

# Friends of Japan

## Greater Interaction Can Bring Our Two Countries Closer

Daria Makhneva, from Siberia, recalls that she “suddenly got hooked on learning Japanese” due to the influence of an older friend in high school who was deeply interested in the Japanese language. Daria went on to study Japanese language and culture in the Faculty of Humanities, Department of Oriental Studies, at Novosibirsk State University. “Japanese is very melodious,” she says, “and I was fascinated by the beautiful flow of the intonation of the spoken language.”

For about three years after graduating from university, Daria worked in Russia as a freelance Japanese interpreter and translator. But she wanted to gain a deeper knowledge of Japanese literature and Japan itself, so she applied for a Japanese government scholarship from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Winning this scholarship, she enrolled in the Faculty of Letters at the University of Tokyo Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology.

“It was very stimulating, as many of the classes were designed to draw out the students’ creativity, such as by having us write poems. We also had many lectures and workshops given by poets or novelists whom I admire, and it really heightened my will to study.”

After getting her master of arts degree, Daria decided to tackle the challenge of job hunting to get hired and work at a Japanese company, just like Japanese students. She got a job at an automobile manufacturer after passing the employment examination and interviews with flying colors. This year she changed employers inside the same industry, taking a job at a truck and bus manufacturer, where she is now, as in her previous working place, responsible for the Russian market. Her responsibilities cover a wide range, including surveys and analysis of market trends and of moves by rival companies, support for the launch of new products, and the handling of official paperwork for shipments. She explains, “I’m continuing to work in Japan because I like the Japanese culture of so-called *monozukuri*—the traditional culture of craftsmanship that helps even now to enhance Japan’s manufacturing production. It makes me happy to be involved in making things, and this gives me motivation to work.”

Daria’s interest in making things extends to her hobbies, and she is currently taking classes in pottery. “In Russia, age is a barrier, whatever you try to do,” she says. “Being in my late twenties, I’d be told that it’s too late for me to learn to make pottery, even as a hobby. But in Japan, you can take up a new challenge no matter how old you are. I think the freedom to try to do something you want to at any time is really wonderful.”

Although differences exist between Japanese and Russian lifestyles, Daria feels that especially the Russian people who live in areas close to Asia have similar ways of thinking and a similar sense of values to Japanese people. “Japanese people have the spirit of *omotenashi*, or hospitality, but Russians have quite the same spirit. Also, the way in which Russian people show respect to their seniors and superiors is the same as in Japan. I feel very strongly that if Japan and Russia would make an attempt to get closer, then a stronger relationship built on deep understanding could be attained.”

If exchanges in various fields increase, aiding mutual understanding, then later generations may look back and on the twenty-first century as the age when Japan and Russia grew much closer. Daria sincerely hopes that such a future will come to pass.



**Daria Makhneva**

A native of Akademgorodok in the Siberian city of Novosibirsk (Akademgorodok is an educational and scientific center that planners studied when designing Japan's Tsukuba Science City). Works in the International Sales Department at the headquarters of Mitsubishi Fuso Truck and Bus Corporation. Is interested in making things and in the Japanese culture of craftsmanship. Hopes one day to try making *washi*, traditional handmade Japanese paper. Currently resides in Japan with her husband, who is Japanese.



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1. At her workplace. 2. Experiencing how to assemble parts in a factory during company training. 3. Daria has learned about Japanese culture while taking classes in pottery making. 4. With international students from the Faculty of Letters, University of Tokyo.