

2020 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Youth Category – 2nd Prize】

A Melting Pot of Gems

(Original in Japanese)

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This year, 2030, is the year in which the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are set to be achieved. We are at a major turning point for the world. And as part of that, Japan has also undergone a big change. That is, we no longer have the policy of being closed to refugees, and we now have many more ‘friends’ in Japan. Today, Japanese people have come to know and live together with people from countries that they knew nothing about ten years ago. When I was in high school, I had the chance to participate in a Model United Nations conference, and it made me pay attention to what was going on in the world. Since graduating university, I’ve been working at a job where I help give support and protection to refugees.

People said that if a lot of refugees came into Japan, it would create disorder in Japanese society, but in truth nothing like that has happened. To be honest, it has brought only good things. With this change in Japanese society, I feel like my perspective has broadened 180 degrees. If you walk to the right, there is a large Christian church. Not only Christian believers, but also people from the neighborhood gather there to enjoy a moment of peace. Over to the left, you can see a Muslim mosque. It’s common to see the Halal mark on food products, and there are lots of restaurants offering Halal dishes. The back streets are bustling with restaurants serving the local cuisines of countries that you’ve never heard of before, as well as shoppers looking for rare cultural items. At the same time, there’s been a revival in shops selling traditional Japanese goods, as foreigners look to deepen their understanding of Japanese culture. It seems that more people are taking another look at Japanese culture. This cultural ‘give and take’ has enriched the citizens of Japan, both materially and spiritually.

In addition, beyond the realm of everyday life, naturalized Japanese citizens have recently been making considerable advances in the political sphere. In today’s global society, it has become absolutely essential to have people with an objective view of Japan.

Through diversified policies, we can expect further growth and development for Japan.

Of course, when I started working with refugees, I sometimes encountered very painful circumstances. But they are the ones who have experienced unimaginable things. They have braved danger and risked their lives, and finally made it to Japan, and as many of them as possible must be allowed to stay. In 2020, that would have been very difficult. At that time, to say the least, I was not aware of the situations that refugees were in. It seemed hard to understand their customs and cultures, and since they were in far off countries, I guess I turned a blind eye to their problems. But over the past ten years, I've encountered many values that I would never have known if those refugees had not been accepted. Each time, my curiosity was aroused, and I embraced their precious culture and spirit—something that no one can take away. That attitude is what I have learned during the last ten years. Compared with that time, when Japan took in less than 50 refugees a year, we have now become a world leader in accepting refugees. It's evidence that each Japanese citizen has begun to move toward greater cooperation with the rest of the world.

At age 17, you will now go to university, and have the chance to meet lots of people, step outside the shell of Japan and learn about all kinds of things. At that time, I hope you will take the initiative to turn your attention overseas, and keep wanting to learn more. At university, you'll exchange ideas through papers and presentations, and when you go out into the world, you'll have the chance to interact with all kinds of people, both Japanese and foreigners. The world is studded with gems you have never seen before—gems known as 'values'. If you can observe as many of those gems as possible, be amazed at their unfathomable variety, and share them with others, I'm sure you will grow into a person with inner riches. Then, by the time it's 2030, you'll have an even better grasp of the world than I do now.