



Organic Indigo Farming and Traditional Dyeing (aizome) Bridging Ancient Wisdom and Wellbeing from the Local Neighborhood

TSUKUBA – November 15th and 22nd, 2021: TIAS 2.0 students, in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of larger environmental and social issues and coming up with solutions through **active participation in community-based activities**, took part in "aizome", the practice of indigo dyeing, or cultivating natural dye in the centuries-old tradition still being practiced in small pockets around the country. The weekly visit to the farm, **Suzuki Noen**, a short distance away from the University of Tsukuba, provided with a **transformative experience for the students** as they not only learned about the history of **aizome in Japan**, but also about the efforts to revive the tradition that has been in practice since the **Edo period**. The activity was organized as part of the **Internship Course, in a collaboration between TIAS 2.0 and Journey for Change (JfC)**. To re-state it's purpose of this internship, and quoting Ms. **Shinobu Hayama** (CEO, JfC): *"is to serve as a crossroads for academic and cross-sector collaboration for the cultivation of next generation global citizens – through collaborative studies, research, community development and social innovations – leveraging the value of cross-cultural education, health and sport science in the pursuit of humanity and national-international development for solidarity"* (JfC).



The participants at the aizome activity were first introduced to the facility by the **indigo farmers led by Suzuki san**, who led the activity by first explaining the different steps to aizome, and then involving the students into the process. **Indigo dyeing is an ancient method of dyeing clothes dating back millennia**. The term "indigo" originates from Greek, which translates to "from India", as the plant - from the larger *Indigofera* genus - is indigenous to the Indian subcontinent as well as other parts of Asia and Africa. Although the visits were planned in advance after prior discussions, the scope of learning and activities was spontaneous and led to a **rich exchange through lively question-and-answer sessions** before and after the dyeing activities.

Suzuki san, along with his colleagues, allowed the TIAS 2.0 students to partake in the **vital process** of aizome, where the **leaves plucked from the farm were being stored and fermented**, and working towards bringing the produce to its final form, from where it would be converted into the **deep blue dye**. The leaves were still rather fresh, going through the process of a wash, restocking and being compressed on traditional materials, before being left like that for another week. **The students took part in two different sessions of this process over two weeks, as the leaves were left in a cool space indoors away from direct sunlight.**

Sustainability is one of the key learning that was acquired through the sessions at **Suzuki Noen**, as the traditional form of aizome or indigo-dyeing, believed to be going extinct around the world, is making a **remarkable comeback amid growing calls for more sustainable fashion practices**. The creation of artificial colors and dyes nearly pushed the traditional indigo-dyeing practices off the proverbial cliff, and the proliferation of fast fashion has accelerated it with **growing environmental issues such as water pollution**.



However, scientific advancements in the field towards creating a more environmentally-friendly method for producing the dye, such as the one published in the scientific journal **Nature** on the same day as this visit – using "genetically engineered bacteria" – may provide a long-term solution to the process as well. However, the process used at Suzuki Noen indeed shows great care being taken towards **preserving the natural elements around the city and efforts are made to minimize the**

waste materials as a byproduct. Furthermore, indigo is also widely recognized for its **anti-bacterial properties**, sometimes utilized in the medical field.

Another important **learnings** from these sessions were that **sustainable development** was being promoted not only for environmental purposes, but also to **uphold the spirit of community and traditional practices** that date back centuries, which defined a region for many years. An initiative like this has the potential to bring the larger community in the city of Tsukuba, as well as the cities around it, together through ancient practices that have been in danger of being lost over time.



Thank you to the students as well as members of Suzuki Noen who chose to be part of the

experience and discussions. Their enthusiasm, observations and curiosity was critical in understanding the deeper relationship between an ancient practice in the modern world, and how it could foster a cleaner environment by encouraging the local community to make conscious choices with regard to fashion, understand the fragility of the environment around us and a practice that brings people together.

Sincerely Yours,

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