



The Challenge of Bringing Japanese Pro-Wrestling to the World

KATSUMI YASUKURA

After living in Japan for over thirty-five years and working in various fields, Dutchman Harold George Meij has taken on the world of Japanese pro wrestling. His dream as the CEO of New Japan Pro-Wrestling is to connect Japan and the rest of the world through pro wrestling—a spectator sport that has evolved into a unique facet of Japan's pop culture.

WHEN Harold George Meij was eight years old, a Japanese business invited his father to work in Japan. He arrived in Japan from the Netherlands and attended middle school, followed by high school in Indonesia, and then spent his college days in the United States. “But I’d always wanted to work in Japan,” he states. “I was always interested in how Japanese people take full responsibility and have the hospitality to help people who are lost, despite not knowing a word of English. The Japanese sense of art and detail—like the way they describe all the various shades of purple, like ‘ancient purple’ (reddish-purple), ‘navy eggplant’ (dusky purple), ‘Kyoto purple’ and ‘iris color’—was fascinating as well. Since I have experience outside of Japan, I thought I could become a bridge between East and West.”

Meij’s career has included work in sales and marketing for drinks, consumer goods and toymakers, and he’s produced major results for each company. “In the foreign business scene, when the boss says to look right, everyone looks right.



©New Japan Pro-Wrestling

2



© New Japan Pro-Wrestling

3



© New Japan Pro-Wrestling

4

- 1 Meiji believes that pro wrestling is a unique part of Japanese culture
- 2 Lots of international fans attended a major pro-wrestling match at the Nippon Budokan in August 2018
- 3 Meeting with female fans of New Japan Pro-Wrestling
- 4 New Japan Pro-Wrestling was formed in March 1972

However, in Japan, despite being the boss, they take in and incorporate the opinions and keep a balance with the workers onsite,” he observes. “Granted, this can cause difficulties at times, but if you manage to get the understanding of those around you, it makes it much easier to create a solid working base. Japanese people tend to be precise about timing, do not leave things incomplete, and aim for perfection, which makes them a powerful force. This is the part of Japanese business that makes it worth the work.”

The next challenge Meiji decided to take on was the pro-wrestling scene. In June 2018, he was appointed as the president and CEO of New Japan Pro-Wrestling. “As a child, I could easily enjoy pro wrestling on TV because it did not require any linguistic knowledge and was a source of great entertainment. Several years ago I began going to New Japan Pro-Wrestling matches as a fan. I accepted this position because I was intrigued by moving from a business of ‘things’ to one of ‘experiences,’ and would be able to use my business skills in a field I find fun.”

Meiji believes that pro wrestling has the potential of becoming just as much a part of Japanese culture as sushi, Mount Fuji and *kabuki* theater. “The strong point of pro wrestling is that it is not just a sport, but rather an encompassing experience. Every time a wrestler does a grand move, they change the atmosphere of the stadium and the crowd cheers for their favorite wrestler. When their favorite wrestlers win, there is a rush of applause, when there are foul moves the fans get angry, and when they lose they cry and get upset.”

Meiji wants to take the Japanese style of pro wrestling worldwide, and he’s been targeting the inbound market as his opening gambit. “We have over 100,000 subscribers on our video channel, and almost fifty percent of them are outside of Japan,” he reports. “When foreign subscribers visit Japan and attend a New Japan Pro-Wrestling match, they tend to share their experience on social media. So that more people get a deeper understanding of the sport and connect with the wrestlers, we put matches up on YouTube, including videos of the wrestlers themselves, their training scenes and videos of matches with English-language versions of the stirring, perfectly-timed announcements made by the Japanese pro-wrestling announcers.”

Pro wrestling is one of Japan’s hidden pop culture gems. As visitors to Japan become more interested in unique experiences, as well as things in Japan, Meiji hopes that pro wrestling will be one of those choices. 