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Special Feature:



Fostering International Exchange Through Iwate's Food



English

Thinking About People's Troubles and Happiness Through Food

Interview with Kazuyoshi Fujita (Hometown: Oshu)

Kazuyoshi Fujita noticed the relationship between food and the environment early on, and established the first network between growers and consumers of organic vegetables in Japan called Daichi wo Mamoru Kai. He is now working to spread that network to farmers around the world. We asked Mr. Fujita about the various interactions he has had with people from around the world through the connection of food.



Asian Exchange

We at Daichi wo Mamoru Kai are protecting Japanese agriculture, with our fundamental policy being for the protection of primary industry. The self-sufficiency rate of food production in Japan is a meager 40%. There is still plenty of land available for food production, but the age of farmers is increasing and no one is willing to take up their place because farming is not profitable. So we import cheap food from abroad while our land goes unused. This is strange even from an international perspective. Japanese farmers should be properly supported so that the next generation of Japanese will not go hungry. Daichi wo Mamoru Kai was created for that purpose, connecting producers and consumers. Even so, there are products that cannot be produced in Japan and must be imported, such as coffee, spices, and bananas. We began interacting with farmers abroad in 1990 through the importation of goods such as these. From the outset we believed these transactions should not be unfair, and so we decided we must purchase through fair trade.

When taking the amount of energy used for trans-

portation into consideration, we believe we should not be purchasing goods from the other side of the world. Instead, we should buy from nearby Asian countries and have a personal relationship with these farmers, even though they are in a different country. I would like we Japanese to think harder about what our attitudes towards problems are, including problems such as comfort women and visiting the Yasukuni shrine, when interacting with other Asian peoples in order to place an importance on our relations as humans. Exchange through agriculture is important. Japanese organic agriculture uses excellent techniques such as producing a high yield with very little land, and so I would like to exchange techniques such as these. In particular, members of Daichi wo Mamoru Kai are working towards a training program so that young people in Asia can learn skills such as mushroom farming, raising livestock, rice planting, and floriculture. Agriculture is also connected with culture and art, so I would also like to do cultural exchange through dancing, clothing, pottery, etc. I believe it is important that we continue to strengthen our relationships with each other.



Olive Oil and Palestine

Presently, 3% of Daichi wo Mamoru Kai's sales are of foreign products. We sell coffee from East Timor. The conflict in East Timor is still continuing, so we felt we should do something to help rebuild the country. That is why we started importing coffee from there. 1% of sales of that coffee go towards purchasing school supplies and sports equipment for local elementary schools. Members of Daichi wo Mamoru Kai care about the people of East Timor and feel the pain of its children, and so these people are able to get involved through drinking the country's coffee.

The olive oil we currently sell comes from Palestine. Olive oil, written about even in the Bible, has its roots in the region of Palestine, which is now in an ongoing political conflict. I have gone there many times, but the border checks of the Israeli occupation make entering and leaving Palestine very difficult. Even so, if I am going to use olive oil, I want to use olive oil from Palestine. Every drop of olive oil we use makes us reflect on the conflict between Palestine and Israel. Many of our members watch or read the news in order to stay further involved with Palestine.

Years ago I brought along some consumers to Palestine to deepen our exchange with the Palestinian people. We toured an olive farm, where the plants grew wilder the more you climbed up the slope of the field. When we asked why it was like that, the response was that near the top there is an Israeli settlement. If you approach the settlement while trying to do work, they shoot at you with rifles. The soldiers shoot because there are women and children in the settlement, and they are afraid that guerillas might be approaching. The olive farm was strewn with boulders and rocks, and the farmers were poor, so they were still relying on donkeys for harvesting. The farmers were being mistaken for guerillas because of their appearance.

I thought, "If only they had a road." If they had a road they could use a light truck to do their work, and they would not be mistaken for guerillas. I asked the farmers, "Wouldn't it be better if you built a road here?" They told me that in order to build 1km of road it would cost them 1 million yen. I thought, if it is only 1 million yen, my organization could probably do something. When I returned to Japan I discussed the issue with members of Daichi wo Mamoru Kai.

We cannot use guns to support the people of Palestine, but isn't building a road something we can do? We sought support for the building of a peaceful road, and in one week, 1500 people each contributed 1000 yen allowing us to collect 1.5 million yen. I took this money and returned to Palestine, telling the farmers "This many people are saying they want you to build a road here." They were overjoyed to receive the money and promised to build the road quickly.

So the following year in November, I visited Palestine once more. By that time they had already built an excellent 1.3 km road. They told me that was all they could build with 1.5 million yen, but they were very happy. The thing we are doing is thinking about people's worries and joys through food. We are able to make an impact on each other's culture, and create a connection that brings enjoyment to life. Gaza has suffered severe damage. Right now we are working with the olive farmers and other NGOs to create a large amount of food baskets that contain everyday necessities. Daichi wo Mamoru Kai has begun asking its members for assistance to send these baskets to the Gaza region. In just one week we were able to collect 4.3 million yen from many different people, but many of these supporters had already been eating our olive oil and reading the news on Palestine that we had been sending out.

What does Morioka look like from space?

It is difficult to understand the good qualities of yourself just by staying in one place. I believe it would be a good opportunity for those living in Iwate to sometimes leave for Tokyo and then look back at Iwate, or leave for a foreign country and look back at Japan. For a farmer who raises livestock, he or she can see that someone in Korea does things one way, and someone from Ulan Bator does things another way, while farmers in Europe do it an even different way. By understanding these things, he or she could think, "The method I'm using is really advanced," or "I didn't realize they did it this way," and make

things exciting and interesting, not just in their life, but also in their work.

We, the promoters of Candle Night, are encouraging people to turn off the lights for two hours during the summer and winter solstices. At 8 p.m. in Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Turkey, Iran, Europe, and back around to America, people will turn their lights off progressively due to the time difference. I would like to think that the darkness would look like a wave when looking from above in space. One person's small action, when connected with many other people's actions, could possibly be viewed from space. It is a magnificent image. I am living in Morioka, and if I were to look at Morioka from space, how would I see it? How would I see the Earth? I think about those things and wonder what I can do as someone living on Earth. I think it is very important that we think in this way.

In regards to time, we have practice thinking everyday in the short term, like the 3 minutes it takes to make instant noodles. We, however, cannot think about things in the long term, on a scale of a thousand years. For example, what will the Earth be like in 1000 years? What will become of humanity? What will happiness be like? If we train ourselves to think of these sorts of things, we can see the Earth and ourselves in a completely different way.



Abundant Nature, Resources, and People



Farmers Can Move People

Iwate is a region with abundant nature, and it does not need to rely on food or anything else for its society to continue. I want to treat it with the utmost care. For someone who has left Iwate and returned it might sound contradictory, but I feel that people's lives will be enriched if they rely on the people, resources, and nature of their own region. If we look at our home and say, "It doesn't have this and doesn't have that," we will become dissatisfied and also develop an inferiority complex. It would make us unhappy.

On the island of Bali there are native dances called Kecak and Legong, as well as painting, and pottery. These arts are famous for being extremely high quality, and all the artists are farmers. When the sun goes up they start their farm work. The middle of the day is too hot so they go home, and go back to work in the evening. In the meantime, they practice dancing or making paintings and pottery.

I asked the people in Bali, "Why is your dancing famous around the world, and why are people so

moved by it?" They answered simply, "It's because we're farmers." "We get up early to go to the fields where we can watch the insects and small animals move and the vitality of life enters our body. We are touched when we watch the rice and other plants grow, it makes us happy. When we feel something, something that moves us about life, or when we are talking to a foreigner, it comes through in our dancing, the way we move our eyes, our hips, and our hands. We start practicing dancing at a young age, so we can do any kind of movement. But only that will not make people feel anything. The expression in our eyes of someone who has, just today, touched a new life with our very fingertips is what moves people. We can do this because we are farmers."

I want farmers in Iwate to hear their story. "So many people can be moved because of being a farmer." That is world class. Farming is an amazing occupation. Iwate is filled with nature and people with warm hearts. I believe when people start to live their life having faith in those things, Iwate will become a rich and wonderful place.

<Profile> Kazuyoshi Fujita

The second son of a rice farmer, Kazuyoshi Fujita was born in Oshu in 1947. A graduate from the Faculty of Law at Sophia University, he founded the NGO Daichi wo Mamoru Kai (The Association to Preserve the Earth) in 1975 in order to popularize organic farming. The joint-stock company Daichi (now called Daichi wo Mamoru Kai), founded in 1977, was a pioneer for social conscious private companies, and served the distribution needs of Daichi wo Mamoru Kai. After starting with organic farming, his organization also began work on issues such as food supplies, environment, energy, and education. Daichi wo Mamoru Kai created an international arm in 1990, strengthening its connection with farmers around the world. Currently, Mr. Fujita is the chairman of Daichi wo Mamoru Kai, the representative director of the Daichi wo Mamoru Kai company, a promoter for "Candle Night," and the president of Asia Nomin Genki University.



■Daichi wo Mamoru Kai homepage: <http://www.daichi.or.jp>

Fostering International Exchange Through Iwate's Food

Japanese food and ingredients are highly regarded overseas. Food is one's culture. There is joy in introducing our food culture to people from a different country but there can also be difficulties. This issue features people who are selling and promoting Iwate's food and cookware overseas, and we will see how international exchange can be done through food.

Exporting Iwate's Food and Ingredient to the World

To promote the exportation of Iwate's agricultural, forestry, and fisheries products to the world, a conference was held in March last year. 'Iwate Fair' was held in supermarkets in Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore to promote Iwate's food and ingredients to the local people. We will hear from Mr. Kiyoshi Nozawa, who was in charge of the Iwate Fair, about his experience and the difficulties in introducing Iwate's food to people with different cultures. Mr. Nozawa works for the Products Distribution Division of the Department of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries of Iwate Prefecture.



Understanding Different Food Cultures

The quality of Japanese food and ingredients has already been well established and regarded in Southeast Asia. However, the food culture and eating habits are very different. For example, we often think cooking rice is a simple task just by using the rice cooker, but in fact, the amount of water added and the way to cook it will affect the taste of the rice. Most Southeast Asian countries have hard water so the amount of water to add when cooking rice will be different. The voltage is also different, so the center of the rice remains hard when cooked with a Japanese rice cooker. This is why introducing food to people with a different culture can sometimes be difficult.

Additionally, different regions have different palates. For example, while people in Iwate like firm and chewy noodles, such as 'wanko soba' and 'reimen', people in Hong Kong do not like these kinds of noodles, and often prefer soft noodles.

I now understand that the palate of Japanese people and the local people are different. We should not only introduce similar products to compete with their existing local products but also to find some products from Iwate that the locals might like after we understand their food culture. However, it is necessary to go to a country to understand the local food culture and eating habits.

Another example would be apples that contain 'mitsu' (syrup). Apples that contain 'mitsu' are highly regarded in Japan, however, people in Hong Kong do not understand why they are popular and think that they look like deteriorated apples. It took me a lot of effort to explain to the local people the good qualities of this kind of apple.

Things that we think are good in Japan are not necessarily considered to be so by people from other countries. Therefore, it is important to understand the food culture and eating habits of the local people before trying to sell or introduce food products to them.

Do the Big Things Together

The exhibitors were faced with language barriers. They would have been able to promote their products more if they could communicate with the customers. We have seen and hear about Southeast Asia's remarkable economic growth, and it was worthwhile to have a firsthand experience of the land. It was the first time for many people and it might not have been up to business level. However, it was a good experience for us to see how other people react to our products. It was a big step for us to have had this experience to communicate with people overseas through our products. I hope more people will be able to utilize this opportunity. It is sometimes difficult for individuals to develop a market abroad, but it can be possible if many people do it together. We drank together in the evening and discuss with each other things such as the customers' reactions. It was encouraging seeing that everyone shares the same goal and having the same awareness of the problems.

Last year was the year for launching. We are in the entrance stage of knowing about the local people and their culture. We received many positive feedbacks on fruits, such as apple, Sanma fish (saury), and scallop. Next year, we are hoping to develop a business with continuity.

Mutually Recognizing Each Others' Food Culture

Katsuyasu Nakamura of Nakamura in Kamaishi has accepted a position as lecturer at a culinary arts school in Dalian, China. Mr. Nakamura presented many creative dishes featuring ingredients from Iwate at the Iwate Fair held in Hong Kong last year. He is largely featured in magazines at home, and is also increasingly becoming active abroad.



Katsuyasu Nakamura
Nakamura

Last year I exhibited at a trade discussion in Dalian, and also presented dishes made with Iwate ingredients at a banquet with senior members of the Dalian City Government in attendance. It was as a result of attending these events that I was offered a position as lecturer. I believe that in order to sell a product, it is important to add something extra to it, just like the "koromo," or coating, added to ohagi (a sweet made with glutinous rice covered in adzuki bean paste) or tempura. In this case, koromo is the sentiment of the growers and producers, as well as Japanese culture. It is very important to communicate this clearly. It is really simple and easy to act like a trading company and simply bring high-class products like dried abalone, sea cucumber, or shellfish meat to sell in lots. You may be able to increase your profits, but it's very difficult to communicate the positive qualities of Japan that way. Especially now with the high cost of the Yen, it has become a time where you cannot simply expect things to sell on their own. So I think it's even more important now to add koromo.

Language is necessary to tell others about koromo. I feel this strongly every time I go overseas. If I could speak Chinese, I think I could do better at expressing the appeal of Iwate's products (laughing). I would like to express my expert knowledge and cooking skills, for example if I were selling abalone I could say, "This is an abalone steak. It looks like it has only been grilled, but there are many hidden flavors using these ingredients," or, "Abalone caught in the Sanriku area feed on many delicious kelp and wakame seaweed, and so it has an excellent taste." However, when speaking through an interpreter a lot of the nuance is lost, and it is very slow going. I get rather impatient (laughing).

After I went to China, I realized that there are many excellent ingredients there. People in Japan right now believe that any food coming from China is bad quality. But that's the fault of only a small number of bad importers. If you go to a market place there are lots of high quality fish and shellfish. Once in Dalian I made Japanese food using local ingredients and had instructors at the culinary school and local government workers try it. Everyone was surprised that Japanese food could be made with Chinese ingredients. Of course you can do it, the fish and clams are the same as in Japan.

Actually, there are people in China that say, "Japanese people say Chinese products are bad, they look down on Chinese products." But, they are delighted when I respond to them saying, "That's not true. Chinese ingredients are

incredibly good. How else can you make something this good?" The important thing is to respect the other person's culture. China has an incredible food culture and lots of great ingredients. As I accept that, I tell them about Japanese food culture.

The importance of a performance

I was able to use many ideas during the Iwate Fair in Hong Kong last year. Buyers were already familiar with basic Japanese food and ingredients. They were interested in hearing new information. So instead of just offering samples of plain apples, I offered apples lightly flavored with brandy and with Miyamori Wasabi added to it. Those who tried it were very surprised and told me it tasted great. Putting on a performance is important, don't you think? Just lining up product samples for people to eat is boring. Having Governor Tasso make a sea urchin rice ball in front of the customers went over very well. I heard later from the Governor that he had practiced before hand, and the customers really saw that hard work.

I flambéed an abalone in front of the audience by drawing sake out of a barrel and adding it to the sauce pan where it lit on fire. Actually, sake doesn't normally light on fire, so I mixed it with brandy (laughing). You need to create a performance in order to make an impression on someone. When there is a performance, and the plating is beautiful, and the food is delicious, it stays in your mind. Even local magazines have begun calling Iwate the "Food Kingdom of Iwate." Rather than selling things, I think the most important thing is to have people develop an interest in Japan, to make them want to visit Japan before doing a business transaction. By having them come to Japan it creates an opportunity to interact, and I believe it will result in developing a strong business relationship. I will not only be teaching in Dalian, but I will be learning a lot from the Chinese people as well, and so I would like to bring many trainees to Iwate. I believe it is now becoming more important to have exchange on an individual level.



Restart Trading with China Independently



Hidenori Kawabata

Kawashu Company

We started doing business with overseas companies 7 years ago. We began with selling abalones that are domestically used for sushi. However, many large abalones were left that could not be used to make sushi. We tried to find out what we can do with these abalones and found out that the Sanriku region in Iwate had a history of making and exporting dried abalones. I did not know about this until some old people told me, 'I used to make these, too'. So I invited two old ladies who are both over 80 years old, to teach me the basics. After the products were done, I started looking for a selling channel and found out that at that time Kobe was the exporting base. I talked about this business with a client who was from Kobe, and he said, 'Yes, let's do it', so we began from there. He took the dried foodstuff to a dried food store in Hong Kong and the customers there were very satisfied and said, 'These products are of very high quality. We would like to do it again next year'. I could feel that they were very happy with the products. I did some research to see what other kinds of products in Hong Kong are imported from Japan, and found out that there are also dried sea cucumber and dried scallops.

We were happy that the Chinese people are satisfied by the products we made, this also made our business possible. So we decided that we should make this real, but we did not know anything about dried sea cucumber. I saw the making of dried sea cucumber in Aomori on a TV program, so I visited the producer but they would not let me know the details as it was a company secret. We had no other ways but to try making it through trial and error. Customers in Hong Kong said to us, 'This is good, this is what we have always wanted. We would like to have more of it'. We were very encouraged by these words.

For about 300 to 400 years since the Edo Period (1603-1867), Japanese dried abalone and sea cucumber were called 'kanka' which was used for trading instead of currency. Japanese products are very natural, and because we make each product with care they are often regarded as safe products. It was easy for us to begin our business in Hong Kong as the quality of Japanese products was already very highly regarded. I only knew about this after I went to Hong Kong and talked to the people from the

"Kawashu, a marine product processing company in Yamada, Iwate, exports such as the high-class food ingredient used in Chinese cuisine, dried abalones and dried sea cucumbers. Through the exportation of dried foodstuff from the Sanriku area, Kawashu is communicating the appeal of Iwate's ingredients overseas.

dried food store. In the Hong Kong industry, Iwate-produced abalones are known to be the best, they would say, 'When you say Iwate, you will think of dried abalone, and when you talk about abalone, you will think of Iwate'.

We also participated actively in the Iwate Fair held overseas by the prefectural government. I think it is good that the prefectural government provides us with this opportunity to sell products that Iwate is proud of. It would be very difficult for individuals to do it by themselves. This opportunity is given to us, whether to utilize it or not depends on the individual.

It is very interesting to do business with people in Hong Kong. Many of the people there are operating their business with the perspective that it is their own company. Even larger companies feel like they are an extension of a private business and this allows us to talk with the management about sales. I appreciate that and find it to be very refreshing. It is also good that we can receive direct feedback and comments from the management and hear what they are thinking. Also, people in Hong Kong place a great importance on eating. They think eating healthily helps you retain a healthy body. There are many different kinds of food and they take time to eat. They do not eat hastily like people in Japan do. I think the culture of relaxing and taking time to eat creates a rich atmosphere. I like Japan to adopt this eating culture, too.



Without kitchen utensils to prepare ingredients, creating delicious meals is impossible. The quality of the utensils used can often be the deciding factor affecting the flavor. I visited Oshu, Japan's top foundry city, to discuss kitchenware with Kuniko Oikawa, president of OIGEN Foundry Co., Ltd., that sells cast iron products worldwide.



Kuniko Oikawa
OIGEN Foundry Co., Ltd.

How did you first begin selling abroad?

Before I became president, Oigen focused on selling through trade fairs. I took over as company president in the 1990s, and coincidentally a trading company that we were working with on overseas sales changed their management around that time as well. The new president was a woman currently living in France. So the two of us initiated marketing activities in Europe starting in the late 90s, visiting customers and doing research. We started creating new designs proposals based on that research, showing overseas partners the designs created in Iwate and receiving opinions and feedback. This resulted in a European inspired flat and elegant teakettle. Actually it was a kyusu (a small teapot). A Nanbu Tekki (cast ironware originating in Iwate) style kyusu is quite rare, don't you think? (Image)

In regards to sales, what plans and difficulties did you have?

The two of us initially focused on marketing by visiting customers around Europe. As a result we made the customers aware that they could consult with us and ask us questions easily. This was an important factor in establishing a trusting relationship with the customers. We receive very few complaints, and I believe this is because of the trusting relationship we built. We will continue to treasure these relationships into the future. One of the difficulties we had was that customers had difficulty visualizing what the final product would look like based on the design. Usually the design is two-dimensional, so we had trouble expressing what the product would look like in three-dimensions. These days you can use computer graphics to create a three-dimensional model, but at the time we had a lot of problems. We also had some trouble abroad. The coating we used on the spout of our teakettles violated the food safety laws of California. The food safety tests in America were too precise. We were eventually able to clear the problem, but at the time we learned first-hand that product quality needs to comply with the various laws and standards of other countries.

What are the differences between Japan and other countries?

Nanbu Tekki in Japan unfortunately has a strong image as a folkcraft. However, outside of Japan, people see the quality of the materials (cast metal) in addition to the reputation of Japanese made products. As a result, the



weight and excellent functionality of the product are recognized, and the way the product is purchased differs. Of course, the design and color of products being sold in countries are different. However, the tea drinking culture there has a long and rich history, and cast iron teakettles have been received as a lifestyle accent. Cast ironware seems to be thought of as a natural product.

Technical development

I think you could say that the techniques for creating cast metal works have already been perfected. However, there are still small details that we are changing. We are always changing to meet demand with things such as coatings, surface treatments, and non-chemical treatments. Recently we have been working to develop a new product that would not require treatment for preventing rust. This new product, sold under the "Naked Pan" brand name, has been receiving high praise.

Please tell us about your future outlook

About 70% of the iron used to make cast iron products is recycled. I have heard that iron made 100 years ago in Germany could be recycled, but if it has been used for more than 100 years there should be no need to recycle it. (Laughing) In the future I see us pushing pans for frying food. Pans are something new that is much different to what you think of Nanbu Tekki. For a few years in Europe, starting in Germany, "bio" and "organic" have been keywords. In the food industry organic has been a huge keyword as well. Cooking utensils are the first things to touch food, so I think there we can find some hint for success when we consider the organic trend. Nanbu Tekki is in a big period of transition at the moment. The current economic conditions are also getting worse, but I feel culturally this could be a time of change as well. I feel like I am being asked what the future holds for traditional craft-work.

Advice for those aiming for overseas

Marketing and research are vitally important. Additionally, you need to see things with your own eyes and talk directly with your customers in order to make their image and thoughts into a reality. You will have to accurately analyze their lifestyle and preferences to do this. Of course it takes a lot of time, but you will ultimately have to do this. I believe that if you talk with your partners sincerely that you will definitely be able to express your thoughts. I truly hope that Iwate will open more and more to the world.

Akira Abe

Iwate Abe Flour Milling Company

Mebukiya is expanding its unique frozen Japanese sweets into overseas markets. Mebukiya has long established its name within the prefecture, and in fact, also has a long history of overseas expansion. The company has the vision of Japanese sweets soaring to the world. In this article, Mr. Abe will introduce Mebukiya. Mr. Abe is the Representative Director of Iwate Abe Flour Milling Company, the parent company of Mebukiya.



We first began selling products through a consignment store in Hong Kong, and then we started to export our products to other countries such as Europe, America, and Canada. Thankfully, our products became popular in these countries. However, our first connection with the overseas market actually began in America in 1972.

Our company started as a flour milling company with a main focus in selling rice flour to rice cracker companies. As a rural company, we needed to do something to increase our popularity in order to consign our products. After some trial and error, we decided to export our products overseas in order to expand rice consumption. We developed rice chips and began exporting to America in 1972. We were considered to be an early exporter in the snack industry, not only in Iwate but nationally as well.

We put a lot of effort into the taste of the product in order to make it favorable for foreign customers. To do so, we developed many different flavored rice chips such as ones with sesame, cheese flavor, and Teriyaki flavor. When everything started to get on track, an unexpected foreign substance got mixed into the ingredients that were being transported from the factory. A part of our shipped products had to be incinerated. That incident gave us a good lesson and we reexamined our concept of hygiene. After that, we have put more effort into our hygiene and quality management. Nowadays, people pay closer attention to food problems, and we can deliver our products with confidence.

Challenge of Japanese Sweets

After that, we shifted from rice crackers to dango (rice dumplings) and it went well, so we decided to challenge the overseas market again. In order to develop a market overseas, trusted partners and collaborators are essential. Luckily, we were blessed and met some wonderful trading companies and local buyers and began our production and sale of Japanese sweets in Hong Kong in 1975. We added the flavor of moon cake to the Japanese sweets that we were selling in Hong Kong so the taste was accepted by the locals and it was a big success. We did the demonstration sale there, and we thought about doing local production. However, we had to give up that idea due to various reasons.

There were no problems with the taste of our sweets. All

we had to do was to figure out how to deal with other problems. We then came to the idea of exporting frozen Japanese sweets, if we did that we would not need to set up a factory overseas. After two years of failure, we successfully developed the frozen Japanese sweet that can be eaten safely around the world. We then began sale again in Hong Kong and it became very popular among the locals. Iwate-made Japanese sweets were fully accepted by the market. After some actual selling of our products in Hong Kong, we felt that there were some difference in the national characters of Hong Kong and Japan. There were times when people lined up to buy our products, however, they don't bulk buy but just buy 1 or 2 at a time. They buy it once and try it, if they liked it then they come back and line up again. I thought this was very interesting. So we displayed a large amount of our products in a way that customers can easily access and freely choose their Japanese sweets a little bit at a time.

Have Confidence in the Product

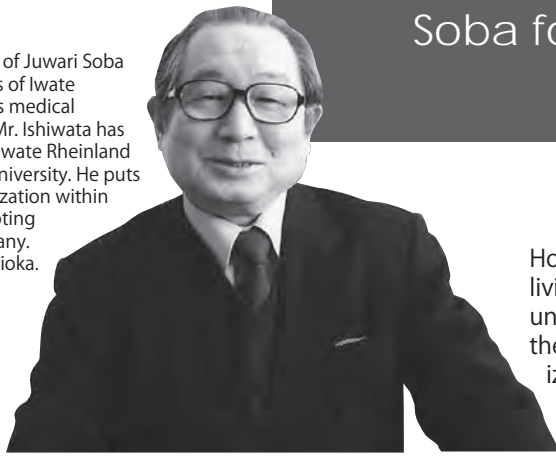
We now distribute products nationally as well as overseas including Singapore, Hong Kong, America, Canada, EU, and Australia. However, overseas buyers are very sharp and clear as to what they want. I have had buyers telling me that 'as long as the products are of good quality we will sell them for you no matter the price. So please provide us with good quality products'. In Japan, you will always get involved into a price competition. However, 'quality' seems to be the most important thing overseas. So it is important that we create products that are not going to be influenced by the price.

To advance into a foreign market that has a different culture and tradition to Japan, the most important thing is to have a partner company and buyers who are willing to work towards the same goal with you. You will need to ask yourself if you are able to trust them or not, and you should be able to tell yourself that this company is reliable and that you would want to work with them. We should choose our partners ourselves, not to rely on others for their introduction, and to be responsible for our own decision. We would really like to pass this message on to many other people.

For those who are going for the overseas market, let's continue to create an Iwate brand together.

Ryuji Ishiwata

Ryuji Ishiwata is the president of Juwari Soba as well as a professor emeritus of Iwate Medical University. He teaches medical philosophy at the university. Mr. Ishiwata has also been a representative of Iwate Rheinland Association from his time in university. He puts great effort into internationalization within the local community by accepting overseas students from Germany. He is currently residing in Morioka.



Soba for the Region, and Contribution to the World

Ryuji Ishiwata Juwari Soba

How to overcome the food crisis is a big challenge for people living in the 21st century. To solve this problem, we need to understand what international exchange means. Ryuji Ishiwata, the president of Juwari Soba, has been promoting internationalization within the local community for many years. Here, he will talk about how food crises can be solved and how to promote internationalization through his current job.

I have been teaching medical philosophy at Iwate Medical University for 30 years. When I was teaching, I felt there was a lack of interest in preventative medicine in university. Also, there was a lack of viewpoints towards building a body that prevents illness. Soba (buckwheat noodles) has been receiving attention and interest from people as a healthy food product. As a new endeavor after retirement, I wanted to work in a field related to food, something vital for every human life. So I began my current job in 2001. I began this work hoping to contribute to the regions of Iwate, which are based on primary industry, as well as internationally.

Food Crisis Breakthrough through Soba

The world's food supply is facing a big crisis. Many developed countries around the world are demanding a change in eating habits as countermeasures against obesity and adult disease. On the other hand, the lack of food in developing countries is becoming serious. Acquiring and the effective utilization of grain is a matter calling for immediate resolution. Soba is a food that could potentially help the world break through this crisis. Buckwheat does not need any agricultural chemicals or fertilizer, and does not take much time and effort to cultivate. It is low in calories, high in protein, and contains many vitamins and minerals. Also, it is a food that is very easy to digest. Once it is in the stomach, it is easily assimilated and goes straight to the intestine so it causes less burden on the stomach. Soba is just the exact food needed by people in the 21st century. In order to promote and make soba more popular, we created a unique soba-making machine so people can make delicious soba easily with buckwheat flour. We also created the machine to be small and light.

Every region in Japan has its own soba. I would like each region to cherish its own unique soba, and eat the soba where it is cultivated. When you go to a region, you will be able to eat that region's soba. Soba becomes the taste of that region. This is called, local production for local consumption. Firstly, I want to popularize this soba-eating culture within the whole of Iwate. Once this is done, soba farmers will be more motivated to cultivate soba, and this will also create more employment opportunities. It will

expand as a secure and safe industry, giving hope to region areas.

International Exchange through Food

As a food of the 21st century, I want more people in the world to know about soba. So far, we have held soba-tasting events in places such as Germany, England, America, Hong Kong, and Dalian. It was received very well. We are still in the stage of gaining popularity. This year, we are planning to make soba a popular food in China. Through the popularization of soba, starting from its ingredient to the milling machine for buckwheat flour, we become aware of the need for development of international exchange through food. For Japan, it is a big task for us to consider how we can build a friendly relationship with China, the biggest country of Asia. Recently, many food scandals have become the subject of close scrutiny. However, these food scandals should not represent the whole of the Chinese food industry. There are many farmers who are working very hard to cultivate crops, and there are also many food processing companies that are carrying out thorough quality control. Japan's food self-sufficiency ratio is low, so it is important that we build a deeper relationship with China. To do so, we can use soba as a bridge and this shall become an example for international exchange with various regions in China.

Local Production for Local Consumption and Globalization

Each region has its own unique food and regional characteristic. Food is influenced by each region's soil, water, wind, etc. Even our body is influenced by the place. Eating the food at the place where it is produced is called local production for local consumption. To protect each region, local production for local consumption is important. Local production for local consumption can coexist with the world's globalization. Globalization makes us rethink about local characteristics. We can learn from each other's way of local production for local consumption around the world. We should utilize each culture's wisdom and take local production for local consumption to the next stage. We do this because we are local people who have roots in our land, as well as being global citizens. This point of view is important for future grass roots internationalization.

This project was introduced by the Morioka Chamber of Commerce Industry in 2006. It was a project selected by the JAPAN BRAND Development Assistance Program, which was launched by the Small and Medium Enterprise Agency. Cast iron kitchenware was designed by a highly regarded international Finnish designer, Tauno Tarna, and made by a Nambu Tekki artisan. These products were exhibited in Helsinki, Finland, at the Design Forum Finland in November last year. These products received outstanding feedback at the forum and are expected to expand the overseas market with a focus on Europe.

One of the companies engaged in this project is Iwachu. According to Mr. Yasuhiro Sato, the vice-director of the Iwachu Sales Department, Iwachu began to export iron kettles (tetsubin) to overseas Japanese restaurants through trading companies around 30 years ago. However, the exportation of kitchenware only started in the 1990s.

It all begins with an order from the historical famous Parisian tea shop, Mariage Frères.

The main branch in Paris serves black tea in iron kettles. Iron kettles were also found in the black tea sales floor of the long-established department stores of 'Galeries Lafayette' and Printemps. The pot peacefully harmonizes with the tea, and surprisingly, these iron kettles were not displayed as oriental goods but as stylish and modern pots. These pots caught many Westerners' attention and made them stop to look at it. The number of iron kettle users may increase in the future, however, spurious products will also increase as the product gets popular. In particular, spurious products that are made in China are very cheap and coated with bad quality enamel. As a result, there are many cases where the lead melts when boiling water is poured into the kettle.



Expanding Overseas

The 'Nambu Tekki Euro Branding Project' is an example of an Iwate business expanding its market overseas. This article examines how this project is developing overseas markets.

By YokoTakanohashi



When I went to Canada at the end of the year, I found an iron kettle in a Canadian person's home when I stayed in Quebec, which is a French speaking area. The Canadian person said the iron kettle was purchased at a Japanese food store where he liked it very much when he first saw it. He praises the beauty and the elegance of the iron kettle while making black tea with it, and without heating it with fire. My image of an iron kettle is black and bulky, and heating hot water in the kettle at a brazier. The way that Canadian person used that iron kettle was very differ-



ent from my image. It was an elegant European way of using the iron kettle.

Without realizing, the concept of a traditional craft with 400 years of history has evolved into a contemporary tableware as time goes by. However, there are things that have not changed, the quality, the high level of safety of the product, and the sincere thoughts of the Nambu people in conveying the superior quality of Japanese products. Mr. Sato said, 'we don't have the know-how like the trading companies do or have much overseas experience. What we have now is a result of making every product with sincerity and responding to customers' requests for high quality products.'

To maintain tradition, we need to keep the old while creating the new. We would like to continue bringing the new initiatives while introducing this tradition to the world.



Connecting People with International Exchange

Kishu Chiba

Kishu Chiba is a former section chief of the Iwate Nippo editorial section. He assisted the Iwate International Association as a member of the establishing committee and the planning committee. Since the establishment of the association, he has been serving as a proofreader for the yearly organ.

Kishu Chiba has volunteered with the Iwate International Association from the time it was established until today. He states that the power of private individuals is important for promoting international exchange.

One year before the Iwate International Association was established, a group of 50 people from private companies formed an establishing committee to discuss, for one year, what kind of organization the association should be. That establishing committee turned into the planning committee at the time the association was founded. The majority of international associations in other prefectures were established under the direction of the government. However, the Iwate International Association was established to be directed by private individuals with the planning committee at the center.

I told Yosuke Takahashi (the managing person from the Iwate Prefectural Government, he later became a Vice-Governor), "Even if the prefecture contributes money, we do not want any direction from the prefectural government." He responded simply by saying, "Okay." I had believed that whenever the government provides money they demand a say in how things are run, but this exchange left a deep impression on me. Just as he had said, he did not make any requests and the planning committee began managing things more and more.

I also visited various media companies in order to collect capital for the association. I first asked for funds from the company I worked for, Iwate Nippo, and was successfully able to get a contribution from them. Following that success, I went to IBC Iwate Broadcasting where they said, "If Iwate Nippo is contributing, we will too." After that, I went to Iwate Television and they quickly gave a contribution, saying the same thing, "So IBC is contributing? Well then, so will we." I believe there is no other prefectural association that has been so connected to private individuals during its establishment.

Relations between nations can be unreliable. If some incident were to occur, relations could suddenly be cut. On the other hand, relations between individuals are very strong. Even if nationalities are different, once a person acknowledges the importance of another person, relationships will not sour for trivial reasons. One by one, networks of relationships grow and lead to stronger and stronger connections. Relations between countries tend to be out of self-interest, and so are fragile. Relations between individuals are permanent. So that is why I believe private individuals should be the conducting international exchange.

The very first festival held by the international association was to feature a performance by the Korean musical group "Samurunori."* The first performance of Samurunori I ever heard was so powerful it caused me to tremble and thought that I must invite them to come perform. The planning committee created posters and tickets, and had made countless preparations when one

month before the performance, the leader of Samurunori was unable to enter Japan because he was caught in possession of marijuana. There was no choice but to cancel the performance, but we later invited a performing group from the Seoul Institute of the Arts to come perform. I asked Mr. Chon (Yon Boku Chon, a lacquer artist and Morioka resident) for help when I was troubled by the sudden cancellation just before the performance date. If I am not mistaken, it was Mr. Chon who negotiated the performance with Samurunori for me originally, because both he and Dok Su Kim, the leader of Samurunori, had taught at the same art school in Seoul. We overcame this emergency because private individuals had been behind the planning.

The volunteer editorial committee has been the major force behind the creation of the international association's yearly organ for the last 18 years. The committee has complete independence. What the committee wants to create does not have to always be the same as what the association's administration wants. However, we are fortunate that the administration respects the direction that the editorial committee takes. I think that is a reflection of the leadership of a planning committee consisting of private individuals. It is precisely because they want the publication to be made in this way that volunteers have continued to help create it. Volunteering requires people who truly want to participate in international exchange, but the enjoyable part is working with people who feel the same way. The relationships the volunteers make become a motivation for them.

The chief editor position is very important for the creation of the yearly organ. While respecting the independence and individuality of the writers, one must have a clear understanding of the stories' points and be able to guide the writers. Having a firm position is important for making the publication. You can see this quality clearly if you look at the back issues of the organ. That has also become part of the culture of this publication.

Of the Iwate International Association's many activities, gathering information is very important, which means there is an important meaning for the yearly organ. In my opinion, I think the organ should be published more than once a year, and that it should deliver information to municipal associations and prefectural residents. This year is the 20th anniversary of the Iwate International Association, but I would like this to be an occasion to return to what it was like when the association was first established and find a way to ask what municipal associations and prefectural residents want. I would like the association to seek out and increase its activities because it is an association on the prefectural level.

*Samurunori is a Korean traditional instrumental performing group formed by Dok Su Kim. The music this group plays has its roots in the farming music performed in the country's farm belt. They use four instruments, the kengari, bell, changu, and hand drum, in a lively stage performance.

English

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