SNS by

saying that they feel reassured because they can consult with compatriots at any time. In-community SNS and other networks, which can be used on a daily basis, of course allow members to consult about daily issues. These networks also bring us a great advantage in that we are capable of quickly responding to emergency situations, ranging from providing disaster information to confirming safety. The Miyagi Chinese Women Community Group organizes many events to learn about Japan. Repeatedly providing these opportunities to interact with local people enhances everyone's understanding of different cultures. This is important. We are discussing the feasibility of holding DRR-related seminars, for example, lectures on lifesaving medical treatment, rescue breathing, and using an AED. To live in Japan, it is not enough to simply understand Japanese systems, lifestyles,



▲ Class to study social security systems for foreigners (2017)

and language. It is also important to let Japanese people know our culture. Mutual understanding will surely be useful for both self-help and mutual help in emergency situations. I would like to continue implementing exchange activities with local people also in the future.

Sendai City's First Year Activity Records from the Disaster is being utilized in other disaster affected areas in Japan.

After the Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred on March 11, 2011, Japan has continued to be hit by natural disasters, including the 2016 Kumamoto earthquake in April 2016, the 2018 Northern Osaka earthquake, and the Heavy Rain Event of July 2018 that hit western Japan. In response to requests from local governments affected by these disasters, the City of Sendai sent booklets titled "Sendai City's First Year Activity Records from the Disaster." The booklet summarizes the activities in the first year after the earthquake struck, along with a wide range of data.

At the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake, we considered all our experiences as valuable lessons. Therefore, from the early stages of the earthquake's occurrence, we kept various records. At present, our booklet serves as a reference book for disaster hit areas to learn about how to address issues that arise one after another. In fact, we received inquiries about, for example, temporary housing and garbage disposal, from local governments in disaster-stricken areas.

We will continue making efforts to send out what Sendai experienced and learned from the earthquake disaster to many people in and outside of Japan, and to pass on our experience and lessons to future generations. We hope our efforts will raise public awareness about the concept of preparedness for future disasters, and provide great help in times of disaster.



▲ Sendai City's First Year Activity Records from the Disaster



▲ Staff of a local government in a disaster-stricken area, reading Sendai City's First Year Activity Records from the Disaster (The Heavy Rain Event of July 2018 occurred in western Japan)

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