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Kyrgyz Republic-Japan Center for Human Development (KRJC) in Bishkek receives about 30,000 visitors annually.



Nurturing People who will Support Asia's Growth

Japan Centers are human development centers established by the Japanese government in Asian countries to help develop local people's business acumen and strengthen ties with Japan. Currently, there are ten Japan Centers in nine Asian countries, and each center carries out activities tailored to each individual country. In Kyrgyzstan, the center is focusing on developing human resources to encourage industry diversification.

BUSINESS PERSONNEL: A MUST FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

At an ASEAN summit in 2015, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced plans to give job training to 40,000 people in Asia over the next three years. This is Japan's Industrial Human Resource Development Cooperation Initiative, which aims to strengthen Asia's "human capital" and make Asia the growth center that will drive the global economy in the 21st century. The establishment of Japan Centers in countries that are transitioning to market economies is

one of the key efforts in this initiative. The centers are designed to become hubs for human resource development in the host countries, while also serving as bases for those countries to network with Japan. Today, there are ten Japan Centers in nine countries: Cambodia, Viet Nam, Myanmar, Laos, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine.

In Kyrgyzstan, which became independent in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Kyrgyz Republic-Japan Center for Human Development (KRJC) was established in 1995. "After the end of the Cold War, companies and factories built during the Soviet era closed down one after another," says Kanat Kolbaev, Director of KRJC. "Therefore, we must develop human resources in order to develop businesses on our own."

KRJC provides lectures and training programs in which local people can acquire business knowledge and skills in such areas as marketing, financial management, and production quality management. Lecturers include personnel managers and consultants from local firms as well as experts from Japan.

Although Kyrgyzstan was one of the first Central

Asian nations to begin transition to a market economy, most of its GDP is still composed of agriculture, gold exports, and remittances sent home by Kyrgyz workers in foreign countries. Stronger export competitiveness and business development are yet to be achieved. These factors influenced KRJC's launch of a new initiative in April 2016, which focuses on diversifying the Kyrgyz economy by developing its human resources. Emiko Hamada, the coordinator at KRJC, says, "We renewed the content of our courses and invited new Japanese food sanitation experts to support the development of the agricultural and livestock processing industries."

So far, KRJC has organized a special seminar to teach the hazard analysis and critical control point (HACCP) system, an international standard for food sanitation management. In this seminar, experts gave lectures on the definition of HACCP and its importance and visited the workplaces of seminar participants to give site-specific advice on sanitation management measures. In the next phase, KRJC plans to increase its activities in rural areas and conduct seminars not only in Bishkek, where KRJC is located, but also in other regions.

A BASE FOR PROMOTING EXCHANGE WITH JAPAN

Thus far, over 10,000 people have completed KRJC business courses. Nurzat Khusainov, who took a KRJC course in 2012, runs a furniture manufacturing company in Bishkek. He says that what he learned from the Japanese experts is now helping him improve his business operations. "For instance, our equipment and tools used to be disorganized," he says. "So I reorganized them to match the operation procedure, utilizing what I learned in the course, and it helped to improve work efficiency significantly."

Kadyrjan Baimatov is now the owner of a café built around the concept of a healthy diet. He says, "My friend and I were planning to start a business but we didn't have any business management know-how. So I decided to take this business course." The course was useful beyond the initial opening phase, too. He adds, "Their ideas on human resources are especially useful for running the café."

Another goal of KRJC is building stronger ties between Kyrgyzstan and Japan, and so it provides a series of programs and courses to promote mutual



The KRJC Library has literature on Japan along with Japanese manga.

understanding. One such example is the Japanese language course. The course is open to all, including people with no knowledge of Japanese. More than 3,000 people have completed this course and many now have jobs related to Japan. Another one of KRJC's efforts is providing opportunities for people to join clubs and workshops in which they can experience aspects of Japanese culture, such as the tea ceremony, Japanese calligraphy, and origami. KRJC's Japanese drum group, O-Edo Daiko, with about 15 members, is now becoming so well-known that it receives performance requests from Kazakhstan, a neighboring country. Guliza Avazova, the leader of the group, says, "When I play the drum, I feel so energized, even if I'm tired from work. All members enjoy this activity, regardless of age."

Director Kanat Kolbaev says, "I myself have become more familiar with Japan through the center's activities, and I learned some Japanese language, too. I would like to further promote exchange between Kyrgyzstan and Japan and strengthen the collaborative ties."

The Japan Center concept is now taking root in Asian countries. It is serving as a driver for the countries' economic development, as well as a promoter of social and cultural exchange with Japan.



Kanat Kolbaev, Director of KRJC, has taken Japanese language courses at the Center and has visited Japan.



Left: Kadyrjan Baimatov, who runs a café in Bishkek, says, "At KRJC, I learned how to draw up an effective business plan." Right: Members of a Japanese drum group practicing for a performance at a festival.

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