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TOWARD A MULTICULTURAL
SYMBIOTIC SOCIETY

CONTENTS

Features

6

Toward a Vibrant and Symbiotic Society

An interview with Shoko Sasaki, Commissioner of the newly established Immigration Services Agency



12

The Door to Multicultural Coexistence that Halal Initiatives Open

NPO Japan Halal Association is working to increase the number of halal-certified products available in stores and restaurants for the increasing number of Muslim travelers visiting Japan.



8

Living Together as Active Members of the Local Community

Toyohashi City in Aichi Prefecture is working to create a symbiotic society where people of different nationalities live together as active members of the local community.



14

Foreign Professionals Connecting Japan with Vietnam

A precision auto parts manufacturer based in Iruma City, Saitama Prefecture has built close ties with Vietnam and enhanced its reputation through its continuous recruitment of talented Vietnamese engineering students.



10

Removing Language Barriers

A multilingual interpretation service launched by a Peruvian resident of Japan is helping non-Japanese speakers to meet challenges with peace of mind.

4

PRIME MINISTER'S DIARY

22

POLICY-RELATED NEWS “Plastics Smart” Campaign

24

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY A New Weather Radar that Can Forecast Downpours 30 Minutes Before

Also

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16

Fukuoka Incubator Helps Dreams Come True

The city of Fukuoka is drawing in entrepreneurs from Japan and abroad through a generous program of business incentives and subsidies.



20

“Good Morning” in Ten Languages

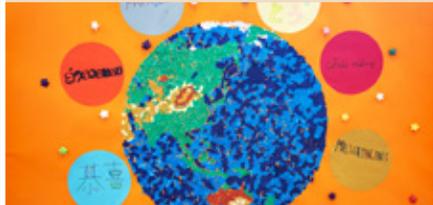
Multicultural collaboration is at the core of the curriculum at Yokohama Municipal Iida Kita Ichō Elementary School.



18

International Café a Popular Lunch Haunt

Non-professional chefs from fourteen countries are bringing variety to the menu and new value to their lives at a café in Minoh City, Osaka Prefecture.



26

MY WAY

Chinese Influencers
Promoting a True Picture of Japan

28

SHALL WE DANCE?

Tsuchie Kodomo Kagura:
The Gods’ Young Entertainers

30

A TRIP BY LOCAL TRAIN

The Enoden: A “Picture Postcard” Railway

THEME FOR JUNE:

**TOWARD A
MULTICULTURAL
SYMBIOTIC SOCIETY**

The number of foreign residents in Japan reached a new record high of 2.7 million at the end of 2018 while the number of foreign visitors also continues to increase, now exceeding 30 million per annum. A range of initiatives are being implemented at both national and local levels to accept, accommodate and integrate foreign nationals for the benefit of Japanese society as a whole.

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ON THE COVER
Toward a Multicultural Symbiotic Society
Photo: Courtesy of Toyohashi City

JAPAN-U.S. SUMMIT MEETING



The Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting

On May 27, 2019, Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, held a Japan-U.S. Summit Meeting with the Honorable Donald J. Trump, President of the United States, who was paying a State Visit to Japan.

In the opening remarks, Prime Minister Abe wholeheartedly welcomed the visit by President Trump and Mrs. Trump to Japan as the first State Guests in the era of Reiwa. In response, President Trump stated that it was his honor to make the first State Call on Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress of Japan in the new era and expressed his gratitude to the welcome by the Japanese people.

The two leaders shared the view that the Japan-U.S. Alliance is stronger than ever before and is now the closest alliance in the world, thanks to the recent measures to strengthen the Alliance including Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security as well as the strong personal relationship between the two leaders. The two leaders also confirmed their determination to continue to further strengthen the unwavering bond between Japan and the U.S. and to lead the peace and prosperity of the region and international community as true global partners in the new era.

The two leaders closely coordinated their policies in light of the recent developments surrounding North Korea, spending adequate time. The two leaders reconfirmed that Japan and the U.S. completely share their position including the need to ensure the full implementation of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions.

Prime Minister Abe expressed his gratitude to President Trump for meeting once again with family members of the victims abducted by North Korea following the

last meeting which took place during President Trump's previous visit to Japan (November 2017). Prime Minister Abe expressed his determination to meet face to face with Chairman Kim Jong-Un towards the resolution of the abductions issue. Prime Minister Abe stated that he would like to meet with Chairman Kim Jong-Un without attaching any condition and talk candidly and frankly. In response, President Trump expressed his full support for Prime Minister Abe's determination.

The two leaders welcomed steady progress of cooperation between Japan and the U.S. towards the realization of a "free and open Indo-Pacific," in sectors including energy, digital and infrastructure. The two leaders reaffirmed their intention to vigorously promote such cooperation towards the realization of this shared vision of Japan and the U.S. hand in hand.

The two leaders welcomed that Mr. Toshimitsu Motegi, Minister in charge of Economic Revitalization, and Ambassador Robert Lighthizer, United States Trade Representative, are conducting discussions in accordance with the Japan-U.S. Joint Statement of September 2018, and shared the view that they will have the two ministers further accelerate their discussions based on mutual trust between Japan and the U.S. to accomplish an early and win-win achievement for both Japan and the U.S.

In addition, the two leaders reaffirmed Japan-U.S. bilateral cooperation as well as Japan-U.S.-E.U. trilateral cooperation to address unfair trading practices.

Prime Minister Abe appreciated President Trump's recent announcement to visit Japan again on the occasion of the G20 Osaka Summit to be held in late June. The two leaders confirmed that they will continue close cooperation between Japan and the U.S. towards the success of the G20 Osaka Summit.



The leaders meeting with families of abductees



Toward a Multicultural Symbiotic Society

“It is important to construct an environment for accepting foreigners to realize a vibrant, symbiotic society in which the Japanese people and foreigners can respect each other,” says Shoko Sasaki, Commissioner of the newly established Immigration Services Agency (see Interview, p. 6). In this issue, we home in on a number of national- and local-level initiatives aimed at achieving the goal of multicultural symbiosis, beginning with a Q&A with the aforementioned Sasaki about the revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, which came into effect in April this year. We introduce case studies of towns that have successfully implemented unique integration programs for foreign residents. We visit Fukuoka to find out why the city has become such an attractive location for foreign start-up businesses and Osaka to meet the people behind an ingenious international café concept. Halal certification, multilingual translation services and education for children of foreign nationals are the other hot topics for contemporary Japan highlighted in this month’s Feature.

Photo: Junichi Ota

Toward a Vibrant and Symbiotic Society

THE revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, which was passed by the Diet in December 2018 and came into effect in April 2019, brought major changes to the system for admitting foreigners and managing their residence. We interviewed Shoko Sasaki, Commissioner of the newly established Immigration Services Agency, about the background to the revision of the Act and the new system.

What were the main events leading to the revision of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act?

As a virtuous economic cycle from growth to distribution has been steadily initiated thanks to the promotion of Abenomics, the active job openings-to-applicants ratio was 1.6 times in 2018 when the bill for partial amendment of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act was submitted to the Diet. Another point to consider is, with the decreasing birthrate and aging population, the working age population (aged 15 to 64) decreases every year and has even dropped to less than 60% of the total population, causing the labor shortage to be a serious problem. To deal with this imminent issue, it was necessary to build a framework as soon as possible to accept work-ready foreign nationals who possess certain expertise and skills in industrial fields where it is difficult to secure a workforce. In this context, the government submitted the bill for partial amendment of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act to the Diet and it was passed last year.

Why was the Immigration Services Agency established as a part of the revision of the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act?

The number of foreign travelers to Japan continued to increase and hit an all-time high of about 31.2 million in 2018 and the number of foreign residents in Japan also hit an all-time high of about 2.73 million at the end of 2018. In this situation, the government must balance smooth entry examinations and strict immigration controls, and properly manage the residence of an increasing number of foreigners. In addition, it is also necessary to perform new operations, like making plans, framing policies, conducting comprehensive coordination to develop a system of accepting foreigners, and properly dealing with the increasing number of foreign residents along with establishment of new statuses of residence. Under these circumstances, the Ministry of Justice's Immigration Bureau was reorganized into the Immigration Services Agency.

What is the new system for admitting foreigners?

Based on the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act and other related laws, Japan admitted foreigners under several statuses of employment: Highly-skilled professionals and the like, international students, technical intern trainees¹ and temporary visitors, including tourists. But considering the serious shortage of workers,

¹ Technical intern trainees are foreigners who reside in Japan to acquire skills and knowledge under the technical intern training system intended to transfer skills to developing countries.

Shoko Sasaki,
Commissioner of
the Immigration
Services Agency



the government decided to add specified skilled workers as a new status of residence.

“Specified skilled worker (i)” is the status of residence for foreign nationals engaging in work requiring skills which need considerable knowledge or experience belonging to specified industrial fields. “Specified skilled worker (ii)” is the status of residence for foreign nationals engaging in work requiring proficient skills belonging to specified industrial fields.

“Specified Industrial Fields” include fourteen fields², including Nursing Care and Building cleaning management. Specified skilled worker (ii) is only applicable for the construction industry and the shipbuilding and ship machinery industry.

For people who receive the status of residence of specified skilled worker (i), their maximum period of residence is five years in total. Skill level is confirmed by exams. Level of Japanese-language proficiency is confirmed by exams related to Japanese language proficiency required for everyday living and business. Accompaniment by family members is basically not permitted. Foreign nationals who have completed technical intern training (ii) with good results will be exempted from taking tests.

What efforts are being made to accept foreigners under the new system?

It is important to construct an environment for accepting foreigners to realize a vibrant, symbiotic society in which the Japanese people and foreigners can respect each other. Based on the Comprehensive Measures for Acceptance and Coexistence of Foreign Nationals, which was drawn up in December 2018, the government will

² Nursing Care, Building cleaning management, Forges and foundries, Machine parts & tooling industries, Electric, electronics and information industries, Construction industry, Shipbuilding/ship machinery industry, Automobile maintenance, Aviation industry, Accommodation industry, Agriculture, Fishery & aquaculture, Manufacture of food and beverages, Food service industry.

carry out various measures, including support for local governments to set up one-stop help desks for foreigners.

In addition, the government will also promote the merits of working in rural areas so that foreigners will show interest in working in rural areas as well as big cities.

What are your aspirations for the future?

We will properly manage and operate the new “Specified skilled worker” status of residence system so that it will be welcomed by both Japanese society and foreign workers. In addition, to realize a better symbiotic society with foreigners, we will work hard so that the Immigration Services Agency can exert a strong comprehensive coordination capability. We will also work hard to make the Immigration Services Agency an organization that is trusted by people inside and outside of the country. 

Interview by OSAMU SAWAJI



Mirai early support school within Toyooka Junior High School. Here, foreign students who have recently arrived in Japan receive primary Japanese language instruction

Living Together as Active Members of the Local Community

Toyohashi City in Aichi Prefecture aims to build a community where everyone can live comfortably by creating a symbiotic society where people of different nationalities live together as members of the local community. Recent years have also seen increased opportunities for foreign residents to play an active role in the local community.

KUMIKO SATO

REVISION of the Immigration Control Act in 1990 giving second and third generation persons of Japanese descent (*nikkei*) the right to permanent residence resulted in an influx of South American *nikkei* to areas with high concentrations of automotive-related industries such as Gunma Prefecture, Shizuoka Prefecture and Aichi Prefecture. This led to the emergence in the late 1990s of districts with concentrated populations of foreign residents amounting to half the resident population, coinciding with a variety of challenges for local governments. In response, local governments accepted non-Japanese nationals into their communities while at the same time engaging in ongoing proactive initiatives to create a symbiotic society. Toyohashi City in Aichi Prefecture is one such local government.

In 2006, Toyohashi City officially declared itself a

All Photos: Courtesy of Toyohashi City

“city of peace, exchange and symbiosis” in response to the “Multicultural Symbiotic Community Promotion Plan” formulated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications the same year. The “Toyohashi City Plan for the Promotion of Multicultural Symbiosis” was positioned as a concrete action plan to achieve this in 2009.

According to Takashi Miwata, supervisor of Toyohashi City’s Multicultural Society and International Affairs Division, “This year’s plan is the third since the first Multicultural Symbiosis Community Promotion Plan was formulated in 2009, for implementation through fiscal 2013. Since that time, the number of projects has increased from fifty to sixty-five due to the diversification of support needs in recent years, such as internationalization and changes to the allocation of residence status.”

The population of Toyohashi City as of April 1, 2019 is 376,181, including 17,601 foreigners. Japanese Brazilians began migrating to Toyohashi City in 1990, and by 2008 they numbered upward of 13,000. However, this number decreased for a while around the time of the Lehman shock, when many returned to their country. Meanwhile, Filipinos began entering the country in significant numbers from 2008, and in 2015 Japanese Brazilians who had returned to their country began migrating back to Toyohashi City. Currently, the number of migrants is on the rise,



- 1 Toyohashi City provides consultation services for foreign residents in everything from health to tax
- 2 A noticeboard at the city hall advertising consultation services in various languages
- 3 The early support school Mirai teaches not only Japanese grammar but also the social manners needed for living in Japan

predominantly from these two countries. The largest group is from Brazil, at 7,911, followed by 3,685 from the Philippines. According to Toyohashi City, the migrant group with the highest growth rate since 2015 is from Vietnam, and it is expected that the future will see an increase in migrants from Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia.

In light of this situation, Toyohashi City is promoting the creation of multilingual services, establishing a consultation counter for foreigners in the city hall that handles enquiries not only in English and Portuguese as has been the case up to now, but also in Tagalog. Through this consultation counter, foreign residents are referred to the relevant section, each with its own consultation counter staffed by a total of six interpreters in three languages.

In the field of education, 2018 saw the opening of Mirai, a school within Toyooka Junior High School providing early support for junior high school students recently arrived in Japan and foreign students transferring from schools for foreign nationals to junior high schools in the city. Portuguese and Tagalog consultants are assigned to the support school, where students have two months' intensive instruction in Japanese reading, writing and conversation, as well as studying English and mathematics. While attending Mirai, students attend the junior high school of the school district in which they reside one day a week, facilitating their transition to the school later.

Toyohashi City conducted questionnaires of residents and held meetings for foreign citizens to gather opinions with regard to the review of existing multicultural symbiosis projects and the launch

of new projects. Reflecting this feedback, the third Plan for the Promotion of Multicultural Symbiosis includes the new issue of the aging of foreign citizens. At present, the average age of foreign citizens is early 30s. Looking to the future, however, Toyohashi City is making preparations to provide support that responds to every stage of life, from early childhood to old age.

Further, the City is strengthening collaboration with NPOs and other private support groups for foreign residents. Activities by private bodies have led to local residents becoming gradually more accepting of foreign residents, and recently opportunities for foreign residents to take an active part in the local community are increasing.

“There have even been cases of foreigners serving as neighborhood association officers. And foreign instructors have been trained in the Red Cross First Aid Method, the first in Japan. It is pleasing to be able to create an environment where non-Japanese nationals are providing the support as residents of Toyohashi City,” says Miwata.

By fusing the values, culture and individuality of foreign residents with existing Japanese values, Toyohashi City is promoting the development of a more vibrant society. **1**

On graduation, students receive a certificate and commemorative photograph with messages written by students and teachers





Removing Language Barriers

Peruvian Cesar Cabrejos is working to promote the availability of multilingual interpretation services in order for people of all nationalities to spend time in Japan with peace of mind.

OSAMU SAWAJI

WITH the number of foreign residents and foreign visitors increasing, it is not uncommon for foreigners who fall ill or are injured in Japan to seek medical attention at a Japanese hospital. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare conducted a questionnaire of hospitals nationwide concerning their acceptance of foreign patients during the month of October 2018. Of the 3,980 hospitals that responded, 1,965 (49%) accepted foreign patients, including seven that accepted at least 1,000 patients. A high volume of emergency calls from foreigners are being received not only by hospitals but also by local fire departments, police authorities, and local governments, so it is important to create an environment that enables those calls to be interpreted quickly and accurately in multiple languages.

In response to this situation, Language One Corporation in Tokyo offers multilingual call center services that interpret three-way telephone calls. The company's call center has around forty staff members, providing a 24-hour service in thirteen languages to respond to requests for interpreting from public institutions and private companies that have

signed a contract with the company. In the case of medical interpretation, interpreting staff interpret conversations between patients and the doctors and nurses at some 200 medical facilities, over the telephone or using tablet devices. Each year, over 1,200 requests for medical interpretation services are received.

"There is no room for error in medical interpretation since human lives are at stake so, in principle, one person interprets and another supervises," says Cesar Cabrejos of the company's sales department.

A third generation Japanese from Peru, Cabrejos came to Japan with his parents in 1990 at the age of 11. He participated in the start-up of Language One in 2011 and became an interpreter for the company before taking on his current role working to promote the service.

In addition to hospitals, Language One's contracted partners include fire departments, police authorities, bar associations, real estate companies, railroad corporations, and local governments. In 2012, the company launched its interpretation service for 119 calls requesting fire brigade and ambulance service in the event of emergencies such as fire or sudden illness in collaboration with Saitama City Fire Department, going on to expand the service nationwide. The Saitama City Fire Department set a

precedent for the introduction of interpretation services for 119 calls in 298 of the total number of 728 local government fire departments nationwide.

The 119 calls demand a rapid response. Therefore a system has been established whereby when the company's call center receives a request for an interpreter from a local government fire department, the call is immediately connected to a staff interpreter.

"I have seen for myself the work that staff do when they receive 119 calls at the Saitama City Fire Department. Witnessing them working so hard to save people's lives was really moving and gave me a strong desire to go above and beyond," says Cabrejos.

As well as interpreting, Cabrejos carries out promotional activities to let foreigners know that multilingual interpretation services are available. One such service is the multilingual service by the Japan Legal Support Center (JLSC) known as "Hoterasu." JLSC is an organization that assists in the resolution of legal disputes, and anyone can access information

on the legal system, consultation centers, and other services relating to both criminal and civil matters at no cost.

With a view to having foreigners make use of the service in times of emergency, Cabrejos and his co-workers visit embassies in Japan to advertise the service of JLSC and explain that it can be accessed by foreigners too.

Currently, Cabrejos is focusing on supporting foreigners during disasters. Until now, the company has provided a free interpreting service for inquiries from foreign victims during disasters such as the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquake and the 2018 Hokkaido Iburi Eastern Earthquake. In the future, he will work with local governments and NPOs to further disseminate services to support foreign disaster victims.

"I would like to help as many foreigners in need as possible. My mission is to act as an intermediary to enable foreigners to use Japan's excellent public services," says Cabrejos. 



The multilingual call center of Language One Corporation in Tokyo
Photo: Courtesy of Language One



Halal-certified Japanese food products
Photo: Mao Fujita

The Door to Multicultural Coexistence that Halal Initiatives Open

The number of Muslim travelers visiting Japan is increasing gradually. Welcoming travelers with diverse religious and cultural customs goes beyond hospitality and opens wide the door of multicultural coexistence.

MAO FUJITA

IN 2003, the Japanese government formulated the Visit Japan Campaign, aiming to double the number of foreign visitors to Japan, then at about 5,21million, by 2010. Subsequently, a goal of 40million visitors by 2020 and 60million by 2030 was set in 2016. As of the end of 2018, that number had increased to 31,19million. Of those, about 86% were travelers from Asia. Growth is expected especially in visitors from Malaysia and Indonesia, countries with large Muslim populations. There are as many as 1.6 billion Muslims (as of 2010), making up 23% of the world population. Thanks to relaxed

visa regulations in 2013 and other measures, the number of visitors from Malaysia and Indonesia has increased from about 65,000 from each country in 2003 to about 470,000 and 400,000, respectively, in 2018. The government aims to create an environment where Muslim visitors can not only worship as normal, but also enjoy Japanese food with peace of mind, as well as expand the number of Muslim visitors, which is why they formulated the Action Plan for Receiving Muslim Visitors to Japan in 2018.

Recently, major airports, railway stations and other public facilities have been equipped with prayer rooms for Muslims having Qibla pointing out the direction for worship. The number of “halal-certified” products has also increased. Halal means

Students from the Islamic Science University of Malaysia exchange information with Japanese high school students
Photo: Courtesy of NPO Japan Halal Association





Hitomi Remon, chairperson of
NPO Japan Halal Association
Photo: Mao Fujita

that which is legal or allowed according to Islamic law.

Hitomi Remon, chairperson of NPO Japan Halal Association, is one person who has worked to spread this halal certification. She took up employment in Malaysia in her 20s and became a Muslim there. After spending five years in Malaysia, she started a company in Dubai, and returned to Japan after the financial crisis in 2008.

“Muslims are not allowed to ingest pork, non halal meat which is not slaughtered according to Islamic law, or alcoholic drinks. When I first came back to Japan, the supermarkets didn’t sell any meat that I could eat. So I started working with halal certification so that supermarkets can have halal sections where Muslims can find ingredients without the need to worry.”

She gathered supporters who could convey correct information about Islam and halal, and founded NPO Japan Halal Association in 2010 as a non-profit organization. They invited lecturers from the Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM), and the association staff studied together about the functions of halal certification bodies that conform to international standards as well as internationally acknowledged halal certification. Halal applies to the method of animal slaughter and to a wide variety of products, including food additives, health foods, and other food products, as well as cosmetics and medical supplies. They have gathered teaching materials about this and currently hold monthly two-day courses for people interested in halal and companies that want to halal-certify their products, alternating between Tokyo and Osaka.

In 2012, the Japan Halal Association was mutually recognized by JAKIM, and Japanese products certified by the association could now be exported to Malaysia. For example, in the case of Japanese traditional condiments like miso and soy sauce, halal certification was difficult due to the small amounts of

alcohol produced during the manufacturing process. Remon informed JAKIM about how they are made and what they contain, and export become possible when they agreed that “natural alcohol coming from natural fermentation is not considered impure. Moreover, this is not just about exports, as the number of products with the halal certification mark that Muslim residents and travelers in Japan can safely purchase is increasing as well.

Remon explains that, “In the future, living together with people from other countries will be the norm, so I hope that Japanese children can get interested in Islam too. I want to contribute to the building of a foundation for coexistence with diverse peoples and cultures by the time they grow up. I feel I have responsibility for that.”



Hitomi Remon at NPO Japan Halal Association's booth at a restaurant business expo at Intex-Osaka
Photo: Courtesy of NPO Japan Halal Association

The association visits elementary schools, high schools, and universities to tell students about the lifestyle of Muslims, as well as invite adherents of other religions to social events, keeping busy with creating a diverse range of opportunities. The halal-related ideas of Remon and the activities of the association are not just for Muslims, but it goes without saying that they are important also in the sense that they enrich multicultural coexistence in Japan. **7**

Foreign Professionals Connecting Japan with Vietnam

A company engaging in precision machining has continuously been recruiting Vietnamese engineers for ten years or so. Because this company has been nurturing them as foreign professionals, not just as foreign workers, it attracts much attention for its Japan-Vietnam business model.

TAKASHI SASAKI

KOGANEI Seiki Co., Ltd., headquartered in Iruma City, Saitama Prefecture, is a company with about 270 employees. Since its foundation in 1943, Koganei has constantly been introducing technologies on the very front lines of the times and has provided many manufacturers with precision parts and components essential to automobiles, motorcycles, airplanes and motorsports, including Formula One. The company



Yusuke Kamoshita (second from left) with three Vietnamese employees
Photo: Takashi Sasaki

has attracted attention in recent years for its utilization of foreign professionals as well as its advanced technologies.

Koganei President Yusuke Kamoshita says, “Everything started in around 2007. We heard from a friend that Vietnamese science-course students had few opportunities to be recruited by companies. Our previous president [Yusuke’s father, Reiji, who is currently chairman of the company] visited a university in Vietnam and recruited Vietnamese students. At that time, the shortage of workers was not so serious as today. But because it was considered certain that we would see a shortage of young workers in the near future, we tried hiring Vietnamese students.”

According to Kamoshita, the new employees from Vietnam are honest and calm and easily blend in with the Japanese employees. In addition, they are highly motivated to work for Japanese companies and work diligently. Furthermore, word-of-mouth has spread among younger Vietnamese about the Vietnamese employees’ lives in Japan and Koganei’s corporate culture, enabling the company to continue recruiting Vietnamese students. Currently, of its 240 engineers, 40 are Vietnamese.

Kamoshita says, “In hiring foreign



Koganei Seiki’s factory in Maebashi, Gunma Prefecture
Photo: Courtesy of Koganei Seiki Co



Koganei Seiki nurtures excellent employees
Photo: Courtesy of Koganei Seiki Co

people, we do nothing special. Basically, we treat them the same as Japanese employees, in salaries and social services as well as in regards to the specifics of operation. I speculated that the Vietnamese employees would have difficulty communicating with Japanese workers in the workplace. But, as president, I am only doing things in the usual ways.”

In December 2014, Koganei established KOGANEI VIETNAM CO., LTD. in Hanoi, the Vietnamese capital, the reason for doing so being very interesting.

Kamoshita says, “Two Vietnamese employees who played a central role in the programming division had to go back home for family reasons. We established the subsidiary in Hanoi to stop them from quitting.”

Currently, seven employees including the two Vietnamese employees who had returned from Japan work in Hanoi. The subsidiary in Vietnam not only plays an important role in developing products but also plays an essential role in recruiting new Vietnamese students and educating and nurturing employees.

In May 2018, Koganei was recognized for these efforts and was introduced as an example in the Ministry of Economy Trade and Industry’s “Fifty Japanese Companies Providing Successful Careers for Highly-skilled Foreign Professionals.” Around this time, the late Vietnamese President Trần Đại Quang, when visiting Japan as a State guest, paid an inspection visit to the company’s factory in Maebashi,

Gunma Prefecture. On this visit, President Quang was impressed by Vietnamese employees working on manufacturing quality parts and components with Japanese employees and encouraged them, saying, “I sincerely hope that you will work hard and be a model for Japan-Vietnam exchange.”

Kamoshita says, “We have not hired foreign people just to make up for the shortage of workers. We have accepted and nurtured excellent Vietnamese students so that they can be truly effective assets for our company.”

Koganei’s education and nurturing of foreign professionals connects Japan with Vietnam and is a developmental model for regions and the world. 



Koganei Seiki manufactures precision parts and components for motorsports applications
Photo: Courtesy of Koganei Seiki Co



Fukuoka Growth Next offers a range of consultancy services for new businesses at its Startup Cafe in Fukuoka City
Photo: Courtesy of Fukuoka City Startup Cafe

Fukuoka Incubator Helps Dreams Come True



Fukuoka Growth Next's Startup Cafe
Photo: Courtesy of Fukuoka City Startup Cafe

The city of Fukuoka, Fukuoka Prefecture on the northern shore of Kyushu is drawing in entrepreneurs from Japan and abroad in part thanks to the range of business-support initiatives and subsidies the City provides.

ALEX HENDY

FUKUOKA City was selected as a National Strategic Special Zone for Global Startups & Job Creation in May 2014, a designation which has enabled the City to introduce initiatives such as a “start-up visa,” exempting foreign entrepreneurs from some of Japan’s standard “business visa” requirements, as well as a variety of “Business Establishment Support” subsidies.

In addition to being well known as a city open to the world, being located close to major cities in Asia, Fukuoka is now also attracting attention as an important incubator in Japan of domestic and overseas start-up businesses.

One such business is NewroCare Institute Japan, the brainchild of Dr. Xiaoping Li.

Dr. Xiaoping Li is a pioneer in the field of neuroengineering. The former National University of Singapore professor has had more than 400 peer-reviewed articles published in the field, including a report in *Scientific Reports* (Nov. 4, 2014), an online science journal published by Nature Research, announcing the development of two breakthrough technologies: the non-contact, non-invasive (1) imaging and (2) modulating of the brain’s neurotransmitters’ activities. When commercialized, Dr. Li believes that these non-contact, non-invasive and therefore



Dr. Xiaoping Li shows a video of a cat being induced to sleep by the PowerDreaming signal. In clinical trials on fifty people, human subjects fell asleep on average within just 10 minutes (compared to 30 minutes control) and achieved REM (deep) sleep time of 85.5% (compared to 47.5% control)

Photo: Alex Hendy



The sleep inducing and modulating PowerDreaming device (center); DreamTector (right), which detects the level of sleep hormone release in the brain to measure and monitor the depth of sleep; and VigiLor (left), which enhances wakefulness, having possible applications for long-distance driving, for example

Photo: Alex Hendy

safe technologies could offer solutions to a range of human health problems, starting with insomnia.

The product Dr. Li aims to launch first is called “PowerDreaming,” a device fitted with a neural IC chip, manufactured in Japan, that can be slipped under a pillow and turned on to induce sleep and modulate the brain’s neurotransmitters’ activities. For the millions worldwide who suffer from insomnia or take sleeping pills, the sleep-induction device could be life changing. Further, by inducing longer, deeper sleep, the device is also designed to efficiently refresh the brain’s neurons, providing for a heightened feeling of wakefulness after sleep.

To commercialize the core technologies, Dr. Li and his wife, Dr. Qian Xia, established NewroCare Institute in Singapore in 2016 and NewroCare Institute Japan, in Fukuoka, the following year.

On a flight to Fukuoka in September 2016 to meet with former colleagues at Kyushu University, which is located in the city, Dr. Li and Dr. Xia happened to read an article in a newspaper about Fukuoka Growth Next, an initiative of Fukuoka City providing facilities, programs and administrators that aims to foster start-ups and accelerate their growth. The chance encounter has brought Dr. Li’s dreams to the very brink of fruition.

“We happened to have the PowerDreaming device with us in our luggage, so we went directly from the airport to the Startup Cafe in Fukuoka that we had read about on the plane,” says Dr. Li. “We arrived at the Café at 5:00 p.m., and within two hours, the

staff had arranged applications including our start-up visas and the necessary medical certification for our business. Thanks to Startup Cafe staff, we could also find an office. The support we have received has been fantastic and is why we have established our business, NewroCare Institute Japan, in Fukuoka.”

Specifically, Fukuoka Growth Next introduced NewroCare to Fukuoka City’s Business Establishment Support Programs (for Foreign and Foreign Affiliated Enterprises), which provides subsidies for office rent, new employment for citizens of Fukuoka, and consultation support, in the case of NewroCare to help with the company’s products’ PDMA [Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices Agency] certification. Fukuoka City has also implemented a Startup Corporate Tax Cut initiative. Dr. Li and Dr. Xia received their start-up visas just one week after they applied and established NewroCare Institute Japan in May, 2017.

In the near future, Dr. Li intends to apply his core technologies to a range of other human health conditions including Alzheimer’s Disease, epilepsy and dyslexia, as well as to the detection of pain felt by patients under anesthesia.

“Products using these technologies will give rise to a whole new industrial field, the neural industry,” Dr. Li predicts.

Fukuoka City’s efforts to attract and support overseas startups demonstrate its character as an open international city and could see the emergence of the city as an innovation center much like Silicon Valley. 

International Café a Popular Lunch Haunt

“Chef of the day” Natalia
Mikhaylenko from Russia

In April 2019, we visited a café in Minoh City, Osaka Prefecture, where each day a different foreign chef prepares cuisine from their native country for neighborhood residents. There, we observed foreign nationals residing in an unfamiliar land and local residents interacting cheerfully through dishes from around the world.

KUMIKO SATO

MINOH Multicultural Center is located in a quiet residential area in the north of Osaka Prefecture. The first floor of the center houses the Minoh City Onohara Library, as well as “comm cafe,” which started operating when the Center first opened. Every lunchtime from Tuesday to Saturday, twenty-four foreign residents from fourteen countries take it in turns to be chef for the day, preparing home-cooked meals from around the world.

Most of the café’s patrons are residents of the neighborhood. Although there had been demand for a library in this district for many years, some expressed concern over the establishment of the new Multicultural Center, which is managed by the

All Photos: Junichi Ota

Minoh Association For Global Awareness. However, since its opening, the café has attracted over 30,000 people each year.

Today’s chef is Natalia Mikhaylenko from Russia. The main menu is “The Captain’s Meat,” which is made by layering pork, potatoes and onions, and baking slowly in the oven.

“In the old days, meat was a luxury food only available to people of high social status, so it was called ‘Captain’s.’ Now, though, it’s a common household dish in my hometown of Vladivostok,” explains Natalia.

Asuka Iwaki is Director of Minoh Multicultural Center and occasionally helps out in the café kitchen. “At comm cafe you can enjoy dishes from different countries as though you were traveling around the world. But we don’t display flags or do anything to emphasize the country of origin of the chef. We want customers to see the chefs as individuals,” she says. The café is designed to let sunlight stream in, creating a bright, welcoming atmosphere, while the layout gives diners a good view of the chef preparing the food on the other side of the counter.

With a population of approximately 135,000, Minoh City is home to some 2,800 foreign nationals



Asuka Iwaki, Director of Minoh Multicultural Center (left) and comm cafe staff



A picture-book storytelling group. The reader is Choi Seong-ja.

hailing from 100 countries. Korean Choi Seong-ja has been a multilingual counselor in the area for many years, and has listened to many foreign women's troubles during that time. "Women who marry Japanese or migrate to Japan because of their spouse's job tend to be isolated from the community. It's hard for them being in unfamiliar surroundings and not understanding much of the language, and they feel lonely," says Choi.

For women such as these, Choi came up with the idea of preparing food from their native country and serving it to the local people, enabling them to be themselves while having a point of contact with the community. The venture trialed in 2010, after which community cafés came to be held at irregular intervals several times a year. Then in 2013, after the establishment of the Multicultural Center, she suggested that the café become a permanent feature, and comm cafe was born.

The café operates on a "chef-of-the-day" system. Supported by staff from the Minoh Association For Global Awareness, which operates the café, as well as some twenty volunteers, working in shifts, the chef of the day takes care of everything from menu planning to the purchase of materials and preparation of meals. The chef pays 30% of sales to the Association, and the Association pays a portion of the labor costs.

According to Iwaki and Choi, running a café is tough if you think about profitability, but those who may have lost sight of their own value in an unfamiliar land regain their self-esteem and their lives take on a new vitality. comm cafe has that power.

As a place where people of different cultural backgrounds come together, it is not possible to impose

the same methods of customer service on the foreign service staff at comm cafe as patrons would experience at Japanese restaurants. For example, in a Japanese establishment, the staff notice when a customer's water glass is empty and come and refill it. However, this level of customer service may be regarded as excessive by foreigners on the staff and make them feel uncomfortable. They may think, if the customer needs something, they will ask for it. Even if there is friction at times, by engaging in dialogue not only with workers but also with customers in order to find the best way to achieve the "comm cafe flow" unique to a multicultural environment, the know-how to achieve a harmonious atmosphere between service staff and customers has slowly been accumulated.

As well as serving food, the café hosts various events such as workshops where customers can experience world cultures, and live folk music. Six years after it opened, comm cafe has grown into a place where people who have left their home countries and local people can interact with each other regardless of generation or nationality. 



Lunchtime at comm cafe

“Good Morning” in Ten Languages

Yokohama Municipal Iida Kita Ichō Elementary School works to provide educational activities based on multicultural collaboration with local neighborhood associations and volunteer groups. Through these activities, children naturally develop open minds.

Principal Chizumi Miyazawa of Yokohama Municipal Iida Kita Ichō Elementary School stands next to a pillar on which greetings are written in many languages
Photos: Kumazo Kato



AKIRA UMEZAWA

At the entrance to Iida Kita Ichō is a sign that says “Good Morning” in ten languages, including Japanese. Of the school’s 235 students, half are of foreign nationalities or have foreign roots. The largest group of those students is Vietnamese, followed by respectively smaller groups of Chinese, Cambodian and Laotian students.

Principal Chizumi Miyazawa says, “Children belonging to the student government welcome other children who come to the school in many languages as part of their activities at the school entrance in the morning. We, the teachers, welcome those children with cheerful greetings so that we can be good role models.”

One of the elements behind the increase in the number of children of foreign nationalities was the arrival of refugees in the mid-1970s. With regime change in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, about 1.4 million people left their home countries and became

refugees. In 1979, the Japanese government accepted some of these refugees and established settlement support centers that helped them to learn the Japanese language, culture and customs, and to settle in Japan. One of these centers existed in Yamato City, next to Yokohama, from 1980 to 1998.

At that time, many of the refugees who received Japanese language education and help in assimilating at this center started living in a housing complex managed by the prefecture inside the Iida Kita Ichō school district, and an increasing number of children with links to the three Southeast Asian countries started attending the school. In the 1990s, more immigrants followed their family and friends to the area, which led to an increase in the number of children.

Responding to the situation, the school developed a multi-teacher educational system. Principal Miyazawa says, “We give lectures on Japanese and math in three to five classes according to the children’s Japanese abilities. For other subjects as well, there are assistant language teachers and Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodian volunteer interpreters, as

- 1 Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian books and decorations
- 2 A poster announcing “Congratulations” in many languages
- 3 The school’s mission in translation
- 4 A Cambodian dance performance on sports day

Photos: Kumazo Kato (1, 2); Courtesy of Yokohama Municipal Iida Kita Icho Elementary School 3, 4)

well as full-time teachers to support children in class. If children have anything that they cannot understand in class, the assistant language teachers act as interpreters so that children can answer in Japanese.”

Iida Kita Icho also puts importance on supporting the children’s parents.

Principal Miyazawa says, “We translate school documents for parents into Vietnamese, Chinese and Cambodian as much as possible. In addition, when we inform them of what to bring for a field trip, for example, we make it a rule to use pictures as much as possible, in addition to words. Interpreters also offer telephone consultations to parents.”

In school events, including sports day, children make announcements in their respective languages after the Japanese announcements so that parents who cannot understand Japanese can understand them. Parents and teachers also participate in a school-wide dance that is conducted on sports day, as a part of the day’s festivities. The school rotates between Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodian dances annually. The support for these programs comes not only from the school, but also from the housing community association and volunteer groups supporting foreigners living in the community as part of their community activities.

Principal Miyazawa says, “Three years have passed since I became the principal of this school. During that period, I saw no children discriminate against foreign students or express prejudices toward them because of their nationality or differences in appearance, probably because our children have had close contact with people from diverse backgrounds since they were small children, and they have acquired the idea that “It is natural that all people are different.” I sincerely hope that they will convey this tolerance and acceptance of differences to others after graduation.”

The experience of accepting many foreigners and of living and learning together in the culture that was developed at the school not only promotes the ease and comfort with which children of foreign descent live but also greatly contributes to the mental growth of Japanese children. 



“Plastics Smart” Campaign

In recent years, marine pollution by plastic litter has become a serious issue. Japan is engaging in a variety of initiatives to deal with the problem.

OSAMU SAWAJI

Litter washed up on the shore in Japan
Photo: Courtesy of Ministry of the Environment

HUGE volumes of various kinds of plastic litter flow into the oceans around the world every day. If it continues at this pace, the weight of marine plastic litter is predicted to exceed the weight of fish by 2050. This litter affects things like the marine environment, ship navigation, tourism, fisheries, and living environments in coastal areas, but in recent years, there is particular concern about the effects of microscopic plastic litter with a size of 5 mm or less (microplastics) on ecosystems.

As such, the international community is working on initiatives to prevent the pollution of our oceans by plastic litter. The SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) have “prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds” by 2025 as a target of Goal

14, and measures to deal with the ocean waste are also discussed by the G7 and G20.

The Japanese government is also implementing a variety of measures to reduce plastic litter. One of these is the formulation of the Plastic Resource Recycling Strategy. The basic principles of this Strategy, which was formulated in May, 2019 ahead of the G20 Ministerial Meeting on Energy Transitions and Global Environment for Sustainable Growth (Karuizawa, Nagano) are promoting the 3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle) for plastic as well as encouraging the use of recycled materials and bioplastics. In line with this, measures such as eradicating illegal dumping, curtailing the outflow of microplastics, and retrieving and disposing of ocean litter will be implemented to deal with marine

plastic litter.

Moreover, the government is advancing the Plastics Smart campaign in collaboration with individuals, NGOs, companies, research institutes, and others. The campaign aims to spread across Japan initiatives such as surveying the reality of the marine plastic litter problem as well as eradicating littering and reducing the disposal of unnecessary single-use plastics. To do this, examples of various initiatives will be presented online and companies and organizations with an interest in the marine plastic litter issue will be encouraged to engage with each other in the Plastics Smart Forum.



PICKING UP LITTER AS A SPORT

Social Sports Initiative organizes Spogomi, which incorporates elements of sports into litter picking so that you can have fun picking litter while also competing. In Spogomi, teams of three to five people have 60 minutes to pick litter while also separating it. Points are determined by weight and differ by type of litter, and the goal is to get the highest total score. Since it's not about weight but points, everybody, young or old, has a chance of winning. The Spogomi tournaments started in 2008, hosted by local governments, companies, schools, and a variety of other groups and organizations. So far, about 90,000 people have taken part. More than 800 tournaments have been held, in Japan as well as Russia, Myanmar, South Korea, Hawaii, Panama, and other overseas locations.



Spogomi in Tomsk, Russia
Photo: Courtesy of Social Sports Initiative

MASS PRODUCING “WOODEN STRAWS”

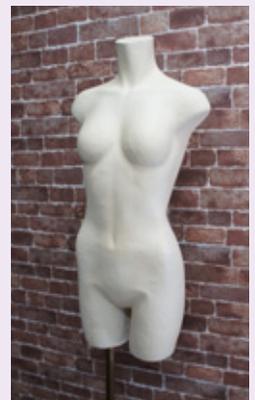
Aqura Home, Co. Ltd. in Tokyo, a builder of wooden housing, has successfully mass produced wooden straws. They utilize technology that they have developed through wooden building to roll wood shaved down to a thickness of 0.15 mm into straws. Mass production of wooden straws using this method is a world-first. As material, they use trees that have fallen down because of natural disasters as well as timber from forest thinning and other domestic timber. During manufacturing, they can accommodate changes in length, thickness, and wood type. The grain appears slanted on the straws, creating a feeling of natural warmth. These wooden straws have been trialed at hotel restaurants in Tokyo since January 2019. They were also provided at the reception of the G20 Agriculture Minister's Meeting held in Niigata in May.



Wooden straws
Photo: Courtesy of Aqura Home

MANNEQUINS MADE OF RECYCLED PAPER

In the past, mannequins, which are manufactured to wear and display clothes, were made of wax or paper, but since the 1960s, plastic has become the norm. Today, more than 100,000 mannequins are made in Japan every year, but they are disposed of as industrial waste after use. Amid this, Mode Kohgei Co. Ltd., a company which has manufactured mannequins for about sixty years in Fujimi City, Saitama Prefecture, has incorporated traditional methods for making *daruma*, dolls affectionately thought of as lucky charms in Japan since ancient times, to manufacture mannequins made of paper. They put about five layers of recycled paper in a mannequin mold, glue them together with rice glue, remove the paper from the mold after it has been dried, and complete the mannequin by finishing the surface with paint or cloth paste. With the growing interest in the plastic problem in recent years, their exceedingly rare paper mannequin is gathering attention and they are receiving more and more inquiries.



A mannequin made of paper
Photo: Courtesy of Mode Kohgei

A New Weather Radar that Can Forecast Downpours 30 Minutes Before

A new radar that can forecast rapid weather changes has been developed. The radar is expected to be useful in our daily lives, for the management of events such as the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics in 2020, as well as for disaster prevention and mitigation.

TAKASHI SASAKI

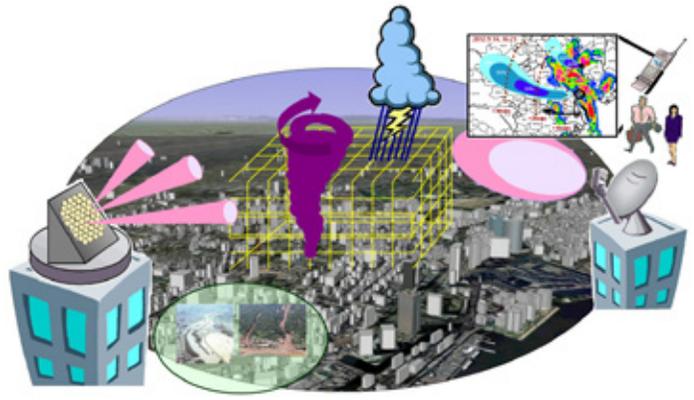
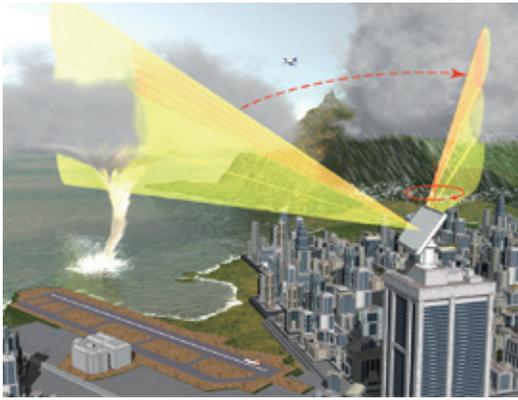
ISOLATED heavy rainfall and localized torrential rainfall, known in Japan as “guerrilla rainstorms,” and unpredictable rapid weather changes, including rapidly developing low atmospheric pressure, have been a major problem in recent years. Rapid weather changes bringing isolated heavy rainfall and gusts of wind sometimes cause unexpected flooding and landslide disasters.

A multi-parameter phased array weather radar (MP-PAWR) has been brought into use for the first time in the world to observe such sudden weather phenomena with high precision. Research and development of the MP-PAWR has been led by scientists at the Remote Sensing Laboratory of the National Institute of Information and Communications Technology (NICT).

The Laboratory’s Director, Dr. Katsuhiro Nakagawa,



Dr. Katsuhiro Nakagawa, Director of NICT’s Remote Sensing Laboratory
Photo: Takashi Sasaki



Illustrations showing the MP-PAWR radar and its weather forecasting capabilities (left) close to an airport and (right) in an urban environment
Figures: Courtesy of National Institute of Information and Communications Technology (NICT)

explains the background to the development.

“A weather radar is the most effective means to observe rainfall. But a conventional weather radar that rotates parabolic antennae mechanically could not detect locally and rapidly developing cumulonimbus in the early stage of ‘guerrilla rainstorms.’ You need to change the angle of the antennae to observe the whole picture of cumulonimbus that develops high in the sky and you need at least five minutes. On the other hand, cumulonimbus develops rapidly in about ten minutes. For this reason, we began development of a weather radar that could rapidly observe cumulonimbus in three dimensions.”

The first thing that Dr. Nakagawa and his colleagues developed was PAWR. Because this radar conducts observations at broad angles of elevation simultaneously, in one rotation it can conduct three-dimensional observations that conventional parabolic antennae could only conduct by rotating as many as dozens of times. PAWR takes less than 30 seconds to observe an area 60 kilometers in radius and 14 kilometers in height and can capture cumulonimbus that develop rapidly almost in real time. At the time, conventional radars with polarized observation functions were also still necessary to observe a wide range of rainfall types with high precision.

In 2017, they developed MP-PAWR, which has multiple functions. The novel weather radar was developed as part of the “Enhancement of Societal Resiliency against Natural Disasters” program, one of the Cross-ministerial Strategic Innovation Promotion Programs (SIP) promoted by the Cabinet Office, and

has been installed at Saitama University.

Dr. Nakagawa says, “A conventional weather radar just enabled us to observe the lower part of rain clouds intermittently. But the practical realization of MP-PAWR has enabled us to continuously observe the whole picture of rain clouds and the state of rainfall. Now we can detect ‘guerrilla rainstorms’ early by quickly capturing ‘localized torrential rainfall in the making’ that is generated in the sky.”

According to Dr. Nakagawa, high-precision weather information provided by MP-PAWR will be highly effective for preventing disasters, such as by providing vital information for water-related disaster mitigation, including river patrols, sandbagging at-risk areas, and issuing evacuation orders to residents, and will provide many benefits in our daily lives.

Dr. Nakagawa points out the possibilities of MP-PAWR, explaining, “Observing things close to your daily lives, MP-PAWR will make it easier for you to bring in the laundry before sudden heavy rainfall and to call off outdoor activities more quickly. In addition, the ability to predict sudden changes in weather will make outdoor events, such as sports competitions and firework displays, safer and more comfortable. Currently, we are considering the uses of the weather information provided by MP-PAWR for the smooth management of the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics in 2020. A range of Japanese state-of-the-art technologies will be utilized for the coming Olympic Games. The Olympics will be a perfect opportunity for us to demonstrate Japan’s advanced weather technologies to the world.”



Chinese Influencers Promoting a True Picture of Japan

KUMIKO SATO

Social media users around the world currently number around 3.5 billion, accessing a variety of content and generating all manner of interaction on social media every day. These users are greatly influenced by “influencers.” One such influencer who disseminates information about Japan from her base in Japan is Lin Yangyang.

LIN Yangyang is an active influencer hailing from China who promotes inbound tourism to Japan using the nickname Lin Ping zai Riben, mainly through Weibo, China’s largest social media platform with more than 720 million

accounts. Lin’s Weibo account has around 4.80 million followers, while her live streams attract more than 2 million viewers on average, and have a significant influence on Chinese tourists visiting Japan.

Currently, Lin is partnering with several companies

Lin Yangyang (right) attends an awards ceremony hosted by Weibo in Hong Kong honoring those who made excellent achievements in the year, April 2019
Courtesy of Cross-Border Next, Inc.



that operate businesses connecting Japanese companies interested in overseas markets such as China with foreign users.

In addition to this business, every day Lin selects the latest information from Japanese news and social media, mainly relating to tourism and food, and disseminates it to China. In particular, the reports on sightseeing spots in Japan that Lin has visited herself are the most frequently accessed content.

“I am trying to convey to people in China what I myself feel Japan has to offer in terms of its beautiful nature and culture. I am careful to be objective and avoid expressing biased opinions. I try to provide information that cannot be obtained through mass media or books, from the perspective of an ordinary person,” says Lin.

Lin opened her “Lin-in-Japan” Weibo account in 2012, one year after the Great East Japan Earthquake. She felt that China’s mass media reported only the damage caused by the earthquake, and stopped reporting on how Japanese people were dealing with recovery issues, or on the tourism industry. So as well as disseminating news reports on Japan, Lin covered behavioral traits such as the way in which people in Japan still maintained order, despite the fact that even stores in the Greater Tokyo Metropolitan area experienced frequent shortages of goods. Lin’s articles at this time received a strong response from Chinese users. In 2012, she added “in-Japan” to her account name and began to disseminate mainly Japan-related information. In 2014, at the invitation of the Tohoku Tourism Promotion Organization, Lin visited various parts of Tohoku and reported on the reconstruction of the affected areas. Since then, she has been collaborating with local governments and companies as well as working with the Tohoku Tourism Organization not only to promote the region, but also to plan new projects targeting Chinese tourists.

Lin enjoys support from users because the

information she disseminates is up-to-date as well as being very useful and highly reliable. When Osaka was hit by a typhoon in September 2018, she published information about how the shopping and business area had resumed normal operations one week later, reassuring many Chinese tourists who had been planning to visit Japan.

“I especially value the live streams that can convey a true picture of the situation. If a user asks a question, you can ask a local person on the spot. That’s something that you can only get with a live stream,” says Lin smiling.

When she was doing live streams walking around rural towns in northern Kanto, in one town an elderly local cheerfully gave her permission to be filmed, and spoke a few words of Chinese into Lin’s camera. This was met with surprise and delight from Chinese users viewing the live stream, and this live interaction between Japan and China appearing on Weibo was the most memorable event for Lin, she says.

“China and Japan both use kanji. The fact that Japan has its unique mature culture while being rooted in China is also very interesting. I really feel that China and Japan are extremely ‘close,’ and not just in terms of geographical distance,” says Lin.

Engaging in these activities and adding “in-Japan” to her Chinese social media account has led to a succession of fellow Chinese influencers. Smiling broadly, their model influencer Lin said that her goal is to continue her activities so that their go-to social media account for information on Japan will be “Lin-in-Japan.” 

Tsuchie Kodomo Kagura perform at Tsuchie Shrine in Oda City, Shimane Prefecture



Tsuchie Kodomo Kagura

The Gods' Young Entertainers

Tsuchie Kodomo Kagura, a “village kagura” dance group in Shimane Prefecture comprised entirely of children, continues to entertain local crowds – as well as the nation’s Gods – some 140 years after it was formed.

ROB GILHOOLY

SUSANO-O, the fearless deity from ancient Japanese mythology, is tasked with saving Princess Kushinada, but first must get past Orochi, a fire-spewing serpent with eight heads and tails and a body long enough to span eight peaks and valleys. Japan’s twinkle-toed superhero

escapes the serpent’s smothering coils, and with graceful swishes of a sword severs their heads one by one amid appreciative cheers from the audience, who watch on transfixed from the shrine courtyard.

The play, *Orochi*, is a mainstay of a dance genre known as “kagura,” widely considered the earliest Japanese performing art. On this occasion, the performance at Tsuchie Shrine in Oda City, Shimane Prefecture is distinct from conventional offerings: The cast of dancers and musicians is made up entirely of children.

They are part of the Tsuchie Kodomo Kagura group (“*kodomo*” means “children”), which was officially established in 1879, but is believed to date back significantly further.

Indeed, surviving examples of kagura artifacts, such as *taiko* drums and the distinctive masks, have been dated back more than 300 years, according to group director, Yoshiyuki Kaji.

It’s a custom that continues today, he says, though there have been interruptions along the way, including during wartime.

Nineteen years ago, organizers were forced to retire the group due to a more contemporary issue – a declining birthrate. “There simply weren’t enough



Susano-o in battle with the eight-headed serpent Orochi

All Photos: Rob Gilhooly

The children perform a variety of plays in the local, Iwami-kagura tradition

children for it to continue,” says Kaji, adding that while there had been five children’s kagura troupes in the region, all of them folded.

When it came to trying to revive the group several years later, Kaji decided they needed to find a way to ensure its longevity and enlisted the help of residents in the area who were seasoned performers at the region’s countless kagura events and festivals. In 2000, the children’s kagura troupe was revived as the Tsuchie Kodomo Kagura.

Subsequently, while in previous times there had been a playful element to the children’s performances, they became more authentic, which appealed to many young people.

That real-deal kagura is highly revered in western Shimane Prefecture, home ground of the Tsuchie Kodomo Kagura. According to legend, kagura was first performed by Ame-no-Uzume – the goddess credited with introducing revelry to the world – to lure the reclusive sun goddess Amaterasu-omikami out of her cave and bring light and warmth to the world.

Over the years, many varieties have evolved, most



Tsuchie Kodomo Kagura director Yoshiyuki Kaji (right) with performer Honoka Moriwaki

incorporating elements of Shintoism and Buddhism, Japan’s dominant faiths. The most traditional, and earliest forms are ritualistic, while others are highly theatrical, occasionally verging on farce.

This latter style, known under the umbrella term *sato-kagura* (village kagura), was officially encouraged during the Meiji period (1868-1912) during which time the government forbade Shinto priests from performing kagura, and residents increasingly assumed roles traditionally played by shrine priests and attendants.



It subsequently flourished and today an ever-evolving repertoire of dances are performed at festivals around the region, particularly in the fall.

The local sato-kagura variety performed is known as Iwami-kagura, which is performed by some 145 troupes in a province of western Shimane Prefecture historically known as Iwami, which incorporates Oda.

The Tsuchie Kodomo Kagura group is the only one made up exclusively of children, who not only perform the plays and provide the accompanying music, but also design the dance programs and some of the dance moves themselves, Kaji says.

The problem of dwindling participant numbers seems to have abated, with members, who are aged between 3 and 15, eager to get involved. Indeed, after “retirement” many continue to attend the twice-weekly rehearsals to help the younger members, Kaji says.

Honoka Moriwaki, 12, who started kagura when she was 4, inspired by her brother who also was a member, says the element of kagura that attracts her the most is the dynamism of the dances.

“There’s other entertainment, like video games, that are dynamic, too, but some things can only be done by people and I want to cherish the power of human expression that is such an integral part of kagura.”

Fellow member Koga Yasui, 14, says the complex and sometimes high-tempo dance moves are further complicated by the ornate costumes, some of which weigh up to 30 kg.

“The plays can be quite long so it can be pretty tiring,” says Yasui, who also started when he was 4. “Like everyone else, when I was little I used to copy the adult kagura performances, so I have been watching and dancing kagura for many years. For most of us, it’s second nature.” **J**



The Enoden travels along Shichirigahama with Mt. Fuji in the background.



The Enoshima Electric Railway

The Enoden A “Picture Postcard” Railway

If you travel by the Enoshima Electric Railway, which runs along the coastline of Sagami Bay, Kanagawa Prefecture, you will thoroughly enjoy the journey, with the opportunity to enjoy marine sports in the beautiful scenery and visit locations depicted in movies and cartoons, as well as temples that are more than 800 years old.

OSAMU SAWAJI

THE Enoshima Electric Railway, which is known colloquially as the Enoden, links fifteen stations between Fujisawa Station in Fujisawa City, Kanagawa Prefecture, and Kamakura Station in Kamakura City, covering a distance of 10.0 kilometers in about 34 minutes. The railway has been used by local people and tourists alike since the entire line opened in 1910.

The Enoden, which comprises two to four cars, travels slowly at an average speed of 22 kilometers per hour. Toshiyuki Nakazawa, general manager of the Tourism Promotion Department, says, “The Enoden travels through many locations, including along the coastline as well as through mountains and residential districts. The allure of the railway is that it exists as part of people’s lives and nature in these locations.”

During the section between Enoshima Station,

which is about ten minutes from Fujisawa Station, and Koshigoe Station, you can feel how closely the Enoden and people’s lives are entwined with each other. In this section, the train travels along the streets like a streetcar, with cars and pedestrians moving alongside it. The streets are so narrow that the train gets quite close to the cars and pedestrians, but always travels along a safe distance away. It makes you feel somewhat nostalgic to see the train travel slowly through the shopping streets lined with small fish shops, restaurants and liquor shops on both sides.

After the train travels past Koshigoe Station, Shichirigahama beach comes into view. You can enjoy the most beautiful landscape from the windows on the Enoden in the section along Shichirigahama. If you get off at the platform at Kamakurakomae Station just in front of Shichirigahama and observe Sagami Bay, which





- 1 A torii gate on the approach to Tsurugaoka Hachimangu
- 2 Kamakura Daibutsu at Kotoku-in
- 3 Enoshima viewed from Shichirigahama

All photos: Satoshi Tanaka

stretches to the Pacific, and Enoshima, which is covered in trees, in a relaxed mood, you will hear the voices of people enjoying surfing as well as the sea breeze.

There are many tourist spots where it is possible to thoroughly enjoy nature and culture in the area along the Enoden. A very popular tourist spot is Enoshima, about 15 minutes' walk from Enoshima Station. There is a bridge just under 400 meters long over the island, and you can cross it on foot or by car. There are many things to see on the island, including the Enoshima Shrine, which is said to date back to the sixth century, and an observatory lighthouse from which you can enjoy a panoramic view of Sagami Bay and Mt. Fuji from a height of about 100 meters above sea level. There is also the Enoshima Yacht Harbor, which was used for sailing when the Tokyo Olympic Games were held in 1964. It will be used again in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Around Hase Station in Kamakura City, there are shrines and a temple that is more than 800 years old. In particular, Kotoku-in, which is famous for the Kamakura Daibutsu (Giant Buddha), attracts many tourists from both within Japan and overseas. Kamakura Daibutsu, which is about 11 meters tall, is

said to have been built in the thirteenth century. The statue was originally housed inside a temple building. However, because the building was repeatedly destroyed by earthquakes, tsunamis and rainstorms, the statue is said to have been left exposed since the fifteenth century.

Kamakura Station, the terminal station, is close to Tsurugaoka Hachimangu, the symbol of Kamakura as an ancient capital. Tsurugaoka Hachimangu is known as a shrine that commemorates Minamoto-no Yoritomo (1147-1199), the lord who established the government in Kamakura. It sits in the center of Kamakura, which is surrounded by mountains on three sides.

Nakazawa says, "Because the Enoden creates beautiful scenes like those on picture postcards with the traveling train and the scenery around it, it has been used for the settings of numerous movies, dramas, cartoons and animations. This has become known overseas as well, and people from a large number of countries have recently come to enjoy the train."

The train arrives at the terminal after just 34 minutes. You can thoroughly enjoy the nature of Sagami Bay and the tradition of Kamakura by traveling on the Enoden. 



Courtesy of MiyagiGinzake



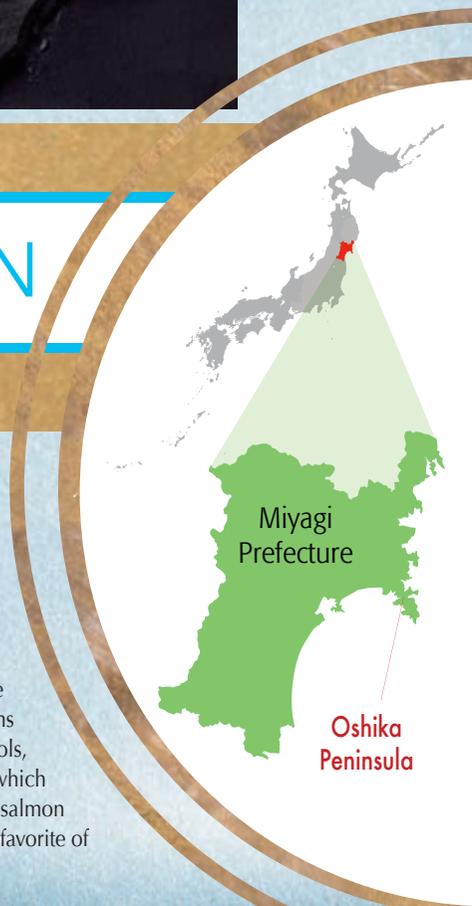
GI JAPAN PRODUCTS



COHO SALMON

Miyagi Salmon

The Pacific Ocean off Miyagi Prefecture is one of Japan's most important fishing grounds, with skipjack tuna, squid and sardines being among the traditional major catches. Today the prefecture is the center of a sophisticated form of Coho salmon production too. Coho salmon is not native to Japan, but the deep, calm, very cold waters off Miyagi's Oshika Peninsula closely resemble the fish's natural habitat further north in the Sea of Okhotsk. Melting snow from the surrounding mountains provides abundant fresh water to Miyagi's inshore nurseries, which produce juvenile Coho salmon that can be quickly transported to the salmon farms in the sea. The fish grow quickly and when mature are hoist from the pools, stunned, then drained and transferred to a seawater tank, a rapid procedure which guarantees freshness and firmness of flesh on delivery. Traditionally in Japan salmon was not a fish to be eaten raw, but today sweet, odorless Miyagi Salmon is a favorite of fresh fish connoisseurs nationwide.



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