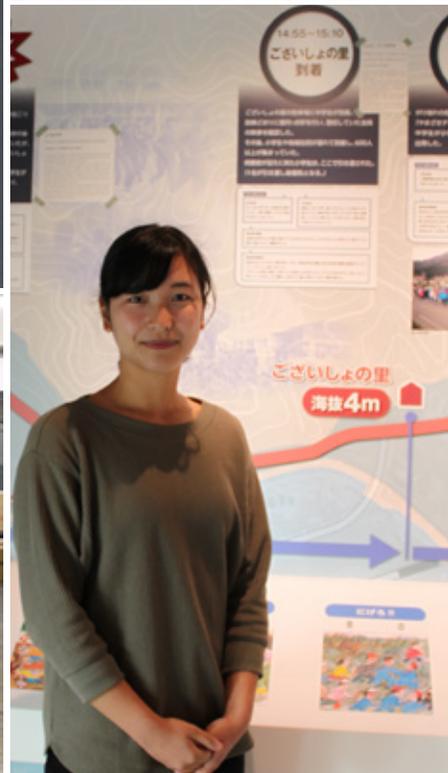


HIGHLIGHTING *Japan*

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THE POWER OF THE YOUNG

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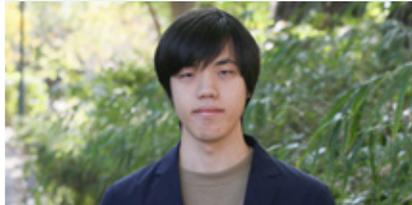
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THEME FOR **DECEMBER:**

**THE POWER OF
THE YOUNG**

Young people motivated to change society for the better are increasingly coming to the fore in Japan. We meet some of the young business leaders and other talented people making waves across the nation in fields ranging from waste reduction and nursing care to music and fashion.



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The Power of the Young
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EDITORS' NOTE
Japanese names in this publication are written in Japanese order: family name first, personal name last.

MEETING BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER SHINZO ABE AND HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS



Photograph of the Japan-His Holiness Pope Francis Meeting

On November 25, 2019, Prime Minister Abe met with His Holiness Pope Francis during his Apostolic Visit to Japan. After this meeting, “Meeting with Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps” was held.

In his opening remarks, Prime Minister Abe said:

“I welcome Your Holiness Pope Francis to Japan. I understand that Your Holiness has wanted to visit Japan for a very long time, and I am happy that after 38 years, an Apostolic Visit was able to be realized. While I was fortunate to meet Your Holiness Pope Francis when I visited Vatican in 2014, it is an especially great honor to welcome Your Holiness to the Prime Minister’s Office today.” Prime Minister Abe continued that “Japan and Vatican are partners that emphasize the importance of peace, the realization of a “World without Nuclear Weapons,” the eradication of poverty, human rights and the environment. With Your Holiness’s visit to Japan as a starting point, I want to expand our cooperation with the Vatican.”

His Holiness Pope Francis expressed his happiness at having the opportunity to visit Japan, stating that he intends to strengthen cooperation between the two countries.

Prime Minister Abe thanked His Holiness Pope Francis for his congratulatory message regarding the Enthronement of His Majesty the Emperor. Also, the Prime Minister Abe stated that “I am grateful for the warm message of His Holiness on the third anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake, as well as

for His Holiness’s encouragement at his meeting this morning with afflicted people by the disaster.”

Touching upon the visit of His Holiness Pope Francis to Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Prime Minister Abe said “Japan, as the only country to have ever suffered atomic bombs, has a duty to lead the effort of international community to realize a ‘World without Nuclear Weapons.’” Prime Minister Abe continued with his determination that “we will tenaciously endeavor to realize a “World without Nuclear Weapons” with maintaining the Three Non-Nuclear Principles, deepening understanding of the reality of atomic bombs, and making an effort to take a bridging role between nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states.”

In response, His Holiness Pope Francis welcomed Japan’s efforts and expressed support for Japan’s determination.

Prime Minister Abe and His Holiness Pope Francis exchanged views on regional affairs, especially on the current situation in North Korea. Prime Minister Abe sought understanding and support for an immediate resolution to the abductions issue, and obtained His Holiness Pope Francis’ support.

Prime Minister Abe presented His Holiness Pope Francis with a digital camera and a rosary. His Holiness Pope Francis gave Prime Minister Abe a triptych of gold, silver, and bronze medals and a set of books.



Photograph of Meeting with Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps



THE POWER OF THE YOUNG

As the movement to build a more caring and environment-friendly society gathers pace in Japan, young people are increasingly coming to the fore. In this issue of *Highlighting Japan*, we meet some of the business leaders and other talented young people making waves across the nation in fields ranging from nursing care to waste reduction and music. We asked them how they came to start on their chosen paths and about their visions. We learned how by turning their passions into plans of action, they are helping to shape the society of the future.

Photo: Courtesy of Mirairo Inc.



Sakano Akira,
chair of the Zero
Waste Academy

In Pursuit of a Zero-Waste Society

SAKANO Akira, chair of the Zero Waste Academy in Kamikatsu Town (pop. 1,500) nestled in the mountains of Tokushima Prefecture, engages in activities to further initiatives for eliminating waste emissions.

What inspired you to take an interest in environmental issues?

At the age of 10, I learned from a picture book that the kakapo, a flightless avian species native to New Zealand, was endangered by activities of human and invasive species. I loved birds so much that I started to think about how to protect it. My interest in nature conservation and environmental issues thus gained momentum.

Based on the idea that a change of the mechanisms in society was necessary to resolve environmental problems, I studied environmental policies at university. After graduation from university, I worked for a company for around two years. Then, I decided to go to graduate school,

and for a while before starting, I stayed in Kamikatsu, the hometown of a friend from university. At that time, while it must be fate, I decided to suspend entering the graduate school and instead to work for the non-profit organization Zero Waste Academy, which was looking for staff. The Zero Waste Academy was set up chiefly by the Kamikatsu Town government in 2005 to implement activities such as human resources development, awareness raising, and research for the zero-waste initiative aiming to build a society with no waste emissions. I wondered what was possible and what was not in dealing with environmental issues, but I thought that it would be an opportunity to verify the effect of environmental policies in a specific area, not an abstract one. I became chair of the Academy in 2015.

What zero-waste actions are conducted in Kamikatsu?

Kamikatsu Town announced the Zero Waste Declaration in 2003 to launch an initiative for pushing ahead with the reduction, reuse, and recycling of waste to maximally eliminate waste that has to be incinerated or placed in landfills by 2020. To attain this goal, town inhabitants carry their domestic waste to a waste collection center themselves and sort it into forty-five different types, such as bottles, cans and paper. At the collection center, there is what we call Kuru-Kuru Re-use Shop. It displays tableware, clothes and other items that people have brought from home, and anyone

can take them home for free. Each household composts its kitchen refuse. As a result of these efforts, the town boasts a recycling rate of approximately 80%, nearly four times higher than the national average. The town faces issues of aging and the shrinkage of its population and has insufficient financial resources to invest in a high-cost waste disposal facility. Behind this success lies an idea shared by officials and inhabitants that they need to resolve local problems themselves. The remaining 20% or so of waste includes PVC, rubber, disposable diapers and other materials that are presently difficult to recycle. It is necessary to change product designs and society to banish products that end up as waste.

What is the Zero Waste Academy doing to address this?

In 2017, the Zero Waste Academy launched an accreditation program for businesses engaging in zero-waste activities such as recycling and waste emission reduction. So far, thirteen entities and twelve brands have been certified, including restaurants and clothing stores in the town, in Kanagawa Prefecture, in Kochi Prefecture and elsewhere. More and more businesses stopping their purchases of items that must end up as waste will accelerate the shift to the society with no waste.

Apart from that, we conduct educational and training activities inside and outside the town. In September 2019, we developed a card game that helps children have fun while learning about zero-waste practices. Players draw cards featuring items seen in everyday life, such as straws, plastic bags and damaged socks, and then think about how to reuse, repair, upcycle, recycle, rot (compost) and refuse (not use to begin with) them. Children think deeply to work out ideas for using items for a long time or refusing them while playing the game. I hope that this will influence their actions in daily life.

You co-chaired the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Switzerland in January 2019 (Davos 2019). Was there anything in particular that impressed you?

A discussion I had with the Costa Rican president was unforgettable. His nation has made various advanced efforts in the environmental area, but I have heard that there is room for improvement in waste collection and recycling. The president asked us for some help for Costa Rica on the basis of the experience of our town.

I still have no idea how we can support Costa Rica in a practical way, yet this conversation gave us strong encouragement in terms of our potential roles in the international field. We have so far responded to a large number of requests from people inside and outside the country asking to come and see our town, and for us to teach workshops, and we've sent out information online. That has gradually increased international recognition of what has been done in the town. In fact, things like our Kuru-Kuru Re-use Shop are now found in Malaysia and other countries. Kamikatsu is one of the few municipalities in the world where all of the inhabitants take part in zero-waste activities, and I suppose it is a beacon of hope for communities facing waste issues.

What aspirations do you have for the future?

We will provide support for spreading the actions of Kamikatsu to other regions inside and outside Japan by localizing them in each region. Inspired by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ESG (environment, social and environment) finance in Japan, we will also work more closely on changing environmental actions of companies and on policymaking to raise public awareness about the environment and on accelerating behavioral changes. 

Interview by SAWAJI OSAMU



Creating Value from Barriers

Participants on a barrier-free-information-gathering event organized by Mirairo
Photo: Courtesy of Mirairo Inc.

Kakiuchi Toshiya is contributing to the creation of a society in which everyone irrespective of their ability or disability can live with ease through design that transforms barriers into value.

SATO KUMIKO



Kakiuchi Toshiya
Photo: Aizawa Tadashi

MIRAIRO Inc. provides consulting for Universal Design. Kakiuchi Toshiya, the current president, founded the company in Osaka ten years ago when he was a university student, though he had made up his mind to start such a business long before that.

“I suffer from a disease called osteogenesis imperfecta, which causes my bones to be weak and break easily. It was so inconvenient to go out in my wheelchair when I was a child that I hoped to achieve, as soon as possible, a society in which everyone is free from such inconveniences,” says Kakiuchi.

Universal Design is a concept proposed in 1985 by Ronald Mace of the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University’s College of Design. Universal

Design aims to create an environment that is accessible to everyone, irrespective of their ability or disability. Kakiuchi believes that the “barriers” that people face, meaning their disabilities or psychological challenges, can be changed into “value” by drawing on these people’s viewpoints and experiences. Kakiuchi set his company’s corporate philosophy to be one of transforming society through “barrier value.”

“Because we are challenged, we can notice things. We can create something based on new ideas and make things more user friendly for everyone by incorporating this feedback into planning and designing,” says Kakiuchi. Twenty-seven of Mirairo’s eighty-seven employees have some form of disability. In addition, about 5,000 cooperative registered partners



The Bmaps interface
Photo: Courtesy of Mirairo Inc.



Participants on Mirairo's Universal Manners program learn firsthand about the challenges faced by people with disabilities
Photo: Courtesy of Mirairo Inc.

who also have disabilities provide a wide variety of feedback to the company via surveys and other means. The mission of Mirairo, headed by Kakiuchi, is to use this feedback to create a social system that can include people who might otherwise find themselves in a socially disadvantaged position.

Mirairo's business started from consulting in the barrier-free conversions of commercial facilities, public facilities and schools, and now covers a broad range of areas, such as creating printed materials and signs that everyone can read easily, dispatching sign language interpreters and providing awareness-raising educational programs. In addition, the company also develops and operates "Bmaps," a map app that enables everyone to post and view information about barrier-free shops. Bmaps provides detailed information for more than 180,000 barrier-free shops and facilities in Japanese, English, Spanish, Korean and Chinese. The information includes, for example, how many steps and bumps there are at the entrance of buildings, the lighting and area of spaces, and whether or not there are wheelchair- and

stroller-accessible restrooms and parking spaces.

Mirairo's business model has been evaluated highly and received the Minister for Economy, Trade and Industry's award in the Japan Venture Awards 2018. Currently, Kakiuchi also serves as an advisor to the Tokyo Organizing Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. The company has been praised highly by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Paralympic Committee for its many initiatives, including distributing 3-D-printed mascot images at a mascot selection event that involved the participation of children nationwide so that visually impaired children could understand the mascots' shapes by touching them.

In July 2019 Kakiuchi was selected as a member of a Working Group set up by the Osaka Prefectural Government to decide on a future vision for Osaka leading up to World Expo 2025 Osaka-Kansai Japan. Because the World Expo is scheduled to last for 185 days, quite a long period of time, there are many issues to be addressed. Kakiuchi regards the World Expo

as the perfect opportunity for Japan to build up experience in providing facilities for persons with disabilities.

"When the 1970 World Expo was held in Osaka, braille blocks (tactile paving) were laid at stations for the first time, which marked dramatic progress in barrier-free measures in Japan. I expect that the World Expo 2025 in Osaka will also bring about good social changes, including in public awareness," says Kakiuchi.

When Kakiuchi was a university student, about 4,900 persons with disabilities entered domestic universities every year. But with entrance examination systems and school facilities now being designed in consideration of persons with disabilities, the number has increased to about 33,000. And as public transit systems are also now equipped with elevators and multi-purpose restrooms, public spaces are becoming increasingly barrier-free. "Japan is an advanced barrier-free country. We have a large accumulation of experience developed here in Japan. I believe that we can make better use of it for the benefit of the world," says Kakiuchi. 



Creating the Future of Nursing Care



Amid the transition of Japan from an aged society to a super-aged society, the shortage of human resources in nursing care has become an issue. Akimoto Kaai is currently working on a solution to the issue through the development of young human resources and by networking.

SASAKI TAKASHI

IN 2025, Japan's largest population group will be the group aged 75 and over, and before long in 2065 those aged 75 and over will account for one quarter of the total population. With the countdown to this unprecedented super-aged society underway, Akimoto Kaai, CEO of Join for Kaigo INC, is currently working on reforming the nursing care industry together with young colleagues of the same

generation with the mission of fulfilling the potential of people through nursing care.

Akimoto has said that she hadn't intended to major in nursing care in university, but that in a start-up club that she joined when she was a sophomore, she heard a story in which the grandmother of one member of the club developed dementia and became unable to recognize even the face of her grandchildren. This caused her to become interested in the world of dementia and nursing care."

Then, Akimoto, with the other members, published the free newspaper *MAGOKORO* on the prevention of dementia, which won the runner-up prize in the nationwide student free newspaper contest. In the last two years of college, she worked a part-time job at a daycare service in a nursing care facility. She then founded Join for Kaigo when she graduated

- 1 KAIGO LEADERS members with 2025 “future leaders” publicity
- 2 Participants gather for discussions after a PRESENT lecture
- 3&4 Akimoto Kaai gives a lecture at the KAIGO LEADERS 5th anniversary event

Photos: Courtesy of Join for Kaigo INC

from university in the spring of 2013.

Akimoto says that her two years working at the nursing care service were significant and very fulfilling, but she could identify issues. “The staff working in the industry were so busy that they could only handle the task at hand, and the high turnover rate and the shortage of human resources were also serious issues. I founded the company in order to raise interest in nursing care among young people and to solve these issues.”

According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, in 2016 there were about 1.9 million people working in the nursing care industry. It is estimated that about 2.45 million people will be necessary by the end of 2025, and human resources development and employee retention are issues of great significance.

One of Join for Kaigo’s core businesses is consulting on recruiting human resources for companies and municipalities, and providing services to nurture human resources. The company holds seminars for the managers of nursing care facilities on recruiting, fostering, and retaining workers and events in which those involved in nursing care and medical care gather to exchange information and opinions.

Another core business of Join for Kaigo is the management of KAIGO LEADERS. KAIGO LEADERS has six full-time employees and about seventy other members including care workers, doctors, and nurses, mainly providing two human resources development programs for young people in their twenties: KAIGO MY PROJECT and PRESENT. KAIGO MY PROJECT is a three-month workshop in which about twenty participants with a variety of job types, titles and ages exchange opinions, each one of them working on launching a start-up or a business improvement project. PRESENT is a program in which experts from a variety of fields give lectures and based on these lectures, lecturers and participants further discussion, creating a place to see nursing care from a fresh perspective, to develop new ideas, and to build up a network of personal connections.

As many as 3,500 people have participated in

Akimoto Kaai
Photo: Itabashi Yuichi



KAIGO LEADERS activities to date. Some have launched start-ups while others have worked on the improvement of their workplaces. For example, a doctor who worked for the department of dermatology at a hospital launched a company that provides services for nursing care facilities in which users can easily seek medical consultation using a PC or smartphone. In addition, an employee of a nursing care facility created a workplace where no employees have left for more than one year, through close communication between staff members and the gradual implementation of improvement measures that the staff proposed.

In addition to those who are involved in nursing care, young people and students, who belong to a variety of industries and organizations, also participate in KAIGO LEADERS activities. Speaking of the KAIGO LEADERS vision, Akimoto says, “In 2050, the leaders of the nursing care industry will be the leaders of Japan.” Akimoto explains that the vision contains the hope that having the power to solve the variety of difficult issues globally in nursing care in a super-aged society will surely lead to the power to help Japan improve society as a whole.

KAIGO LEADERS currently has three bases for its activities, in Tokyo, Kansai (established in 2018) and Hokuriku (established in 2018), and will further increase the number to eight from Hokkaido to Kyushu in 2020, with the plan of widening its network of young people interested in nursing care across the country.

It is Akimoto’s challenge, working with the many young people tackling the variety of issues faced by the current aged society, to provide good nursing care and to build good communities and a strong, sustainable society. **■**

Preparing Future Generations for Another Disaster



Kikuchi Nodoka
Photo: Umezawa Akira

Kikuchi Nodoka works as a storyteller in Kamaishi City, Iwate Prefecture, explaining to visitors from Japan and around the world about her experience during the Great East Japan Earthquake that hit her hometown in 2011. She tells people how important it is to protect their own lives in a disaster.

UMEZAWA AKIRA

KIKUCHI Nodoka was a third-year student at Kamaishi Higashi Junior High School when the Great East Japan Earthquake struck on March 11, 2011. She and her classmates fled from the school into the surrounding hills to escape the surging sea as a siren continuously wailed across the area. They ran for their lives along with the students of the adjacent elementary school, with whom they had conducted regular evacuation drills to ensure they survived an emergency together. Kikuchi says she thought, “The tsunami will come soon after the shaking stops. I must evacuate to the surrounding hills as quickly as I can. As soon as this idea entered my mind, my body reacted, thanks to the routine emergency drills that I had experienced before.”

The Sanriku region, where Kamaishi City is located, has a history of significant seismic activity and devastating tsunami damage. In an attempt to prepare children for another disaster, the Kamaishi City Government has been promoting disaster management education. Kamaishi City was devastated by the tsunami, but 1,927 elementary schoolchildren and 999 junior high school students survived in the city, a survival rate of 99.8%.

Inspired by the high survival rate for schoolchildren in the disaster, Kikuchi later embarked on her career. “Many of the schoolchildren in the city survived the tsunami, but many others in other parts of the region died. I have come to realize that our generation must address regional disaster management issues



The newly established Inochi o Tsunagu Miraikan in Kamaishi City (left). Panels and pictures help to inform visitors about disaster preparedness (right)
Photos: Courtesy of Saijo Yoshiyasu / Grafica Inc.

seriously,” Kikuchi says.

As Kikuchi studied in high school and college, she kept asking herself how she could contribute to the promotion of regional disaster management activities. She thought about becoming a disaster medical assistance team nurse to help disaster victims or becoming a school teacher to educate children about disaster prevention. Both are important professions, but she felt that there was something else for her to do in her career.

In the spring of 2019, the Inochi o Tsunagu Miraikan was established in Kamaishi City as a center for disaster preparedness education, passing on the history of the disaster, and sharing stories and lessons learned from it. When she happened upon an ad recruiting staff for the facility on the web, she immediately applied, thinking, “this is it!”

Kikuchi says, “I was thinking all the time about how I could contribute to protecting the lives of people and helping the region while leveraging individual people’s insights and experience in the region. I realized that I wanted to pursue a career in gathering peers who are willing to work together in emergencies.”

Kikuchi works as a storyteller at the facility today,

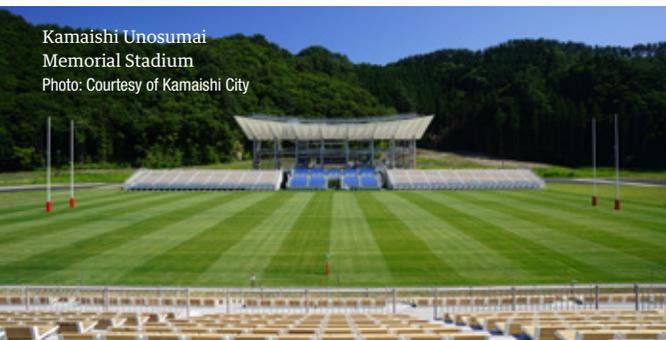
explaining to visitors about her disaster experience and disaster-prevention education with the aid of panels and pictures showing disaster damage. She has been invited to address audiences at conferences and symposiums focused on disaster prevention initiatives. Through these activities Kikuchi has been sharing lessons learned from the disaster with people across the country.

“Through a number of activities, I have built up a network of people engaged in regional disaster management activities across Japan. Going forward, I will stay active in passing the insights and expertise learned from my colleagues on to the youth in local communities,” says Kikuchi.

In the place where her high school used to stand, Kamaishi Unosumai Memorial Stadium has been built, which was used to host matches in the 2019 Rugby World Cup. A number of international rugby fans visited the Inochi o Tsunagu Miraikan before and after the games.

“I was so glad that so many people from around the world came to visit the facility. I was deeply touched when I saw visitors in tears at the exhibits as if they were also disaster victims.”

When asked about the challenges confronting disaster prevention, Kikuchi says without hesitation, “It’s indifference. You cannot forget the people who sacrificed their lives to save other citizens who were not prepared for the disaster. Quite a few of the tsunami victims included ordinary citizens with a keen interest in disaster prevention calling for evacuation as responsible members of local community organizations.” Indifference puts you and the people around you at risk. I will stay committed to local community development and make people realize the great importance of disaster prevention.”



Kamaishi Unosumai Memorial Stadium
Photo: Courtesy of Kamaishi City



Bonding with Chemistry through Cards

At the age of nine, Yoneyama Yuito invented a card game which helps players to learn about chemical bonds, and then set up a business at the age of twelve. The game has been a hit on the Japanese market and an English-language version is now in the works.

UMEZAWA AKIRA

CHEMISTRY Quest is a card game in which players compete to create chemical bonds. There are forty-eight cards in the pack. Each card represents an atom and is marked with a chemical symbol, either hydrogen, carbon, oxygen or nitrogen. Players form molecules by combining these atom cards. When a molecule is formed, a player is

rewarded with a card, and players compete to collect cards. For example, two hydrogen cards and one oxygen card will combine to form water. Three hydrogen cards and one nitrogen card will form ammonia. At the end of the game, the person with the most cards wins. Chemistry Quest is original because it helps players to learn about chemical bonds while also having fun.

The game was invented by Yoneyama Yuito, who is now 20 years old and a first-year student at the University of Tokyo. He was only nine when he came up with the idea for the game in 2008 and just twelve when he established Chemistry Quest Inc. in 2011 to make the game commercially available.

People are often put off by complicated, chemistry-themed games. Nevertheless, nearly 135,000 sets have been sold since Chemistry Quest was released, and an iOS app version of the game was also launched in 2012.

Yoneyama had an inquisitive mind from an early age, and

All Photos: Itabashi Yuichi

showed interest in many subjects. He explained that was because of the experiences he had in kindergarten.

“The kindergarten was unique because all communication was done in English. The classes were also unique. For example, we were tasked to introduce the place where we lived. We had to gradually expand the location, starting with the town, then prefecture, country, and last, Earth. I really enjoyed the class, which allowed me to discover the joy of pursuing my interests, instead of simply acquiring knowledge.”

Yoneyama’s home in Sagami-hara City, Kanagawa Prefecture, was close to the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) Sagami-hara Campus, and he often visited the Campus to attend events open to the general public. To learn about space, he read everything that he could lay his hands on, including illustrated reference books, and he took interest in the history of Earth. Learning about space then spurred his interest in fossils and minerals.

“When I was investigating about minerals, I realized that minerals are composed of distinct elements. That is why atomic symbols are used to describe specific minerals. This is how I developed interest in chemistry, which has become the theme of the Chemistry Quest project,” Yoneyama says.

Playing a card game his friends had made themselves during lunch gave him an idea to create his own card game. “It was

similar to Shinkei-suijaku (a memory game), and I wanted to make something similar so that I could share the joy of learning chemistry through a game featuring chemical bonding.”

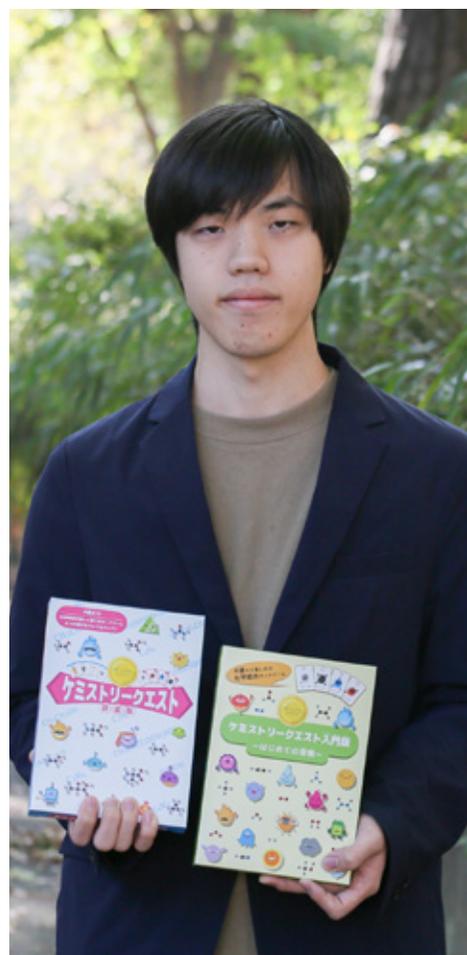
When he was eleven, Yoneyama presented Chemistry Quest at the Tokyo International Science Festival, an event where visitors can learn about science and technology in a fun way, to allow them to try it. Both young and old people evaluated it highly and recommended that he make it commercially available.

To pursue his desire to share the joy of learning chemistry through the game, at the age of 12 Yoneyama requested that a publishing company commercialize Chemistry Quest, and had a series of discussions with the employees of the publishing company despite the 20-year or more age difference, to decide on the design and contents of the rule book.

As soon as the game was made commercially available, Yoneyama established a company and assumed the position of CEO.

“Even if it were commercialized, there was a limit as to what I personally could do to make the game widely available across Japan. I thought a company could be a solution that would make it possible to reach out to as many people as possible and make them aware how fun this game is.”

When he was a second year high-school student, Yoneyama released a revised new edition of Chemistry Quest. He now studies



Yoneyama Yuito holding rule books for the Chemistry Quest game

at the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Tokyo, while at the same time preparing for the launch of the English version of Chemistry Quest, with a view toward entering overseas markets.

“I hope that children around the world will play the game and take interest in chemistry. I am also hoping to make a new card game. Although I am busy studying at university and the lack of time is my biggest worry, I hope to realize this wish.” 

Yuki Aki with
an OriHime robot
Photo: Itabashi Yuichi

Empowerment through Alter-ego Robots

Yuki Aki aims to overcome the difficulties caused by physical disabilities and distance through “alter-ego robots” and realize a society in which everyone can participate.

SASAKI TAKASHI

Even if you cannot leave home because of illness, if you had an alter ego, you could still attend school as usual or work in a company. This was the idea that gave birth to OriHime, an “alter-ego robot.” OriHime can easily be operated by anyone using a smartphone or personal computer and can be communicated with as if the real person were right there in its place.

OriHime is a doll-type robot with only an upper body. It is 23 cm tall, 17 cm wide and weighs 660 grams, and houses a built-in camera, speaker and microphone. By connecting OriHime to the Internet, an operator can remotely control the robot using a personal computer or smartphone to move its head and change its line of sight, or signal “Yes” or “No” and express feelings like joy and anxiety by head or hand movements.

Yuki Aki, the co-founder and COO of Ory Lab Inc., is developing the robot. Yuki has loved science since she was a small girl. As a first-grade student she received first prize at the Natural Science Observation Contest organized by a newspaper company for her study of the ecology of snails. In 2006



Yoshifuji Ory with a remotely operated OriHime-D robot at Alter-Ego Robot Café DAWN
Photo: Courtesy of OryLab Inc



Yoshifuji Ory (third left) with colleagues and robots at Alter-Ego Robot Café DAWN
Photo: Courtesy of OryLab Inc

when she was a first-year student in high school, she received the Minister for Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's award (the top award) for her research on fluid dynamics in the Japan Science & Engineering Challenge (JSEC). But Yuki had to be hospitalized for an extended period with tuberculosis shortly after that, which prevented her from participating in the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF), in which only top JSEC winners qualify to participate. The following year she again succeeded in winning a JSEC prize, and used her previous bitter disappointment as a springboard for her participation in the ISEF. At that time, Yuki became friends with Yoshifuji Ory, the 2004 ISEC Minister for Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's award winner who later become CEO of Ory Lab Inc.

"Yoshifuji had a very hard time with illness and truancy in his elementary and junior high school days. He told us about his basic concept for OriHime, to use a robot to combat social isolation. Because it was exactly what I myself had felt when my own illness prevented me from participating in the ISEF, we hit it off right away. And we decided to launch the alter-ego robot project together with the other people we had become friends with through the JSEC," says Yuki.

The OriHime prototype, completed in 2009, was shaped like a doll with its hands and legs and had many problems in practical applications because it was hard to operate and easily fell over. Through trial and error, they completed the current style featuring only a movable neck and arms in 2013. In 2016 they managed to mass-produce robots and finally

provided them to many users through a monthly rental business model.

"Currently, we provide OriHime to large companies that actively promote teleworking as well as to hospitals and individuals. Operators often tell us that as they look and hear around the office via OriHime, they feel as if they were there. People who make contact with OriHime in the office say that the personality of the operator shows in neck and arm movements as well as in their voice. OriHime is a technology that can communicate a person's presence, as well as their mind and feelings," says Yuki.

Until now, Ory Lab Inc. has focused on providing as many OriHime robots as possible. But now it plans to carry out new projects. One of the projects is a public experiment called "Alter-Ego Robot Café DAWN" using OriHime-D, a new type of alter-ego robot about 120 cm in height that can do simple manual labor. In this experiment, people suffering from serious diseases like amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and with severe disabilities operate OriHime-D by OriHime eye, a communication device that can be operated with the eyes alone, to perform customer service tasks.

"This café gives bedridden people who have never worked before the opportunity to feel the joy of working. In addition, we also propose a whole new work style different from conventional teleworking to companies that have a hard time with shortages of human resources," says Yuki.

Now many eyes are turning to Yuki and her friends' activities to overcome various restrictions through the new OriHime technology and connect people with each other and with society. 

THE KOTO

Into Tomorrow

University student and professional musician Konno Leo is leading the traditional Japanese musical instrument that is the koto into new dimensions while learning from and maintaining its age-old traditions.

SATO KUMIKO

THE standard koto comprises thirteen strings, each with a movable bridge, strung over a long body made of paulownia wood. The koto is typically placed on a stand on the floor and is played using three plectra on the right hand and bare fingers on the left. Based on an instrument introduced from China in the eighth century, the koto has played a key role in the establishment of Japan's unique music traditions.

Konno Leo, a third-year student in the Department of Traditional Japanese Music at Tokyo University of the Arts, plays the koto with an apparently effortless grace, performing and recording in a variety of styles and in genres ranging from classical koto music to jazz. Konno

Konno Leo

says, "I collaborate with players of many instruments, including violin and flute, but what I cherish are the sounds which only the koto can produce."

Konno says that what attracts him most about the koto are its "slightly awkward features as an instrument. The standard koto has only thirteen strings, so the range of sound is limited; and the instrument doesn't produce a lot of volume, either. But, because of this, I am particular about each sound; for example, sounds that resonate in the performance space when performing, and sounds that make the listeners concentrate. I think this is where the koto's identity is born."

Konno, the son of an American father and a Japanese mother, attended an international school in Yokohama from elementary through high school. All students start to learn to play the koto in music class in the elementary school. One of the instructors at the school is the American koto player Curtis Patterson. Konno says that he enjoyed the freedom of playing koto amongst students of many nationalities. He received a silver medal at a national elementary and junior high school music competition, which he first entered while in elementary school, and received

the grand prix award as a third-year student in junior high school. Later, he gained further prominence by winning a major contest for traditional music that included adult participants when he was a second year student in high school. Konno released his first album in March 2017, under the stage name, LEO.

In April, immediately after his debut, he entered university and devoted himself wholly to his studies, since his music department prohibits performances outside the university during the first year. Konno says, “Students learn everything from etiquette to posture over the course of the year. As I had been performing as I liked up until that point, it was a difficult year for me.”

Nevertheless, the experience was useful. Relearning classical Japanese music that was written about 100 to 400 years ago also had a great effect on him. “In traditional music, there are unique musical intervals, and I’ve finally become able to incorporate these when playing modern koto music and music of other genres. I’ve been evaluated as having grown a lot in recent performances, but I’ve personally experienced my growth, as well.”

Konno says that being in an arts university with students majoring in other instruments and other fine arts has expanded his world. Restarting his performing in his second year, he developed plans for performances with artists from a variety of fields, including spatial performances, and turning the act of performing itself into an art form has become one of Konno’s goals. Konno plans to incorporate many koto pieces that he composed himself in his latest album, which is currently in production. Among these is a cutting-edge piece of music in which the koto’s timbre is electrically altered with the use of an effector.

Says Konno, “There are so few children learning koto today in Japan. We cannot let this long-standing traditional culture fade away. That is why I want to show the appeal of the koto to many more people through my work.” 🎪



A traditionally attired Konno at the koto



Konno in concert



Future Fashion Leaders on Show

The highlight of the annual festival at Bunka Fashion College in Tokyo is the fashion show, where students showcase their creations and thousands of people gather to watch.

UMEZAWA AKIRA

BUNKA Fashion College, the first professional dressmaking school in Japan, was established in 1923. Over 300,000 students have graduated from the institution, and some have become world-renowned fashion designers, including Yamamoto Yohji, who established the Yohji Yamamoto brand, and Takahashi Jun, who established UNDERCOVER. Approximately 3,500 students who aim for success in the fashion industry currently study at the college, which organizes its departments based on four specialties: Fashion Creation, Fashion Technology, Fashion Marketing and Distribution, and Fashion Accessories and Textiles.

Pieces designed by students are displayed and sold at the school festival held every November, which attracts many visitors who can also look around the facility or purchase goods from select shops organized by students. The highlight of the

All Photos: Itabashi Yuichi

festival is the fashion show, where students showcase their own creations.

Some 20,000 people gather at the college to watch the fashion show each year. With the support of members of the fashion industry and teachers, students deal with all aspects of the fashion show, including planning, designing and creation of show pieces, styling, stage direction, modeling, hair and makeup, and setting up the venue. Each year, they leave visitors speechless not only with their fantastic stage direction but also with their elaborate creations.

Yoshimura Kaori and Hada Sayuri, teachers who also fulfill the role as chairs of the fashion show committee, explained the meaning behind the show managed chiefly by students.

“Students form teams in early May to start preparation. Three planners collaborate with other students, who are responsible for other parts of the show, to create a scene. Today’s students find it difficult to have passionate discussions with others.



Scenes from the Bunka Fashion College fashion show

While they may struggle to establish communication initially, they soon learn not to compromise and not to shy away from discord and conflict in order to create pieces of a high standard. In six months, they gain a lot of knowledge from the experience and grow as people.”

Domestic and overseas companies, textile organizations, production areas and trading companies provide a variety of materials to support the fashion show. After students have decided on a theme, which materials to use, and which scene to present their pieces, they give a presentation. Students who have successfully completed this process act as the head of the scene, and come up with designs by working with three planners and three design staff.

This year’s show was comprised of eight scenes. Each lasted about three minutes, during which nine to eleven models appeared successively on stage. A team that used materials provided by Eddie Bauer, an American outdoor brand, created a scene called *TEPPEN* (summit), to portray the ambitious mountaineers’ attitude toward life with pieces featuring the colors blue, red and white. The daring creations showed how outdoor wear might evolve in the future. The other team used materials provided by LANIFICIO CERRUTI, a long-established Italian textile manufacturer, and created a scene called *Ideal* based on the history of suits. Classic yet

modern pieces offered endless possibilities for fashion creation.

The most distinctive scene was called *Buvivian*, which used the national costume of Ukraine as its motif. Adorably colorful creations adorned with flower motifs that were made chiefly with folk-inspired textiles provided by the Embassy of Ukraine and Fujikake Co., Ltd. drew loud applause from the audience. The show lasted about 30 minutes, and was repeated sixteen times over three days. The venue, which accommodates up to 900 people, was full to capacity each time.

Sasaki Chiokuni, a second year student in Garment Creation in the Fashion Creation Department, who acted as the chair of the fashion show committee this year, decided to enter Bunka Fashion College after watching one of the fashion shows before enrolling. “I was mesmerized not only by their creations but also by the music, lighting and stage direction. I found it difficult to believe that the pieces were created by students. At the same time, I dreamed of creating a show like this myself.”

One thousand students were involved in this year’s fashion show. The valuable experience of organizing a quality show as students helps to develop talented people who can lead the fashion industry for the next generation. 

Rules on Flying Drones in Japan

Japan has recently amended its rules on the operation of drones and other unmanned aircraft (UA).

SAWAJI OSAMU

IN recent years, there has been rapid growth in demand in Japan for “UA/Drones,” flying objects that cannot accommodate a person and are operated by remote control or autopilot technologies. UA/Drones have been developed for recreational and business uses such as taking photographs and video, spraying agricultural chemicals and inspecting infrastructure. Going forward, it is expected that further proliferation of the technology in a range of areas will create new industries while expanding service opportunities and helping to improve our quality of life.

Meanwhile, operating UAs must not undermine air traffic safety, injure people, or damage buildings or vehicles on the ground. For that reason, partial amendments to the Civil Aeronautics Act were issued and came into force in December 2015 and September 2019, respectively, introducing fundamental safety rules for unmanned aircraft.

The Civil Aeronautics Act defines the term “UA” as any aerial vehicle weighing over 200 grams that cannot accommodate people on board for structural reasons and can be remotely or automatically piloted.

(1) Airspace requiring administrative approval for flying UAs

Any person who intends to operate a UA in the following airspaces is required to obtain permission from the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, or MLIT. (Permission will be granted only if you have completed certain safety

procedures following the application for permission to the Ministry.

- Areas where air traffic safety could be undermined

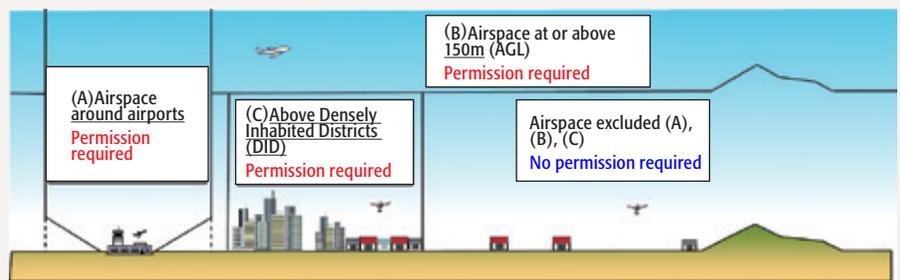
(A) Airspace around airports. No-fly zones include airspaces above designated approach surfaces around airports and heliports, transitional surfaces, horizontal surfaces or extended approach surfaces, conical surfaces or outer horizontal surfaces.

With the partial amendment made to the Civil Aeronautics Act in September 2019, the airspace below approach surfaces, transitional surfaces and above the airport premises have been added to no-fly zones in consideration of the possible significant impact on airport operations resulting from the closing of a runway due to an accident caused by a flying UA, given in particular the busy runways at the following eight airports: New Chitose Airport, Narita International Airport, Tokyo International Airport, Chubu Centrair International Airport, Osaka International Airport, Kansai International Airport, Fukuoka Airport and Naha Airport. (See Figure.)

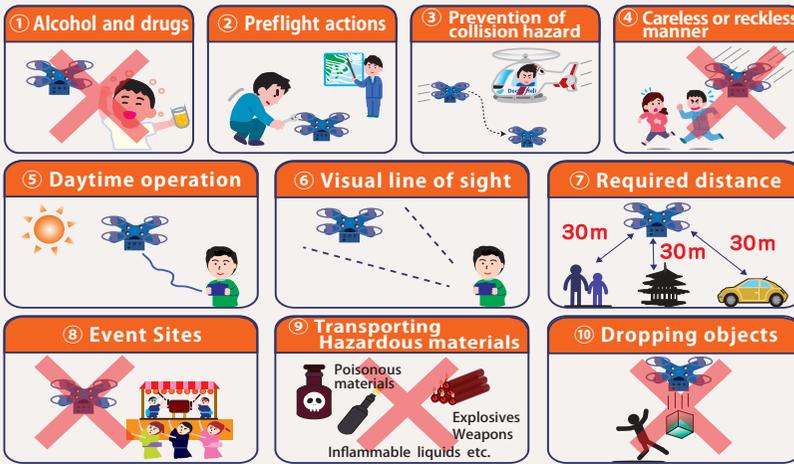
(B) Airspace at or above 150 meters above ground or sea level

- Airspace above densely populated or inhabited districts

(C) Airspace above densely inhabited districts as defined by the government based on the results of the National Census



Courtesy of MLIT



- [6] Operate UA/Drones within Visual Line of Sight (VLOS).
- [7] Keep a 30 m or more operating distance between UA/Drones and persons or properties on the ground/water surface.
- [8] Do not operate UA/Drones over event sites where many people gather.
- [9] Do not transport hazardous materials such as explosives by UA/Drone.
- [10] Do not drop any objects from UA/Drones.

Courtesy of MLIT

(2) Operational limitations

The following rules must be followed when flying a UA. Rules [5] to [10] below are not applicable to flights if administrative approval has been obtained from MLIT. (For rules [5] to [10], permission will be granted only if certain safety procedures have been completed with the application made in advance for permission to the Ministry.)

- [1] Do not operate UA/Drones under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- [2] Fly or operate UA/Drones after taking preflight actions.
- [3] Operate UA/Drones to prevent collision hazards with airplanes or other UAs/Drones.
- [4] Do not operate UAs/Drones in a careless or reckless manner
- [5] Fly or operate in the daytime.

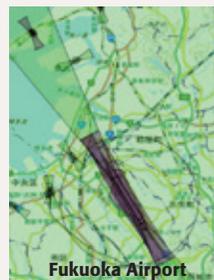
PENALTIES

If the rules (1) or [2] through [10] in (2) are violated, the UA/Drone operator is liable for a fine of up to 500,000 yen. In the case of violation of rule [1] in (2), the operator is liable for imprisonment for up to one year or a fine of up to 300,000 yen.

The permission requirements listed in (1) and rules [5] through [10] in (2) are not applicable to search and rescue operations by the central government, municipal government organizations, or their contractors in accidents or disasters. ㊦

For more information on the Civil Aeronautics Act, please visit the following website:

<https://www.mlit.go.jp/en/koku/index.html>



Notes: The purple areas show new no-fly zones. The Figure may reflect certain measurement errors or represent airport sites that have been altered after completing construction. For further details, please contact airport administrators.

Courtesy of MLIT

More Efficient Medical Inquiries Using AI

A new AI-driven medical inquiry service has been launched that is expected to reduce the burden of clerical work for doctors, leaving them more time for patients.

UMEZAWA AKIRA

MANY medical institutions have difficulty reducing doctors' long working hours and patients' long waiting times. One cause is the inefficient management of medical records. During an examination, a doctor verbally confirms the details of the handwritten medical questionnaire completed by the patient in the waiting room and then enters the results into the electronic medical record after the examination.

Dr. Abe Yoshinori, a practicing physician and CEO of Ubie Inc., says, "Doctors are so busy with the clerical work of updating electronic medical records that they cannot focus on medical examinations—their main work." AI-based Patient Interview System "AI-Monshin" developed by the namesake company solves this problem.

AI-Monshin is software that converts information

entered by patients on tablet terminals into proper technical terms and displays it on doctors' computers. If patients enter their age, sex and symptoms while waiting for an examination, AI will choose optimum items from 3,500 types of question data and display around twenty questions on the tablet. Patients choose from the items displayed and answer the questions, a process which takes around three minutes. The answers are displayed on doctors' computers as text using medical terms.

Ubie Inc. created an algorithm that optimizes



Abe Yoshinori, MD, Ubie Inc CEO



Data entry screen explaining that if the patient enters the word “head,” a range of possible symptoms will then be displayed



Some of the range of data entry options



A patient's medical records are accessible to doctors using the app

the data entry options for each patient by learning from 50,000 pieces of paper data. Unlike conventional medical questionnaires that ask all patients the same questions, the software enables doctors to obtain accurate information from each patient, which can reduce the average inquiry time from 10 to 3.5 minutes. The system is currently being introduced at more than 100 hospitals, which have reported, “The reduction of inquiry time has enabled us to secure more time to communicate with patients.” “At medical institutions that have introduced AI-Monshin, when patients enter the examination room, possible names of their ailment have already been displayed on the doctor’s computer. This knowledge facilitates

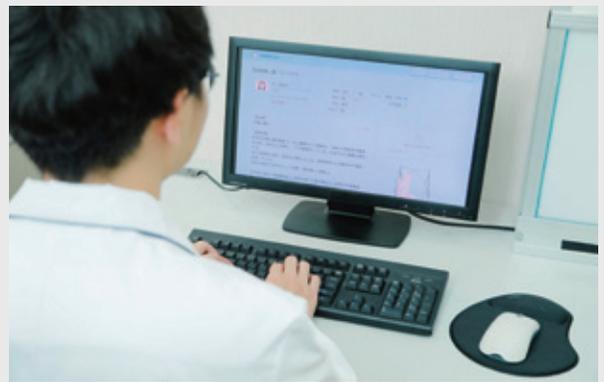
the doctor’s decisions on treatment policies. The software can predict the name of a disease with high precision, from more than 1,100 possibilities,” says Abe.

In addition, the company has constructed a system for taking photos of drug data books that contain necessary information for medical workers, such as the history of drug use, medical history and allergies, and letters of introduction from other medical institutions using a tablet terminal at the reception desk and displaying these details on doctors’ computers. The company is also constructing a system for automatically incorporating the details of inquiries into electronic medical records in collaboration with an electronic medical records developer.

One encounter with a patient when Abe was an intern inspired him to develop AI-Monshin. The patient, who had started to find blood in their stools two years previously, had said, “My condition was not very bad. I was so busy that I was not able to go to the hospital, but I later felt a pain in my back and sought medical advice.” An examination revealed that large intestine cancer had metastasized to the patient’s bones. Abe says there was nothing he could do.

The experience made him aware of the importance of providing the right treatment to patients at the right time.

Abe says, “I have the idea of constructing a system for users who feel comfortable making medical inquiries at home. If you feel unwell, enter your symptoms into the smartphone app. The data will be sent to the hospital and you can easily consult with a doctor. I also intend to provide multilingual solutions to people all over the world in the future.”



A doctor refers to a patient’s symptom entries

Connecting People through Okonomiyaki

Fernando Lopez from Guatemala runs an *okonomiyaki* restaurant in Hiroshima that is a hot favorite of local and international customers alike.

SATO KUMIKO



OKONOMIYAKI is a popular, inexpensive pancake dish made using a flour batter and ingredients such as meat, seafood and vegetables. The batter and other ingredients are shaped into a circle on a hot griddle, cooked, and finished with a variety of toppings including a special sauce. The sauce, a blend of vegetables, fruits and spices, has a distinctive sweet taste, and is indispensable to okonomiyaki.

There are two prefectures in Japan that are known

for their okonomiyaki: Osaka and Hiroshima. Osaka-style okonomiyaki is prepared by mixing the batter and most other ingredients together before grilling them. Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki on the other hand is prepared by first making a thin crepe and then stacking other ingredients such as cabbage, noodles, pork and egg on top. The latter style is comparatively light.

The number of okonomiyaki restaurants in Hiroshima offering a wider variety of toppings than is

- 1 Fernando Lopez behind the griddle
- 2 The restaurant entrance
- 3 The counter dining space

Photos: Sato Kumiko (1); Courtesy of Fernando Lopez (2, 3)

conventional, such as cheese or kimchi, has been increasing in recent years. Okonomiyaki Lopez is one such restaurant. The restaurant's owner-chef, Fernando Lopez, who was born in Guatemala, introduced okonomiyaki topped with jalapeño, a chili pepper native to Central and South America, for the first time.

"One of our regular customers who worked at the company next door once requested a spicy okonomiyaki topping. I served jalapeño and he really liked it. The jalapeño topping was subsequently added to our menu. I initially thought that jalapeño would not pair well with okonomiyaki. Nevertheless, other customers also liked it, and it is now a part of our regular menu," Lopez says. The okonomiyaki he prepares is appreciated by the locals, who are particular about their okonomiyaki, and his seventeen-seat restaurant is filled to capacity almost every day.

Lopez grew up in Guatemala, which was politically unstable at the time due to a civil war. As soon as he graduated from school, he went to the United States to live with a relative. He worked as an apprentice in a restaurant, since he had always enjoyed cooking, and his skills and diligence were soon recognized, winning him quick promotions. While working at a hotel in Hawaii, he met a Japanese woman from Hiroshima whom he later married.

"I thought that Japan would be a better place for me to raise a child in the future and moved to Hiroshima in 1995. Going back to Guatemala was not an option," Lopez says.

"Another reason to go to Japan was to open a

restaurant. I could not realize this for four years, but just as I was beginning to give up, my wife's aunt recommended that I open an okonomiyaki restaurant."

Following her advice, Lopez worked as an apprentice in a famous okonomiyaki restaurant in Hiroshima. The owner recognized his talent, and not only passed down vital techniques but also willingly supported the opening of the new restaurant that Lopez had dreamed of. He even helped design the griddle, which is central to the preparation of good okonomiyaki, to be 3 cm thick.

The griddle requires 45 minutes to preheat and a further 15 minutes to stabilize the temperature, which means that an hour a day is spent just to get the griddle to the right temperature. The thick, large griddle may take longer to preheat than others, but it distributes heat evenly, allowing Lopez to cook okonomiyaki on any part of it, without having to worry about hot or cold spots. It takes Lopez 15 minutes to cook an okonomiyaki on the griddle, which wraps around the counter area. The slow, gentle cooking process is the key to the taste of Lopez's okonomiyaki. When it is ready, customers enjoy eating the okonomiyaki straight from the griddle.

"There is no divider on the griddle to separate customers. People who do not know each other sometimes start talking, which is a great thing about okonomiyaki," Lopez says.

Hiroshima, which has two World Heritage Sites—Itsukushima Shinto Shrine and the Hiroshima Peace Memorial (Genbaku Dome)—is frequented by a large number of overseas tourists, and many of them have visited Lopez's restaurant after learning of it by word of mouth.

"Many customers have expressed a desire to live in Japan, because it offers peace and safety rivaled by few countries in the world. My time living in Japan has made me realize that many people have worked hard to achieve and maintain this peace," Lopez says.

Each night after closing, Lopez polishes his griddle until midnight so that the next day he can connect people once again at the okonomiyaki restaurant where people are always smiling. ■



Jalapeño-topped *okonomiyaki* on the griddle
Photo: Courtesy of Fernando Lopez

The Meteoric Rise of Street Dance



Young dancers having a blast



“Dance battle” performers at SSDW



A dance team in action on the main stage in Yoyogi Park

Since its introduction to Japan in the 1980s, street dance has soared in popularity and now ranks alongside sports such as baseball and volleyball at schools.

ROB GILHOOLY

It’s a tense battle, pitting the infectiously energetic team Jagarico against the subtle guile of team Mitsuya Cider.

One after another, the four members of each team take to the floor to show off their skills in one of four genres - hip-hop; pop; lock; and freestyle. At this stage of the contest, high-level technique is a given:

It’s all about flair, attitude and originality, and both teams have those in spades.

By the slimmest of margins, the judges declare team Jagarico as “battle park” champions for 2019, marking the climax of the

Shibuya Street Dance Week (SSDW) in Tokyo.

“I’m totally stoked,” said Jagarico member Takamatsu Yuta, an elementary school fifth grader whose electrifying display in the pop category - performed in pinstripe suit and trilby hat and supplemented by an array of amusing facial expressions - brought the crowd of spectators alive.

SSDW, which takes place at venues around Shibuya and features contests and workshops aiming to introduce street dance to as wide an audience as possible, is a relative newcomer to the Japan street dance



Video by Satoshi Tanaka



scene, but has quickly garnered a healthy following. This year's event attracted some 39,000 visitors - almost triple that of the inaugural year in 2015.

Street dance first found its way to Japan in the 1980s via the Bronx district of New York, where since the seventies genres such as b-boying/b-girling and hip-hop had evolved organically on the streets to become an integral part of vernacular culture.

Its growth in Japan started with the late night airing of popular American TV music program "Soul Train" and was further boosted by the arrival of Music Television (MTV), which first hit the airwaves here in the latter part of the eighties.

A few years later the pop sensation TRF, whose DJ Koo influenced riffs and street-heavy dance moves - courtesy of dance legends Sam, Etsu and Chiharu - inspired an entire generation of wannabe hip-hoppers.

By the mid nineties, the sight of Japanese youth popping, locking and toprocking about town was common nighttime fare - especially where there was any kind of reflective glass, such as the facades of business high-rises and department stores.

If at a glance their gyrations seemed narcissistic, some perspective was gained from the countless contests and other street dance events that were gaining traction, especially in major conurbations such as Osaka and Tokyo.

Furthermore, street dance schools and studios - a seeming contradiction for a dance genre heavily reliant on improvisation - were opening up one after another. One such company was Avex - the record label producing TRF, Amuro Namie and other dance-heavy acts - whose "Avex Dance Master" program was introduced in Tokyo in 2001, before spreading to other parts of the country.

Street Dance's popularity stepped up several notches from 2013 after the Japanese government introduced it into the education curriculum to supplement two other genres, folk and "creative" (essentially ballroom dancing). The rationale behind its introduction, made under the moniker "modern rhythm dance," was that it could "enrich student communication through image-based expression and dance," according to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's website.

Now there are more than 2,000 street dance clubs at senior high schools alone, according to the Osaka-based Street Dance Association. Street dance is becoming as popular as major sports such as baseball and volleyball at schools, and Japan's

street dance population, including rhythm dance, is estimated to reach at least 20 million by 2020.

Another organized event that has gradually found favor nationwide are the numerous dance battles such as the one that formed a centerpiece of Shibuya Street Dance Week, says Nakanishi Sachiko, a producer at the entertainment division of the Shibuya-headquartered PARCO department store chain and one of the masterminds of the Shibuya street dance event, which is organized by Arts Council Tokyo.

"Street dance is clearly no temporary fad, but something that has taken a firm root in modern youth culture," says Nakanishi, adding that Shibuya is the nation's undisputed street dance Mecca. "When I was at school, students who played baseball were the cool ones in the class, and then a little later it was the kids who played soccer. Nowadays, it's those who do street dance."

Another highlight of the Shibuya event was a contest held entirely for high school teams, who competed on the outdoor stage in Tokyo's Yoyogi Park. The winner was a team from Komae High School in Tokyo, which is coached by alumni and professional dancer Yazawa Asuka.

"One of the big differences with street dance in Japan now is that some of these people will certainly go on to perform professionally, maybe even internationally," she says. "It's pretty common now to see Japanese street dancers performing overseas."

DJ Hiroking, who provided the music for the dance battle during the event, agrees, adding: "Ever since SSDW started in 2015, the level of participants across the age groups has increased markedly. It's exciting to think what next year might bring." 

An Omura Line train runs alongside Omura Bay in Nagasaki Prefecture



The Omura Line

A Railroad at the Edge of a Calm Sea

The Omura Line runs across Nagasaki Prefecture, affording views from the train windows of the calm seas of Omura Bay while connecting passengers with attractions including a theme park recreating European streets and houses, and a traditional porcelain-making town.

SAWAJI OSAMU

THE Omura Line operated by Kyushu Railway Company (JR Kyushu) is a 47.6-kilometer railroad line that connects Haiki Station in Sasebo City in northern Nagasaki Prefecture and central Nagasaki Prefecture's Isahaya Station in Isahaya City. Most of the line runs along the eastern shore of Omura Bay, a large bay situated almost in the center of the prefecture, stretching about 25 kilometers north-south and about 12 kilometers east-west. Because the bay is surrounded by land on all sides except where some parts of the northern shoreline meet the open sea, it is as calm as a lake. Among other beautiful views, the view of Omura Bay stretching out quietly from beneath the train windows in the coastal section of the Omura Line between Kawatana Station and Matsubara Station is particularly enjoyable. Chiwata Station on this stretch of line is well-known for having a fantastic view of the beautiful sunset across

Omura Bay, attracting visitors from across the country. Although no station attendants are permanently stationed at the elegant wooden station building, the café Chiwata Shokudo serves drinks, curry and rice featuring local rice and vegetables inside the building.

"The constantly changing colors of the sky are really great. I see the setting sun almost every day, and the colors of the sky change every day. I love the colors of the sky just after sunset very much," says Yushita Kaori, who manages Chiwata Shokudo with her husband.

There are also special train services on the Omura Line. One of those special trains is Seven Stars (Nanatsuboshi) in Kyushu. Seven Stars, which started running in 2013, is a luxury train that tours around Kyushu. The services include an overnight package and a three-night package. The overnight package, for touring northern Kyushu, is scheduled so that





The wooden Chiwata Station building



Huis Ten Bosch theme park

passengers can savor a full-course dinner while feasting their eyes on Omura Bay shining in the sunset.

In addition, the luxury train Aru Ressha makes a round trip, mainly on weekends, between Sasebo Station, situated to the north of Omura Bay, and Nagasaki Station, situated to the south of the bay, by way of the Omura Line. (The operating section may be modified.) Aru Ressha was named after its concept's initials, "Amazing, Royal and Universal," and was designed to replicate a train that was first manufactured more than 100 years ago. Passengers on the luxury train can enjoy a course meal supervised by a world-class chef who runs a restaurant in Tokyo. The dishes served use lots of high-quality ingredients produced locally in Kyushu.

There are many tourist attractions, including Omura Bay, along the Omura Line. Japan's largest theme park, the 1.52 km² Huis Ten Bosch, is located on the northern shoreline of Omura Bay, just a five-minute walk from Huis Ten Bosch Station. Huis Ten Bosch opened in 1992 and has more attractions than you could possibly enjoy in one day, such as multitudes of flowers displaying the unique colors of each season, famous light displays, and a myriad of entertainments provided every day including attractions featuring the latest technology.

In addition, in the mountains a 20-minute car ride north from Kawatana Station lies Hasami Town, a famous porcelain-making town, and neighboring Arita Town. Hasami ware originated in the early seventeenth century and was mass-produced by more than thirty climbing kilns utilizing the mountain slopes. Hasami ware is largely everyday tableware, such as dishes and bowls, exported to Europe and Southeast Asia during the Edo period (1603-1867), as well as traded in other parts of Japan.

"Hasami ware is characterized mainly by its lightness and strength. Its design, either traditional or modern, is also very attractive," says Yushita, who uses Hasami ware at Chiwata Shokudo.

Nakaoyama District, which is in the corner of Hasami Town, is a village where about fifteen potters have gathered, and its streets and houses with their brick chimneys exude an atmosphere of a long history. Many works by the potters of Nakaoyama are exhibited and sold at the Nakaoyama Koryukan in the community and you can experience pottery making at the Nakaoyama Denshukan. You can also take an educational tour of the Nakao Climbing Kiln Site, a national historic site and a huge climbing kiln roughly 160 meters in length that had been in use for about 300 years. Lively ceramics festivals that draw many visitors are held at Nakaoyama in the spring and fall.

A trip on the Omura Line gives passengers an amazing opportunity to enjoy both modern entertainment and traditional local culture, as well as the beautiful scenery of Omura Bay. 



Tea cups on display at Nakaoyama Koryukan

Courtesy of Kazuno City



GI JAPAN PRODUCTS



RADISH

Matsudate Shibori Daikon

Matsudate Shibori Daikon is a native variety of *daikon* radish that has been cultivated in Matsudate district of Kazuno City in Akita Prefecture for more than 100 years. Surrounded by mountains, the production area has a wide temperature difference between day and night, a topographical feature that enhances the distinctive flavor of the radish as it grows. The radish is prized because of its very sharp taste as well as its sweetness, which is derived from its unusually high sucrose levels. The unique taste is different from that of other spicy radishes. Matsudate Shibori Daikon is typically served grated (hence the name, *shibori*, meaning “squeezed”) and used as a condiment in dishes such as *soba* noodles, boiled tofu and *kayaki*, a kind of chowder cooked in a scallop shell instead of a pan.

For more information about Japan’s GI products, go to <https://gi-act.maff.go.jp/en/>



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