

'I love the Belarusian language'

Belarusian State University student from Japan tells of learning Belarusian and why he dreams of working in Belarus

By Taisiya Azanovich

Hitoshi Tanaka arrived from Japan just two years ago, but already loves our country. His Russian is good enough to shock strangers and his written skills are just as exemplary. A second year student at BSU's Institute of Journalism, he only began learning Belarusian recently and has already convinced his teachers that he can storm this 'Bastille!' At the weekend, he volunteers while chatting to those who are unwell. He loves Belarusians for their sincerity and warm smiles. Here, he tells us why he dislikes Japanese journalistic principles and admonishes us on having the 'wrong' sushi.

If your countrymen came to visit you in Belarus, what would you tell them about our blue-eyed country and which sights would you show them first?

I'm sure that my friends would be really impressed. The National Library would be my first point on our excursion. When I saw it for the first time it fairly took my breath away. It was in the evening and it was playing through its various colours, to tremendous effect. I took out my camera at once and began taking photos. Even in Tokyo there's no such big library. During my studies, I've come to know the works of Belarusian writers and poets. You should be proud of the creativity of Yakub Kolas, Yanka Kupala and Vladimir Korotkevich. After seminars on Belarusian literature, I think that Frantsisk Skorina is one of the greatest figures in Belarus' history. One of the most beautiful corners of Minsk is Trinity Hill. We'd visit it together

and I'd then take my friends to Stolitsa shopping centre, where I'd treat them to the tastiest ice-creams. If we had more time, we'd visit Brest Fortress, because I've started taking an interest in Belarusian history. You know, it's a special place, to the point of making my hands tremble and my heart beat faster. Certainly, we'd also visit the Belovezhskaya Pushcha

stereotype by not only understanding Russian well, but also speaking it well.

I started learning Russian thanks to... sports. I always liked Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian sportsmen. I once saw a TV interview with a Belarusian kickboxer who interspersed his speech with Russian proverbs and sayings. He did it so adroitly that I couldn't

one — only my mother and dog. Once, my mother told me: 'Your face is dead. Maybe you want to continue to learn Russian?' She had hit the spot so I asked: 'May I?'

Is it common in Japan for children to ask permission of their parents?

Certainly, children should ask the opinion of their parents before making any impor-

Hitoshi Tanaka — a frequent visitor of university library

smile constantly; the smile becomes insincere. In Japan, you can't say what you're thinking as you need to be always polite and well-mannered. We even chat to friends on formal terms. Quarrels are rare in our country but, if we do argue, it shows that our patience is exhausted. I like that Belarusians just say directly what they mean.

We are united by our common pain. We've experienced a terrible thing: radiation. Probably, this has made us spiritually close to Belarusians.

Would you like to stay and work in Belarus?

With pleasure, as I admire the principles of Belarusian journalism more than those in Japan. For example, no major Japanese edition would take on a student for work experience as competition is too tough and they'd be afraid that a student might learn trade secrets. The main things in Japanese journalism are facts and impartiality; only the absolute masters are allowed to express a personal opinion. One day, at the Institute of Journalism, a Belarusian teacher asked me why I had only stated the facts and I was really surprised that an alternative was possible. It was a real eye-opener for me. Now, as soon as I come home from university, I grab a bite and start writing. Certainly, Belarusian journalists write better than me but I'm working hard to improve myself and I'm delighted that my publications are starting to appear in Belarusian editions.

Wow. You're surprising us! The Japanese are famous for their discipline and capacity for work. However, do Japanese men have time for their family?

Not always. Our men work

very hard. It's rare for the Japanese to leave work on time. Our men usually stay longer, until late at night. In order to make a career, you need to work hard. Japanese women tend not to work, keeping the house and bringing up the children. By the way, a child has full freedom, without rules or prohibitions, until he or she turns 3 years old. Then, their upbringing becomes more rigid, although Japanese parents never hit their children; they only scold.

Have you thought of starting a family here, in Belarus?

I admit I like Belarusian girls more than Japanese girls, who wear rather a lot of make up. Belarusians are naturally beautiful, more liberated and more talkative. When they start talking, it's impossible to stop them (laughing). Japanese girls are shy. If a girl has a boyfriend, she won't dare chat to another guy in his presence. However, I'm not thinking about a family yet. The main thing is a career.

Do you miss your homeland?

I miss my mother. I also constantly think about Japanese food. I've tried Belarusian sushi and I hope it won't offend you if I say yours is wrong. In our country, you have to study for at least ten years to become a sushi chef! Nevertheless, I've fallen in love with your country.

Maybe you'll start writing in Belarusian soon; I've heard that you've begun studying.

It's too early to talk about it but I really like the Belarusian language. I only have lessons once a week and I'm not successful in everything.



ALEXANDER RUIZHECHKA



Hitoshi Tanaka will try to communicate with his peers in Belarusian

and would admire the 'powerful' aurochs.

Hum!... It's interesting to think what I'd show my Belarusian friends in Japan. (pondering thoughtfully) I come from the city of Ashiya, in Hyogo Prefecture; it's the smallest Japanese city, but the richest. Actors, sportsmen and writers live there. We have the sea and very beautiful mountains so I'd take my Belarusian friends on a walk there. Come and visit!

Usually, foreigners are afraid of the great and mighty Russian language, which is traditionally considered to be among the most difficult. You're breaking the

help being fascinated and began being interested in the Russian language. First, I studied at the Russian Institute in Japan and then learnt for ten months in Moscow; the most difficult test for me was grammar. I knew the theory, but using it in practice is like a riddle. After my Moscow courses, I planned to continue my studies but, unexpectedly, my mother fell ill. I had to forget about Russian and began working at a factory; I was there for four years and had no opportunity to use my favourite language. I missed Russian words greatly and life fell into a tiresome pattern of work, home, home, work. I barely chatted to any-

tant decision: it doesn't matter whether you're ten or thirty. As a result, my mother agreed. It was too expensive to continue studying in Japan so I began to look at other variants and was advised to go to Belarus. I've never regretted my decision and, when I return to Japan for holidays, I always tell my friends how much I like Belarus. I tell them about the clean, wide streets and the kind people. The Japanese are also very kind but Belarusians are more open. They have the lightest and sincerest smiles. Japanese employees are required to constantly smile at visitors and we even have a saying that 'A guest is God!' However it's difficult to

Examining ancient, trial, modern

Reproductions of world famous Slutsk belts came off assembly line

By Yuri Chernyakevich

Larisa Tarasova, the Director of Slutskiya Payasy (Slutsk Belts) enterprise, tells us that historians in Minsk are now examining the work, to give their expert evaluation. "I'd call

this version of the product a trial but it does follow the original belts in technological parameters, ornamentation and range of colour," Ms. Tarasova underlines. "The length of the belt is 3 metres and its width is 35 centimetres; it has the same

pattern and the same quantity of interwoven threads."

The Slutsk factory wove the belt from silk and methanite threads but plans to use gold and silver thread in future, as in bygone days. The unique reproduction took about 60 hours to complete,

using German equipment made to order especially for the manufacture of Slutsk belts. The machinery was installed at the enterprise in September of this year and is fully automated, with its own software.

The Slutsk Belts com-

plex is almost ready to open to the public, featuring displays for visitors, explains Ms. Tarasova. A state programme has helped the factory to revive the production of Slutsk belts: one of Belarus' most well-known treasures.



Modern Slutsk belt