

**◊Valentine's Day◊**

February 14th is Valentine's Day. I confess I've basically forgotten the day since elementary school. In elementary school in Canada, it's common for children to give small cards and chocolates to their friends. Everyone has a little envelope on their desk, and you drop Valentines into your classmates' envelopes anonymously. It's more a popularity contest than anything else – the most popular children have lots of cards, while children with few cards sit sadly alone.

Traditionally speaking, in Canada and other western countries men are supposed to give gifts of cards, chocolate and flowers to their special ladies (If you're not in a relationship, there's no expectation for you to give chocolate to anybody). The tradition got flipped around in Japan due to a translation error by a candy chocolate manufacturer who was promoting the day to sell more chocolate. The same manufacturer tried to make it up later by creating "White Day", a holiday for men to return the favour. In Korea, they've gotten pretty imaginative with this theme, creating a "Black Day" as well for lonely singles to eat jajangmyon (black bean noodles).

Valentine's Day is often accused of being the most commercial of holidays, a holiday promoted generally by florists, candymakers, and greeting card companies in order to make an extra buck, and I have to say I agree with that judgment. That said, I would certainly enjoy getting chocolate, so I'm not going to complain! (Feel free to send me your chocolate this month.)

-Jennifer Ward

◊Niseko CIRs International Culture Event #3: A Brief Introduction to the Tang Dynasty◊

On December 22nd, CIR Yiyang Ke held the third "Monthly International Culture Event" at Asobook Library: "A brief introduction to the Tang Dynasty". The structure of the event was quite interesting. Rather than doing a general overview, Ke focused on interesting historical figures and pieces of poetry in order to paint a more personal and quite intriguing picture of the age. Even those usually uninterested in history were easily enthralled by her presentation, which included "gossip" tidbits of scandals from historical courts. At the end of the presentation there was also an opportunity to enjoy Chinese tea in the traditional way, poured many times over in order to let all the flavour seep through. The event has no doubt left many with the desire to learn more about this interesting time in history.



Children's Valentines from the 90's.

◊The 4th Niseko Winter Music Festival◊

From January 12th to 14th, The 4th Niseko Winter Music Festival was held in Hanazono, Hirafu, and Hilton Niseko Village. The Australian Chamber Orchestra as well as the classical guitarist Yasuji Ohagi were invited to play at three different venues. The program was different each night, covering a wide range of music from various countries. Sunday night was a modern music schedule that differed quite a lot from what some might expect from a Chamber Orchestra. The event was packed past capacity, the room full of people eager to hear the show. According to the Niseko Winter Music Festival Executive Committee, "This year, the number of international visitors saw a distinct increase. The musicians and the ACO staff seemed to enjoy themselves staying in Niseko, too. It is apparent that this unique event has certainly been gaining both local and global recognition."



The Australian Chamber Orchestra performing on Monday, January 14th at Hilton Niseko Village.

◊Niseko CIRs International Culture Event #4: Chess Time!◊

On January 19th, 2013, I held a cultural event at Asobook Library for the first time. The event was focused on teaching beginners the rules of chess as well as a little bit of history of the game. We spent the better part of the time playing the game. We filled the community room with participants, and I was thrilled to see so many people of many ages come to play chess. In Canada, students often participate in school chess clubs, but I knew chess isn't so well known in Japan. I was worried that, like shogi, it might be thought of as an "old man's hobby" that young people would ignore in favour of their DSes or PSPs. I was very happy to be proven wrong. I am hoping to hold regular chess events from now on, so please join us if you're curious at all about playing chess!

-Jennifer Ward

Do you have something to say? Is there a topic you would like us to write about? Feel free to contact us! We are always interested in printing articles from readers!

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