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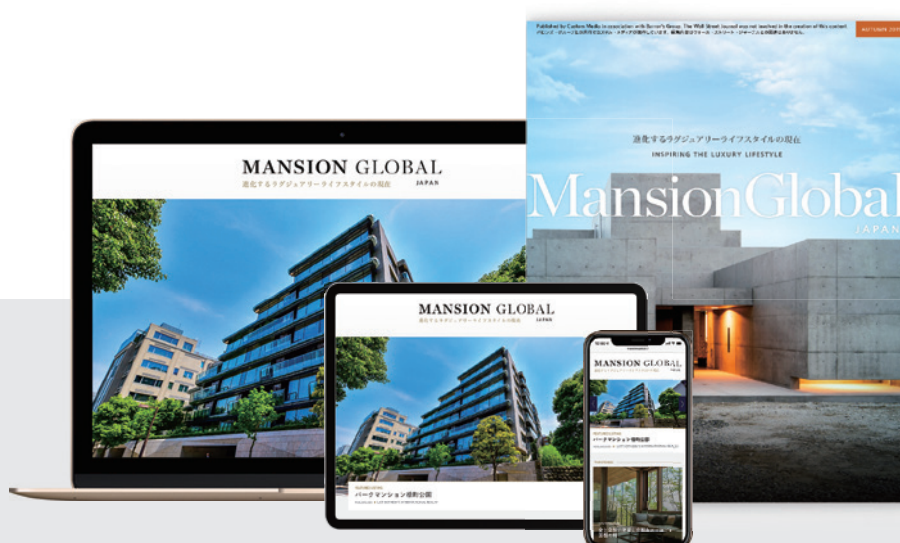
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PHOTO: YUKI KOHARA

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ACCEPT AND RESPECT



Christopher Bryan Jones
chris@custom-media.com

Diversity has been part of my life for a very long time. It's what led me to Japan and what has shaped me into the person I am. But that wasn't always the case. Growing up in rural Alabama during the 1970s and 1980s did not offer me diverse experiences. When I got to university, however, I quickly became involved in the International Student Association at the University of Alabama. I also lived in the Rotary International House with 11 other students, each from a different country.

EYES OPENED

Interacting with different ideas, customs, and beliefs made me realize how rich human culture is. Being in that house was like taking a trip around the world every day. Some of my most cherished memories are of the moments we all shared, when diversity came together but differences dissolved.

That was the early 1990s. At the time, I felt like part of a small group that was bringing about a world in which everyone would live in harmony and differences would be embraced. And, for a while, I thought we were getting there. Almost 30 years later, I'm not so sure.

DIGITAL TRIBALISM

Progress has been made, but, over the past few years, it seems that we've been sliding back down the hill. Diversity has never been a hotter topic, but it feels as if we are talking past each other. Social media provides the best tool we've ever had for sharing ideas and building discussion, but, all too often, we end up with groups of homogenous thought stirring in an echo chamber, occasionally emerging to shout at one another. There isn't much real engagement going on.

If we are to realize our potential, we must learn to harness the power of diversity. That means accepting differences and respecting each individual. For this to happen, strong leadership is essential and thoughtful communication is important.

One of the things I love about working with the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) to bring you this magazine is that I am still an active participant in the

kind of advocacy that enriched my life as a student. In university, I didn't think of what I was doing as advocacy, but I was essentially working to bring about greater acceptance and inclusion in a culture that was not ready to embrace such diversity.

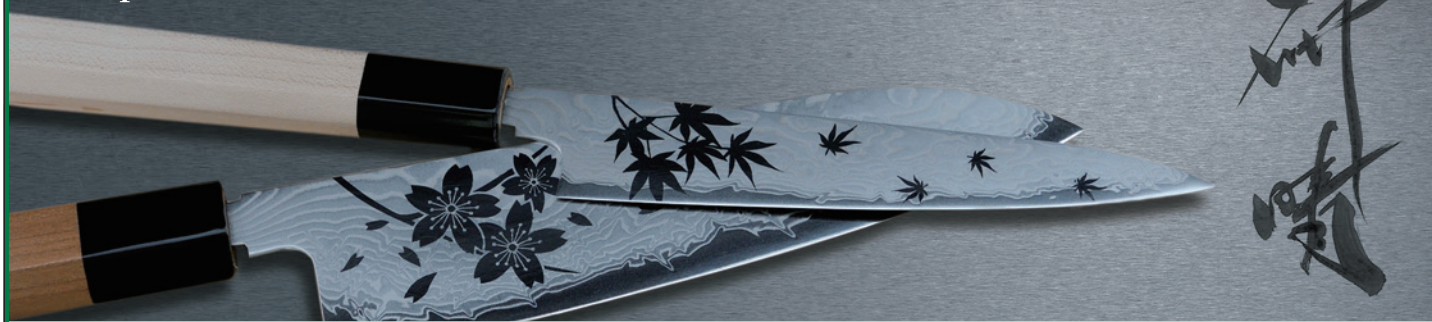
BUSINESS OF EQUALITY

One of the battles we are fighting in Japan is that of marriage equality. You don't have to go back far to find a time when same-sex couples could not marry even in the United States. But, with perseverance, advocates changed public perception and government followed. The same conditions that brought about that transformation are beginning to be seen in Japan. Change on the local level is already happening, and discussions are starting on a national level. The leadership that the ACCJ is providing is making a difference, and we highlight this on pages 21 and 44-47. ■

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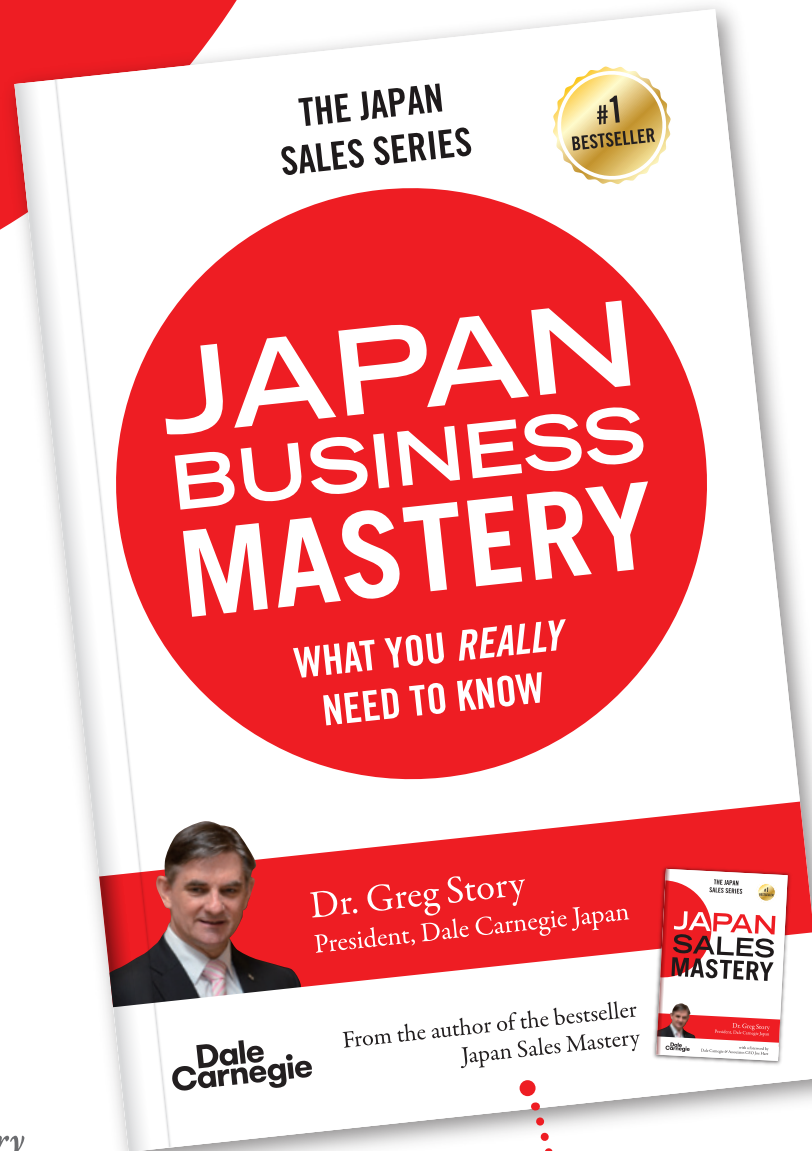
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Wrapping Up a Year of Success



PRESIDENT

By Peter M. Jennings
ACCJ President

As president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ), I am proud of the remarkable and important work being done by the ACCJ on behalf of its members throughout Japan on a broad range of issues and topics.

In just the past few weeks, the chamber has been involved in various high-level talks and briefings. These include:

- Meeting with Senator Ted Cruz of Texas to discuss the US–Japan partnership
- A panel discussion with the Union of Kansai Governments about the Kansai Digital Health Platform
- An extraordinary event with Jim Bridenstine, administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (page 11)
- ACCJ-Kansai Women in Business Summit (page 14)
- The 56th Annual Japan–US Business Conference in Washington, DC
- Event with Dr. Yasuhiro Suzuki, chief medical and global health officer at Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

The breadth of ACCJ activity, and the engaging ways in which members and committees participate on a daily basis, is quite impressive. I strongly encourage our members to get involved and stay up to date through the chamber's social media efforts on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

US–JAPAN TRADE AGREEMENTS

I am extremely enthusiastic about the signing of the US–Japan Trade Agreement, which features several key achievements, including positive steps forward for agriculture and industrial goods.

I am particularly encouraged by the bilateral agreement on digital trade, which will help ensure even greater success for innovative US companies in the Japanese market. Ensuring a forward-focused framework for the digital economy has been a priority of the ACCJ, and we have held long-standing positions on critical components of the agreement, such as data flows, privacy, and localization.

In our efforts to continue to be a voice for members, the ACCJ was pleased to co-host with Keidanren—the Japanese Business

Federation—the 10th Annual Internet Economy Dialogue, a forum for private-sector input into US and Japanese government discussions on this sector. The joint statement from this event is available on the ACCJ website.

To provide all members timely access to information on the trade updates, the ACCJ held a member-only conference call on October 11. The call focused on what the new trade agreement means for members and the ACCJ's commitment to the next stage of negotiations toward a comprehensive trade agreement on the wide range of outstanding issues that remain.

ONGOING ENGAGEMENT

One of the unique strengths of the ACCJ as an on-the-ground organization is our ongoing engagement with key stakeholders in the Government of Japan. Over the past year, the chamber has had more than 50 meetings and visits with key agencies of the Japanese government to exchange ideas, share the positions of US businesses in Japan, and listen to the perspective of policymakers.

This dialogue ensures discussion, debate, and, ideally, resolution of the challenges faced by member companies in Japan. The Diet Doorknock, our largest consolidated advocacy effort, is being planned for early 2020 and we look forward to, once again, meeting with policymakers and senior officials in the Japanese government.

CAP THE YEAR

Heading into the final two months of the year, I would like to remind you of two key avenues for engagement with the chamber.

The Board of Governors election starts on November 11 and ends on November 27. I encourage all eligible members to cast your vote for the ACCJ's 2020 leaders. Your input will guide the future direction of the chamber.

To cap off the year, the ACCJ's core value of corporate social responsibility will be front and center at the annual Charity Ball on December 7 at the Hilton Tokyo in Shinjuku. The Charity Ball is a joyous affair that connects friends old and new while building support for local community organizations. This year's theme, A Gold Medal Evening, will be a great way to celebrate all the ACCJ wins this year! I hope you will join us. As always, I welcome your thoughts and questions at pmjennings@accj.or.jp ■

Over the past year, the chamber has had more than 50 meetings and visits with key agencies of the Japanese government.

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Public–Private Investment in Space

By Aaron Baggett

To mark the 50th anniversary of the first lunar landing, the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) Alternative Investment, Aerospace and Defense, and Special Events Committees welcomed Jim Bridenstine, administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), to share his insights into space exploration and partnerships with the commercial and international space industries.

COLLABORATION

Bridenstine kicked off the event at Tokyo American Club on September 25 by emphasizing the importance of international relations when it comes to space exploration—primarily, the far-reaching work done on the *International Space Station* (ISS). Astronauts from 18 countries—including Japan—have operated the ISS, and experiments from more than 100 nations have been conducted there.

Bridenstine said, “This has not just been a marvel of technological achievement, it has also been a marvel of diplomatic achievement.”

“We are working hard to make sure that the nation of Japan and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) is with us when we begin our next journey in space exploration—mainly going to the moon and on to Mars.”

LIFE IN SPACE

Due to technological limitations, the ISS cannot last forever, explained Bridenstine. Not only does this pose a challenge for planned missions to the moon and Mars, the ISS has also been the base for developing breakthrough industrialized biomedicines and materials such as fiber optics.

Bridenstine said that the transformational capabilities being developed would change lives on earth, and that the day is coming when habitation in low earth orbit is going to be driven by the private sector. Low earth orbit is defined as 90–600 miles (140–970 kilometers) above the earth’s surface. “We need to start thinking today about what comes next. And, of course, international partnerships are a big part of what comes next.”

NASA has already established such partnerships in the area of commercial resupply. The night before the event, Japan’s

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Ltd. successfully launched the eighth H-II transfer vehicle to carry supplies and experimental materials to the ISS.

The next step for NASA is commercial crews. “Within a year, we will be launching astronauts to the *International Space Station* [in cases] where NASA is not purchasing, owning, or operating the hardware,” Bridenstine said. “Instead, we are buying services for low earth orbit.”

He described a robust commercial marketplace in space that enables NASA to do more. “We want to be one customer of many customers. That’s what drives down our costs and increases our access. We also want to have numerous providers that are competing against each other on cost and innovation.”

Bridenstine assured guests that NASA and JAXA will always have a presence in low earth orbit, but they want to “be the tenant, not the landlord.” If they can achieve this, the agencies can put more government resources into areas where there is not yet a commercial marketplace: the moon and beyond.

ARTEMIS PROGRAM

Upcoming plans include the Artemis program, an ongoing, crewed spaceflight initiative that involves NASA, commercial spaceflight companies, and international partners, such as JAXA and the European Space Agency. According to NASA, the Artemis program’s mission is to land “the first woman and the next man” on the moon. The agency then wants to “lay the foundation for private companies to build a lunar economy” and eventually send humans to Mars.

But to reach the moon safely and efficiently, a command module is needed, and NASA is considering construction of a crewed spaceport in lunar orbit that would serve as a gateway to deep space. “The architecture that we are building has reusability built into it. The more reusability we have, the more access and lower cost we’re going to have,” Bridenstine said.

He also stressed that, because they are competing on cost, commercial crews, suppliers, and partners must reuse their systems to further drive down cost and increase access for NASA.

A long-term program of sustainable exploration on and around the moon, the Artemis program is planning to return humans to the surface of the moon by 2024. ■

We are working hard to make sure that . . . the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency is with us when we begin our next journey.

A Gold Medal Evening

Food, drinks, and fun for a good cause

By the Charity Ball Committee



Jenna and members of Gospel Square

For this year's flagship corporate social responsibility event, the ACCJ Charity Ball, we wanted to share with our members and friends some of the excitement the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games is bringing to our community. Few cities have had the privilege of hosting one of the world's foremost sports competitions, at which athletes from 206 nations and territories in 2020 will compete. The 2019 American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) Charity Ball on December 7 will help build the excitement heading into 2020 as we give our all to help those in need.

SOULFUL SOUNDS

The Saturday evening will feature stellar music, including that of Steve "Mr. Killakeys" Wilkerson, who we are fortunate to have joining us again this year. Taking a break from his usual stomping grounds in the Deep South, Wilkerson will bring his unique style and mastery of the piano to Olympic themes. He's thrilled to be back to perform with some of Tokyo's top local talent.

Joining Steve will be Argie Phine, a singer of enormous versatility from South Carolina who has shared the stage with such greats as Randy Travis, Michael Bolton, Ayumi Hamasaki, and Yuji Oda, as well as regularly appearing on Fuji Television and TV Tokyo. To add to the excitement, there will be a special appearance by Jenna and members of Gospel Square, one of Japan's largest gospel groups.

Once the dance floor opens, The Conductors, a popular Tokyo band, will get us out of our chairs for the evening. Marcus Pittman leads on vocals and saxophone, with Phine adding her soulful voice, backed by a full funky horn section to lift the party.

FOOD AND DRINK

Inspired by the ancient Games first held in Olympia, Greece, we reached out to the Embassy of Greece in Tokyo and Thana Fragkis to have our menu designed with a distinct Greek flair. And, with the help of our faithful local purveyors Hotei, Iconic, Grape-off, A-Wines, and Nostimia, a selection of wine was chosen at the Charity Ball Wine Taste-off on October 2 at The Place of Tokyo. Hotei and Iconic were the winning vendors.

FOR THE COMMUNITY

While the annual Charity Ball is, of course, an evening of great food, drinks, and fun, its ultimate purpose is to enable the ACCJ to support important causes and initiatives in the community. Our entertainers—and all those who lend a helping hand—give back in countless ways. They have all been most generous with their time to make this evening special. We hope you will join us to celebrate the ACCJ's wins this year as we raise funds for our very worthy charities! ■



Steve Wilkerson



Argie Phine



Marcus Pittman

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Hotel Boom: A Look at Japanese Investment Trends

By Aaron Baggett

Many of Japan's industries may be facing economic challenges, but tourism is not one of them. An influx of visitors from abroad has made it one of the country's fastest-growing sectors, shattering the initial tourism targets of 40 million visitors annually by 2020 set by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

This growth in tourism has increased demand for hotel properties and shops, and regional land prices have been pushed up for the first time in 27 years. Hotels are being developed faster than ever and have become attractive investments.

To better understand what is driving this growth, the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) Tourism Industry Committee, Integrated Resorts Task Force, Real Estate Committee, and Alternative Investment Committee invited Hisashi Furukawa to speak at an event on September 26 at the ANA InterContinental Tokyo. Furukawa is president and representative director of Japan Hotel REIT Advisors Co., Ltd., the country's largest real estate investment trust (REIT). His address was entitled Hotel Boom: A Look at Japanese Investment Trends.

THE BUBBLE

Furukawa spoke about long-term market trends, as well as those that have emerged in recent years surrounding inbound tourism and social media.

"This was a very tough time for Japan," he said. Known as the Lost Decade, the post-bubble period saw the bankruptcies and bailouts of many financial institutions, and the collapse has had long-lingering negative effects. This can still be seen in the form of the government's debt burden, which is the highest in the world.

But there were some positives, Furukawa said. "Equity players gathered in Japan and looked for investment opportunities. This was a turning point for the real estate business."

WHAT IS J-REIT?

Furukawa also explained REITs, which are companies that own or operate real estate that generates income. This can include office buildings, residential apartments, shops, and hotels. REITs were first developed in the United States in 1960,

but the Japanese REIT—or J-REIT—market wasn't created until 2001.

With the bursting of the economic bubble came a plunge in property prices. J-REITs were introduced to stabilize—and hopefully increase—investment in the market. Today, Japan is the second-largest REIT market behind the United States.

REASONS FOR GROWTH

Furukawa then summarized the most recent trends—particularly, inbound tourism. "If you look back 15 years, there were only 5.5 million tourists [each year] in Japan. It took 10 years to reach 10 million, which isn't so bad. But, in 2014, we saw really rapid growth."

Furukawa believes the reasons include:

- Abe's tourism push
- Relaxed visa restrictions
- More international flights
- Expanded airport capacity

However, the introduction of smartphones and the rise of social media in the late 2000s deserve a good deal of credit, too.

"The smartphone not only made trips to Japan easier and more enjoyable, but social media helped promote Japan," Furukawa said. "Japan is not very good at promoting itself, but once inbound travelers shared pictures and experiences, it caused a sudden increase in visitors."

TOURISM IMPACT

In March, Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism reported a nationwide increase in land prices—back up to 40 percent of the peak price set in 1991. It is the fourth consecutive year the national average land price for commercial areas has risen.

Furukawa and other experts believe the data suggests this correlates directly with the influx of visitors to the country. As real estate developments aimed at inbound tourists continue to spring up around the country, the price of real estate has finally begun to recover. ■

Our entertainers—and all those who lend a helping hand—give back in countless ways.

2019 ACCJ-Kansai Women in Business Summit

By Yuka Nakamura



PHOTOS: LIFE14

US Consul General Karen Kelly (third left) and Kansai-WIB D&I Subcommittee Chair Yuka Nakamura (second left) with participants

The Kansai chapter of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) held its 2019 Women in Business (WIB) Summit—the fifth in a successful annual series—on September 24 at the Hilton Osaka. The theme, Driving Business Through Inclusion: It Starts With You, attracted more than 200 participants from diverse industries. During the two plenary and three breakout sessions, an important and engaging dialogue took place about the leadership behaviors and individual actions we can take to drive inclusion in our organizations.

BEYOND WOMEN

The Kansai chapter established the ACCJ's first WIB committee in 2008. At the time, there were few female leaders in the business community in Japan—especially in Kansai. As a pioneer, the ACCJ-Kansai WIB committee started advocating for women in the workplace through various activities to raise awareness and support the creation of a better working environment.

Since then, gender equality and women's empowerment have been discussed actively across the country, and progress has been made thanks to the efforts of many people and organizations, including the Government of Japan. Eleven years after its start, the Kansai WIB Committee has moved to the next phase, going beyond gender equality with the newly established Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Subcommittee.

D&I MYTHS

There are some common myths surrounding D&I. Some think it just means to be kind to other people. Others think it is something nice for business, but not a must-have. And there are others who see it as something led by human resources or senior management that is for big global companies with employees of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, not for small, local companies.



Kansai WIB Committee Chair MaryAnne Jorgensen (left) with Royanne Doi, global legal, ethics & compliance adviser at Yamaha Corporation

An important and engaging dialogue took place about the leadership behaviors and individual actions we can take to drive inclusion in our organizations.



Program

Welcome Greetings

Stephen A. Zurcher, ACCJ vice president–Kansai
 Laura Younger, ACCJ executive director
 Karen Kelley, US consul general, US Consulate
 General Osaka–Kobe

Opening Presentation

The Power of Closing the Gap
 Peter Fitzgerald, president, Google Japan G.K.

Plenary Session One

Enhancing Performance: Communication
 and Understanding across Generations

Plenary Session Two

Power of Inclusion: Reflecting on my Career

Breakout Sessions

- Psychological Safety: Why It's Important and What You Can Do
- Conversations Matter: Practical Steps to an Inclusive Workplace
- Make a Difference! Dialogue for Action

Closing Reception



Are these things really true? The 2019 summit aimed to debunk these myths by:

- Providing clarity on why and how inclusion empowers individuals to maximize their contributions, which is critical to driving sustainable business
- Increasing the understanding of specific behaviors that contribute to—and detract from—an inclusive work environment at both the individual and organizational levels
- Offering actionable examples to participants at all levels that they can apply to take initiative and drive inclusion in the workplace, no matter the size and type of organization

POWER OF INCLUSION

Two plenary sessions built the foundation for the discussion about what inclusion looks like and how it contributes to driving business.

The first, Enhancing Performance: Communication and Understanding across Generations, explored differences and challenges in the workplace brought about by age, and provided insights from Generation X and Millennial panelists.

The second, Power of Inclusion: Reflecting on My Career, invited three experienced panelists to share their personal journeys. This provided an opportunity to reflect on how inclusion can have a positive effect on the workplace and answered key questions about how our actions—conscious and unconscious—impact the inclusion of others and ultimately influence the extent to which individuals are able to contribute their best work.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Building on the foundation established in the plenary sessions, the breakout sessions took a deep dive into three angles of inclusion:

- Psychological safety
- Conversations
- Dialogue that gets action

These sessions enabled participants to transform theory into practical actions they could take right away. All three rooms were filled with positive energy and constructive discussions, and it is our hope that these conversations continue to evolve as participants return to their organizations with a greater understanding of the issues and a renewed vigor to drive inclusion in business across the Kansai region. ■

Yuka Nakamura is chair of the ACCJ-Kansai D&I Subcommittee

All three rooms were filled with positive energy and constructive discussions.



1 The American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) Human Resource Management (HRM) Committee held a media briefing about its updated marriage equality viewpoint in the Boardroom of the ACCJ Tokyo Office on September 19. Among the speakers were Isamu Ando, senior partner at EY Japan (left), and Tomoka Ohashi, managing officer at Panasonic Corporation (page 21).

2 ACCJ-Chubu Women in Business Committee member Makiko Yamauchi (left) and Chair Erin Sakakibara (right) with cross-cultural business trainer Saeko Noda, who presented Communication Management: Overcome Barriers in Gender and Culture! at Coat of Arms Pub and Restaurant in Nagoya on October 16.

3 The ACCJ Kansai chapter held its annual meeting with the Union of Kansai Governments at Kobe Portopia Hotel on October 18. This year's focus was on partnering for innovation and the Kansai Healthcare Data Platform.

4 Hisashi Furukawa, president and representative director of Japan Hotel REIT Advisors Co., Ltd. (center) with Tourism Industry Committee Co-Chairs Cynthia Usui and Steven Dewire. Furukawa presented Hotel Boom: A Look at Japanese Investment Trends at the ANA InterContinental Tokyo on September 26 (page 13).

5 ACCJ members and guests participated in the 17th Annual Mercedes-Benz – Cole Haan Cup golf tournament, co-hosted by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Japan and the European Business Council in Japan, at Atsugi Kokusai Country Club on October 4.

6 Global investor Jim Rogers (center) offered a candid perspective on Japan's economic future in an interactive discussion with an audience of more than 160 ACCJ members and guests at the Roppongi Hills Club on September 13.

7 Senator Ted Cruz of Texas (center) met with ACCJ leaders at Tokyo American Club to better understand trade and political issues impacting US businesses in Japan during his October 9 visit to Tokyo.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Please visit www.accj.or.jp for a complete list of upcoming ACCJ events or check our weekly e-newsletter, *The ACCJ Insider*.



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▪ NOVEMBER 12

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▪ NOVEMBER 13

2019 Kansai International Meishi Exchange—10th Anniversary

▪ NOVEMBER 14

Rugby Alliance III: Pass the Passion

▪ NOVEMBER 20

JASO-ACCJ-Kansai Thanksgiving Party 2019



CHUBU

Champagne Ball and Awards Evening

Go back to the '80s to help the community

By Bruce McCaughan

The Chubu Chapter of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) is getting ready for its annual Champagne Ball and Awards Evening, to be held on November 15 in the luxurious Oogi Ballroom at the Hilton Nagoya.

This year marks the 14th time the ACCJ Chubu chapter has collaborated with the Tokai Japan Canada Society (TJCS) to organize and host this not-to-be-missed event for denizens of central Japan's international business community.

SETTING A THEME

What had always been an elegant, yet fun, black-tie event, adopted a theme format for the 6th annual Champagne Ball in 2011. That year, we decided on a 1970s disco theme—and what a groovy time we had!

The format has been so well received—and has been so much fun to plan—that we've stuck with it. Over the years, the theme has often been chosen not only for its fun factor but often to honor aspects of the host organizations and their nations. We have celebrated such Americana as Mardi Gras, Hollywood, and Las Vegas, featuring Elvis himself. We've also paid tribute to our Canadian friends with a theme dedicated to that country's 150th birthday, and have honored our host city of Nagoya with a theme dedicated to its five sister cities.

EIGHTIES LIVE

This year, as we close out another decade, we've decided to take a nostalgic trip back to the 1980s and have booked a dance band. Rudy and the Stars, who headlined the 2015 Champagne Ball, are busy preparing a set list that includes ample tunes from the 1980s. Attendees can expect to be treated to a lavish experience, including appetizers, sumptuous buffet, free-flowing drinks, live music, photo ops, an awards ceremony, the company of great people, and, of course, bubbly!

Although a black-tie affair, business attire is also acceptable, but we expect many of the more than 200 guests to come clad in theme-inspired dress, adding to the vibe of the evening. We also hope to see a lot of big hair, and may have a prize or two for those with the best 1980s-inspired look.

HELPING HANDS

But the event is not just fun and games. Corporate sustaining responsibility (CSR) is an important part of our business community, and—as the name suggests—the Champagne Ball and Awards Evening is an opportunity for each host organization to recognize some of their leaders for distinguished service. The ACCJ-Chubu typically honors its Volunteer of the Year and Leader of the Year on this occasion.

What's more, the ball would not be possible without the support of corporate sponsors. Various sponsorship opportunities are available, and they offer a great way for local businesses, as well as big brands, to elevate their presence within Chubu's international community.

Not restricted to members of the host organizations, the ball is open to anyone 20 years of age or over. Non-members are not only welcome, they are encouraged to attend as couples, a group, or individuals. Seating is pre-assigned, with or without specified seating preferences, but registration and pre-payment is required.

In addition to an elegant evening, all attendees have the opportunity to join the ACCJ's ongoing CSR efforts by buying raffle tickets for the chance to win fantastic raffle prizes—including domestic weekend getaways and overseas air travel. Proceeds of the prize raffle are donated to help support the Chubu Walkathon's Chubu Children's Fund initiative. ■



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Sales Support Alliance

New initiative brings sales professionals together

By Aaron Baggett

At the beginning of the year, the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) Sales Development Committee leaders asked how the chamber might better support members whose job it is to develop sales? The answer came in the form of the committee's most groundbreaking initiative, the Sales Support Alliance (SSA), which was officially launched on October 15 in the Boardroom of the ACCJ's Tokyo office.

WORKING TOGETHER

The SSA is a series of regular monthly meetings at which members can systematically share sales leads and make introductions with those that have matching requirements.

"We can harness the unrealized potential of our committee membership and the ACCJ membership at large," said Carlo La Porta, co-chair of the Sales Development Committee. "We all have valuable knowledge and networks. The alliance has been created to put those assets to work, helping us all boost our sales and grow our businesses."

Unlike a one-off networking event, the SSA will build an enduring community of sales professionals that enables them to build confidence and trust over time. The monthly meetings will also include a scheduled time for members to share sales-related expertise and to develop closer, more rewarding relationships than are possible at one-time events.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

The SSA is led by participating members so that everyone has a voice in guiding and improving how the initiative is run. The committee has also planned several benefits for members, including greatly expanded opportunities to make

valuable sales contacts. "After only three SSA meetings, four introductions will have been made, two of which will likely result in transactions," La Porta said. "Once the organization grows to critical mass, the pace of introductions is expected to accelerate."

The committee said that the SSA would also give a whole new meaning and purpose to member participation in other ACCJ activities. "Instead of going into every networking occasion to find the few people who they might be able to sell to, SSA members are constantly on the lookout for ways to introduce fellow members to new opportunities. Every contact and every conversation suddenly become interesting—and potentially productive," said La Porta.

The committee wants the SSA to be personally rewarding for its contributing members, in that it will provide them with a new network of known and trusted associates on whom they can rely for advice and fellowship.

BROAD BENEFIT

While members have a lot to gain from the SSA, the connections it provides can benefit the business community as a whole. "The initiative is squarely in line with the chamber's core objectives of promoting the interests of member companies and improving the international business environment in Japan. So, we all benefit," said La Porta.

If you would like to experience what the SSA offers, join us at the next meeting. Although the SSA was created for Sales Development Committee members, it is open to ACCJ members and their guests through the end of the year. Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of every month at 8:00 a.m. in the ACCJ Tokyo Office Boardroom. ■



SSA members are constantly on the lookout for ways to introduce fellow members to new opportunities.



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Renewed Vows

Marriage equality message
makes a difference

By C Bryan Jones

It has been more than a year since the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) released its viewpoint entitled Support the Recruitment and Retention of Talent by Instituting Marriage Equality in Japan, and the momentum achieved over the past 13 months is encouraging.

The document quickly received the support of six foreign chambers of commerce in Japan, representing Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and the UK. It has since been endorsed by the Belgian-Luxembourg and Danish chambers of commerce in Japan, the European Business Council in Japan, 45 companies—both domestic and international—and has spawned coverage in Japanese-language media that has helped fuel the push for change at the government level.

CHANGING TIMES

On September 19, the ACCJ Human Resource Management (HRM) Committee issued an updated viewpoint of the same name and hosted a media briefing session in the Boardroom of the ACCJ Tokyo Office. Speaking at the event were:

- Yumiko Ohta, vice-chair of the HRM Committee
- John Carlson, government affairs manager at AbbVie
- Isamu Ando, senior partner at EY Japan
- Tomoka Ohashi, managing officer at Panasonic Corporation
- Yasuzo Takeno, LLAN board member and partner at Mori Hamada and Matsumoto

The updated viewpoint highlights some of the progress seen globally. For example, 28 countries now extend rights to LGBT couples, up from 25 a year ago. Austria, Ecuador, and Taiwan joined the list this year, and the number is expected to continue rising. *The Guardian* reported on October 21 that Northern Ireland will legalize same-sex marriage by February next year, bringing it in line with the rest of the UK.

The outlook isn't so good in all parts of the world. Some 71 countries still have laws that make homosexuality itself illegal across the Americas, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

When Taiwan legalized same-sex marriage on May 24, it became the first nation in Asia to do so. Two weeks later, Japan's opposition parties submitted the Equal Marriage bill in the Diet in an attempt to push Tokyo in the same direction. There is also hope that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) will support efforts to improve equality for LGBT couples. The LDP has said it intends to introduce legislation, but this has not yet happened.

Still, the election in July of openly gay politician Taiga Ishikawa to the House of Councillors—the Diet's upper chamber—gives

hope that discussion of the issue will be accelerated. He joins Kanako Otsuji, who was elected the first openly gay member of the Diet in May 2013. She serves in the House of Representatives.

Ishikawa's election reflects a growing acceptance among Japan for marriage equality. The ACCJ viewpoint now cites a 2018 survey of 60,000 people aged 20–59 by Dentsu Inc. that finds 78.4 percent support for same-sex marriage.

There has also been a change in the number of people in Japan who self-report as LGBT. This was 7.6 percent in the 2015 Dentsu poll, but has risen to 8.9 percent in the latest report.

BUSINESS CASE

At the heart of the advocacy is the fact that, because Japan does not yet recognize same-sex marriages, the nation has a competitive disadvantage. The ACCJ viewpoint focuses on three key issues that must be addressed to change this:

- The cost of attracting and retaining LGBT talent
- Encouraging a more diverse and productive workplace
- Supporting a more diverse and inclusive community

Japan is the only member of the Group of Seven that has not legalized such unions. As a result, businesses are losing talent to other nations because those who they want to hire cannot be accompanied by their same-sex spouse and cannot receive the benefits they would elsewhere. This makes Japan a less-attractive option. It is also causing some Japanese talent to leave the country.

But there is no doubt that the ACCJ's leadership on the issue is resonating, and leaders in both government and the private sector are beginning to see the benefits—both to business and quality of life. With the world's eyes on Japan for the Rugby World Cup 2019 and the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the time for the government to make this change is now.

For more on this topic, turn to page 44. ■



MADE IN AMERICA

US brands that became Japanese

By Aaron Baggett

The place is Ohio. The year is 1939. James “J.J.” Lawson has just opened a store at his dairy plant in the town of Cuyahoga Falls—a move that would one day transform the customer experience in Japan. But, at the time, there was no way Lawson could have imagined such a transfer of business culture across the Pacific. And he never would. Injuries from a car crash took his life in 1962, but what he started 80 years ago in the US Heartland is a key part of modern Japanese society.

Lawson’s transition is one example of how US business success led to the creation of something considered unmistakably Japanese. While the situation at home may have soured, these brands found greener pastures overseas. We’ll take a look at three examples, starting with milk.

MOVING TO KANSAI

The first Lawson in Japan opened on June 14, 1975, in Toyonaka City, Osaka Prefecture. The Lawson Milk Company had been purchased by Consolidated Foods Inc.—now the Sara Lee Corporation—in 1959, and growth of the brand led to an agreement with Osaka-based Daiei, Inc. in 1974 to bring locations to Japan.

Convenience stores in Japan are a bit different from those in the United States. Besides selling food and basic necessities,

they also serve as a place to pay bills, mail letters, buy concert tickets, do banking, and even receive packages.

It’s all quite a surprise to visitors from the United States, who are accustomed to a certain model of such shops. That Lawson’s true origin was built on the American Dream is, perhaps, even more unexpected.

But Mr. Lawson’s Milk Store, with its sign showing a white jug on a blue background, was already well-known in the small Ohio town for its signature product when eggs, bread, deli meats, and ice cream were added to the shelves. Soon after, non-edible items such as soap and toilet paper went on sale, and something resembling the convenience stores of today was born.



Lawson's first store (Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio)

The shop grew into a chain across the northeastern United States numbering more than 700 stores. Consolidated Foods eventually sold the brand to Dairy Mart, but when that company went bankrupt in 2001, Lawson passed into the hands of Canada-based Alimentation Couche-Tard Inc. All stores were converted to the Circle K brand and that was the end.

BIG IN JAPAN

Only it wasn't. While Lawson may have ceased to exist in the United States, Daiei has turned it into a juggernaut in Japan. Of the more than 55,000 convenience stores that dot the country, some 14,000 carry the Lawson name. That's more than the number of 7-Eleven locations (10,000) in the United States and Canada combined.

Getting there took some real business foresight and a willingness to adapt to the local market. Daiei wanted to emulate the growth that The Lawson Milk Company had experienced in the United States, but, as American Public Media's *Marketplace* radio show explained in a 2018 look at Lawson's history, the idea of the convenience store was still new to Japan in the mid-1970s. Nevertheless, the opportunity was there as densely packed cities made Japan ideal for the business model. Bigger than mom-and-pop shops but smaller than supermarkets, convenience stores could strike the perfect balance between size and convenience, making life better for consumers and business more profitable for operators.

Ken Mochimaru, of Lawson's corporate communications division, told *The ACCJ Journal* that Lawson resonated well with Japan at the time because the country was undergoing rapid modernization. The country was just one decade removed from the 1964 Tokyo Summer Olympics, which had accelerated the development of railways, roads, and other infrastructure. "People were seeking greater convenience in every facet of their lives. With the changes that followed, the challenges facing society diversified as well. Lawson grew quickly on this foundation."

That growth was quick indeed. Just three months after opening its first store in Toyonaka City in 1975, Lawson began expanding across Japan. By 1977, it had introduced 24-hour operations. Printing and copying services began in 1983, followed by bill payment—an extremely important part of Japanese life—in 1989.

"The ongoing change of customer needs through the years made convenience stores in Japan so much more than just places to shop," Mochimaru said. "As a facility whose lights stay on 24 hours a day, it serves as a reliable cornerstone of the community. The convenience store is an essential part of people's daily lives."

Lawson stores can now be found in all 47 of Japan's prefectures, as well as in other countries in the region, including China, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines. And, in a return to its roots, the brand has dipped its toes back into the US market with two locations in Hawaii, opened in 2012.

People were seeking greater convenience in every facet of their lives . . . Lawson grew quickly on this foundation.



One of the first Lawson locations in Japan

NO MONEY, NO STORE

Another US brand—perhaps more widely known—to find itself still playing in Japan while having disappeared from its place of birth is Tower Records. The retail music giant once flourished in the United States but, under the pressures of changing habits among consumers and distribution methods, it became but a memory—a ghost of days gone by.

The first Tower Records was opened by Russell Solomon in 1960 in his hometown of Sacramento, California. Finding quick success, Solomon expanded to San Francisco in 1967 and

Los Angeles in 1970. More locations appeared across the United States over the next decade, and the subsidiary Tower Records Japan was formed in 1980. The first Japanese store opened in Sapporo the same year.

Until the early 2000s, Tower Records was the de facto hangout for music lovers around the world. In addition to the United States and Japan, stores could be found in Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, Hong Kong, Ireland, Israel, Malaysia, Mexico, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom. Their motto, "No music, no life," defined a generation and influenced numerous imitators, even today.

But due to a combination of bad investments, competition, and the rise of digital media, the company accumulated some \$100 million in debt and, in 2006, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and liquidated its assets.

But the Japanese stores were unscathed, as the local subsidiary had become independent through a management buyout in 2002. Not only was it unaffected by the bankruptcy back in the United States, Tower Records in Japan became a symbol of the country's youth culture. The massive nine-floor location in Shibuya—one of the largest retail music stores in the world—is a mecca for music lovers and hosts exhibitions in the top-floor gallery as well as live performances by popular bands. In all, Tower Records Japan operates 80 stores across the country.

Commenting on this success, Tower Records Japan Director of Public Relations Tatsuro Yagawa said that their corporate philosophy has never changed. "We are the store of the music fan, by the music fan, for the music fan. We didn't change our



The original Shibuya Tower Records

strategy, but we were flexible. Focusing on customer perspective is a major strength of Japanese retailers. We change everything based on the customer, and we believe we can attribute our success to our effort of continuously adapting based on the needs of the era.”

PROTECTIVE INDUSTRY

As the second-largest music market in the world, Japan has long been considered the last bastion of brick-and-mortar music stores. Japanese consumers have not been as quick as those in the United States to accept digital media.

Yagawa believes this is partly due to Japanese fan culture. “Currently, we categorize music fans into two groups: regular fans and devoted fans,” he said. “Devoted fans are strongly dedicated to supporting their favorite artist, and they buy CDs as a way to support their activities.” The idol group AKB48, for example, is well known for selling millions of copies of their singles thanks to fans who buy multiple discs to show support and to get multiple chances to vote for their favorite group member in each year’s AKB48 general election. Ballots are bundles with physical copies of the music.

But the success of physical media in a digital age cannot be attributed simply to fan culture. Japan’s music industry is highly protective and holds an iron grip on the market, reinforced by strong licensing and anti-piracy laws. Japan has several small and mid-level music companies in addition to the goliaths, and all demand long, bureaucratic licensing procedures.

Streaming services such as Apple Music, Google Play Music, and Amazon Prime Music only came online in Japan in 2015. Spotify, one of the biggest music streaming services in the world, opened an office in the country in 2011 but was stuck in negotiations for nearly five years before being allowed to launch.

We didn’t change our strategy, but we were flexible. Focusing on customer perspective is a major strength of Japanese retailers.

PAY TO PLAY

Another factor, Yagawa said, is that physical media has high resell value in Japan, which has measures in place to protect the price of new CDs. In fact, the music industry is so well protected in Japan that it is illegal to cut prices. The *saihanbai kakaku iji seido* is Japan’s resale price maintenance system. Under this law, new CDs, records, cassettes, books, magazines, and newspapers made in Japan cannot be discounted under any circumstances until the date specified using the *sai* system—if such a date is indicated.

The original idea behind this system was to stop larger publishers from driving smaller ones out of the market. But it eliminated competition and opened an entirely new market comprising secondhand shops and CD rentals. As customers began to simply copy rented CDs to blank media, music companies began requiring license fees from rental shops to make up for lost revenue resulting from piracy.

These powerful restrictions made Tower Records Japan’s future uncertain. In a 1999 issue of *Billboard Magazine*, former resident director and chief executive officer of Tower Records Japan Keith Cahoon, said: “Legally, we can’t discount Japanese-made products. So, you have to compete on other levels.”

The company needed to make its stores part of the culture—the same way it had won the hearts of US music lovers decades before.

Nearly 20 years later, Yagawa shared that same sentiment. “We believe physical media isn’t going anywhere. With that in mind, we try to consider different approaches. How can we support our customers’ music life? How can we plan new goods and merchandise centered on music culture? Lastly, how can we can read the change in purchase behavior and procure music efficiently in a market where customer preferences have become more personalized?”

In 2018, Japan’s annual output of CDs fell below 100 million, and, for the first time, 54 percent of its media distribution was through streaming services. In a May 5 article in *The Japan Times*, experts

attributed this in part to the nation’s beloved pop stars joining the online streaming market. Still, physical media accounted



Tower Records was forced to liquidate in the United States.



Tower Records in Shibuya thrives as a cultural mecca.

for 79 percent of Japan's total in 2018, according to the Recording Industry Association of Japan.

Bit by bit, digital music is eroding this physical stronghold, but Tower Records Japan is holding on, thanks to its ability to adapt to how Japanese fans engage with their favorite artists.

DUSKIN DONUTS?

One more brand that most people assume was born in Japan is Mister Donut. With a product well-tuned to the Japanese palate, it certainly feels—and tastes—that way.

But the first Mister Donut was opened not in Tokyo but in Boston—63 years ago. Its roots can be traced back to a brand still going strong in the United States: Dunkin' Donuts, which Mister Donut founder Harry Winokur started with his brother-in-law William Rosenberg. A disagreement over expansion—Rosenberg wanted to sell franchises but Winokur did not—led the latter to go his own way.

It's ironic, because the success of Winokur's first Mister Donut shop caused him to embrace the franchise model after

all. By 1970, there were 275 Mister Donut locations in North America, and the company was acquired by International Multifoods Corporation. Under their ownership, Mister Donut grew to become Dunkin' Donuts' biggest competitor. At its peak in the 1980s, there were 550 locations across North America. Winokur and Rosenberg were pitted against one another, and when Dunkin' Donuts opened its first shop in Japan in 1970, Mister Donut followed a year later with a location in Minoh, Osaka Prefecture.

TOO MUCH NUTMEG

Mister Donut came to Japan through a partnership between Winokur and Seiichi Suzuki, founder of Duskin Co., Ltd. Suzuki had traveled to the United States to study business and, after meeting Winokur, decided to bring the donut shop to Japan.

Like others fighting for a piece of the Japanese market—including Lawson, Tower Records, and Dunkin' Donuts—Mister Donut was meant to be an exact copy of its US operations. But Keiji Chiba, the former general manager and director of Duskin's food industries, didn't like the idea.

He had other plans, and they clearly worked. Mister Donut became a hit in Japan. A decade after the market entry, Chiba explained what he did in a 1982 interview with *The New York Times*. He tested the market by secretly building a full-scale replica of a US Mister Donut shop inside a Duskin warehouse. Duskin sales staff were asked to sample the donuts and comment on the decor. They were unimpressed.

"They didn't like it at all," Chiba said. "They thought the counters were too high, the chairs were too wide, the coffee cups were too heavy, and the doughnuts were too large and tasted funny. Too much nutmeg for the Japanese palate."

So, he altered everything—including the menu. A complete makeover, with a high-class atmosphere. Donuts were always seen as children's snacks in Japan, so they raised the prices and modeled their stores after trendy Seattle-based coffee shops—



The character *sai* placed inside a circle is used on media as part of Japan's resale price maintenance system. Often followed by a date and *made* (until), it indicates the first date the item can be sold at a discounted price.

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Mister Donut in Japan, 1971

the same coffee shops that had led to the demise of Mister Donut in the United States. And it worked.

TRADING PLACES

Mister Donut was forced out of the US market by competition from the likes of Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts, which procured the Mister Donut brand in 1990 and converted the shops into its own.

But in Japan, Mister Donut was king. Business was booming thanks to Chiba's strategies. He purposely chose to open shops in suburban towns rather than central Tokyo. Dunkin' Donuts had gone for Ginza. "There were hundreds of suburban towns like Minoh all over Japan, but only one Ginza," Chiba said. Mister Donut employed popular comedians for advertisements, launched campaigns aimed at children, and lowered prices after the collapse of Japan's economic bubble.

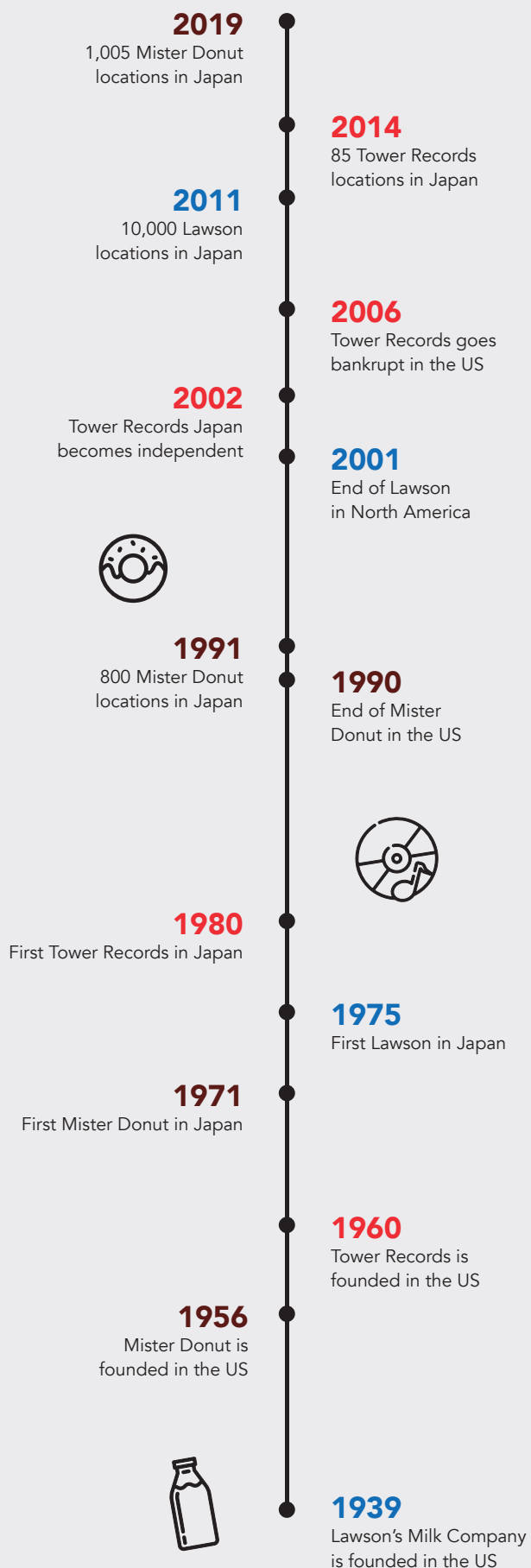
Today, there are more than 1,100 Mister Donut stores across Japan. Meanwhile Dunkin' Donuts—the victor in the US turf war—found itself unable to compete and withdrew from the market in 1998.

As these three case studies show, with the right vision and willingness to adapt, Japan can be fertile ground for US companies. In fact, it might be their salvation. ■



Mister Donut adapted to Japanese tastes

Timeline



Each year, 1.3 billion tons of food are wasted worldwide, says the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. And 6.43 million tons of it originates in Japan, according to the Japanese government in 2016—the most recent data available.

Recognizing the importance of reducing such waste—not only because it matters on a global scale but also because securing a more efficient food supply matters to the country's future—the Government of Japan enacted legislation in May that aims to cut the loss.

And businesses are cooperating. Seven-Eleven Japan Co., Ltd. and Lawson Inc. announced shortly after that they would discount *onigiri* (rice balls) and *obento* (lunch boxes) nearing expiration. It was a move that could be implemented using traditional labels, but could be enhanced by the use of radio frequency identification (RFID) tags, a technology that originated

in World War II but has become a key part of modern inventory management.

TAGGING WASTE

RFID tags are small labels that use electromagnetic fields to provide data to other devices, such as smartphones. Unlike barcodes, they need not be in the scanning device's line of sight.

In 2017, Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) launched a project to promote the use of these tags by retailers. Five major convenience store chains—7-11, FamilyMart, Lawson, NewDays, and Ministop, which is owned by retail giant Aeon Co., Ltd.—have agreed to introduce RFID tags on all their products by 2025. That's a huge step forward, as the number of items sold by the five companies total some 100 billion annually.

With 55,743 convenience stores in Japan as of December 2018, rollout of RFID technology in these small centers of daily life could bring big results.

TURN UP THE RADIO

Cutting food waste and staffing costs with RFID

By C Bryan Jones





Panasonic's walkthrough checkout system being tested in Osaka

One company leading the way is Glendale, Calif.-based Avery Dennison. The packaging and technology company has developed a range of RFID-based solutions aimed at the food industry under the Freshmarx solutions name.

Of particular note in terms of food waste are Temp Tracker—a cloud-based application that allows stores and kitchens to monitor temperatures in storage environments to prevent inventory loss, optimize staff efficiency, and improve customer safety—and Food Waste Tracker, which allows businesses to do what the name says. Specifically, the solution logs and tracks the root causes of food waste and provides data that can be analyzed to enhance reduction efforts and align business operations with community and environmental goals.

Doing so makes business sense. A Roadmap to Reduce U.S. Food Waste by 20 Percent, a 2016 study by ReFED, a collaboration of more than 30 business, nonprofit, foundation, and government leaders committed to reducing food waste in the United States, found that waste tracking and analytics could bring restaurants an extra \$620 million in profit annually.

RFID technology can help stores better track which items will soon expire so that they can provide incentives to buyers. For example, the price could be steadily lowered automatically as the expiration date approaches. Avery Dennison estimates that, by reducing the number of items that are thrown away because they are past date, RFID could cut food loss at stores by as much as 20 percent.

RFID technology can help stores better track which items will soon expire so that they can provide incentives to buyers.

SPARKLESS SPARK

But there have been challenges. With Japan's focus on convenience stores, and foods that many consumers grab to eat on the run or during lunch breaks, the RFID tags must withstand heating in a microwave oven. There has been concern that the metals in the tags could spark when heated.

Such worry appears to be a thing of the past, however, thanks to a breakthrough by Avery Dennison. In January, after a decade of research, the company unveiled its WaveSafe tag, an RFID label that can withstand up to five minutes of heating in a 950-watt microwave oven.

These WaveSafe tags will be used on all items in the aforementioned stores that require heating. Their cost, however, has not been announced. METI has recommended that RFID tags be sold for no more than ¥1 each. Higher costs could present an obstacle to implementation, slowing the government's plans to cut food waste and maintain operations of stores through more efficient inventory management as the workforce shrinks.

There is certainly incentive for manufacturers to make RFID tags easy to implement, however. The technology represents a big market—\$4.91 billion globally in 2017, according to Statistics Market Research Consulting Pvt Ltd., projected to reach \$18.2 billion by 2026.

SMARTER TAGS

Another reason food is sometimes thrown out is that it has spoiled prematurely. An offshoot of RFID technology being

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developed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) aims to solve this problem by monitoring food for contamination. Called RFIQ, the technology makes use of the electromagnetic waves generated when an RFID tag powers up to capture data about the product to which the tag is attached. A machine learning model then analyzes that data to detect contaminants. This can be helpful both in store for inventory management and safety as well as at home, where consumers can better determine whether a product is still good rather than throwing it out.

In two trials, the MIT team was able to use RFIQ to identify tainted baby formula and fake alcohol with 96-percent and 97-percent accuracy, respectively. The wireless system can detect minute changes in the signals from RFID tags that show abnormal conditions inside the container.

Another example of how RFIQ could be used to prevent problems and deaths resulting from contamination is the ongoing water crisis in Flint, Mich., which began in 2014. A combination of RFID tags and RFIQ could have allowed easy detection of the elevated lead levels introduced to the city's water supply.

One of the great things about RFIQ is that it works with the hundreds of billions of RFID tags already in place on products. The technology is not yet ready to deploy in the market, but the effectiveness and benefits are already clear.

AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE

Another goal of METI's RFID plan is to ensure that convenience stores can continue to operate efficiently as the country finds itself with fewer workers.

In its 2017 *Declaration of Plan to Introduce 100 Billion Electronic Tags for Products in Convenience Stores Formulated*, METI said: "The retail industry in Japan has been facing a labor shortage and an increase in labor costs affected by the



Panasonic's Regi-Robo checkout system

impact of the declining birthrate. It also faces a variety of issues across its supply chains, including food loss and returned food, despite achieving highly efficient logistics through mass production and frequent deliveries. With the potential of causing an increase in the burden on onsite employees and in the cost of operations, companies in the retail industry have been undertaking a variety of measures to overcome the issues."

Increased automation is one such measure, easily seen in many stores where self-checkout systems have replaced human clerks. While the experience may be less personal, it is more efficient—both for store operators and customers.

Combining RFID for inventory control with the Internet of Things (IoT) and cloud-based technologies can help stores provide a consistent customer experience with fewer staff. Shifting the payment process to the consumer is part of that.

Panasonic Corporation has demonstrated two RFID-based checkout systems since 2017—one with Lawson and the other with Trial Company, Inc., a Fukuoka-based retail and distribution company.



A strip of Avery Dennison's RFID tags

Five major convenience store chains . . . have agreed to introduce RFID tags on all their products by 2025.

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In the Lawson tests, Panasonic showed its Regi-Robo automated system, which uses a smart basket that can read the RFID tags attached to products. When the shopper is finished filling it with items, the basket reads the tags, calculates the price, automatically settles the transaction, and places the items into plastic bags.

The trials were carried out in 2017 at the Panasonic-Mae location in Moriguchi, Osaka Prefecture—an experimental store supported by METI where technologies and techniques for the next-generation of convenience stores are being developed.

Panasonic said: “We have developed the Regi-Robo using our know-how for productivity enhancement in factories, mechatronics technology, and sensing technology, all of which we have accumulated in the manufacturing industry. The Regi-Robo is a customer-friendly self-checkout machine which will shorten customers’ time for settlements and operations at register counters.”

In 2018, Panasonic and Trial demonstrated what they called the industry’s first “RFID-based walkthrough automatic check-out solution” at Trial’s headquarters in Fukuoka. The system, which features Trial’s RFID tagging technology, functions in a similar way to the Regi-Robo, in that customers can walk through carrying a basket filled with RFID-tagged items. Using pre-approved payment methods, the system can complete the

transaction itself, meaning there is little the customer needs to do and no staff are required.

Hiroyuki Aota, president of Panasonic Smart Factory Solutions Co., Ltd., said: “We are utilizing IoT and robotics technology to provide retail, distribution, and logistic solutions that help realize a better life and society. In 2017, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry announced its plans to introduce 100 billion electronic tags for products sold in convenience stores. With this tailwind, we are developing individual solutions that have the potential to become key solutions for the retail and distribution industry.”

Waste tracking and analytics could bring restaurants an additional \$620 million in profit annually.

SAFER TOMORROW

While not the only technology that can enable such automation for improved retail management and customer experience, RFID’s proven track record and versatility make it an ideal solution to the challenges now facing Japan.

Not only can RFID revolutionize inventory control and help improve food safety, it can help achieve the overarching goal of reducing food waste at the same time. And the combination of US and Japanese companies working to advance the technology highlight how the expertise of the two nations can be brought together to solve the problems of an aging society. ■



DATA-BASED ENGAGEMENT

Alyssa Kimura
challenges corporate norms

By John Amari



When it comes to creating the optimum workplace culture, companies must realize one thing: they can't just guess. Everything is based on data.

That's what Japanese serial entrepreneur Yumi Alyssa Kimura told *The ACCJ Journal* when asked how to shape a work environment that is equitable, diverse, and fully engages employees.

Kimura is the co-founder and chief executive officer of LEAD, a San Francisco-based human resources tech (HRTech) startup. The company's online, desktop, and mobile services match employees to each other based on their interests, mentorship needs, and desire to connect with co-workers across the company.

The artificial intelligence-enabled platform also allows HR managers to aggregate and map out data, including that which shows employee behavioral patterns and company demographics. Such information can inform the company's diversity strategies, change management goals, and employee career aims.

The upshot for employees is increased communication and engagement with co-workers, realization of personal goals, and greater job satisfaction.

Companies, meanwhile, benefit from a better understanding of the organization as a whole, not to mention the needs and aspirations of groups and individuals. Increased innovation and competitiveness—as well as growth in the bottom line—are also expected outcomes of using the platform.

"Employee engagement is not just about measurement such as people analytics, but also about letting employees talk to each other by building connections between teams," Kimura said. "If more and more companies do that, then they will have a more open culture."

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Kimura may be onto something. Multinational consulting company Ernst and Young (EY) found in their 2019 *EY Belonging Barometer* study that employees who enjoy a sense of belonging are more productive, motivated, and engaged.

The research has four key findings:

- Diversity and belonging are workplace expectations, with 56 percent of respondents saying they felt they belonged when they were trusted and respected at work.
- Regular check-ins between co-workers prevented people from checking out, with check-ins taking priority over actions such as public recognition (23 percent), being invited to off-site events (20 percent), and being invited to join a meeting with senior managers (14 percent).
- The majority of women felt that exclusion from participating in workplace activities was a form of bullying; the opposite was the case for men.
- Of Millennials, 48 percent were least likely to feel that exclusion is a form of bullying, compared with 46 percent of Gen Xers and 44 percent of Baby Boomers.

The business-to-business platform was originally a peer-to-peer social network to connect women to mentors.



Kimura (right) at eBay's diversity speaking event

When asked what emotion they feel when excluded at work, 40 percent across genders and generations said they were likely to feel ignored; 26 percent of men said they feel stressed and 28 percent of women said they feel sad when they are ignored.

PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE

Kimura has experienced many of the workplace dynamics that EY's report highlighted. Indeed, it was due in part to such experiences at a tech startup and in the recruitment industry that she felt the need to found LEAD.

Back in 2016, when she lived in San Francisco, Kimura was tapped as the Japan country manager for Chinese telecommunications company Meitu Inc.

"I built Meitu Japan from scratch, including hiring my own people and increasing the company's BeautyPlus product to more than 20 million users in Japan," Kimura recalls.

She also led Meitu's partnerships with large corporations in Japan, including with major telecoms and media companies. During the same period, Meitu listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

Before Meitu, she had a stint working as an HR consultant in Tokyo for the Tardis Group and Hays Plc. Both are human-capital consultancies.

During her time at the tech startup and the HR companies, she interviewed some 3,000 professionals and new recruits about their careers. That experience was instructive, feeding directly into the workplace challenges she would later wish to solve at LEAD.

WORKPLACE DISPARITY

Meitu had a higher turnover rate in the global business compared with the Japan division, Kimura said.

"In Japan, we had zero turnover for more than a year," she recalls. "The reason was that we managed our staff differently, because most of our employees back then were pretty young."

Meitu's Japan operation had a culture that prioritized mentorship, communication, and friendship among co-workers, and emphasized hitting key performance indicators (KPIs).

The result was mass adoption of the company's main products across Japan—as well as high employee job satisfaction, engagement, and retention.

When Kimura consulted in the HR industry, one of her areas of focus was recruiting professionals in the fast-moving consumer goods market.

In that sector, the disparity in pay between female and male brand managers shocked her: women typically were paid salaries of \$50,000–60,000, compared with \$50,000–300,000 for men.

"That's really crazy. And that's one of the reasons that drove me to the United States—the gap was so huge.

"I decided that I couldn't work in a country and live in an environment where I knew that the glass ceiling for women is around 50K, no matter how talented you are."

STARTUP DNA

Kimura is an alumna of Kwansei Gakuin University, in Hyogo Prefecture, where she majored in law, and the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, where her focus was HR management and analytics.

Her knack for entrepreneurship goes back to high school, however, when she lived in Shanghai. Kimura consulted for a real estate agency, a tour guide company, and a talent sourcing company in the city between 2005 and 2007.

Before becoming Japan country manager at Meitu, she co-founded Spinnaker Partners Inc., the Silicon Valley-based arm of a Tokyo-established venture capital consultancy.

Later, in 2017, she co-founded LEAD. Earlier this year, the company graduated from the Alchemist Accelerator, a San Francisco-based startup incubator. But the venture-capital-backed company is not the only startup in the HRTech field.



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PEOPLE ANALYTICS

At LEAD, Kimura's goal is to solve many of the work-based challenges that she encountered in the United States and Japan—and that have been identified in studies.

The company's solutions cover six main areas:

- Employee matching
- Mentoring
- Personal surveys
- Workplace culture building
- Company KPIs
- Behavioral insights design toolkit

A key goal of the platform is to provide insights into employee behavior—a field of research in which the results are often counterintuitive.

“For example, if you have 30 percent of female employees in the sales department that want mentors, HR is going to think they need mentorship to increase their sales performance,” Kimura said.

However, using behavior data, she showed that about five percent wanted to meet with engineers instead. The same number wanted to meet with product managers and co-workers in finance. How is that?

“Some of them wanted to change their career path. That's why they were meeting with people from different departments—and doing so constantly.”

An outcome of such surprising choices in mentorship or lunch partnerships is that a person in sales, for instance, may want to begin a course on computer programming based on conversations with someone in the IT division.

Those kinds of surprising outcomes can only be captured through behavioral insights, Kimura said.

Turnover is another area in which such arguably surprising insights are valuable.

“Pay is actually not a big issue when looking at why most people quit,” Kimura pointed out. “Most of them leave because of co-workers, stress, lack of promotion, job dissatisfaction, and a negative relationship with the supervisor.”

To change the corporate culture in Japan and abroad, we need more women role models, to show that women can become more successful.

GLOBAL PLATFORM

LEAD has come a long way since its first iteration—the business-to-business platform was originally a peer-to-peer social network to connect women to mentors.

Today, it seeks to support the aspirations and interests of workers from all walks of life and demographics, and to provide companies with the tools and insights needed to realize the company's goals.

“To change the corporate culture in Japan and abroad, we need more women role models, to show that women can become more successful,” Kimura said. “But it's not just about women. Each individual has their own talent, and the company should treat them all as equals, and give them the opportunities to execute their abilities so that they can grow.” ■





FOR ALL AGES

Japan's search for a sustainable social system

By C Bryan Jones

“Reform of the social security system to one that is oriented to all generations is the greatest challenge of the Abe Cabinet, which promotes the dynamic engagement of all citizens. In light of the rapidly declining birthrate and aging society, it is vital that we do not stop at just improving the social security system, but proceed with reforming the system itself.”

These are the words of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, delivered on September 20 at the government's first planning meeting on the creation of a social security system oriented to all generations.

The meeting followed an uproar in June caused by the release of a report by the Financial Services Agency (FSA) that said the average couple living to age 95 would need an additional ¥20 million (\$186,000) beyond what they would receive from the public pension system. Minister of Finance Taro Aso rejected the findings and that report was withdrawn in response to the outcry.

But the problem is real. Japan's current pension and health-care systems will become more difficult to maintain as the population ages. The September meeting showed that the government understands this despite the walk-back.

CHALLENGES

When the current system was designed, the expectation was that people would live into their seventies, perhaps eighties. Japan's current life expectancy is 83.7 years—the world's second highest—and is expected to reach 85.7 by 2030. But while that may be the average, more people are living beyond 100, and some projections show more than half of Japanese babies born today will pass the century mark.

At the same time, the number of babies born each year has been in decline for a decade. In 2018, there were 921,000 births in Japan, down by 20,000 from 2017. The number was below one million for the third year in a row and represents the fewest births since the record-keeping began in 1899.



Japan's current life expectancy

The population may be shrinking, but the gap between those paying into the pension system and those withdrawing money is widening. In 2017, the country's population was 126 million. A drop of 25 percent—to 94 million—is expected by 2060. That would widen what is already the highest old-age dependency ratio among countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

The ratio of individuals aged 65 and over to those aged 15–64 stands at 46 percent—more than 10 points higher than the next OECD country (Italy, 35.2)—and could reach 77 percent by 2050, according to demographic projections.

A solution to this growing imbalance must be found if Japan is to maintain its high living standards.

“Fundamentally, Japan now stands at a very important crossroads in addressing the sustainability of health and retirement,” said John W. Carlson, manager of government affairs at AbbVie and chair of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) Healthcare Committee. “Overcoming the challenges facing the social security system will necessitate three key actions: the education and empowerment of Japanese citizens; expansion of public and private financing; and wider utilization of disruptive technologies to improve system efficiency.”

SOLUTIONS

Abe's comments at the meeting established a framework for the government's efforts.

“We aim to ensure the peace of mind of not only the elderly, but also children, the childrearing generation, and the current generation,” he said. “We will further review sustainable reforms on the entire spectrum of our social security system, such as pensions, healthcare, nursing care, and employment, with sights set on the arrival of the 100-year life society, amidst the declining birthrate and aging society, as well as the diversification of lifestyles.”

Areas being looked at include:

- Early education
- Higher education
- Healthcare
- Consumption tax
- Workstyle reform

The last point relates to another of Abe's goals: raising the retirement age.

At a May 15 panel on future investment, the prime minister said that employment laws would be changed to require companies to hire workers up to age 70. He continued this theme in his comments at the September meeting.

“We must create an environment in which healthy and highly motivated elderly people can work, regardless of their age. We have announced a series of initiatives, such as the establishment of a legal framework to secure employment

opportunities up to the age of 70, and the creation of an environment that allows motivated people to have side jobs and multiple jobs.”

This will require a real shift in thinking for a society that does not embrace the concept of multiple jobs and in which the mandatory retirement age remains 60. While there are incentives for postponing retirement until age 65—and workers can choose to begin drawing their pension at any time between 60 and 70—doing so requires the cooperation of the company.

In terms of education, school became free for children aged 3–5 in October and, in April, higher education will become free for those who show that they are truly unable to pay.

HEALTHIER TOMORROW

The viability of the healthcare system is also of great concern, and Japan faces a challenge brought on in part by demographic changes and in part by the success of its high-quality care and coverage.

One of the five pillars on which the ACCJ focuses its advocacy efforts is healthcare and retirement.

In 2017, the ACCJ Healthcare Committee released a white paper with the European Business Council in Japan that outlines recommendations for successfully navigating the social and economic changes that impact the health of the

nation. And in 2018, the Healthcare Committee and the chamber's financial services committees kicked off the Sustainable Health & Retirement Initiative, to develop a multiple-

stakeholder, proactive blueprint for the future sustainability of Japan's social security system.

Some 320 members comprise the Healthcare Committee, which has five subcommittees:

- Dietary Supplements
- Digital Health
- Medical Devices & Diagnostics
- Pharmaceuticals
- Regenerative Medicines & Biosciences

Through its advocacy efforts, all these groups seek to improve understanding of how innovative medicines and technologies can contribute to the Government of Japan's vision for greater workforce productivity and economic growth.



JOHN W. CARLSON

Manager of government affairs at AbbVie
Chair of the ACCJ Healthcare Committee



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Because solving the healthcare and retirement puzzle requires not just medical know-how but also monetary action, the leaders of the ACCJ Healthcare Committee and Financial Services Forum have increased collaboration to bring together the healthcare and financial services sectors in an ongoing dialogue.

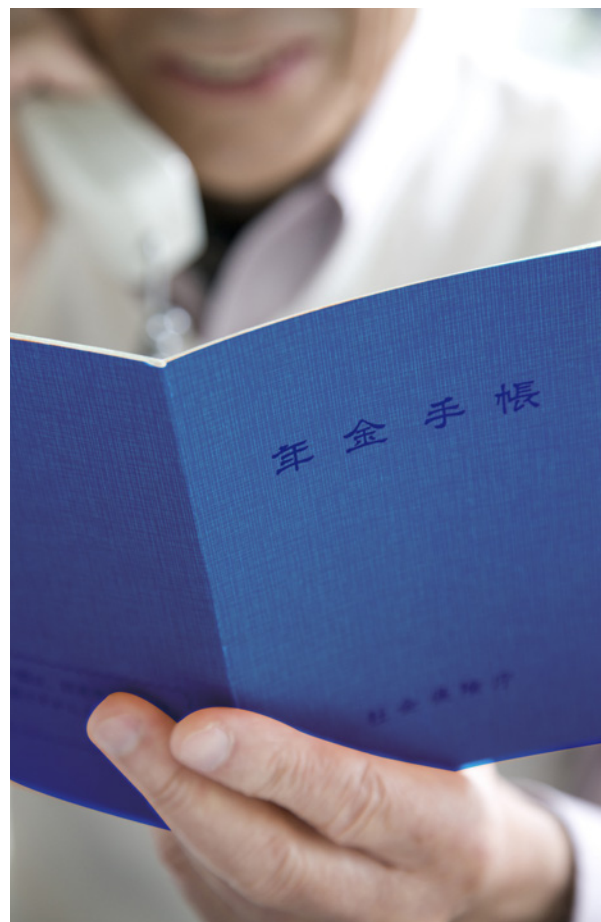
Carlson explained, “From our perspective, it is critical that the public and private sector work together more transparently to develop solutions that meet the needs of the Japanese people and place Japan at the forefront of thought leadership on social care policy for aging societies.”

As Abe’s comments demonstrate, the Japanese government recognizes the need for a variety of policy approaches—including improving the fiscal sustainability of the social security system, and fostering a more dynamic society with higher productivity and more women and seniors in the workforce.

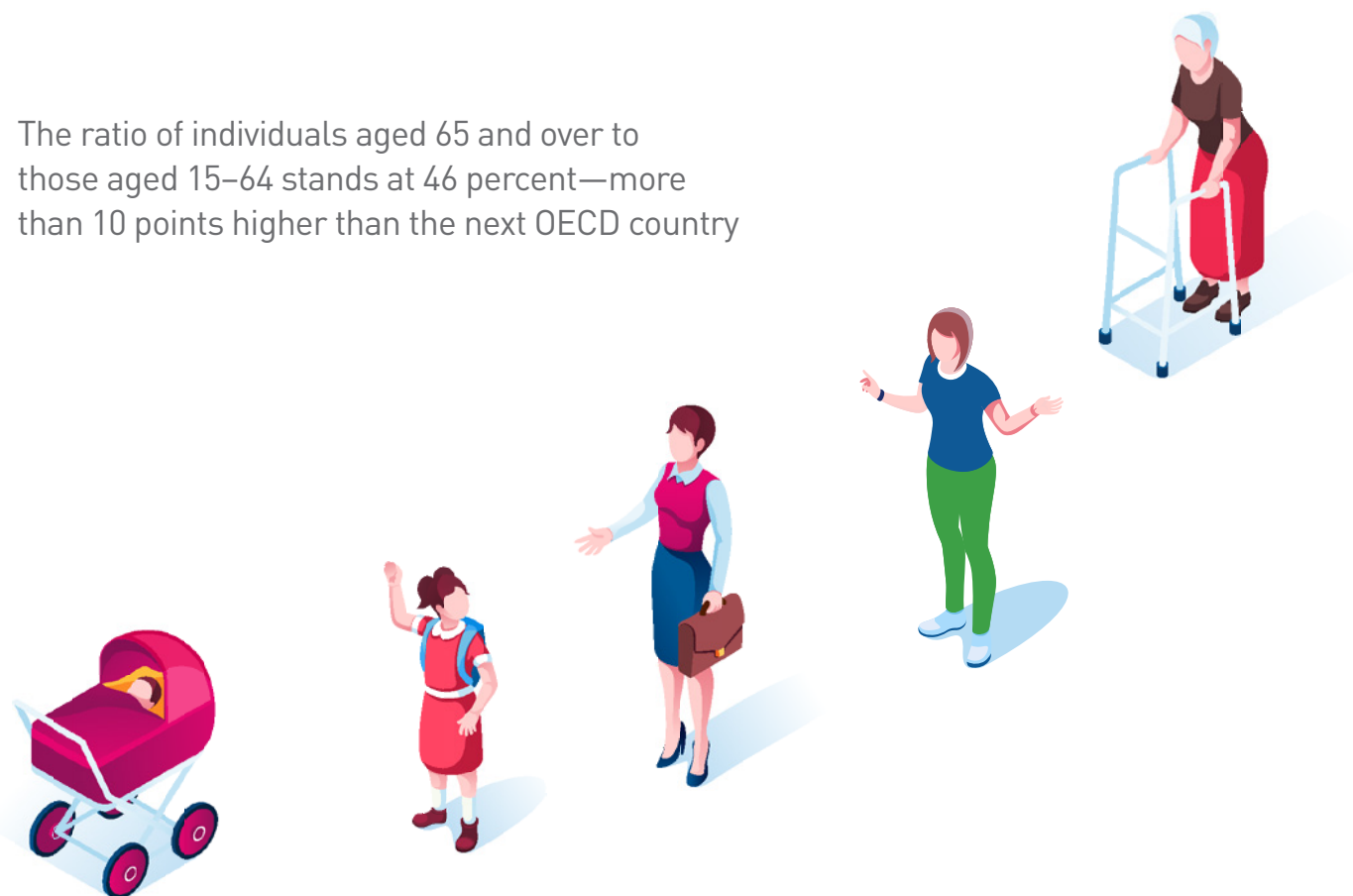
When it comes to health, the money put into the system should be viewed as an investment. Strengthening preventive nursing care and disease prevention have been cited by Abe as the goals of upcoming government initiatives. And finding more efficient ways to deliver healthcare will help keep costs manageable.

In its white paper, the ACCJ expressed great optimism that Japan is up to the task. “More than most nations, Japan is well-placed to meet these challenges: healthy life expectancy in Japan—the period when people can live without sustained medical or nursing care assistance—is 71 years on average for men and 74 for women,” the authors said.

“With the right policies and approach to healthcare, Japan can continue to improve the health of its citizens and create a blueprint that aging societies across the world can follow.”



The ratio of individuals aged 65 and over to those aged 15–64 stands at 46 percent—more than 10 points higher than the next OECD country



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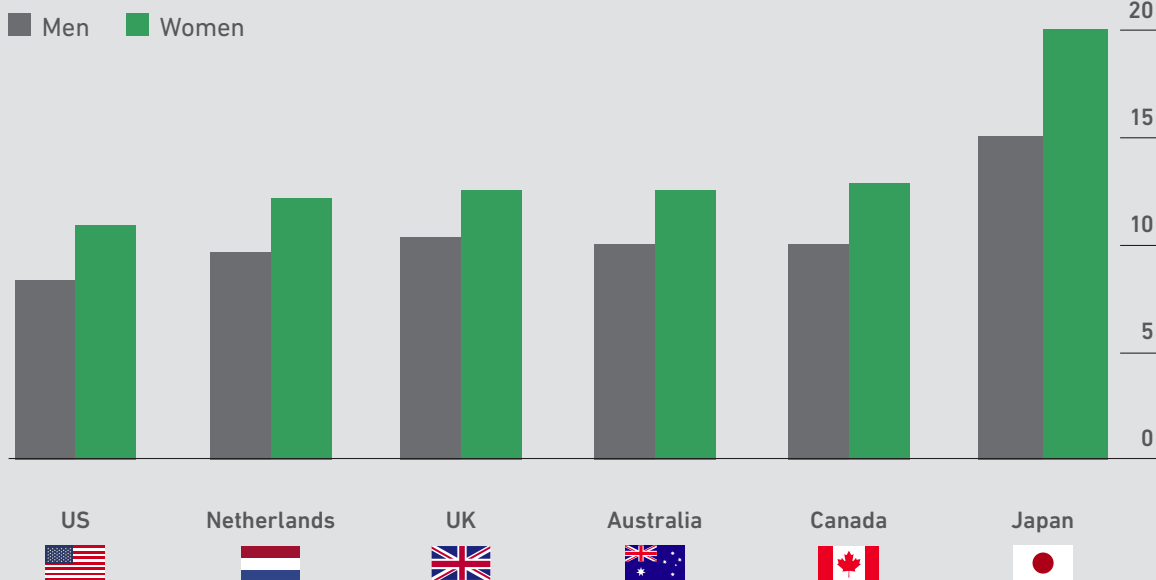
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Retirement Savings Gap

Estimated years of life expectancy past retirement savings, by country



SOURCE: WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

PAYING FOR IT ALL

Recognizing challenges and crafting solutions is good, but somehow it must be paid for. The consumption tax increase from eight percent to 10 percent on October 1 has not been popular with consumers, and some have concerns about how it might negatively impact the economy due to reduced consumer spending.

If Japan is to avoid any part of the tax increase, it will need to transfer some of the burden onto the private sector.

But for the private sector to be able to deal with the additional burden, it will need to change its savings mindset into an investment mindset, so increasing tax deferred investing—such as defined contribution plans and net income stabilization, or NISA, accounts—need to be expanded. Investment products need to become more transparent and investor-focused and investor education needs to be pushed.

But even with such a shift in investment strategy, the consumption tax may play a key role in saving Japan's healthcare and social security systems. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) published a report on November 28, entitled *On Financing Retirement, Health, and Long-term Care in Japan*. Financing the cost of aging through consumption tax is one of the paths explored.

Assuming that the ratio of debt to gross domestic product (GDP) stabilizes at current levels, the authors considered what level of consumption tax would be needed to care for the population as it ages—if consumption tax was the only source

of funding. Starting at eight percent, they found that a gradual increase to about 20 percent would be required.

Although the increases should be implemented very gradually, they say, half of the adjustment must be made by 2030. At that point, 11 years from now, the consumption tax rate would be 14 percent. In April, the OECD said that Japan may need to raise its consumption tax to as high as 26 percent to ensure fiscal sustainability—a rate that could be hard to swallow when a rise to just 10 percent is causing a stir. The OECD average is 19 percent. As with the IMF assessment, the OECD view assumes that consumption tax alone would be the source of primary surplus.

In the same report, the OECD recommends two other steps that the Abe administration is already working on: eliminating the mandatory retirement age of 60 and creating a more welcoming and supportive environment for women in the workplace.

So, while rises in the consumption tax may not go over well with the public, periodic increases may be a necessary part of life for a country that last year had public debt that was 236 percent of GDP.

But one thing that Japan has proven is that it is resilient. With the engagement being seen among business leaders, and the government's willingness to consider new paths and engage in meaningful dialogue with the private sector, the country is likely to succeed in adapting to life as a super-aged nation, building a society that works for all generations. ■

BUSINESS OF EQUALITY

Advancing the cause for LGBT+

By Rurika Imahashi

NIKKEI
ASIAN REVIEW



For members of Japan's LGBT+ community, this year has been full of changes offering hope of greater progress toward legal equality.

In mid-September, the Utsunomiya District Court awarded damages to a woman who split with her female partner over infidelity, granting de facto recognition of their common-law partnership.

Earlier this year, the Ministry of Justice overturned a deportation order for a gay Taiwanese man who had overstayed his visa, taking into consideration his longtime partnership with a Japanese man.

And, in August, a transgender woman from Southeast Asia who was in a 17-year relationship with a Japanese man was

granted a long-term residence permit, becoming the first foreign transgender person given special permission to stay in Japan.

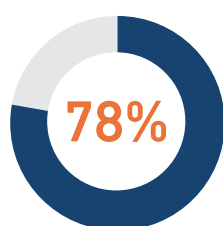
What these developments show is that local governments, courts, and even ministries are taking incremental, bottom-up steps forward rather than waiting for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government to lead with sweeping national reforms. But Abe may find that his reticence over the issue—playing to his conservative base and pleading constitutional complexity—is behind the times.

PUBLIC SUPPORT

A 2018 survey of 60,000 people aged 20–59 by advertising giant Dentsu Inc. shows 78-percent support for same-sex marriage. And a government survey of 6,000 married women the same year found nearly 70 percent of respondents favored legalizing same-sex marriage.

“Now, even if you don't agree with people being LGBT, we are talking about it,” said Nelson Ysabel, President of Stonewall Japan, an LGBT+ support organization. “The change is coming.”

“Public awareness about LGBT [people] has been rapidly raised,” said Makiko Terahara, an attorney at law firm Tokyo Omotesando. This is thanks to LGBT+ people speaking up. Terahara represents plaintiffs in cases involving 13 gay couples who are suing the Japanese government. The couples claim



of people in Japan
aged 20–59 support
same-sex marriage

the government's failure to legalize same-sex marriage violates their constitutional right to equality.

Progress on the issue has been gradual but steady in recent years. Since Tokyo's Shibuya Ward became the first municipality to recognize same-sex partnerships in 2015, at least 25 towns—and one entire prefecture, Ibaraki—have followed suit. These jurisdictions issue partnership certificates that same-sex couples can use to apply for public housing, for example.

STRONGER COMPANIES

The business community is keen to stay ahead of the curve as well. The American Chamber of Commerce in Japan recently warned in a statement supported by 61 organizations—including JP Morgan and Panasonic—that the disparity in legal rights between heterosexual and same-sex couples “makes Japan a less attractive option for LGBT couples, compared to many other countries vying for the same talent.”

So far, 28 countries and regions have legalized same-sex marriage, beginning with the Netherlands in 2001. Taiwan and Ecuador are the latest, both making the legal change this year. Japan is the only Group of Seven nation not to offer formal recognition of same-sex relationships.

Japanese business leaders are beginning to fret that the lack of marriage equality is hampering their ability to attract top talent.

Japan is the only Group of Seven nation not to offer formal recognition of same-sex relationships.

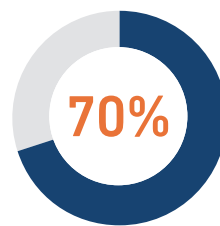
Moriaki Kida, regional chief operating officer at consultancy EY Japan, laments that several of his colleagues have left Japan because it does not offer legal protection for their same-sex

partners or their children.

“It's a huge loss for the Japanese economy,” Kida said, given the country's need for highly skilled people and its declining population.

Kida himself is gay and faced legal barriers when he moved to Japan three years ago from New York. His

husband, who is British, could not obtain a spouse visa. To legally remain in the country, his husband had to go to a Japanese language school and apply for a student visa. With marriages between a man and a woman, the foreign spouse's legal status is more secure: The visa period is longer, for example, and the foreign spouse can work legally.



of married women in Japan support same-sex marriage



PHOTO: YUKI KOHARA

Moriaki Kida (left) sits with his British husband.

Local Governments in Japan that Recognize Same-sex Unions

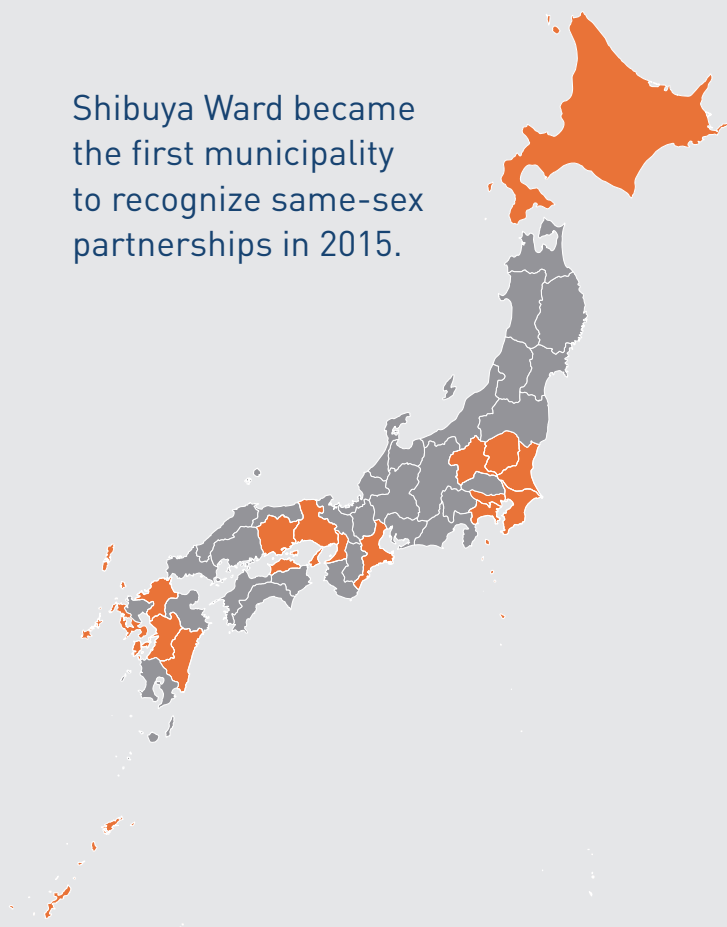
(as of October 2019)

Shibuya (November 2015)	Fuchu
Setagaya	Yokosuka
Iga (April 2016)	Soja
Takarazuka (June 2016)	Odawara
Naha (July 2016)	Hirakata
Sapporo (June 2017)	Edogawa
Fukuoka (April 2018)	Toshima
Osaka (July 2018)	Kanuma (June 2019)
Nakano (August 2018)	Miyazaki
Oizumi (January 2019)	Kitakyushu (July 2019)
Chiba	Ibaraki Prefecture
Sakai (April 2019)	Nagasaki (September 2019)
Kumamoto	Sanda (October 2019)

Planning to recognize

Saitama	Mitoyo
Minato	Sagamihara
Yokohama	Akashi
Koga	Narashino

Shibuya Ward became the first municipality to recognize same-sex partnerships in 2015.



SOURCE: MEDIA REPORTS

DIET DEBATE

The question of same-sex marriage is inherently political. Abe's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) says it is promoting social understanding of sexual minorities. The LDP said it would submit a bill dedicated to the "promotion of understanding of LGBT+ people" to the Diet during the January–June session this year, but did not. The party now hopes to submit legislation during the October–December session, but it has not given a timetable.

State Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare Gaku Hashimoto admits that some lawmakers are cool toward LGBT+ rights, but adds, "We want to promote a society in which people, regardless of their sexuality, can feel a sense of security, and we want to eliminate prejudice based on lack of understanding."

Until last month, Hashimoto served as chief secretary for working groups on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Some LGBT+ people agree that changing public perceptions takes time. Yu Takase, a transgender man in his 20s, said that gradual acceptance leads to a deeper understanding. "It's better than a fast change that does not really sink in."

But the LDP is avoiding the issue for the moment. "The LDP's stance is that we will think about what happens next after a social understanding is created and has penetrated," Hashimoto told the *Nikkei Asian Review*. "Whether the party discusses same-sex marriage depends on how public discussion goes."

CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION?

One rationale for the LDP's go-slow approach is that allowing same-sex marriage would require a constitutional change. Japan's postwar constitution has not been amended since its adoption in 1947.

Article 24 says: "Marriage shall be based only on the mutual consent of both sexes and it shall be maintained through mutual cooperation with the equal rights of husband and wife as a basis."

In 2015, Abe said in the Diet that changing the constitution to allow same-sex marriage would require "extremely cautious consideration" as it "does not envisage marriage between people of the same sex."

However, experts cast doubt on this interpretation. Sota Kimura, a constitutional scholar at Tokyo Metropolitan University, argues that it is "commonly accepted" that the constitution does not rule out same-sex marriage.

Kimura stressed that article 24 was written to make clear that women—who were at a disadvantage in Japan's male-dominated prewar society—now had the freedom to choose whom to marry without the say of third parties such as parents.

He argues that it is easy for the LDP "to say article 24 rules out same-sex marriage." It provides a convenient way to "cover up the party's true feelings that they don't actually want to legalize it."

DIFFERING VIEWS

In a surprising move, conservative heavyweight Hakubun Shimomura, head of the LDP's Election Strategy Committee, said in late September that same-sex marriage should be among the potential constitutional changes up for discussion.

Japanese Companies Catering for LGBT+ Couples (as of October 2019)

Company	Industry	Service
Lifenet Insurance Dai-ichi Life Insurance Nippon Life Insurance	Life insurance	Same-sex partner can receive insurance
SoftBank KDDI NTT	Mobile service	Family discount is applicable to same-sex partner
ANA JAL	Airline	Mileage can be shared with same-sex partner
Sony Bank SBI Sumishin Net Bank Rakuten Bank Mizuho Bank Sumitomo Mitsui Trust Bank	Banking	Same-sex couple can apply for housing loan

SOURCE: INDIVIDUAL COMPANIES

But opposition parties reject this suggestion, calling it a way to hide the conservative party's opposition to change. "Same-sex marriage can be legalized without amending the constitution," said Taiga Ishikawa, a gay parliamentarian with the Constitutional Democratic Party.

"When one discusses constitutional changes for same-sex marriage, it is a package that includes the amendment of [war-renouncing] article 9," Ishikawa told a gathering of reporters in September. "The LGBT community must say 'no' to being used to amend the pacifist constitution."

In June, opposition parties submitted a bill to the Diet that would allow marriage between people of the same sex. They argue that amending Japan's civil law by using a neutral term such as "party to marriage" instead of "husband and wife," for example, would enable same-sex marriage.

Terahara at Tokyo Omotesando agrees. "As the constitution does not rule out same-sex marriage, constitutional changes are not necessary," she said, adding that it is

Japanese business leaders are beginning to fret that the lack of marriage equality is hampering their ability to attract top talent.

"extremely difficult" to change Japan's constitution. It requires a national referendum, which Japan has never held before. Ishikawa said that holding a direct national vote would cost at least ¥80 billion (\$736 million).

MOMENTUM BUILDING

Masayuki Tanamura, a professor at Tokyo's Waseda University and an expert in family law, said Japan is at a tipping point. "Japanese society has long protected a traditional type of family and has excluded those who do not fit that."

Now there are more diverse families. The traditional model "does not reflect what a real family is today," Tanamura said, adding, "The LGBT rights issue raises a fundamental question: What defines marriage and family?"

Tanamura stresses that this is especially important for Japan, as the country is opening its doors to more people from abroad. "If LGBT citizens are treated equally, it means that all diverse people are protected equally."

But for some, it is too late. Satoshi Kimura, a 27-year-old gay man, left

Japan six years ago for Canada, unable to envision a free and open life as a queer person at home. "I could not imagine myself when I grow older," he said. "I had no idea what my life would be, living in Japan."

Now he has a master's degree as well as permanent residency in Canada, and has been with his partner for four years. He has also developed a clear image of the life he wants them to live together. "Being an immigrant is not easy, but, more than anything, I can be myself and feel respected," he said. "I don't think I'll go back to Japan unless it changes." ■



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DIET DAILIES

FINANCIAL SERVICES AGENCY

VEXED REPORT HELPED ASSETS

When the Financial Services Agency (FSA) issued a controversial report in June saying that a married couple living to age 95 would require savings of ¥20 million, something rarely observed in politics was heard: numerous voices expressed sympathy for the agency. The opposition parties reacted furiously and FSA head Taro Aso refused to accept the report, setting off another flurry of political conflict.

One problem with the report was that portions did not provide enough detail. For example, based on the assumption that an elderly couple's assets would decline at the rate of about ¥50,000 per month, the report's authors predicted a ¥13–20 million post-retirement shortfall. With pension and savings, however, the actual deficit would likely be less. Aso pushed for revisions and thought a considerate explanation would be sufficient to allay anxieties among the public.

Essentially, the message of the report was straightforward: in an era when lifespans approach or surpass the century mark, “people are going to need more funds than before.” But this sounded an alarm. Today, about half the population has assets in the form of bank deposits.

Worry over insufficient assets is a global problem. The issue was raised—and a lively and wide-ranging discussion ensued—at a symposium in June attended by G20 finance ministers and central bank directors.

Of particular interest is the strong emphasis on the importance of “the female perspective,” which was raised by many experts from around the world. In many countries, fewer women than men hold jobs and women's wages are lower than those of men. But women tend to live longer, so the risk is greater for them if retirement funds fall short.

That particular perspective was not touched on in the “problematic” report, and the point was also not raised by any of the opposition parties. Rather than examining the true state of the matter, debate developed into an unruly

squabble, exposing the intolerably low level of many politicians, who appear to harbor no concern other than how they appear to their constituents.

MINISTRY OF LAND, INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORT AND TOURISM (MLIT)

JR, SHIZUOKA CLASH OVER HIGH-SPEED TRAIN

Controversy has arisen over the Chuo Linear Express, the new high-speed train utilizing maglev technology that will connect Tokyo and Nagoya. Shizuoka Prefecture and JR Tokai Railway Company have been at odds over construction of the Minami Alps Tunnel, which has been running behind schedule and threatening the 2027 completion target. Another disagreement arose recently over insufficient measures by Shizuoka Prefecture to reduce the volume in the Oikawa River channel. MLIT has adopted a hands-off

posture up to now, but may be drawn into the conflict.

A MLIT supervisor said, “From the personality and character of Shizuoka's governor, we should have anticipated these sorts of problems.” His view was that to resolve the matter, JR Tokai should make at least some concessions.

But JR Tokai seems to be showing no such inclination, leading to further friction. President Shin Kaneko, voiced his concerns over the impact of the delay at a press conference at the end of May. One month later, he said, “We are proceeding in accordance with national policy,” indicating that his hardline stance would continue.

MLIT conceded that JR Tokai's remarks are factual and that the ministry has no problem with them, but said that they were ill-timed and failed to consider the other party's feelings, thereby risking to aggravate the problem.

Many are said to share the view that MLIT's intervention cannot be avoided if the standoff is to be overcome. ■



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