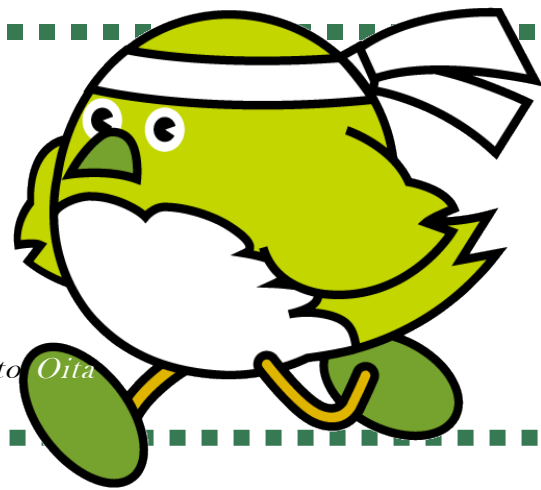


# What's up,

# OITA!

2021 August  
No. 62

*Bringing the latest from Oita, Japan to all those connected to Oita thriving all across the globe.*



## Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games Special: Olympians in Oita Prefecture! Interactions with Local High School Students and More!



The long-awaited Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games finally began on July 23, 2021!

Oita hosted the pre-games training camp for several national teams prior to the games. In this issue, we will be delivering a special on the pre-games training camp for the Portuguese Athletics National Team (FPA).

Prior to the convention of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, Oita Prefecture hosted pre-games training camps for nine countries including Portugal, Fiji and Cameron. The camps were hosted in Oita City, Beppu City and Hita City. Out of an abundance of caution, athletes received PCR testing on a daily basis and lived in locked-in accommodation spaces unopen to the public.

Although face-to-face meetings were out of the question, the Portuguese Athletics National Team (FPA) and twelve local students performing in the Inter-High School Championships 2021 made interaction online. The students received analysis

on videos capturing their daily training, as well as advice on how to deliver better physical performances.

The students took the FPA's advice to heart, and looked forward to attending the Inter-High School Championships with renewed vigour.

After the closing of the Olympic Games on August 8, the Paralympic Games will run from August 24 to September 5. Although the world is still facing restrictions in communication due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the experiences with overseas athletes have made an impression in the hearts of Oita's people. We greatly look forward to seeing more out of these connections in the future.



Portuguese flag with signatures from FPA athletes.



Students intently listening to feedback. Could they be our future Olympians?

Interview

with

# Dye-house Koya Somekai



Mr. Tsujioka & his wife Yukiko in front of their family business.

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I recently spoke with professional dyer and business owner TSUJIOKA Kai. Mr. Tsujioka runs the dye-house Koya Somekai in Taketa City with his family. Koya Somekai occasionally runs workshops. The photos seen in this article are taken at a children-friendly event on Aug 7, 2021.

INTERVIEWER: XIN LAN XIE  
PHOTOGRAPHY: KIM HANA, XIN LAN XIE



**Q:** Please introduce yourself.

**A:** I'm from Fukuoka Prefecture, and it's been eighteen years since I've moved to Oita. I majored in painting at the Oita Prefectural College of Arts and Culture, and decided that I'd stay behind in Oita because it feels so inviting here. I first came across *aizome* (indigo dye) when I was studying painting at college. There were courses in dyeing and pottery, as well as classes on dyeing. I came across the ways of dyeing and *aizome* in these classes and was extremely moved by what I saw.

Since I wanted to have a hand at dyeing myself, I studied it concurrently with painting. When graduation came and it was time to decide what I should do next, I moved to the then Ono Town – now Ono Town, Ono District – in Oita Prefecture. There, I spent my days by cultivating Japanese indigo in various fields and exploring the methods of dyeing on my own according.

I moved to Taketa seven years ago. I now work as a dyer with my wife and daughter and have my own workshop and fields here in Taketa.

**Q: What kind of products and services does your business provide?**

**A:** We make everyday items such as clothing, as well as indoor furnishing items such as *noren* dividers, tapestries and *furoshiki*. Another service we provide is *somenaoshi* – this is where we retouch clothing with faded colours, so that they can be used again as if they were new.



**Q: What made you want to run your own business? Please tell us what motivated you to start your company and the company's history.**

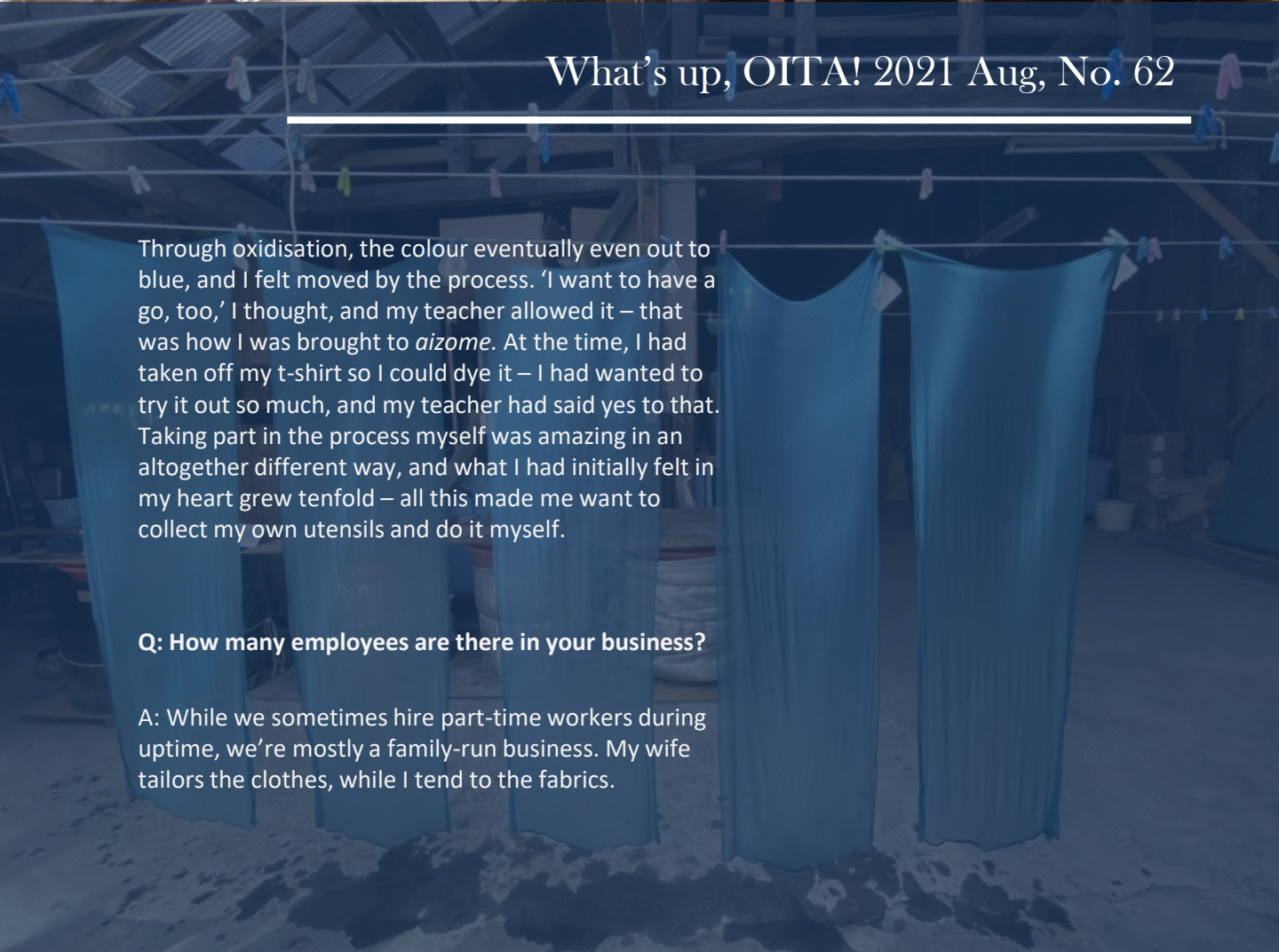
**A:** I began operating my own company because I had wanted to create products that no other person could make, things that are born from me. These include growing Japanese indigo (*Persicaria tinctoria*) in fields, making patterns from my own designs at home, and dyeing with the Japanese indigo I grew in my own fields – these are all things that can't be done by other businesses.



**Q: I learnt from your company's website that you had majored in *Nihonga* ('Japanese-styled paintings'). Were you well-versed in dyeing from that time?**

**A:** Rather than well-versed, it so happened that there was a course in dyeing when I was studying *Nihonga*. Back then, I happened to walk by a teacher performing *aizome*. What I witnessed was the unique characteristics of *aizome* – you begin by immersing white fabric into *aizome* dye, when you pull the fabric up, it first takes a blackish-green hue with a yellow tinge before becoming yellowish-green.





Through oxidation, the colour eventually evened out to blue, and I felt moved by the process. 'I want to have a go, too,' I thought, and my teacher allowed it – that was how I was brought to *aizome*. At the time, I had taken off my t-shirt so I could dye it – I had wanted to try it out so much, and my teacher had said yes to that. Taking part in the process myself was amazing in an altogether different way, and what I had initially felt in my heart grew tenfold – all this made me want to collect my own utensils and do it myself.

**Q: How many employees are there in your business?**

A: While we sometimes hire part-time workers during uptime, we're mostly a family-run business. My wife tailors the clothes, while I tend to the fabrics.





**Q: Tell us about the origins behind the business name *Koya Somekai*.**

A: Koya (lit: 'indigo house') is an old name for dye houses, just like how greengrocers are called 'yaoya' in modern Japan. Dye houses were once popular, quintessential establishments, and there was always one or two in every town in the past. That's because clothes were expensive in the past when everyone wore kimonos. I really like the system of renewing clothing items so they can be worn again instead of getting thrown away. We're a *koya*, in other words, a dye house, and in this dye house there's me, Tsujioka Kai, who is a dyer. I thought that rendering my name as 'kai' in hiragana would lack impact, so I chose to stylise it as 'kahi' following the ways of more archaic Japanese, where 'hi' is read 'i'.

**Q: What's the thing that comes to mind when we mention *Koya Somekai*?**

A: It has to be our organically grown Japanese indigo. That, and *moyosome* (printed dying). The prints are produced as they were in times past, in the same way kimonos were printed. The parts of fabric that are treated with a masking paste remain white – the paste is made from glutinous rice and rice bran.

**Q: So the paste works like masking fluid in watercolour?**

A: That's one way to think about it. We knead, steam and stretch the glutinous rice and bran before applying the mixture onto fabric. Spaces treated with the paste remain untouched, in this way it's similar to masking tape used in watercolour. Because of the ingredients used, the paste falls off when it comes in contact with water. The soiled water then flows directly into the river. Since the paste is made from natural ingredients, it causes no damage to the environment.

**Q: Concerning the location of your business, why did you choose Taketa?**

A: I had received an invitation from Taketa City. While I had used a primary school back in Ono Town, the school was abolished. The site then got repurposed for other projects, so I couldn't use it anymore. Just as I was looking for the next place to go, Taketa City contacted me and said 'do come over if you like'. Thanks to the mayor at the time, I was able to borrow this current location from the city. Taketa is a city that places a lot of work in the cultural sphere, so it's well equipped for anyone who's interested in exploring this field.

**Q: How do you promote your work?**

A: We don't do any promotion in particular, and tend to rely on customers bringing in other customers. Other than that, we also post events on Facebook from time to time.

**Q: What do you place the most effort on?**

A: It has to be the cultivation of Japanese indigo, as well as farm work. I don't use any chemicals when it comes to soil cultivation. It's all done by hand, and neither agrichemicals nor herbicides are used. I pay a lot of attention on not placing burden on the plants. I also put a lot of emphasis on farming in a way that is interlinked, as if drawing a circle. To clarify, even if there are animals like insects and wild boars that cause damage to the crops,

I want to grow my plants in a symbiotic environment that holds a place for all things.

**Q: Before we wrap up, do you have a message for our readers?**

A: We want everyone to know that it's possible to wear a piece of clothing forever. Even if a piece of garment becomes worn-out, it's possible to restore its state through dyeing. Our fondness towards a piece of clothing grows stronger the longer we wear it. I'm of the opinion that it's okay to wear a t-shirt until it becomes ragged and tattered – as the t-shirt becomes frayed, the fabric softens and becomes more fitted to your body shape. I really want people to know that there is a system out there where nice pieces of clothing can be retouched, renewed, and re-worn.

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# Editor's note

## A fond farewell to our readers

Hard as it is believe, I will be concluding my time as the writer and editor of the English edition of *What's up, OITA!*.



Xin Lan Xie, Australian CIR at  
the Oita Prefecture,  
Aug 2018 ~ Sep 2021

Oita is a treasure trove of natural wonders with people who are equally charming. I am grateful to have had explored the nooks and crannies of Oita through writing for this newsletter, and urge you to explore (or re-explore) the prefecture once the world reopens.

While I'm unsure when the next writer and editor will arrive, I hope you'll continue to enjoy future articles once normal publication resumes. Thank you for your readership in the past 3 years - it's been a fun working as a CIR at the Oita Prefecture!