

# sustainable japan

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## President aims to turn social dissonance into dynamic diversity in Japan Rogers taps ACCJ's energy for a sustainable future

**Name:** Jenifer Rogers  
**Title:** President of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ)  
**URL:** [www.accj.or.jp](http://www.accj.or.jp)  
**Title 2:** General Counsel Asia at Asurion  
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**Hometown:** Midland, Michigan  
**Years in Japan:** 16

### Leaders & Readers

**JOE MUNTAL**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Jenifer Rogers, president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ), is a familiar face among the upper echelons of Japan's corporate community. In 2015, she became the first foreign female director of a Japanese trading company when she was elected as external director of Mitsui & Co. and has since served as a non-executive



"Life is either a daring adventure or nothing." This quote from Helen Keller is one Jenifer Rogers has taken to heart.  
SHINSUKE KAMIOKA

director at Kawasaki Heavy Industries and Nissan.

When she is not running board meetings at the ACCJ or attending board meetings at some of Japan's largest corporations, Rogers serves as general counsel Asia at Asurion, a global tech services company.

Commenting on how she balances the responsibilities of her numerous positions, Rogers noted her ability to compartmentalize. "Because I have so many interests and everything sounds so fascinating, I have a hard time saying no," she told The Japan Times, speaking from the ACCJ office in Tokyo's Azabudai district. "I love everything I'm doing, so one of my biggest challenges is just to compartmentalize and focus on one thing at a time. I'm learning to embrace that, and I'm having a good time."

Rogers' recent activities in Japan started in 2014, when she relocated from Hong Kong to Tokyo in her current position at Asurion. However, her relationship with Japan spans decades. In the 1980s, her father was president of Dow Chemical Japan, and it was this familial connection that led her to Japan for the first time in 1981.

Back then, Tokyo was not the international city it is today. Rogers noted how difficult it was to get around as a non-Japanese speaker. There were no bilingual signs, and if she got lost, her only option was to ask for directions at the nearest *koban* (neighborhood police station). "It was a very different city," she said. "I still saw women in kimonos and there was still a lot more of 'traditional Japan.' Don't get me wrong, Tokyo was modernizing — you still had the subways — but it was still

a Japanese city."

Rogers' initial stay in Japan shaped her interest in international relations. She had planned to go to nursing school after returning to the U.S., but her experiences studying at Sophia University, where she interacted with people of various nationalities and engaged with global issues, inspired her to shift her focus. "I started to think about how to make a difference in the world through cross-cultural understanding in the international arena."

Propelled by her new passion, Rogers returned to the U.S. to enter Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, where she developed a foundation in economics and foreign policy. After graduating, she decided to enter the Georgetown Law Center. "When you think about what you can change and how you can engage internationally, and look at the institutions, you realize everything relates to law," she said. "Law school was a way for me to combine my interests and prepare for a career abroad."

Rogers has since led a prolific international career. For 18 years she worked at Bank of America Merrill Lynch (now BofA Securities), where she served in a variety of senior legal roles in New York, Dublin, Hong Kong, London, Tokyo and Mumbai. She also worked as a legal consultant for the World Bank, while obtaining her master's degree in international public policy during a self-described "sabbatical."

Considering her expertise and fluent Japanese abilities, it is no surprise that Japan's business community looks to Rogers for her perspective on various topics, including risk management and corporate



SHINSUKE KAMIOKA

### President, general counsel, director

Jenifer Rogers is president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) and general counsel Asia at Asurion.

Fluent in Japanese, Rogers first came to Japan with her parents in 1981, when her father was appointed president of Dow Chemical Japan. This encounter with Japan sparked a lifelong interest in international relations and cross-cultural understanding.

In addition to her duties at the ACCJ and Asurion, Rogers serves as an external director at Mitsui & Co., Kawasaki Heavy Industries and Nissan Motor Co. Before joining Asurion, she worked in senior legal roles at Bank of America Merrill Lynch in various cities across the world and worked as a legal consultant for the World Bank.

She is a commission member and treasurer of the Japan-U.S. Educational Commission (Fulbright Japan), governor of the board of the Georgetown University Alumni Association, member of the board of the U.S.-Japan Council (Japan), founding member of the Asia Society Japan Center and a member of its Arts Committee, as well as a member of the Board of Councilors of the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology Graduate University.

governance. It is also noteworthy that she is one of only a few foreign female directors in Japan. Japan ranked 120th among 156 countries in gender equality in 2021, a disparity reflected in the mere 8% of board seats occupied by women at listed companies in Japan. For comparison, as of 2021, women occupied 45% of board seats at listed companies in France and 26% in the U.S.

Despite Japan's comparatively slow progress toward gender equality, Rogers is optimistic about the future. "I think you're seeing an acceleration in the appreciation of diversity and inclusion," she said, noting that when she arrived in 2014, only about 2% of board seats were occupied by

women, a quarter of the level now. Japan's aging demographics, compounded by the effects of COVID-19, which have dispelled stigmas toward remote work, have also contributed to this acceleration, she said.

"Diversity is discomfort," Rogers said. "Japan is a harmony-based society that emphasizes compromise, but you're going to have debates when talking to people with different backgrounds. Turning that concept of constructive dissonance into something positive that can encourage us to reach consensus in a more dynamic way is something that excites me."

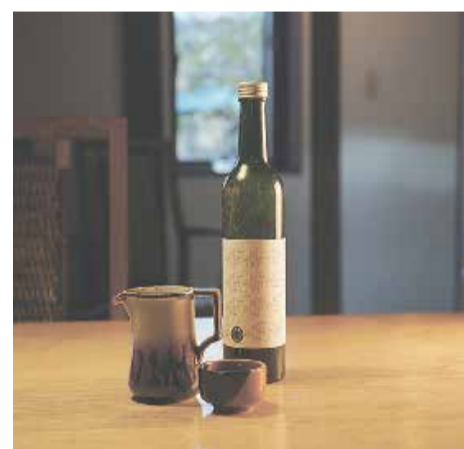
As president of the ACCJ, Rogers taps into this excitement toward dynamic consensus-building when advocating for

the chamber's interests, which are centered on four areas: U.S.-Japan partnership, digital transformation, health care & retirement and sustainability. With regard to sustainability, the chamber has offered recommendations to the Japanese government on how to reach its target of carbon neutrality by 2050 and is working with its members to ensure responsible supply chains and ESG (environmental, social and governance) disclosure.

"We have a lot in the pipeline, and I think sustainability is going to be one of our most exciting areas," she said. "We have so many ways we can contribute, and we're focused on harnessing the energy of our diverse members."

## Tonoya-Yo

### Reinvigorating rustic traditions with finesse and flair



**ROBBIE SWINNERTON**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Tonoya-Yo, chef Yotaro Sasaki's atmospheric inn and restaurant in the rural heartland of Iwate Prefecture, is unlike any other in Japan. Housed in a wooden rice storehouse beautifully refurbished and fitted out in a seamless blend of traditional and contemporary style, it offers a full immersion in the food culture of this little visited corner of Japan.

Sasaki was born into a family of innkeepers who have provided accommodation and sustenance for visitors to Tono for four generations. From his father he learned the hearty dishes that have sustained the local population through the centuries. But when it came to setting up his own restaurant, he has honed a style entirely his own.

Grounded in the precepts of Kyoto's refined multicourse cuisine, Sasaki's cooking yet remains deeply based in the food traditions of his hometown. It also borrows freely from outside influences. He prepares *nama-fu*, a traditional wheat gluten cake with the texture of polenta, draping it with slivers of prosciutto that he cures himself. And he grates homemade cheese and *hoya* (sea squirt) preserved like bottarga (salt roe) on top of the local type of wheat noodle, *hitsumi*, as if it were lasagna.

But the heart of his cuisine is the rice he grows each year in his own 100% organic



paddies and serves as the culmination of each meal. He has also created a cottage industry of brewing milky-white *doburoku*, the traditional rustic antecedent of modern-day sake.

Working in his kitchen with a single assistant, Sasaki only accepts one group of up to eight guests at each meal, and just six for overnight stays, ensuring that any visit to Tonoya-Yo is an exclusive and highly prized experience.

**TAKUYA TASSO**  
GOVERNOR OF IWATE PREFECTURE



It is with great delight that we have learned that Tonoya-Yo was selected as one of The Japan Times' Destination Restaurants 2021.

We hope that many people will be able to experience the fascinating food, history and culture of Iwate through the cuisine of Tonoya-Yo.

It has already been 10 years since the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami. We would like to express our gratitude for all the support we have received from Japan and abroad and hope that you can come and enjoy the many charms of Iwate.



**Address**  
Tonoya-Yo  
2-17 Zaimoku-cho,  
Tono, Iwate Pref. 028-0521, Japan  
<http://tonoya-yo.com/>



**TOSHIKI HONDA**  
MAYOR OF TONO



It is my great pleasure to announce that Tonoya-Yo has been selected as one of the restaurants featured in the Destination Restaurants list. We hope that people from all around the world will enjoy the distinctive food of Tono.

Chef Yotaro Sasaki's passion for brewing, fermenting and maturing from the soil up makes his dishes a unique experience. We look forward to welcoming you to Tono, the home of eternal Japan and the country's first special certified area for *doburoku* sake.

## 125 years

125th anniversary special

### Times Capsule

Vol. 3: Frank Lloyd Wright

## 1967: Wife of Wright seeks to save the Imperial

On Oct. 22, 1967, when Frank Lloyd Wright's last wife, Olgivanna, came to Japan to appeal for the preservation of the Imperial Hotel, a Japan Times reporter asked why she was so interested in saving the hotel. She answered, "Because my husband put many years of work in it, and the best of him in it."

She added that it was great engineering work and her husband was very proud that it had saved many Japanese lives at the time of the 1923 earthquake by giving them shelter.

"It is a historic building. It is part of history. It shouldn't be destroyed," she said.

Two and a half years later, a ceremony was held at the Museum Meiji-mura in Aichi Prefecture to signal the start of the reconstruction of part of the Imperial Hotel.



The Times Capsule series will post topics related to sustainability that we have covered during the 125 years of The Japan Times.

**Brand history & Archives**  
<https://sustainable.japantimes.com/brandhistory>



The main entrance of the Imperial Hotel designed by Wright, Apr. 19, 1960

The Japan Times  
AFTERNOON EDITION  
Typeset in the building at Imperial Hotel every morning.  
TOKYO WILL LIVE!

Tokyo, Friday, Sept. 7, 1923  
The Japan Times

Mrs. Olgivanna Lloyd Wright poses for camera Sunday in front of the old building of the Imperial Hotel designed by her famous architect husband.

Monday, Oct. 23, 1967 The Japan Times

