

HIGHLIGHTING *Japan*

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ON THE COVER

Revitalizing the Regions

Photo: Ine Tourism Association

JAPAN-AUSTRALIA SUMMIT MEETING AND OTHER EVENTS

On January 18, 2018, Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, held a Japan-Australia Summit Meeting and other events with the Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia, who is making a working visit to Japan. To begin with, a summit meeting (small-group meeting) was held, and following that, Prime Minister Turnbull attended a special meeting of the National Security Council (NSC). In addition, a summit meeting (expanded meeting) was held. The outcomes of the summit meeting were released in a joint press statement.

At the small-group meeting the discussion centered on North Korea. Prime Minister Abe presented his recognition of the situation, which is that North Korea is making progress with North-South dialogue but is continuing with its nuclear and missile development, and so the situation is conversely deteriorating. On that basis, the two leaders shared the view that denuclearization consistently remains the goal, and that there can be no stability in the Asia-Pacific without denuclearization.

At the special meeting (Four Ministers' Meeting) of the NSC, a broad-ranging discussion took place that centered on future Japan-Australia security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, including policies for Japan and Australia to make greater contributions to the peace and stability of the region by further deepening their close security cooperation as "special strategic partners" that

share fundamental values and strategic interests. It was confirmed that Japan will deepen collaboration and cooperation with Australia in order to realize the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy.

The two leaders discussed bilateral cooperation and regional affairs.

Prime Minister Abe expressed his recognition that advancing security and defense cooperation between Japan and Australia will directly contribute to the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific region. Additionally, Prime Minister Abe expressed his intention to strengthen both the quality and quantity of joint exercises involving Japan and Australia, based also on his visit of Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) Camp Narashino with Prime Minister Turnbull on the morning of the day the summit meeting was held, and Prime Minister Turnbull showed his concurrence. The two leaders shared the view that they will aim to conclude negotiations that are currently taking place between Japan and Australia on an agreement to facilitate mutual visits by the two countries' defence forces as promptly as possible.

The two leaders highly appreciated the concrete progress being made with Japan-Australia innovation cooperation, including the brown-coal hydrogen project and the utilization of quasi-zenith satellites, as well as cooperation between Japan and Australia in the fields of energy, including liquefied natural gas (LNG) and agriculture, and they shared the view that they will further promote collaboration. In addition, the two leaders shared the view that Japan and Australia will cooperate for the success of the 2019 Rugby World Cup and the



The Japan-Australia Summit Meeting

2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, and will strengthen people-to-people exchanges through these events, including at the regional level.

The two leaders confirmed that Japan and Australia's approaches in the Pacific Island countries region are aligned, and shared the view that Japan and Australia will cooperate closely for the success of the Eighth Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting (PALM 8) in May this year.

The two leaders appreciated the progress with trilateral and quadrilateral cooperation among Japan, Australia and the United States, Japan, Australia and India, and Japan, Australia, the United States and India, along with sharing the view that collaborations will continue.

The two leaders confirmed they will collaborate closely on signing and bringing the TPP into effect promptly. In addition, with regard to the RCEP, the two leaders confirmed they will continue to collaborate closely in order to realize a high-quality agreement.

Prime Minister Turnbull raised the issue of whaling. Prime Minister Abe touched on Japan's position, and expressed the view that efforts should be made to ensure that the whaling issue does not have a negative impact on the favorable bilateral relationship as a whole. Prime Minister Abe requested that excessive obstructive behavior at sea is prevented, and that effective responses are taken.



The special meeting of the National Security Council (meeting among four ministers)

Revitalizing the Regions



“I believe that Japan must succeed in its initiatives as the leader in the transition to a super-aging society and deliver its experience of the nationwide spread of regional revitalization appropriately to the rest of the world.”

So says Hiroya Masuda, a member of the Council on Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalizing Local Economy.

In this month’s Feature, we take a look at some of these initiatives, from child care support and educating young leaders to agricultural reform and innovative tourism programs.

Hiroya
Masuda

Essential Points for Regional Revitalization

HIROYA Masuda, a visiting professor at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Public Policy, is a member of the Council on Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalizing Local Economy which has been established under the Japanese government Headquarters of the same name. We asked him about Japan's vision for regional revitalization.

What is the background to the policy of promoting regional revitalization?

There is a huge demographic shift in the background of regional revitalization. The population of Japan entered a period of decline in 2008. Regional revitalization is aimed at alleviating the exhaustion of regional economies caused by the population decrease and getting the economies back on their feet.

The provinces will be lacking in labor force to a considerable extent if things stay the way they are at present, because the population is not decreasing uniformly across Japan. The migration of young people from the provinces to Tokyo to enter schools and secure employment is progressing at a rapid pace. Similar conditions are also emerging in other large cities in Asia. This phenomenon may be part of urbanization, but we must face it with an appropriate sense of crisis.

Based on this awareness, the government developed a comprehensive strategy in October 2014. A range of initiatives have spread over the last three years under the five-year plan. But this is not an easy problem for which results can be produced in five years. We must continue our policies for a long time by reviewing our strategies. We have just started on the first stage.

To what points does the Council on Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalizing Local Economy attach particular importance?

The first point is focusing policies on the members of the younger generation and providing stronger support for efforts to make learning and working easier for them. In other words, we are attempting to rebuild a cycle through which the members of the younger generation earn an income, have children and pass the baton to the next generation. The total fertility rate is at a particularly low level of 1.24 in Tokyo, where our population is concentrated. Keeping in mind that this rate is below the national average of 1.44, and is the lowest in Japan, taking ever solid measures to address the falling birthrate, such as eliminating nursery waiting lists and establishing consultation desks with the rate in mind is also essential.

The second point is to equip the provinces with attractive places to work and generate flows of people moving from Tokyo to the provinces. This is the most important point.

The third point is to introduce policies for improving productivity and raising growth potential continuously to address the second point. In other words, the point is to further promote the industrial revitalization that is now underway throughout Japan.

What are the key points for revitalizing industries under the population decrease?

These points lie in increasing employment for the members of the younger generation and productivity enhancement with the use of AI (artificial intelligence) and robots, for example. I think that a period of population decline is ideal for

reviewing the industrial structure and focusing on productivity enhancement. A decrease in the working-age population and an increasingly severe labor shortage will force us to reconsider our traditional ways of working, in particular. There used to be a feeling that robots would take jobs away from humans, but activities for exploring a range of possibilities, such as the introduction of robots to control initial costs, are now strengthening. I believe that Japan is in a position to be a leader in trying out various ideas because it was the first country in the world to move into the stage of a super-aging society.

This challenge will be instructive to not only parties in Japan but also countries in Asia and areas beyond. It will also provide Japan with another opportunity to earn profits by exporting systems and structures if it succeeds.

Expectations for the members of the younger generation are great, aren't they?

Members of the younger generation are fearless when it comes to introducing AI and robots to their lifestyles. They abound in ideas as well. I think that leaving how to shape the future society up to their ideas and supporting them resolutely will be the right thing to do. I believe that society evolves in this way.

It is better to attach priority to systems that make the most of young people's flexible thinking about businesses in the sharing economy than to worry about the poor sales of goods in the age of the sharing economy. I believe that the government will face a test in terms of how to develop a system for providing support without meddling in young people's ideas too much.

Tell us about the possibilities and courses of action that are anticipated to expand from now on.

Provincial cities have problems, such as difficulties involved in developing new businesses, generating jobs and even moving. But people who find Japan's attractiveness in such provinces,

book private guesthouses on the Internet and visit Japan have been growing in number in recent years. We are living in an age when those on the visited side can deal with such visitors using a smartphone. I think that local governments should leave visitor reception to individuals who are sensitive to those changes if they are there. I believe that changes based on ample ideas will occur if they do so.

For example, Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples, regional performing arts and festivals in all regions are attractive content that Japan can offer. There are harvesting experiences and fresh local dishes at farmhouses in the harvesting season as well. We are living in an age when visitors from overseas will be able to deepen their understanding with automatic translations on their smartphones if we improve the Wi-Fi conditions in the provinces and think up a few good ways of highlighting this content.

Opportunities for the provinces have been growing in recent years with the increasing number of low-cost flights and international flights to regional airports.

Share your view of the future outlook for regional revitalization with us.

The important thing is to resolutely and flexibly discuss what we need to do to keep local communities alive in the best way for them, because Japan's population structure is going to change significantly.

Our efforts to revitalize the regions are in their fourth year. The foundations for such discussions have been laid, and results have accumulated around the country. Regional revitalization is now in the stage of execution.

I believe that Japan must succeed in its initiatives as the leader in the transition to a super-aging society and deliver its experience of the nationwide spread of regional revitalization appropriately to the rest of the world. □

Interview by HITOSHI CHIBA

Nurturing Leaders to “Create the Future”



Overseas university students and high school students from Tono City come together to exchange ideas, August 2017.

A local initiative to develop human resources in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake is winning national attention as a model for “regional revitalization.”

TAKASHI SASAKI

TONO City, famous throughout Japan as a village of folk tales, is located in the southeastern part of Iwate Prefecture and has a population of approximately 28,000. Tono has the same kind of issues as many other regional cities, such as a declining birthrate, a high percentage of senior citizens and a declining population. In April 2014, a place for developing human resources called “Create the Future College in TONO” (hereafter, College) opened to address these issues.

Fuji Xerox Co., Ltd., which has its head office in Tokyo, established the College in collaboration with Tono City.

Kunishi Higuchi, office manager of the Innovative Revitalization Group, Fuji Xerox and representative director of the College, recalls events at the time. “The incentive to build the College arose in the aftermath of the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake of 2011. Along the Sanriku coast and other places where the damage caused by the tsunami was significant,

around 4,000 of our multifunction devices that had been delivered were swept away by the tsunami, and an urgent response was required.”

Seven staff members were dispatched from the company’s Innovative Revitalization Group to provide support on the ground, with one of the support bases being Tono City, situated inland about 30 km from the Sanriku coast.

“As our staff members assisted in the recovery, they listened to the stories told by the local people and understood they faced a huge challenge for the future of Tono City, which had escaped serious



Create the Future College in TONO is based in a renovated middle school that had fallen into disuse.

All photos: Courtesy of Fuji Xerox Co., Ltd.

People from all walks of life discuss the topic of “life after retirement” in Tono City, September 2017.

damage from the earthquake. Because there were no universities in or around Tono City and not many places to find work, the young people who would supposedly play a major role in the region in the years to come have to leave their hometowns to further their education or to find a job,” Higuchi explains.

Aside from supporting the recovery, Higuchi and his staff members came up with the idea of “Create the Future Camp in TONO.” The activity started the year after the earthquake disaster. Around fifty people, university students, researchers and company employees from within Iwate Prefecture and metropolitan areas as well as Tono City residents, gathered together in old farmhouses and other facilities in Tono City to freely discuss the future of the city using Fuji Xerox’s unique communication method.

“The goal was to find the real issues facing Tono and to come up with creative ideas for solving those issues through a free exchange of opinions by people with different backgrounds.

As the activity continued for just over a year, there was an increased understanding of the issues and also an increased desire to solve those issues among the local people. Through the cooperation of Tono City, the College, established in a disused middle school, became a reality.

At present, people from industries, government and academia, mainly local residents, have visited the College, and seven major programs in three categories of interaction, living and culture, and industry creation have been carried out.

There are training projects to identify issues, the principal objective of which is the development of regional leaders, and in three years since it opened, a cumulative total of about 14,000 people have studied at the College.

The major goal of the College is, through these programs, to discover and develop people who will lead regional revitalization, and get actual projects up and running.

In August 2016, the University of Tokyo Innovation Summer Program (TISP) was held at the College. In this program, students from the University of Tokyo and university students selected from



around the world lived with local high school students from Tono City, and together learned about the city, discovered its charms and generated ideas for regional revitalization.

“The College started as a part of Fuji Xerox’s reconstruction activity, but it was turned into a general incorporated association in the third year after its establishment, and our aim is sustainable management where we can become independent and not have to rely on temporary subsidies.

For that we above all need a relationship of trust with the people of the region who are contributing to its operation. In order to be able to continue our activities independently and to generate real results in the future, it will be even more important to expand paid programs.”

Around four years have passed since the opening of the College, and as the College becomes a deeply connected part of the local community, collaborations with different kinds of stakeholders other than Tono City have started to arise, thereby generating a set of common values.

The College has partnered with industries, government and academia on the concept of “learning through interaction” and will address broader issues including development of human resources, child-care support, area management and original industry creation in the future.

There are many other examples of addressing issues faced by the region, but the “Tono model” is raising people’s expectations and attention as it is proving that human resource development could open the way to the future. ■

Changing Agriculture

Amnak Co. has restored about 9 hectares of dormant farmland in the Noza area of Yabu.
Photo: Courtesy of Yabu City



As a National Strategic Special Zoneⁱ, Yabu City in Hyogo Prefecture is introducing unprecedented agricultural reforms as it strives to establish a model for the sixth industrialization of agriculture.

MAO FUJITA

YABU, its population about 24,000, is located in northern Hyogo Prefecture which is much prone to heavy snowfall and depopulation. The city estimates that the population will shrink to less than 10,000 by 2060, 47.4% of which will consist of senior citizens. Facing the issues of an aging agricultural workforce and the spread of abandoned farmland, Yabu applied to become a National Strategic Special Zone, a national framework that promotes economic and social structural reforms, centering on agriculture as the key industry of the city. In May 2014, it was designated as a reform base for agriculture in hilly and mountainous areasⁱⁱ. Through this, the requirements for corporations to participate in agriculture were greatly relaxed. Yabu restores abandoned farmland, implements revolutionary agriculture with high added value for agricultural produce and food products, and establishes an agricultural model that has an

eye to exporting agricultural products, collaborating with private corporations which have working capital and management know-how.

At first when Yabu was designated a National Strategic Special Zone, some local farmers had misunderstood the initiative, thinking that the state would liquidate the abandoned farmland, and were worried that the private corporations engaging in agriculture would withdraw from agriculture once their business did not go well. Regarding this unprecedented undertaking by the city, Norimitsu Tani, the head of the Division for the National Strategic Special Zone and Regional Revitalization, General Planning Department in Yabu says, “We received some severe feedback from both citizens and outsiders. Yet, we saw it as an opportunity for changing agriculture in Yabu, so we kept negotiating with local farmers and citizens. Thanks to this effort, citizens and the administration are working hand in hand to implement this policy today.”

Under Japanese law, farmland cannot be bought or sold in the same way as general land or buildings, but the law requires the permission of an organization called the Agricultural Commission. Moreover, corporations must meet certain requirements in order to buy farmland. The purpose of the law was

ⁱ The National Strategic Special Zones is a policy that aims to revitalize local economies by bringing in new investments and human resources. This is achieved by offering incentives in the form of relaxed regulations and lower taxes in designated areas or fields to create an environment that facilitates the economic activities of private business actors.

ⁱⁱ The hilly and mountainous areas signify areas between where the plains end and the mountainous areas begin.



to preserve farmland, therefore it raises the hurdle for new entry to agriculture, and has led to increasing abandoned farmland in line with the scarcity of workforce and successors caused by depopulation. When Yabu was designated a National Strategic Special Zone, this removed the hurdle and opened up opportunities for diverse people thinking about taking up agriculture.

At present, thirteen corporations are collaborating with local farmers in Yabu, establishing new agricultural JV corporations or participating in agriculture as a second business initiative, thus advancing the sixth industrialization business taking care of the production, processing and sales of agricultural products all together (see December 2017 issue, pp. 20-21).

Amnak Co. is a participant from outside of Yabu. It has restored about 9 hectares of dormant farmland in the Noza area in Yabu, and is overseeing the whole process from sake rice production to harvesting and polishing as well as exporting the Japanese sake to Taiwan after branding it in collaboration with a local brewery. According to Tami the local residents have commented, “I would never have dreamed that fields that had been abandoned for ten or twenty years would come back to life and be full of rice plants again” and, “I really hope that the business will succeed so that this beautiful landscape of terraced rice fields can remain.” He adds, “Yabu thanks the corporations participating in agriculture here, and we, as administrators, are also working to provide assistance so that the agriculture can live on.”

Hyogo Nakabayashi Co., a local bookbinder, started growing garlic in both the high- and lowlands in Yabu as a way to level out work volume over the year, dedicating some workers for garlic production in order to deal with its shrinking main business. By

1 An employee of Hyogo Nakabayashi Co. holds bulbs of the company's garlic.

2 An employee of Amnak Co. in the company's rice fields

3 Asakura Sansho, a local specialty promoted by Yabu Partners Co.

Photos: Courtesy of Yabu City (1, 2); Courtesy of Yabu Partners Co. (3)

taking advantage of the rather large differences in temperature in Yabu, it becomes possible to plant and harvest different kinds of garlic according to their best period. Hyogo Nakabayashi is hoping to turn Yabu into a garlic-producing area by making the most of these characteristics and the terrain. They had previously converted one of their bookbinding factories into a plant factory that uses only artificial light to grow lettuce and other foliage plants. This year, they hired a new employee who has just graduated from the agriculture high school in Yabu.

Moreover, Yabu Partners Co., a company 100% financially backed by the city, provides consulting for new corporate participants and cultivates new distribution channels of agricultural products, strengthening the brand name of Yabu. This company has also started supporting the sales expansion of Japanese pepper called Asakura Sansho, a local specialty, winning a strong reputation among overseas chefs after selling it at the Expo Milano in July 2015. As a result, the pepper is now exported to France, Italy and the United Kingdom. The company is also experimenting with the production of mini paprika and Chinese lantern plant for food which are predicted to increase revenue, and recommending them to new farmers.

After being designated as a National Strategic Special Zone, Yabu has revitalized its original local industry and is aiming to become a sustainable agricultural city that can keep on attracting people through agriculture. Yabu will continue its work to create an environment that facilitates agricultural projects by local farmers and corporations participating in the agriculture industry. □



Rows of *funaya*
boathouses line the
shore of Ine Bay
Photo: Courtesy of Ine
Tourism Association

The Lure of a Kyoto Fishing Village

A small fishing village facing population decline is enjoying a revival, drawing on its unique scenery as a tourism resource and uniting its residents in the process.

MAO FUJITA

In the north of the Tango Peninsula, Kyoto Prefecture, lies a fishing village called Ine blessed with an attractive harbor facing the Sea of Japan. Ine is famous for its *funaya* (boathouse) scenery, which blends into the natural surroundings.

The first floor of a *funaya* is used as a boat garage and work space, and the second floor as a living area. A narrow path runs behind the *funaya* on the mountain side separating the *funaya* from the property's main building. Residents living here come and go between the *funaya* and the main buildings.

There are currently about 230 *funaya* forming an unbroken line along the bay, some of which date back to the Edo period (1603–1867). Owing to this unique historical scenery, Ine is the first fishing village to have been selected as one of Japan's Important Preservation Districts for Groups of Traditional Buildings. As such, any house repairs require municipal permission and adherence to strict regulations concerning the use of Japanese roof tiles and lumber. Ine also restricts shops from putting up signboards as a way for the town to jointly preserve the *funaya*.

scenery that blends so well with nature.

Although sporting beautiful scenery, the population of Ine Town, presently around 2,000, has been declining. Wanting to slow the population decline, since taking office twelve years ago Mayor Hideki Yoshimoto has worked to communicate Ine's appeal to the world and draw tourists to the town. Yoshimoto explains, "There is a limit to industries like fishing and farming that require workers and depend heavily on weather conditions. What this town needed to survive was not simply harvesting, but a change in awareness among residents to think about market needs and marketing. I wanted to activate the town's tourism industry as an initiator for that."

In order to increase the settled population, people outside needed to find out about Ine, and Yoshimoto thought the key was tourism.

Yoshimoto began working on branding the town for tourism centering on the *funaya*. He communicated the appeal of Ine's beautiful scenery by having the town join The Most Beautiful Villages in Japan and The Most Beautiful Bays in the World. Moreover, he recruited people from outside the area to communicate online about local products and the *funaya* lifestyle from a new perspective.

Yuuri Ohkubo, originally from Kyushu, moved to Ine in August 2016, and is in charge of publicity at the town hall. She says, "I moved here after seeing a newspaper article recruiting for the Local Vitalization



1



2



3

- 1 Mayor Hideki Yoshimoto (center) with staff from the Local Vitalization Cooperator Squad, Yuuri Ohkubo (right) and Takanobu Mukai (left)
- 2 Ine Tourism Association staff members Jun Ishikura (left) from Taiwan and Kazue Takai (right) from Kobe, Japan
- 3 Shiho Nagahama with her popular Mont Blanc dessert made from sweet potatoes

Photos: Mao Fujita

Cooperator in Ine [overseen by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications]. There's neither a convenience store nor supermarket here, but I don't feel it's particularly inconvenient thanks to Internet services and the support of other residents. More people are moving here, and we have lively socials for new residents who come from all over the place, such as the Kanto region and Taiwan, so I always feel connected to other people."

The town hall works to provide livelihood support to new residents while endeavoring to bring in more new residents and tourists from abroad in the future. The town's Tourism Association has staff that speak English, Chinese (Taiwanese Hokkien, Cantonese) and Spanish.

The town's steady efforts and the rise of SNS in recent years has resulted in an increase in tourists to Ine from within Japan and abroad, with the number of foreign tourists doubling annually for the past three years, led by visitors from Taiwan and Hong Kong. It is not what the townspeople had expected, but turning the small boats in the bay into sea taxis on the suggestion of an overseas student became an instant hit among tourists. The increase in tourism has naturally awoken a spirit of hospitality among the townspeople, prompting residents to suggest walking tours around the town that introduce the lifestyles and history of Ine.

Ine plans to renovate vacant funaya into accommodation for rent by the spring of 2019. Building on this opportunity, the refurbishment of funaya for hospitality purposes is increasing, creating spaces where tourists can experience Ine's sea up close.

Shiho Nagahama is the shop manager of Ine Café, which is run by Sabai, the designated manager of

Funaya Biyori, a tourism and exchange facility in Ine. She says, "I came back here after ten years away and was astonished by how the town's tourism had developed. I make use of my experience as a pastry chef in Osaka and bake cakes here at the town's only café, providing a space where tourists can enjoy the scenery while having a tea break."

Ine has turned its natural appearance as a fishing village into a tourism resource, and its beautiful scenery interweaving traditional funaya buildings with the bay is now visible to the world. Driving this transformation was a leader's passion, the suggestion of an overseas student, and the ideas of new residents of Ine. Welcoming new people has drawn out Ine's appeal to the fullest, and the people of this town on a small bay now gaze out to the wide sea full of hope for the future. ■



A sea taxi returns a group of tourists to the shore.

Photo: Courtesy of Ine Tourism Association

Adventures on Fields of Drifting Snow

Jifubuki tour participants enter the snow field.



Aomori's Drifting Snow Tour is a popular experience with visitors that has been around for thirty years, taking advantage of a troublesome natural phenomenon for local residents called the "Jifubuki" to attract tourists.

KUMIKO SATO

THE Tsugaru region is located in the western area of Aomori, the northernmost prefecture on the main island of Japan, and it is known for heavy snow in winter. Tsugaru is also known as the birthplace of Japanese author Osamu Dazai (1909-1948), whose works attract readers both in Japan and abroad even today. At the beginning of his book *Tsugaru* (or Return to Tsugaru: Travels of a Purple Tramp), Dazai introduces the seven types of snow that fall in the Tsugaru region: *kona-yuki* (powder snow), *tsubu-yuki* (corn snow), *wata-yuki* (cotton snow), *mizu-yuki* (slush), *kata-yuki* (spring snow), *zarame-yuki* (coarse snow), and *kohori-yuki* (ice snow).

Each of the seven types of snow in Tsugaru refers to the subtle differences in the snow's condition depending on the temperature. Besides the seven types of snow, there is fierce Jifubuki drifting snow, a natural phenomenon unique to the Tsugaru region in the middle of winter. Jifubuki refers to a fierce

weather phenomenon involving the hazy scenic effect created – sometimes the view becomes pure white – when fresh snow on the ground is blown upward by roaring winds. In the town of Kanagi, where Dazai's childhood home still stands today, the local people organize Jifubuki tours every winter as part of the unique attractions that enable tourists to dare to enjoy the fierce drifting snow.

Shu Kakuta, who initiated the experience and is now the head of the tour known as Tsugaru Jifubuki-kai, says about the trend, "Over the past thirty years, as many as 13,000 tourists visiting the region have enjoyed our Jifubuki Tours. The tour is rapidly fully booked every time because we only accept up to fifteen participants at a time for security reasons. In recent years, many participants have come from abroad, particularly from tropical regions including Hawaii and Taiwan."

Before launching the experience in his hometown of Kanagi, Kakuta had a job in Tokyo. When he returned home from Tokyo at the time, he says, "The whole town was lacking in energy, as if it was deserted. People in the town had no choice but to endure the fierce weather every winter." Given this situation, Kakuta gradually became fascinated by the idea of trying to find something that might entertain people during the wintertime. In this process, he came to remember that he had once seen a back-shot

All photos: Courtesy of Goshogawara City

photograph of local farm women trudging stoically through drifting snow. It was a picture taken by Ichiro Kojima (1924-1964), a local photographer from Aomori City.

“Heavy drifting snow often paralyze our traffic system. Jifubuki is indeed a troublesome phenomenon for the local people in winter, because it can be life threatening if you get caught in it. On the other hand, it offers a fantastic, beautiful view as expressed in the photo,” Kakuta says.

He initially proposed the tour as an event that would enable people living outside the region to experience jifubuki in Tsugaru, but his idea invited criticism from the local community, who worried that it could contribute to negative publicity for the town of Kanagi. Despite these criticisms, Kakuta’s consistent passion for his idea has finally paid off. The first Jifubuki tours were held in 1988, and they proved to be a huge success, with requests received from all over the country to make them an annual event as soon as the tour was closed for the year.

Many of the participants in the tour have greatly appreciated the rare experience, saying that they were deeply touched by the hospitality provided by the local people with their simple and unaffected personalities and the warm companionship with conversations in the Tsugaru dialect. “What seems useless to the local people could turn out to be something unusually valuable as an experience for people visiting the region. I believe that Aomori Prefecture

still has many latent assets waiting to be developed as tourism resources,” Kakuta says.

The popularity of the Jifubuki tours has spread across the entire Tsugaru region in recent years, with an emphasis on the participants and organizers enjoying the experience together and creating friendships. Jifubuki Tours marked their 30th year in 2017, and they were held in seven locations across the Tsugaru region: Imabetsu, Nakadomari, Hiranai, Asamushi, Goshogawara, Ajigasawa and Kanagi. The number of locations selected reflects the seven types of snow in Tsugaru.

Those who take the tour typically don a baggy *kakumaki*, a type of shawl made out of pure wool, and *kanjiki* (snow shoes made out of bamboo), which are traditionally used by Tsugaru residents in winter. In addition, visitors can enjoy eating local seafood, soaking in a hot spring or other regional delights, depending on the location.

Another popular tourist attraction in the Kanagi area is the Stove Train that runs on the Tsugaru Railway Company line. The Tsugaru Railway Company is a private sector local railway company that was founded in 1930. Even today, a potbelly stove containing burning coals has a spot on the train – the only such example in the world – that runs through the snow field of the Tsugaru plain, which is about a 30-minute ride from Goshogawara Station to Kanagi Station. While enjoying the snowy view out of the window, passengers can sip on hot local sake sold on the train with *surume* (dried squid and cuttlefish) prepared on the stovetop and served as quick nibbles to accompany the sake.

Visitors do not always have the luck of experiencing drifting snow that is perfect for the Jifubuki tour. When the weather is fine, some play with the other participants like children in the snow field; others enjoy being alone in the snow and adopt a philosophical outlook.

Kakuta places the utmost importance on safety. “I leave it up to the participants to make their own way to Tsugaru and book their own accommodation. Getting here must be like a riddle for them and is a big part of the fun,” he laughs. ■



Fun and games
in the snow

Starry Nights

A small village in Nagano Prefecture is running a hugely successful sightseeing experience promising visitors “the best starry sky in Japan.”

TAKASHI SASAKI

NAGANO, an inland prefecture in Honshu filled with mountains ranging from 2,000 to 3,000 meters high, has many popular tourist destinations. Located in one of these in the southern part of the prefecture, Achi Village, which has a population of about 6,600, and its Hirugami Hot Springs have been able to attract tour groups with an experience called Tenku-no Rakuen: Nihon-ichi-no Hoshizora Night Tour (Paradise in the Sky: A Night Tour to the Best Starry Sky in Japan).

In Achi Village, guest numbers at the hot springs, one of the main local industries, had declined continuously for ten years or so. Faced with this major crisis, the village began offering the starlit night tours in 2011.

“Hirugami Hot Springs is a relatively new hot spring area that was discovered in 1973,” says Yuji Shirasawa, president and representative director of Achi Hirugami Tourist Bureau, a joint-stock company established in May 2016. “They have been popular due to their good spring quality and first-rate accommodation. However, there are many hot-spring areas that boast a larger scale and a longer history than the Hirugami Hot Springs, not only in Nagano Prefecture but also in many other parts of Japan. It was obvious that we could not expect the decreasing visitor numbers to recover by merely focusing on the hot springs as a selling point.”

Tenku-no Rakuen: Nihon-ichi-no Hoshizora Night Tour was a plan devised by the people in Achi Village as a way out, with Shirasawa at the center. In 2006, the Ministry of the Environment ranked Achi Village in the top category on its list of places where the darkness of the night sky is ideal for the observation of stars.

The village commenced its starlit night tour at a ski area called Heavens Sonohara on a trial basis in 2011. It was a basic program that simply guided participants to a location where the starry sky was easy to see. However, about 6,500 people took part in the program in its



A visitor on the Night Tour peers at the stars through a telescope.
Photo: Courtesy of Achi Hirugami Tourism Board

first year. This result gave Shirasawa and the others a strong sense of success and prompted them to make the tour more attractive by planning a range of programs, including live performances by musicians, explanations of the starry sky by narrators and lunar surface observation sessions using an astronomical telescope on the nights when the moon is full and the stars are hard to identify. As a result, tour participant numbers reached approximately 150,000 in 2017, more than twenty times the figure six years earlier.

“I was aware that the starry sky over Achi Village is incredible, but I had never imagined that it would lead us to a business,” offers Shirasawa. “But almost all people who live in Japanese cities say that they have never seen the Milky Way in their lives. The beautiful starry sky in Achi Village can release strong emotions in these people that nothing else can replace.”

A range of organizations involved in sightseeing had worked to promote tourism in Achi Village on their own until that point. However, none of them had produced good results. Achi Hirugami Tourist Bureau was established to address the need to integrate them in a bid to revitalize the village as a whole. Needless to say, it is an organization born through the operation of the starlit night tour. The tour not only has increased the number of tourists who visit Achi Village, but also has produced greater economic effects on the village than anticipated because the majority of visitors stay overnight at Japanese-style inns or Western-style hotels within the village and eat in local restaurants at night.

“I consider that nothing about travel is more attractive than strong emotions,” notes Shirasawa. “Unified regional initiatives with a solid sense of speed, such as the one for the starry sky in Achi Village, are indispensable for making the most of potential tourist resources. It is our job to assume this role and pass the attractive aspects of this village as a tourist destination on to the next generation.”

In addition to the starlit night tour, Achi Hirugami Tourist Bureau is putting a range of novel ideas into practice to make Achi Village more attractive, such as predawn ski lift operation in seasons when seas of clouds tend to appear and the commercial launch of an observation terrace, in a bid to enhance the area’s appeal.

It takes about 30 minutes by car to reach the Hirugami Hot Springs from the nearest train station. Achi Village is working to improve convenience for visitors from overseas by preparing direct bus routes for those who travel to the area via rail.

Shirasawa is envisaging close cooperation with neighboring cities, towns and villages that have diverse tourist resources. He believes that such cooperation will make a larger area in the southern part of Nagano Prefecture, which is commonly known as Minami Shinshu, more attractive. Achi Hirugami Tourist Bureau is about to commence initiatives for developing tours and events that will delight all visitors to Minami Shinshu, sharing the essence of the success achieved by the starlit night tour. ■



A Network of Mothers Inspires

2 3

A child care group established by one mother twenty years ago is now spearheading the creation of a society that enables everyone to raise children with ease by actively collaborating with companies and administrative bodies.

KUMIKO SATO

KAGAWA Prefecture, located on the island of Shikoku facing the Seto Inland Sea, is the smallest of Japan's forty-seven prefectures, having a land area of about 1,877 square kilometers. As in other outlying regions of Japan, Kagawa Prefecture is experiencing the trend of weakening social ties in its communities, largely brought about by the concentration of the population in urban areas. Takamatsu City, the Kagawa prefectural capital, is a key location in Shikoku. Many companies headquartered in Tokyo and Osaka have established branches in Takamatsu, and families frequently relocate to the city as a result of job transfers. However, such relocations can make mothers with infants feel isolated in a city with which they are unfamiliar.

The specified nonprofit organization Wahaha Net was established by Emiko Nakahashi, who

experienced difficulties herself when she relocated to Kagawa Prefecture while raising children. She leads social activities that attempt to resolve the concerns and worries of mothers in the area, where territorial bonds have started to weaken.

Nakahashi, the Chairman of Wahaha Net, reflects, "Kagawa Prefecture is my hometown, but it was the first place for me to raise children. Unlike today, the Internet was not widely used at the time, and I had difficulties gathering sufficient information about things I wanted to do."

It occurred to Nakahashi that there must be other mothers who were also having difficulties, so she sought the assistance of her friends to establish Wahaha Net, a child care group organized by mothers, in 1998. "Wahaha" is written as 輪母 in kanji, meaning "a circle of mothers." The first issue of *Oyako DE Wahaha*, a community-based child care information magazine, was published the following year and received a great response. The print run of 2,000 copies sold out instantly, and a further 3,000 copies had to be printed.

If you touch upon the situation surrounding child care at the time, in the wake of the "1.57 Birthrate Shock"ⁱ in 1990, an awareness that society as a whole must support those who provide child care

ⁱ The "1.57 Birthrate Shock" in 1990 refers to the upset over the revelation that the total fertility rate for the previous year (1989) was 1.57, which was lower than the previous lowest value of 1.58 in 1966.

- 1 Mothers sell handmade goods at an event organized by Wahaha Net. The aim of the event is to connect mothers with companies.
- 2 A registered Kosodate (child-rearing) Taxi driver helps a child into the back seat of her cab.
- 3 Parents, expecting mothers and infants gather in a vacant space in Takamatsu City, Kagawa Prefecture under the Wahaha Hiroba program.

Photos: Courtesy of Wahaha Net

and children began to emerge. “Basic Direction of Measures in Support of Future Child-Rearing” plan, also known as the Angel Plan, which was formulated with a view to support balancing work and child care, was drawn up in 1994, followed by the Basic Policy on the Promotion of Measures for Declining Birthrate in 1999.

The number of people who provided the group with support increased gradually, as did the number of those who wanted to place ads in *Oyako DE Wahaha*, and this successfully transformed the publication into a free newspaper after four years. The name was changed from Wahaha (輪母) Net to Wahaha (わはは) Net, “wahaha” being onomatopoeic Japanese for the sound of laughter, when the group received certification as a specified nonprofit organization in 2002.

Businesses that have continued to this day were started in 2003, including Wahaha Mail, which distributes child care information via email for mobile phones, and Wahaha Hiroba, which allows parents and children to get together at vacant stores situated in shopping centers. Wahaha Hiroba, which was established in partnership with shopping centers and local building firms, has implemented pioneering businesses, and it was appointed by Sakaide City in Kagawa Prefecture as a commissioned project in 2004 as part of its regional child care support initiatives.

“When I started out, I found it advantageous that Kagawa Prefecture was small. Moving around was easy, as was data collection such as questionnaires. Every organization is compact, and the distance between myself and the people in key positions, including



Emiko Nakahashi, Chairman of Wahaha Net
Photo: Kumiko Sato

the mayor, prefectoral governor, and presidents of companies, was also small. It was relatively easy to get people to listen to what I wanted to say, and to gain their support. These are the advantages that are unique to a small prefecture,” says Nakahashi.

Wahaha Net established trust in the region and now implements numerous projects commissioned by administrative bodies, including consulting work coaching small and medium-sized enterprises on work style reform, and the planning and creating of awareness-raising publications such as child care booklets written primarily for fathers. It also has numerous successful cases under its belt that it has achieved in collaboration with companies, such as the planning of residential buildings that are easy for children and those who provide child care to use in collaboration with condominium developers.

In particular, the Kosodate (child-rearing) Taxi, which was developed with a view to making taxi services more accessible for expectant and nursing mothers as well as young children by requiring taxi drivers to attend a lecture class, received a large amount of positive feedback from users when a trial was carried out by a taxi company based in Takamatsu City. The number of taxi companies that wish to be member companies of the service has since increased. The service is now managed by the National Kosodate Taxi Association, a general incorporated association that became independent from Wahaha Net. The number of registered taxi companies throughout Japan now exceeds 150.

The core activities of Wahaha Net remain those based in communities. The focus is given to the development of environments that allow everyone to raise children with ease. They play the role of establishing ties between administrative bodies, companies, and residents in partnership with the relevant partners, or by providing support themselves.

“All businesses that we are involved with today were prompted by mothers we met face to face and their concerns,” says Nakahashi.

The activities of Wahaha Net indicate the importance of painstakingly collecting even the smallest opinions expressed within communities. ▀



Hot-Spring Cures for All

Blessed with a beautiful lake and prolific hot springs, Semboku City, Akita Prefecture, has revived a tradition called *toji* (hot spring cures). The city is now promoting health tourism to hot springs visitors from Japan and overseas.

KUMIKO SATO

LOCATED in the central eastern region of Akita Prefecture, Semboku City is famous for Tazawako Lake, surrounded by the glorious mountains and hot springs that dot the area, such as Tamagawa Hot Springs and Nyuto-onsen-kyo Hot Springs Village. The hot springs in Japan



At Tamagawa Hot Springs, visitors can enjoy bedrock bathing outside
Photo: Courtesy of Semboku City

are classified into ten types according to their composition or spring quality. “Nine of the ten types of hot spring are available in the Semboku area,” says Naoteru Odano, Director-General for the Regional Revitalization and Comprehensive Strategy, Semboku City. “Visitors to the area can enjoy many different types of hot springs without going anywhere else. That cannot be found in other areas.”

Since the 1970s, Semboku City has promoted green tourism, which means staying at private facilities, such as farmhouses, and experiencing nature and the lifestyle in farming and mountain villages. Users of such facilities were mainly schools, aiming for education in the beginning. Recently, people of all ages including foreign tourists have started to enjoy the healthy meals and mountain hikes offered by green tourism based on the increased awareness of health. In view of this trend, Semboku City established the Council on Promoting Next-Generation Healthcare Industry in 2017. Locals, such as the managers of hot spring facilities, food suppliers and medical experts have taken part in the Council and have started proposing and examining health tourism, adopting balneotherapy.

There is an ancient tradition in Japan called *toji*, which involves staying in hot-spring areas to take baths, drink spring water and relieve

A Taiwanese traveler (right) receives health counseling from a Taiwanese doctor (center) and Japanese authorized balneotherapeutic doctor (left).

Photo: Courtesy of Semboku City



accumulated fatigue.

“Agriculture was the main industry in this area,” says Odano. “Farmers here once shared the custom of taking hot-spring cures in the off-season. They knew from experience that soaking in hot springs relieves fatigue and improves the immune system. These days, few people practice toji, but we would like more people to rediscover its merits.”

Semboku City hopes to promote the health of its citizens and establish a new healthcare industry for tourists by preventing lifestyle-related illnesses and improving health based on a modern version of toji, which combines effective exercise, healthy meals and balneotherapy in an abundant natural environment.

Plans are still being examined by the Council on Promoting Next-Generation Healthcare Industry, but several projects for Semboku citizens have already been launched. One is exercise programs in a municipal hot-spring swimming pool. Such programs have started to show their effects on the citizens that follow them continuously, including a decrease in their body fat ratio.

The system of Hot Spring Bathing Masters certified by the Semboku City Balneotherapy Research Society is another project already in progress.

“The system is aimed at deepening citizens’ understanding of hot springs and promoting safe bathing. Thirty-four citizens who have taken courses offered by the city office have been certified as Hot Spring Bathing Masters so far,” says Odano. “Each year the number of visitors from overseas is growing at hot spring areas in Semboku City. We would like the Hot Spring Bathing Masters to work energetically as concierges in the future, explaining the medicinal benefits of hot springs and the proper way to bathe to tourists from overseas who have never soaked in hot springs.”

On the other hand, Semboku City is facing a problem of a shortage of medical doctors. Many people with various problems visit Tamagawa Hot Springs, which boasts the largest flow from a single fountainhead in Japan at 9,000 liters per minute. These people have expectations for its curative properties based on the fountainhead temperature of 98°C,

strong acidity at a pH of 1.2 and peculiar spring quality containing minute quantities of radium. Nurses are on call on a full-time basis at the spa facilities in Tamagawa Hot Springs. However, they are not allowed to provide medical treatment. Visitors have to be transported to a hospital two hours away by car in cases of emergency.

In 2016, Semboku City was designated as a national strategic special zone for regional revitalization where various deregulatory measures are allowed. The deregulation includes a change that enables foreign medical practitioners to work at clinics taking advantage of the advanced clinical training system, not just the designated hospitals to which foreign medical doctors are permitted to provide medical treatment as medical practitioners. This is aimed at facilitating international exchange in the field of medicine and enhancing a sense of relief on the part of foreigners who visit the hot springs in the area. As an experiment, Semboku City invited a medical doctor from Taiwan in June 2017. He offered health counseling services with a Japanese authorized balneotherapeutic doctor to visitors from overseas at a bathing advisory office at New Tamagawa Hot Springs.

“Semboku City signed a partnership agreement with Taipei City because Tamagawa Hot Springs and Beitou Hot Springs in Taipei City are the only two places in the world where hokutolite containing radium is produced,” says Odano. “Exchanges between medical doctors in Japan studying balneotherapy and their counterparts in Taiwan realized the latest health counseling services.”

Semboku City has revived the once-flourishing tradition called toji by updating and commercializing the practice to suit the times. Semboku City is aiming to transform itself into a destination for the latest in balneotherapy through various initiatives, including deregulation and ambitious exchanges at home and abroad. ■

COSMIC-RAY PARTICLES SHED LIGHT ON PYRAMID'S SECRETS

A team of Japanese researchers has discovered a large and hitherto unknown void in a mystery-shrouded pyramid in Egypt.

HIROSHI SAKURAI

THE Great Pyramid of Giza, also known as Khufu's Pyramid, is estimated to have been built between 2580 and 2560 BCE. Having a base of 230 meters and standing 139 meters tall, it is the largest of Egypt's stone constructions.

Despite the discovery of the King's Chamber, Queen's Chamber, Grand Gallery and other features such as corridors and shafts, the precise internal structure of Khufu's Pyramid and its method of construction remain a mystery. In 2015, a joint international research project dubbed ScanPyramids was launched in a bid to reveal the secrets of the Khufu and three other pyramids. In the project, research institutions from Egypt, France, Canada and Japan

are investigating the pyramids using world-leading non-invasive technologies.

The core technology of the project is Nagoya University's cosmic-ray muon radiography, which uses muons, elementary particles that are continually falling to Earth, for imaging the internal structure of an object.

"Normally, non-intrusive internal examination of a human body or an object is conducted using X-rays. However, X-rays cannot penetrate an object that is 1 meter or more in thickness. Muons on the other hand can pass through even rock more than 1 kilometer thick. Using muons, we can image the inside of a huge structure, such as a pyramid, just like X-ray imaging," explains Kunihiro Morishima, Designated Assistant Professor at the Institute for Advanced Research, Nagoya University.

Attempts to use muons to image the inside of a large object have been made since the 1960s. However, high-resolution image data could not be obtained because muons themselves were difficult to detect. Nagoya University developed an automatic reading device combining a microscope and a computer as a new method of physical analysis to replace visual inspections made using a microscope. By increasing the processing speed of this device, the team opened up the potential for practical application of cosmic-ray imaging that makes use of the high resolution offered by nuclear emulsion film, a

Khufu's Pyramid



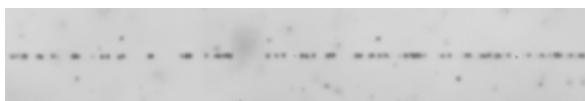


high-precision muon detector.

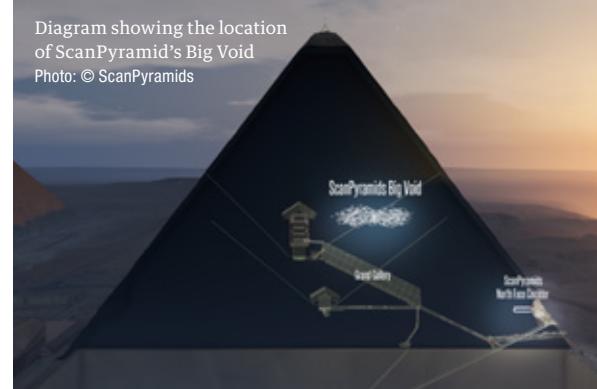
A nuclear emulsion film is a radiation detector in the form of a thin sheet. It is a transparent plastic sheet with both surfaces coated with a 0.07-millimeter-thick emulsion layer. The film can be placed anywhere because it is lightweight, compact and does not need a power supply.

When muons pass through a nuclear emulsion film, they leave tracks on the emulsion layer. An almost constant number of muons reach the ground from all directions with an almost constant directional distribution. Placed in a monitoring point, a nuclear emulsion film permits recording of a 3D image of tracks showing how many muons have reached it and from which directions. By reading the image or tracks with the Hyper Track Selector, a device that was developed by Nagoya University, the internal structure of the object located in the direction from which the muons came can be shown three dimensionally. By using this technology, Nagoya University has succeeded in imaging the inside of a volcano, a nuclear reactor and other objects.

“Because of its compact size, a nuclear emulsion film can be placed anywhere, which is its advantage. Microscopic devices have improved in terms of both resolution and processing speed, so we can see clear



Hyper Track Selector photograph of muon tracks recorded on a nuclear emulsion film



images quickly,” says Morishima.

The team led by Morishima began to observe muons in Khufu’s Pyramid as part of the ScanPyramids project in 2015, placing nuclear emulsion films side by side in various configurations covering a maximum of 8 m² on the floor of the Queen’s Chamber. An analysis of approximately 11.0 million muons, recorded on a total of 1.8 m² of nuclear emulsion film included in the above, indicated that a huge and hitherto unknown void more than 30 meters long appeared to exist approximately 40 to 50 meters above the Queen’s Chamber, or 60 to 70 meters above the ground. In response, the High Energy Accelerator Research Organization (KEK) of Japan and the French Alternative Energies and Atomic Energy Commission (CEA) made observations using their own methods and validated the finding.

The finding was published in the British science journal *Nature* in November 2017 and received an enthusiastic response from all over the world.

“We have yet to identify the shape of the void. Moving forward, we will place the nuclear emulsion films in other parts of the pyramid, such as along the Grand Gallery, to obtain a detailed shape of the void three dimensionally,” says Morishima.

Determining the shape of ScanPyramid’s huge void will be an excellent clue in trying to find the purpose for which the chamber was made in addition to explaining how the pyramid itself was built. There are great expectations for the analyses to be made in the future. ■

Building Bridges through Poetry

Poet, man of letters and woodblock artist Peter MacMillan from Ireland circulates information about the heart of Japan through his translations of Japanese literature.

HITOSHI CHIBA



Peter MacMillan

PETER MacMillan lives in Tokyo. Bamboo is planted in the bare ground at his house, which is also his atelier. When you go through the wooden gate, you can see a water harp pot.ⁱ It exudes a quiet ambience that gives the sense of a Japanese atmosphere.

MacMillan was born and raised in Dublin, Ireland. He studied literature and philosophy at the National University of Ireland and graduated at the top of his class. He came to Japan by chance in 1987, and since then he has spent thirty years here; more than half of his life.

MacMillan says with a smile on his face, "When I was 28 years old, I decided to come to Japan to work as a university lecturer.

I decided to enjoy having adventures in Japan, which I knew nothing about back then." After graduating from the National University of Ireland, MacMillan went to the United States and became a visiting researcher at Princeton University, Columbia University and the University of Oxford. At Columbia University, MacMillan studied under Professor Donald Keene, who is a Japanese literature researcher. After coming to Japan, MacMillan taught philosophy at the University of Maryland, University College, Japan School. He also taught English and British and American literature at Kyorin University and worked as a poet, publishing collections of poems.

When MacMillan was unable to

decide between staying in Japan and returning to Ireland at the age of 40, he decided to translate Japanese collections of poems into English. He embarked on the English translation of *One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets*ⁱⁱ and published *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each* in 2008. Professor Keene evaluated this work highly, and the translation won the Donald Keene Center Special Prize for the Translation of Japanese Literature and the Special Cultural Translation Prize of the Japan Society of Translators. This achievement helped MacMillan to overcome his indecision and led him to decide to be a bridge-builder between Japan and the world. Following this, in 2016, he published the English translation

All photos: Yuichi Itabashi

i. This is a type of Japanese garden ornament that was invented in the Edo period (1603–1867). You can enjoy the echoes of the sound of water drops that drop into a hollow bowl buried underground close to a water bowl.

ii. This is a collection of poems by 100 poets compiled by Fujiwara Teika (1162–1241), a major poet in the Kamakura period (1185–1333).

of *The Tales of Ise*, a collection of *waka* poems from the early Heian period (794-1185); in 2017, he published *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each*. MacMillan continues his translation activity with a focus on *waka*, 31-syllable Japanese poems.

His activity was highly recognized and in 2017 he was invited as a translator in residence to “NIJL Arts Initiative: Innovation through the Legacy of Japanese Literature,” a project by the National Institute of Japanese Literature (NIJL) of the National Institutes for the Humanities (Inter-University Research Institute Corporation) to share Japanese classical works that have been handed down from generation to generation for more than a thousand years with researchers all over the world, which made him even more determined to be a bridge-builder between Japan and the world.

MacMillan finds it very difficult to translate Japanese and Japanese classics, such as *waka*, into English. It is frequently the case that *waka* have no subjects, and one word has multiple meanings. As a result, each poem has a complicated dual structure, which makes it extremely difficult for MacMillan to express the intentions of the poets in English. But MacMillan says, “Because *waka* have no subjects and are ambiguous, they enable poets to express profound emotions. This made me aware of the delicateness and attractions of the Japanese language and the attractions



of *waka*.

MacMillan also discovered the differences in an aesthetic sense.

He says, “Japanese people have the aesthetic sense that because beauty is short-lived and fragile, it is beautiful. Because this is completely different from the Western aesthetic sense, it was a major discovery for me.”

MacMillan’s discovery was made on the basis of the following two *waka* poems in *The Tales of Ise*, which he translated into English: *Yononakani taete sakura no nakariseba, haru no kokoro wa nodoke karamashi* (If there were no cherry blossoms in the world, my heart would be calmer in spring) and *Chireba koso itodo sakura wa medetakere, ukiyo ni nanika hisashi karubeki* (We find the cherry blossoms so beautiful because they fall. Nothing lasts eternally in this sorrowful world, does it?) The former says that in the spring, we are worried whether the cherry blossoms will bloom, and when the cherry blossoms bloom, we are worried that they will fall. The latter says that there is nothing eternal in the world, and that the cherry

blossoms are wonderful because they fall.

MacMillan says, “The aesthetic sense and spirituality that you should love the world because it is short-lived and fragile still represents the spirituality of the Japanese people.”

MacMillan’s efforts as a bridge-builder between Japan and the world go beyond the English translation of classical literature. He named himself “Seisai” after Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), whom he reveres, and produces woodblocks of *Shinfugaku sanjurokkei* (“Thirty-Six New Views of Mount Fuji”). He has also produced an English version of a card game called *karuta*ⁱⁱⁱ featuring *One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets*, and organizes world competitions. In the future, MacMillan will publish the revised translation of *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each* and will also publish a book about Mount Fuji, which is described in Japanese literary works from *Man'yoshu*^{iv} to contemporary works. MacMillan is committed to expressing the spirituality of Japan to the world with a range of approaches. ■

iii. This is a card game where players divide the top part of 5-7-5-7-7 poems, 5-7-5, from the bottom part, 7-7, listen to the top part that is read aloud, receive the cards for the bottom part and compete based on the number of cards they win.

iv. This is the oldest Japanese collection of *waka* poems, compiled in around the eighth century. It includes 4,536 poems composed by many men and women, from the Emperor to the general public.

Visualizing the Bus Business

A bus company in Saitama Prefecture is helping to improve bus operations in Vientiane, the capital of Laos.

HIROSHI SAKURAI

BASED in Kawagoe City, Saitama Prefecture, Eagle Bus Co., Ltd. has attracted much attention for its efforts to successfully revitalize the regular scheduled bus business.

Eagle Bus has positioned courtesy buses and sightseeing buses at the center of its operations based on one of its core corporate principles, which is promoting the company's contributions to the public through business. In 2006, Eagle Bus entered the regular scheduled bus business, taking over unprofitable routes from a leading bus company that had given up on them. To turn the business around, Eagle Bus equipped these scheduled

buses with GPS and infrared sensors to collect various data such as the numbers of passengers getting on and off at the respective bus stops and the state of operational delays, and conducted a questionnaire survey of the bus users. Then, using



Masaru Yajima, president of Eagle Bus Co., Ltd.
Photo: HIROSHI SAKURAI



A regular scheduled bus supplied by Japan in Vientiane, Laos
Photo: Eagle Bus Co.

software they developed in house, they analyzed the collected data, reorganized the bus timetables, optimized the locations of the bus stops and modified the route operations as well. Through these steps, Eagle Bus reduced costs and increased the number of bus users at the same time. The company was able to improve its income and reduce its expenditure for the deficit-ridden bus routes as a result.

"You can reform the regular scheduled bus business by visualizing matters such as bus operation data, passenger demands, costs and improvement processes," points out Masaru Yajima, president of Eagle Bus.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) took note of the bus business improvement carried out by Eagle Bus. JICA launched the Project of Improvement of Transportation Capacity of Public Bus in Vientiane Capital as a technical cooperation project in 2012. Through this Project, the Agency supplied the public bus corporation in Vientiane, the capital of Laos, with forty-two buses in the form of grant aid.

As in other Asian countries, traffic jams had worsened in Vientiane in recent years due to the rapid increase in the numbers of private cars and motorcycles. At the same time, the number of regular scheduled bus users had decreased sharply because of traffic jams and poor-quality bus service. The JICA technical cooperation project was aimed at improving



Buses donated by Kyoto City at a terminal in front of a shopping mall in Vientiane
Photo: Eagle Bus Co.



An Eagle Bus driver explains bus operations to visitors from Laos at the company's depot in Kawagoe City, Saitama Prefecture, November 2017.
Photo: Eagle Bus Co.

the administration, financial affairs and services of the public bus corporation and paving the way for increasing the number of bus passengers and alleviating traffic jams. At JICA's request, Eagle Bus accepted a group of inspectors from Laos in 2014, introduced their improvement method to the group, took part in a traffic seminar held in Laos the following year based on a request from the Laotian side, and gave a presentation there explaining how the company had improved its regular scheduled bus business. The Laos side showed extremely strong interest in this presentation. "I developed the desire to try and see directly whether or not our visualization approach would be effective in Laos," explains Yajima.

As a project under JICA's Support for Japanese SMEs Overseas Business Development program, a Feasibility Survey for the Improvement of Vientiane Capital State Bus Enterprise Infrastructure in Lao PDR was launched in 2014 with Eagle Bus as the primary contractor. Measures for Improvement began in 2016 after the Verification Survey with the Private Sector for Disseminating Japanese Technologies for a Base Operation Improvement System based on one year of research. Eagle Bus equipped forty-two buses with sensors and on-board cameras in September 2016 and began collecting operational data two months later. Using these tools, Eagle Bus found that the public bus corporation did not operate its buses according to the routes and timetables it had set, and that the number of buses operated differed each day. The company also learned that passengers got on and off the buses on the street instead of using bus stops. This practice resulted from the salary system whereby bus drivers were paid according to work quotas. In addition to these points, Eagle Bus discovered that the buses were kept in standby mode for a long time due to an inappropriate

operational plan and that they consumed more fuel than required for the distances covered because the engines were left running idle for long periods of time to cool the bus interiors.

Based on this data, Eagle Bus worked on an improvement plan with the public bus corporation. It changed the bus routes, moved and erected bus stops, shortened bus standby times on routes on which reform was possible, and moved standby areas to shaded locations. Through these measures, fuel efficiency was improved and exhaust gas was reduced effectively. However, improvements in areas such as bus drivers' manners and services were difficult under the existing conditions. City 2 was established within the public bus corporation as an organization in charge of bus operations on new routes in August 2017 with the support of JICA and Eagle Bus for that reason. The new organization introduced Japanese bus services and systems for managing bus operations extensively and began operating twenty-five secondhand buses donated by Kyoto City in December 2017. City 2 also began operating a bus route linking the center of Vientiane with the airport on January 18, 2018. City 2 introduced Japanese-style services on this route, such as greetings by drivers and on-board announcements.

"The new organization is improving regular scheduled bus operations dramatically," observes Yajima. "Reliability and safety are increasing. Passenger numbers are also growing. We are also thinking about making the most of these buses to promote tourism in the future."

Eagle Bus has also been taking part in a bus support project launched by JICA in Cambodia since 2017 as an advisor. The company's concept of making social contributions through its bus business is about to spread to other Asian countries as well. ■



Swish-swish: Thin slices of beef are drawn back and forth through the simmering broth.

FRIENDSHIP AND SHABU-SHABU

Simple yet luxurious, shabu-shabu is communal dining at its finest.

ROB GILHOOLY

BUBBLING merrily away in a cast iron pot is a delicately sweet-and-savory kelp-based *dashi* (broth), into which is dipped a variety of vegetables and paper-thin cuts of beef.

Held between wooden chopsticks, the meat is briefly drawn back and forth through the broth with a “shabu-shabu (swish-swish),” the Japanese onomatopoeic equivalent of which is the name of this simple and delectable hot-pot.

“Shabu-shabu” is one of Japan’s most popular dishes whose most common English translation, “Japanese hot-pot,” seems woefully inadequate – rather like calling “sushi,” “raw fish.”

On the one hand, that’s because of a key ingredient, while on the other hand, it’s down to an important element of “shabu-shabu” culture.

The ingredients – rib-eye beef, *harusame* cellophane noodles, tofu, Japanese leeks, Chinese cabbage and other vegetables, are simple enough, so too the broth in which they are cooked, which is made from nothing more than *kombu* kelp and water.

Shabu-shabu’s main feature can be found in its dipping sauce, which is painstakingly made from ground sesame and combinations of various other ingredients,

which differ from restaurant to restaurant.

“The secret is definitely in the sauce,” says Ichiro Miyake, President of Restaurant Eiraku-cho Suehiro Honten Co. (Suehiro) in Osaka, which is widely known as the originator of shabu-shabu.

“As sesame has a high oil content it can quickly oxidize and the aroma, and taste of the *goma-dare* dipping sauce can deteriorate quickly. That’s why we make a new batch every day. It takes us 10 hours just to grind all the sesame seeds,” Miyake explains, adding that among other ingredients traditionally added to the sauce are rice vinegar and soy sauce, which add to shabu-shabu’s renown as a healthy repast.

Shabu-shabu is a relatively recent addition to Japanese cuisine. It has its roots in a hot-pot from Inner Mongolia known as Xiao Wei Yang that was adapted at a Kyoto eatery named Junidanya in the early part of the twentieth century by using fish instead of lamb as the key ingredient.

That dish kicked off a hot-pot culture in the Kansai region – which includes Osaka, Kyoto, Nara and Kobe – known as mizutaki-nabe, literally “cooked in water hot-pot.”

Shabu-shabu, too, came about from this boom



Fresh broth is added to the pot ready for heating.

At Suehiro, a variety of fresh vegetables, tofu and *harusame* are prepared for cooking alongside the beef.



when Miyake's grandfather was conjuring up innovative ways to use the high-grade beef that formed the cornerstone of the menu at Suehiro, which in those days was a popular steak house.

"He already had the concept for the dish - a mizutaki hotpot that incorporated vegetables, thin slices of Matsuzaka wagyu beef and a sesame sauce, but couldn't come up with a name," Miyake explains.

"One day he saw one of the staff washing hand towels in a large bowl and it reminded him of the beef being drawn through the broth. He was struck by the sound it made. We Osakans love onomatopoeic words and he decided this sounded like 'shabu-shabu.'"

When Miyake's grandfather subsequently explained to his staff what the dish would be called, he was met with incredulous stares and unabashed giggling, he adds.

Yet, within a relatively short time, a long line of curious customers could be seen snaking its way from the entrance of the restaurant, which was established in 1910 and is located close to Osaka Station. One of the restaurant's biggest fans was Japanese woodblock artist Shiko Munakata (1903-1975).

"Rumor quickly spread about this new dish

with a weird name," Miyake says, adding that shabu-shabu was first put on the menu at Suehiro in 1952, the same year Munakata was honored with a prize of excellence at an international print exhibition in Switzerland.

One of the endearing features of the hot-pot culture in Japan in general and shabu-shabu in particular is that it is traditionally cooked in one pot, and the contents shared by those who have gathered to dine - whether that be a group of friends, work colleagues or family members.

And as the meal progresses, relations deepen among those who are gathered, much as the flavors of the ingredients combined with the evaporation of the dashi produce a denser, more pungent broth.

"Since olden times, this has been a feature of hot-pot culture in Japan, whether it be eaten at a restaurant or in the home," Miyake explains, adding that the beef, which is chilled to facilitate ease of slicing, should be left to soften before any shabu-shabu-ing is performed, allowing valuable time to chat and drink. "This hot-pot culture serves an important function, permitting the deepening of friendships and understanding." □

Kinkowan Bay and
Sakurajima

A Taste of Primeval Japan

Known for its spectacular volcanic scenery, unique hot springs and delicious local produce, Kirishima-Kinkowan National Park makes for a unique travel experience at any time of the year.

KENTARO SANO

KIRISHIMA-Kinkowan National Park extends across Miyazaki Prefecture and Kagoshima Prefecture in southern Kyushu, featuring giant calderas formed by past large-scale volcanic eruptions.

Southern Kyushu, where Mt. Shinmoedake and Mt. Sakurajima are situated, has frequent volcanic activity, and eruptions continue to occur even today. The park can be broadly divided into a northern and southern parts. The northern part is known as the Kirishima area and has more than twenty volcanoes of various sizes. The southern part is known as the Kinkowan Bay (or Kagoshima Bay) area, which is centered on Mt. Sakurajima.

Many tourists visit the famous places in the Kirishima area, including the Ebino Highland, Kirishima Onsen hot spring resort, Takachihogawara and Kirishima-jingu Shrine. In the Kinkowan Bay area, people can visit the beach in a closed-off section of Kinkowan Bay, between the Osumi Peninsula and the Satsuma Peninsula, Cape Sata-misaki on the Osumi Peninsula, Mt. Kaimon, Ibusuki hot springs and Mt. Sakurajima, a legendary volcano symbolic of



the area's unique scenery.

Formed approximately 26,000 years ago, Mt. Sakurajima is a symbol of the park, rising 1,117 meters above sea level. This active composite volcano has two peaks, Kita-dake (northern peak) and Minami-dake (southern peak), encompassing 80 square kilometers in total with a circumference of approximately 52 kilometers. Mt. Sakurajima is a major tourist destination that continues to attract visitors from within Japan and abroad, particularly because it offers an opportunity to feel the heartbeat of the earth.

Mt. Sakurajima has experienced major eruptions since its formation. As the name implies ("jima" means island in Japanese), Mt. Sakurajima was originally an island floating in Kinkowan Bay. The massive lava flows from the 1914 eruption created a land bridge between the island and the Osumi Peninsula, located on the eastern side of the bay. The eruption was so devastating that it buried neighboring Kurokami town located to the east of Mt. Sakurajima overnight under ash and volcanic pumice stones.

Haragosha Shrine in Kurokami town has about two thirds of its three-meter-high *torii* (shrine gate) buried beneath the ashes. Later it was named Kurokami Buried Torii, and has since been preserved as a reminder of the devastating eruption that should be passed on to future generations. The sacred structure has been designated as a natural monument of Kagoshima Prefecture.

Takatoge Pass (550 meters above sea level) is





A communal *suna mushi* sand bath



Mt. Kaimon viewed across blossoming *nanohana* field mustard

located to the east of Mt. Sakurajima, and is one of the vista points on the Osumi Peninsula from which visitors can enjoy a magnificent panoramic view of Mt. Sakurajima and Kinkowan Bay. Cape Sata-misaki at the tip of the peninsula is the southernmost point of Kyushu, where many subtropical plants grow along the path. If the weather permits, visitors can enjoy a view of Yakushima, a UNESCO World Heritage Site famed for its ancient cedar trees, as well as Tanegashima, the rocket-launch complex of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA).

Lake Ikeda, a caldera lake located on Satsuma Peninsula, across from Osumi Peninsula, is the biggest volcanic lake in Kyushu. Giant *unagi* (eels) live there. The eels grow up to 1.8 meters long, 60 centimeters at their thickest, and 20 kilograms in weight. Beautiful fields of flowers including bright yellow *nanohana* (field mustard) spread along the lakeshore each January, lending their name to the popular Ibusuki Nanohana Marathon. This is a popular scenic spot among joggers and cyclists.

South of the Satsuma Peninsula is Nishi-Oyama Station – now an unmanned station – Kyushu’s southernmost train station, which has become a pilgrimage site for railway enthusiasts. Many come seeking verification of their visit issued by the Ibusuki Tourism Association.

There is a unique yellow post box at the station, inspired by nanohana, a symbolic flower of the area. It is popular among those wishing to send letters to their loved ones. Nanohana blossoms are at their peak from late December through February. Visitors can enjoy a magnificent view of Mt. Kaimon beyond the fields of flowers, which makes the area a popular spot for photography.

Mt. Kaimon is a volcanic mountain at the

southernmost tip of the Satsuma Peninsula, rising 924 meters above sea level. It is often called “Mt. Satsuma Fuji” because of its resemblance to Mt. Fuji in terms of its elegant conical shape overlooking the sea. From the top of Mt. Kaimon, visitors can enjoy a panoramic view of the renowned places in the Kirishima area in the north and Yakushima in the south. It is also possible to enjoy a bicycle ride on the scenic path that circles the mountain. Ibusuki-onsen Hot Spring is located to the east of Mt. Kaimon. It has remained very popular for decades because of its *suna mushi* sand baths that are difficult to find elsewhere in the world.

Visitors enjoy sand bathing by simply burying themselves in the hot sand on the beach for 10 minutes, long enough for healthy perspiration. Sand baths offer an excellent full-body detox and are known to have a skin-beauty effect, exhibit the effect to improve atopic dermatitis, and cure arthritis and back problems. Past volcanic activity created not only a magnificent landscape and hot springs, subsequent eruptions had an enormous impact on the topography and geology of southern Kyushu, such as the Shirasu-Daichi (pyroclastic plateau) formed by sediment from falling ash and pyroclastic flows accompanied by past large-scale eruptions of Mt. Sakurajima.

Shirasu-Daichi features good drainage. Sakurajima *komikan* (oranges), Sakurajima *daikon* (radishes) and Satsuma *imo* (sweet potatoes) are among the local delights famous nationwide. Satsuma *shochu* (Japanese distilled spirits) made from Satsuma *imo* is very popular and has been designated by the World Trade Organization (WTO) as a geographical indication protection. Enjoy a glass of Satsuma *shochu* while sand bathing in front of Kinkowan Bay on your trip to the park. ■



THE
FLOWERS
OF JAPAN

Pussy Willow

Neko Yanagi

*the warmth —
throwing off their skins
pussy willows*

*Haiku by Hisajo Sugita;
translated by Makoto Ueda*

In this haiku by Hisajo Sugita (1890–1946), the author, out on a walk on a cold winter morning, is moved by the sight of a Japanese willow shrub (*Salix caprea*) breaking into bloom. The skins of the red buds lined up on the plant's long skinny branches have been thrown to one side to make way for the big furry catkins within. *Neko yanagi* (lit. cat willow) is a haiku season word for the (lunar) new year and is a harbinger of spring. The poet Sugita on the other hand seems to value the fluffy catkins for their immediate power to warm the cockles of the heart.

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