

## Round Table: Talking about the Daily Life Support Services for Foreign Researchers

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\*JISTEC (Japan International Science & Technology Exchange Center) is an incorporated association under the jurisdiction of MEXT. It is dedicated to the advancement of science and technology and contribution to the international community through the promotion of international exchanges and the provision of support to research and researchers. At the Kavli IPMU, JISTEC's support desk has been opened three days every week since three years ago, for the daily life support services for foreign researchers and their families.

### Settling into the IPMU Support Desk

**Ozawa:** Would you introduce yourselves?

**Hamakoji:** I'm originally from Sweden, and I came to Japan in 1975 with my Japanese husband. When I started working at JISTEC in 1988, I thought that it would only be a part time job for a few years...well, 25 years later I'm still working and 3 years ago I started working here at IPMU.

**Nishikawa:** I started working for JISTEC 13 years ago. I met Anna when I was

working at the Tsukuba Information Center, providing a variety of information for foreigners. After that, when I was working at a different job, Anna, whom I had met only once, came to me asking if I wanted to join JISTEC for a position for the newly established Ninomiya House, a dormitory for foreign researchers.

**Hamakoji:** I was asked if I know some suitable person, and I immediately remembered her.

**Ozawa:** You really have a good memory!

**Nishikawa:** ...although I had only met

her once before.

**Hamakoji:** You made a very strong impression on me.

**Nishikawa:** (Laughs)

**Hamakoji:** When I went to the Information Center to find her, I was told that she wasn't there anymore, but I didn't give up---I searched and finally found her.

**Ozawa:** You located her over such a wide area? Amazing!

**Nishikawa:** I was actually thinking about changing jobs at that time, so I said yes

without hesitation.

**Hamakoji:** So she owes me, big time!

**Nishikawa:** I know I owe a lot to her.  
(Laughs)

**Ozawa:** You've known each other for a long time. Three years have passed since JISTEC joined IPMU, and now we can cooperate with each other very well, but there were some unfamiliar and uneasy feelings between us at first.

**Nishikawa:** That's true. I was pretty worried.

**Ozawa:** Anna-san, I remember when we first met you told me that it would be best for the researchers and JISTEC staff to know each other. Moreover, you asked me if you were expected to answer 100% of emergency phone calls for 24 hours. I understood the reason why you asked me things like these. I think you already knew that it is not easy to answer the phone 100% of the time in your everyday life. I was deeply impressed by your sincerity, and I felt that you are an honest and reliable person indeed! Did you feel any difficulty at first?

**Hamakoji:** On the other side of the line, there is a person in need of help, so when you have emergency phone calls you always worry about missing a call and that is a heavy responsibility.

**Ozawa:** Answering emergency calls 100% of the time is extremely difficult, so nobody can easily accept the request to have an emergency phone 24 hours a day. It is very hard work to have the phone—even for you two, who are very skilled and have a lot of expertise in support for researchers.

**Hamakoji:** Until you answer the phone you don't know how serious the emergency is, but at least in Tsukuba we have a lots of experience, and we feel confident that we can handle most things. Regarding Kashiwa and Tokyo, we didn't have any experience, so we were quite anxious.

**Ozawa:** Have you settled into this area now?

**Nishikawa:** Far from it. (Laughs)

**Hamakoji:** We are improving. Compared to the 25 years in Tsukuba, we have only been at IPMU for 3 years, so there is still much to learn, but thankfully we have AXA Assistance Japan<sup>\*1</sup> to help us with finding information about hospitals in Tokyo.

**Ozawa:** It may not be always possible to answer the phone because the cell phone signal is too weak to be received, etc. as you worried about. But in case that you cannot answer the phone, AXA Assistance Japan serves as a backup, which is an important service.

**Nishikawa:** I agree. For example, we are also leading an ordinary life so we sometimes find ourselves in situations when we can't be reached by phone, even if we carry an emergency phone, such as when we take a subway train.

**Hamakoji:** Now, when we give the emergency card<sup>\*2</sup> to any newcomer, we always explain that even though we are basically available 24 hours a day, we may be doing something that prevents us from immediately answering, like driving, so please keep calling and we will pick up.

**Nishikawa:** We explain that in person when giving out the emergency card.

**Ozawa:** How many calls per year do you receive?

**Hamakoji:** Really serious emergencies are rare, but you never know when that call may come, so you need to be prepared.

**Ozawa:** The phone is very important in the event of emergencies. I remember that someone called for emergency in the very early morning, when their baby got a high fever.

**Nishikawa:** That was around 5 o'clock in the morning.

**Hamakoji:** So far we have been very lucky in that no one here has been seriously hurt, but unexpected accidents

do happen—for example, people can fall and hurt themselves. Since most of the researchers at IPMU don't have children, we have fewer visits to the emergency hospital. Strangely, kids usually run a high fever at night.

**Ozawa:** There have been some small accidents occurred so far.

**Hamakoji:** Well, so far we have been able to handle them.

### Feeling Truly Happy in Doing Something Good

**Ozawa:** It was the first time for you to be outside of Tsukuba for such support-desk service at IPMU, wasn't it?

**Nishikawa:** This way, researchers can easily drop by at the support desk and have a chat with us. We get to know each other even if a relationship of trust may not be reached in the beginning.

**Ozawa:** We ask you to go to the city hall and the bank together with newly arriving researchers soon after their arrival. It is a good opportunity to get to know each other well. One year after the JISTEC staff had started service at IPMU, we conducted a questionnaire with foreign researchers on this service. The answers were all favorable. For instance, many of them were relying on your sincere support for almost everything. I was very pleased that the support desk had gone very well. In the early days of IPMU, some of us had a cell phone by turns for emergency calls from foreign researchers, but we felt quite uneasy to have such a phone throughout the night after normal working hours. In that sense, we have been relieved very much by the JISTEC's service.

<sup>\*1</sup>: AXA Assistance Japan provides English telephone operator service for 24-hour for information requested by non-Japanese researchers at IPMU in case of emergency.

<sup>\*2</sup>: Newly arriving researchers and long term visitors are provided with the business card sized emergency cards showing the phone numbers of JISTEC, AXA Assistance Japan, and IPMU.

**Nishikawa:** Thanks for saying that. We are very grateful to be able to work with all the nice staff of IPMU.

**Ozawa:** I think the support at IPMU, where you have to work in close coordination with IPMU administrative staff, is very different from the one at Tsukuba.

**Nishikawa:** We knew that the staff at IPMU had taken good care of their researchers, and in turn, we felt pressure to do well.

**Hamakoji:** We actually were a bit intimidated at first.

**Ozawa:** Why?

**Hamakoji:** We had concerns about how to adjust our way of working to the IPMU. We were quite nervous.

**Ozawa:** The IPMU staff had taken charge of the support to some extent before JISTEC came. So, at first there was some confusion between you and us about how to share the work. But, gradually we got accustomed to doing so, and now we ask you to support researchers for all health problems and private matters. Our roles are now clearly defined.

**Nishikawa:** As time went by, I remember talking to Anna and saying to each other: "You know what, I'm having fun doing this job."

**Hamakoji:** Yes, in the beginning we did not have much confidence in our knowledge about this region and we



worried we wouldn't be very useful. In Tsukuba, we have our own personal experiences to help us when we search for information, but here we had to start from scratch. In the beginning, not many researchers came to the support desk, and we sometimes felt like we were not useful at all. But now we have many people coming by the support desk, and we actually feel like we are doing something good.

**Ozawa:** Now people come to the support desk continuously for various problems.

**Hamakoji:** Being busy is much better...

**Nishikawa:** Researchers also wave to us when they get down the stairs.

**Ozawa:** They may think you are friends. Do some people come by just for a chat?

**Hamakoji:** Sometimes people just come by for a chat or to check in and see how we are.

**Nishikawa:** Sometimes they just come to say, "I'm back" when they return from a trip somewhere. These kinds of small things really make our day.

**Hamakoji:** Yes, there are so many nice people here!

**Nishikawa:** Everybody is so nice.

**Ozawa:** Is it comfortable for foreign researchers to live in Japan? Many of them don't speak Japanese. But Japan is a safe country to live in. Also, they can enjoy JISTEC's support.

**Nishikawa:** Everybody is voicing their satisfaction with how they are treated at IPMU, and they marvel at the ease and opportunities in terms of how they get to engage in research abroad.

**Ozawa:** It is a policy of IPMU to request all the researchers to go abroad more than one month and up to 3 months per year to make themselves visible, as well as IPMU.

**Hamakoji:** But I also think the researchers here are a bit mysterious.

**Nishikawa:** Strange folks?

**Hamakoji:** So many are playing difficult instruments.

**Nishikawa:** Yes, so versatile!

**Ozawa:** Not only doing research.

**Hamakoji:** People here have so many interests and hobbies and they know about many things.

**Nishikawa:** It's fun to talk to them.

**Ozawa:** Some people have musical backgrounds.

**Nishikawa:** And they play sports as well.

**Hamakoji:** They seem to be very good at

managing themselves without a lot of rules.

**Ozawa:** They are not used to being controlled by the institute, so we have to respect their autonomy. We shouldn't say things like, "Do this, do that" or "Don't do this, don't do that," in the Japanese way.

**Nishikawa:** That's true. That may be one thing that distinguishes IPMU from other Japanese research institutions.

**Ozawa:** In the Japanese system, controlling researchers administratively is a matter of course.

**Hamakoji:** Too many rigid rules can create a negative workplace atmosphere, and in turn, create barriers between researchers and staff.

**Ozawa:** Researchers and staff members are very friendly with each other at IPMU. Everybody here looks happy.



Of course I don't know what researchers really think about IPMU, but I heard from one of the administrative staff who is a member of the IPMU orchestra<sup>\*3</sup> that most of the researcher members of the orchestra say that they are very happy at IPMU. But, I am a bit worried that there are some unique researchers who sometimes embarrass you.

**Hamakoji:** Many researchers I have met have been a bit odd. Maybe that is what makes them good researchers. Often they are concerned about completely different things than most other people.

**Ozawa:** It is astonishing to see that such an excellent researcher has concerns about trivial kinds of things.

### Support Foreigners as Their Parents and Friends Do

**Nishikawa:** When I started on this job, Anna gave me a piece of advice: our job

<sup>\*3</sup> Refer to *Kavli IPMU News No. 20* (December 2012) page 11-13.

is to provide foreign researchers with information on options to choose from. We should respect researchers' choices, even if we have our own personal preferences. Once a decision is made, we shouldn't say anything more. That was like an "aha moment" for me.

**Ozawa:** Director Murayama also said a similar thing. He advised us to let the researchers choose one from among some of the possibilities.

**Nishikawa:** Though there are times when I was like, "What?! Why did he/she choose this instead of that?" I know I needed to respect the choice by the researcher him/herself.

**Ozawa:** In finding an apartment, for instance, some people choose a troublesome option. But that's the way it goes. We should understand that they have their own reasons to choose it.

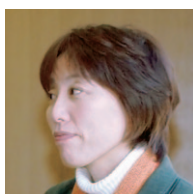
**Hamakoji:** But, of course when things go wrong, we never say, "I told you so."

**Nishikawa:** No, we don't.

**Hamakoji:** Our job is to support. We provide some of the support that the person usually has from his family and friends in his home country.

**Nishikawa:** As Anna always says, when we go to the hospital with researchers, we don't function as medical translators—we are supporters. That's why we don't just translate whatever the doctor says—we have to voice our opinions for the benefit of our researcher customers. That's the difference between medical translators and us.

**Hamakoji:** We are definitely not medical translators. We do not have the medical knowledge needed for such a difficult job. What we do as support people is to listen to the doctor together and of course we translate too when needed but sometimes we also have to ask the



doctor to explain again, "explain it like you would to a 4 year old."

**Ozawa:** I think they are satisfied with your way of translation. It's something like their family or friends accompanying them would do.

**Hamakoji:** When someone has a special medical problem, we study about it on the internet to try to understand at least a little about it and also to check some medical terms that may be used at the hospital. If something is unclear, we ask the doctor.

**Nishikawa:** Another example is when we accompany researchers to real estate agencies. Some real estate agents speak English, but they are acting on behalf of their companies. On the other hand, we, as supporters, have to speak constantly with our customers benefit in mind.

**Hamakoji:** To be a support person means to put yourself on the side of that person, and if needed, to fight for them. I have fought with banks and city hall many times.

**Ozawa:** So do we.

**Hamakoji:** But sometimes, even though you are on that person's side there are times when you have to tell people that things cannot be done the way they want.

**Ozawa:** It's important to tell them the truth. For instance, we always try to explain things clearly when it comes to money, because non-Japanese people are often particular about money. By the way, foreign researchers must feel life in Japan more or less inconvenient due to the language problem, though some of them study Japanese very hard.

**Nishikawa:** Researchers from western countries usually tell us how lucky they are to be able to receive support services like ours in Japan, something they usually don't get in other countries. Although they can read English in English speaking countries, they won't be able to do so in Asian countries. The lifestyle is also

different in those countries. People can say that going abroad is their own choice, but they will encounter difficulties. That's when support services become necessary.

**Ozawa:** We now see more information written in English than before.

**Hamakoji:** We hear that a lot. There are many manuals and pamphlets with English explanations in various places in Japan today. But they are just the basic official information. People come with all kinds of different situations and needs and a manual cannot explain them all. In the end it comes down to telling your story to a person. I wish people would understand that.

**Ozawa:** We sometimes tell researchers coming to Japan to visit our website where we put lots of information about life in Japan, but it is not enough for them at all. People have different problems and different questions. So we have to keep in touch with each of them and answer their questions as much as possible.

**Hamakoji:** They are talking about translation software and talking robots, which may be good if your question is "where can I find an Italian restaurant," but for more important things you still need to talk to a person.

**Nishikawa:** That's true.

**Hamakoji:** That is why, I think, there should be support centers. A place where people can go and talk about whatever information or help they need—a place where there would be a person to listen, to meet someone who cares.

### Crucial Points Are Missing in Japanese Internationalization

**Ozawa:** Exactly. We often hear about the importance of internationalization and globalization, and we are urged to invite foreign people to Japan, but there are few support desks or support centers.

**Hamakoji:** Even in the immigration

office, it is difficult to find someone who speaks English.

**Ozawa:** Really? That's hard to believe.

**Nishikawa:** I was also surprised to learn that postcards sent by immigration offices are all in Japanese.

**Hamakoji:** Banks and hospitals, too. I don't understand why it's impossible for them to hire some English speaking staff. The crucial point is missing.

**Ozawa:** Probably they are only producing English manuals and pamphlets.

**Hamakoji:** Yes, there are often beautiful colorful pamphlets, but not a single English speaking person if you want to ask something.

**All:** (Laughs)

**Hamakoji:** Why don't they use human resources there? Not printed materials, but one English speaking person to deal with foreign customers could do so many things!

**Ozawa:** I think so.

**Nishikawa:** Not only that. The very few things that are written in English are mostly warnings such as "Don't do this" and "Don't do that."

**Hamakoji:** Yes.

**Nishikawa:** For example, things such as "We don't provide money exchange services" and "Surveillance cameras are installed" are in English, but "discount information" is never in English.

**Hamakoji:** We never see that.

**Ozawa:** English statements are mostly prohibitions and cautions.

**Nishikawa:** That's because people don't put themselves in foreigners' shoes.

**Hamakoji:** Of course, there is always the question of how much help is needed, and some people think that foreigners make unreasonable demands. But those are rare cases. Most people ask for help only when they really need. Unfortunately for many foreigners there is no place to go for help.

**Ozawa:** Many Japanese people think overseas students can speak

Japanese. IPMU researchers are often misunderstood as those students; so they are supposed to speak Japanese. This kind of feeling makes internationalization difficult. Even if we are inviting just one researcher from abroad, it takes a long time to go through the formalities and support his/her life in Japan. Without support staff, it would be a burden on the host professors or their assistants. If they are busy, they cannot invite researchers from abroad.

**Nishikawa:** Whether or not you have a caring host professor makes a whole lot of difference.

**Ozawa:** Some people are left alone without support.

**Hamakoji:** Sadly, some people say that life here was hell, and they will never return.

**Ozawa:** That's too bad. It's a real disappointment for people who need support, but who can't find any.

**Nishikawa:** Also, there are some things you can ask for from your colleagues and some things that you can't.

**Hamakoji:** In your workplace you have to be careful. You don't want to bother your colleagues who are busy with their own things too much. If there were a support center you wouldn't have to worry about that, you could ask for help and they would be able to deal with you professionally.

**Ozawa:** You can place a bit of distance.

**Hamakoji:** Your colleagues may find it hard to say no, even though they would prefer not to spend time helping you. That could create tension in the workplace.

**Nishikawa:** They would think it easy to ask for help from a third person like us.

**Ozawa:** We also feel that it is very helpful. Most of the researchers don't want to ask the administrative staff for help with their private matters. They can consult with JISTEC staff about a private matter like health problems without

hesitation.

**Hamakoji:** I'm happy to hear you say so.

**Ozawa:** I wish there were more support staff like Anna-san and Nishikawa-san.

**All:** (Laughs)

**Hamakoji:** We do need to educate more support staff.

**Ozawa:** They are absolutely necessary for internationalization.

**Hamakoji:** There is always difficulty to get funding for hiring people.

### Phones and Manuals Only Can't Solve the Problems

**Ozawa:** It seems that funding first goes to equipment and infrastructure, and then to "soft" measures. Also, it's pretty difficult to get long-term funding. With short-term funding, people are inclined to produce English manuals and pamphlets.

**Nishikawa:** Those who don't have first-hand experience tend to think like that. Or they would think everything could be solved with phone calls.

**Ozawa:** Phone calls alone can't solve the problems.

**Nishikawa:** No. But people usually don't understand that.

**Hamakoji:** A person who has never had to answer an emergency phone call may think that it can be done even with people you have never met.

**Nishikawa:** "Since you understand English, you can manage the situation and solve things on the phone, right?" That's what they say.

**Hamakoji:** And they say, "There are not so many emergency calls, so it not a big problem."

**Nishikawa:** But for 24 hours!

**Ozawa:** And you have to be ready to answer phone calls any time.

**Hamakoji:** If I don't know the person calling, I would have to start an emergency call with "who is this?"

**Ozawa:** If the person in a panic is not a native English speaker, they end up just

yelling “Aahh!”

**Hamakoji:** Sometimes it is difficult to hear/understand what the person is saying on the phone.

**Nishikawa:** I don't understand everything. It is a tall order for me.

**Ozawa:** It would be a real panic if a serious accident or sudden illness happens.

**Hamakoji:** For example, if I needed to call the police about someone's emergency and they asked me questions like, “Who is this person,” “Where does he live,” “Where does he work,” “How is he connected to you,” etc., and then I answered, “Uhh, I'm not sure...I don't know...,” then the police wouldn't listen to a word I say. Therefore it is very important to know something about the people you are supposed to support. In IPMU we have a list, which is absolutely wonderful.

**Nishikawa:** That list contains all the necessary information about the person, and it is easy to read. It's really helpful.

**Ozawa:** It is a confidential list of members' addresses, insurance, and other personal information.

**Nishikawa:** It even contains contact numbers for water and electricity companies. In the event of a problem such as water leakage, we can call the management company immediately. It's really convenient.

**Ozawa:** If you know the person well, it helps you hear what he/she is saying.

**Nishikawa:** It is totally different when you receive a phone call and know who you are speaking to, and when you don't have a clue who is on the other side of the phone.

**Ozawa:** It's really makes a difference if you know the person.

**Nishikawa:** That is something that is not in any handbook.

**Ozawa, Hamakoji:** No, no.

**Ozawa:** For going ahead with the procedures to accept newly arrived

researchers, supporting research activities, and so on, we are also doing in our office many things not on any handbook. If they are on manuals, we would be able to ease up and we would need fewer staff members. But, actually we need to be very flexible and creative to deal with these things. So I don't like to be said to compile everything about our work in a manual.

**Hamakoji:** When someone has a medical problem, we try to find a hospital that suits that particular person but it is interesting that often the person comes with the preconceived notion that the medical system in their own country is the best. It then becomes our task to explain why things are done in a certain way here and to try and point out the positive aspects. Sometimes we also have to explain to the hospital staff why the foreign patient may be very upset about things that Japanese people think nothing of. For example, here it is often asked that the parents leave their child alone with the doctor/nurse but when we explain that this not acceptable in that person's country the staff will usually comply.

**Ozawa:** Anna-san, you can support that way because you have a lot of experiences. If I am told by the doctor to ask the parents to leave their children alone, I'll tell them so without any doubt.

**Nishikawa:** I would probably say the same thing.

**Hamakoji:** It has happened once or twice that I went back and apologized to a doctor with some strawberries when we have been a bit “unreasonable”.

**Nishikawa:** Out of pocket, of course.

**Hamakoji:** Well, we do want them to treat us again next time we come.

**Nishikawa:** But we haven't been able to establish a relationship of trust with the doctors in Kashiwa yet.

**Hamakoji:** That is a bit of a problem for us still.

**Nishikawa:** We need to gain more experience.

**Ozawa:** You need more time for it.

**Hamakoji:** It comes with time and experience.

**Ozawa:** I think Japanese doctors are very different from those in other countries.

**Hamakoji:** It depends on the hospital.

**Ozawa:** In the US, medical services are sort of a service industry, and the patients are customers, I guess.

**Nishikawa:** They might not have to wait for 2 hours to get a consultation of 3 minutes like we do in Japan.

**Ozawa:** Then, it would be a shocking experience for those who are treated that way.

**Hamakoji:** Sometimes I am a bit surprised at how difficult it can be to find a good doctor, but fortunately, we also have lots of good experiences.

#### For 38 Years Anna-san Experienced All the Hardships in Japan

**Nishikawa:** Anna has a strong sense of responsibility.

**Hamakoji:** Probably because as a foreigner you always have to work harder than the “natives”. If you fail at something it will be: “it is because she is a foreigner,” “foreigners are lazy,” etc.

**Nishikawa:** That is probably because you first came to Japan at an early stage and have been living here for a long time. Nowadays, if a foreigner fresh to Japan can speak a little Japanese or use chopsticks, people tend to be impressed.

**Hamakoji:** People are kind to “visitors”. People like me who are here to stay have to work hard at being accepted. Japan has a tendency to quickly pull people down from the pedestal they put them on and so it doesn't need much for you to be in the “doghouse”.

**Ozawa:** Yeah, I agree Japanese people have that tendency.

**Nishikawa:** I never realized that until you mentioned it.

**Ozawa:** So Anna-san, you are always on guard and thinking ahead.

**Hamakoji:** I have had years of practice.

**Ozawa:** It must be stressful.

**Hamakoji:** Yes, it can be stressful but I think the older I get the more comfortable I become with myself.

**Ozawa:** Have you inured yourself to hardships?

**Hamakoji:** I'm an "obachan" ……

**All:** (Laughs)

**Hamakoji:** Those old Japanese women are tough and I'm becoming one too.

**Ozawa:** Was it tough when you come to Japan?

**Hamakoji:** It was tough in the beginning … trying to be perfect.

**Ozawa:** It was expected to be able to do that much.

**Hamakoji:** If you tried to insist on something you were the "rude foreigner", if you cried you were the "hysterical foreigner" so you try so hard to be that perfect person that nobody will criticize.

**Nishikawa:** Must be hard but you managed well.

**Hamakoji:** I suppose so.

**Ozawa:** How long have you been in Japan?

**Hamakoji:** I came in 1975. So 38 years.

**Ozawa:** Has Japan changed?

**Hamakoji:** Oh, it is like a different country. Although not everything has changed for the better…

**Ozawa:** Where are you living?

**Hamakoji:** In Tsuchiura City. Same address, same phone number, all these years.

**All:** (Laughs)

**Hamakoji:** I want the foreign people that come here to see the good things in Japan and to leave with good memories. I also want the Japanese people to see the good in the foreign people that come and to experience that foreign doesn't have to mean bad; to see that even though there are some weird foreigners most of us are just like you

—ordinary, simple people. Without this, there will never be any place for people like me, or my "mixed" kids. When I'm in the hospital I try to explain the positive things to the foreigner so that he can see them too, and to the staff I try to explain a bit about how it is in the foreigner's country so that the staff can learn and understand that things can be different too. For example, often people complain about the long waiting time here, but I always explain that with a more patient-friendly system, the cost for the individual would have to go up considerably, and so people put up with the wait in order to keep the cost down.

**Nishikawa:** That is new to me. I have never explained things in this way.

**Hamakoji:** It is a simple explanation but I think it is rather true.

**Ozawa:** Such an explanation can be very persuasive.

**Nishikawa:** It really is. I can easily understand it.

**Ozawa:** It is hard for me to explain like that.

### Foreigners Can Speak Out on What They Really Feel

**Nishikawa:** Thanks to her rich experience, she can say all these things, and I think it is because she is not Japanese, that people are able to truly and directly voice their opinions to her.

**Hamakoji:** It is kind of hard to complain about Japan to a Japanese person.

**Nishikawa:** That's why you are such an asset.

**Hamakoji:** I wish there were more opportunities for foreigners to work like me.

**Nishikawa:** There are foreigners working at this kind of job, but very few can reach this level.

**Hamakoji:** You need to know the language and to be able to read.

**Ozawa:** It is great that Anna-san can read Japanese and understand kanji

characters.

**Hamakoji:** Well, I cannot really brag about my kanji level.

**Nishikawa:** But I don't see Anna as a foreigner.

**Hamakoji:** Sometimes I'm not sure myself.

**Nishikawa:** You are even looking more and more like Japanese.

**Ozawa:** Have you become half Japanese?

**Hamakoji:** I lived my whole adult life here so I suppose I'm somewhat "Japanized", sometimes my foreign friends tell me "if that is not bothering you, you've been here too long!"

**Nishikawa:** I don't get to be told things like that. It is also important to be able to listen to real complaints from foreigners. In many cases, foreigners may find it difficult to tell us Japanese their real opinions even if they find things to be strange.

**Hamakoji:** We make a good team.

**Nishikawa:** We each have our strong and weak points.

**Ozawa:** Complement each other.

**Hamakoji:** We know each other very well, both the good and the bad parts.

**Ozawa:** You can say anything frankly to each other, can't you?

**Nishikawa:** Right.

**Hamakoji:** We can have different opinions and still get along well.

**Ozawa:** Do you sometimes think differently?

**Nishikawa:** Of course, our ways of thinking are different.

**Hamakoji:** I'm the pessimist. Keiko is always the optimist, always moving forward.

**Ozawa:** Nishikawa-san is a woman of action.

**Hamakoji:** She is definitely the optimist, always saying "Yes, OK" to everything. I'm more like "you really want me to do that?"

**Ozawa:** She is wonderful.

**Hamakoji:** She is always smiling—never

shows an unhappy face...

**Ozawa:** She has never made a long face. Her smiling face always makes us happy when she comes to our office in the morning. Researchers also feel her warm welcome, I think.

**Hamakoji:** I always try to be like her but my pessimistic side pops up.

**All:** (Laughs)

**Ozawa:** But in the end you always try to help researchers as much as you can.

**Hamakoji:** In the end, of course, I try to do my best too, but I'm a bit slow at the start.

**Ozawa:** Do you do things very carefully?

**Nishikawa:** Yes, she is very prudent.

**Hamakoji:** In English I would call myself an optimistic pessimist.

**Nishikawa:** Positive pessimist.

**Hamakoji:** I'm both, but I'm always thinking about what can go wrong.

**Nishikawa:** Extremely prudent.

**Hamakoji:** I stay awake at night thinking about things that can go wrong.

**Ozawa:** Wow!

**Hamakoji:** But Keiko always thinks that everything will work out fine.

**Nishikawa:** In other words, Anna is more of a perfectionist and I don't take things too seriously.

**Hamakoji:** That is not what I meant.

**Nishikawa:** For example, I go to see movies even when I'm carrying an on-call emergency phone. I choose an aisle seat, put the phone on silent mode with vibration and hold it in my hand. In Anna's case, she wouldn't go see a movie. She would be home to be on call. I mind my daily business like always, but Anna doesn't. That's what I mean by saying that Anna takes things very seriously while I'm less so.

**Ozawa:** Your ways are different, but your intentions for support are really the same.

**Nishikawa:** What makes things easy for us to work for IPMU is that no matter what we are asked to do for researchers,

we can easily accept the request because IPMU gives us the go ahead to do so, almost without restrictions.

**Ozawa:** I want the researchers feel free to come to the support desk for help. But, when you are busy, you can of course deal with such a request later as to arrange a Sumo ticket. They readily understand it.

**Hamakoji:** And that we can always turn to the IPMU staff for advice and guidance is really good.

**Nishikawa:** When we have some concerns we always say to each other "let's talk to Ozawa-san."

**Hamakoji:** We really mean this—we are not just being polite.

**Ozawa:** Thank you very much. Actually I am always trying to ask you to help IPMU researchers with the contract between IPMU and JISTEC in mind.

#### Anna-san Has Attended the Birth of Baby ~ 100 Times

**Ozawa:** Since our cooperation has been successful now, we have rough procedures for typical cases. So, what I have to do is mostly keeping track of how the support service is going and we are leaving the actual service to you. You help researchers not only for medical issues, but also for childbirth.

**Hamakoji:** March is really busy—1 baby at IPMU and 3 other in Tsukuba.

**Ozawa:** A baby boom!

**Nishikawa:** Lately, you have been going for the check-up every week.

**Hamakoji:** Until the baby is born and everything is OK, I'm always anxious. I have had some bad experiences as well.

**Nishikawa:** Anna has had some experience as a volunteer counselor and she has seen a lot of sad cases too.

**Hamakoji:** When bad things happen, there are no words that will help. Just being there sharing the pain, allowing the person to be upset and sad. In other ways we are helpful because we can

take care of all the paperwork and other things that need to be done, even in the midst of sorrow.

**Nishikawa:** No matter how much you prepare, there is always the unexpected.

**Hamakoji:** There are no guarantees, and so I worry.

**Ozawa:** Many people named their babies "Anna", right?

**Hamakoji:** There have been a couple of little Annas during the years.

**Nishikawa:** That is so cool.

**Hamakoji:** I get Christmas cards and greetings from all over the world, and it is so nice to see the children grow. There are so many different ideas about giving birth and each hospital has their way and each couple has their birth plan and so each time what I can do for them is different but every birth is special.

**Ozawa:** If a person with a lot of experiences like Anna-san is close by a pregnant woman, the woman can be at ease.

**Hamakoji:** I have a bit of experience so sometimes I can give some suggestions.

**Nishikawa:** So, how many births have you been at?

**Hamakoji:** I haven't counted but I think over 100 births by now. Sometimes it is tough but it is a wonderful job to be useful.

#### Hard to Quit This Wonderful Job

**Nishikawa:** To have a job where people say "Thank you" is a fantastic thing.

**Hamakoji:** It is truly satisfying.

**Ozawa:** It stimulates you to work hard.

**Hamakoji:** Oh yes.

**Nishikawa:** It would be hard for me to quit this work.

**Hamakoji:** Even the emergency phone—there is a person in need of help on the other side.

**Ozawa:** The person is very lucky thanks to your presence when he/she is in trouble.



**Hamakoji:** When you get an emergency phone call it is sometimes difficult to make a decision whether the person need an ambulance or a taxi will do, so if we can we go and if the person says, "I'm glad you came," then it is worth it.

**Ozawa:** We are thankful that you help our researchers and their families with sudden illnesses or injuries at any time.

**Hamakoji:** There are many different kinds of emergencies, but people are usually relieved if someone can come to them.

**Ozawa:** It is very helpful.

**Hamakoji:** But sometimes it can be impossible to go, like when we had the heavy snowfall last month. Even if someone had called for help I probably couldn't have made it.

**Ozawa:** Some roads were closed for the heavy snowfall.

**Hamakoji:** When it is impossible, you can't help it, but if we possibly can we always try to go. However, Tokyo in the middle of the night when the trains aren't running... that would be tough.

**Nishikawa:** Really tough.

**Hamakoji:** During the large earthquake we learned the hard way about how little we can do. I didn't know whether my family was alive or not, all I could do was to take care of the foreign family which was with me at the time. We were at the hospital with their one-month-old baby. I took them with me back to the office and helped them to find their other children who were at school. That was all I could do.

**Nishikawa:** I was at IPMU but couldn't really do much, even finding out about the train service was impossible.

**Ozawa:** It was very hard for everyone to go back to home. I've heard that Anna-san's house was damaged by the earthquake.

**Hamakoji:** Yes, my house was a total mess.

**Nishikawa:** In such times we really feel

helpless, there is such a limit to what even the support center can do.

**Hamakoji:** We do whatever we can do, and when we can't, then that will have to do, too. For example, if someone call that they broke their foot in Akihabara 3am in the morning, they might have to take a taxi to the hospital themselves. If someone ends up unconscious in a hospital I might wake up my husband and ask him to drive me there right away. We do the best we can.

**Ozawa:** IPMU researchers are very lucky to have JISTEC's support as if they have support from their family. I wish this support system could be extended to other places.

**Nishikawa:** IPMU could be the model for future support desks.

**Ozawa:** Yes, I hope that this system propagate over the Kashiwa campus first, then over the University of Tokyo, and eventually, all over Japan.

**Hamakoji, Nishikawa:** Yes, that is so true.

**Ozawa:** Thank you very much, I enjoyed a lot!

**Hamakoji, Nishikawa:** Thank you. Thank you.