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## Keio University draws new generation to build society

### ESG Talk

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With Japan facing the challenges of a declining population and a prolonged economic slump, the president of Keio University said the university must accelerate building a globally attractive educational environment by inviting young people from around the world.

"When the Japanese economy is struggling amid the declining population and aging society and when we think about how to build Japanese society for the future, the fact of the matter is we should attract as many young people as possible from around the world," Keio University President Kohei Itoh told The Japan Times in a recent interview.

"We have to review what our university has done in the past two to three decades and take on whatever Keio can do to make things better," said Itoh, who was appointed president in May 2021.

The president said, however, that becoming one of the world's top 100 universities or exclusively focusing on research is not what Keio aims to do, because its mission is contributing to the world by bringing leaders out into society. In the latest ranking, only two Japanese universities — the University of Tokyo and Kyoto University — are ranked in the top 100.

When Itoh thinks about Keio's mission, he is always reminded of these words of the school's founder more than a century ago: "Making human resources that lead the

whole society."

"Since our mission is contributing to the world, what is required for our university is not just encouraging academics and increasing the number of graduate students. What matters most is how to support students' growth and how to create an environment that helps them to study on their own and take off to the world," Itoh said.

Itoh refers to the spirit of the founder, Yukichi Fukuzawa, an educationist and philosopher of enlightenment, in influencing the country at the start of the Meiji Era. He is well-known as the author of "Gakumon no Susume" ("An Encouragement of Learning"), published in 1872. His thought that "heaven does not create one man above or below another man" had a significant impact on the Japanese people at that time, making the book a bestseller, with sales of 3.4 million copies.

At a time when Japan had just opened itself to the world after maintaining a long isolationist policy under the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1867), the introduction of Western philosophy by Fukuzawa impressed a citizenry emerging from a feudal society. In the book, he wrote that all people are born equal, and that what makes the difference between a wise man and a fool is whether a person learns or not. We should not only be satisfied with a good family and a good life, but we always have to make efforts to create a better society. For that purpose, we need to keep on learning, he said. In the era following the Meiji Restoration, Japan was slowly transforming itself into a capitalist country. Although taking its first steps as a modern



Keio University President Kohei Itoh KEN SHIMIZU

society, it was still controlled by a small number of privileged people. Fukuzawa, who founded Keio in 1858 when he was 25 years old, said the school's mission was educating people who could learn by themselves and guide all of society in the right direction to build a better country.

According to analysis by Shinzo Koizumi, an economist who was Keio's president from 1933 to 1947, Fukuzawa's activities after he established Keio i.e., 1858-1901, took three stages. In the first stage, he "introduced the world and Western education to the people." It was a time when the country was opening itself up to other nations, learning from Western cultures, building a new economic

system and reinforcing military power. During this period, Fukuzawa visited the United States in 1860 and Europe in 1862 as a member of a government mission. After the long journeys, he wrote books to introduce his countrymen to what he had seen and learned overseas.

The next stage (1870-1880) was the "sweeping and destroying" stage. Fukuzawa persuaded Japanese people to learn how not to be controlled by the government, in an era when national policymaking was still dominated by a small number of aristocrats and descendants of samurai, who accounted for slightly more than 5% of the overall population.

"Fukuzawa said the commoners, consisting of about 93% of the population, needed to learn how to not merely defer to the government but to make a contract with it, pay taxes and express their opinions on an equal footing with the government," Itoh said. "In this way, he showed what democracy is all about." The Keio president said that what Fukuzawa taught people was that government ends up oppressing the people if they don't learn enough.

In the last stage (1880-1901) of Fukuzawa's influence on society, he proposed "construction and management" of the country. In this stage, Fukuzawa said Japan should develop as a democratic country. He recommended a political system along the lines of the British two-party system, insisted that the emperor should play a symbolic role and criticized discrimination against female students.

One thing that makes today different from that era of absorbing knowledge from overseas is the fast development of information technologies. "People think they are making judgments by themselves, but SNS and other personalized media tend to feed polarized information that makes them feel comfortable," Itoh said. This trend could affect many aspects of our society, including voting behavior and ethical decisions, Itoh said.

Since he was appointed president last year, Itoh has had meetings with university presidents in many parts of the world, striking partnerships for study exchange programs. He aims to make not only Keio University but all Keio schools attractive for younger generations. "I'm responsible of developing our school, from the elementary school to the university," Itoh said.

He said the mission of the school is to create leaders in the country, and not merely to join a race to be ranked in the world's top 100 universities by increasing natural sciences and cutting liberal arts to push up rankings. About 70% of the university currently consists of the humanities and social sciences, and the rest is natural sciences and





"We have to review what our university has done in the past two to three decades and make it better" said Itoh. KEN SHIMIZU

engineering.

That said, the prime strength of Keio University comes from its medical department, which makes its biosciences competitive worldwide. The university's Human Biology-Microbiome-Quantum Research Center (Bio2Q) was selected as an outstanding research center under the World Premier International Research Center Initiative (WPI) in October. The WPI program was launched in 2007 by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Bio2Q, led by Keio University School of Medicine professor Kenya Honda, was the first center at a private university to be so selected. The research run by Bio2Q focuses on the interactions between the microbiome — the microorganisms living in and on the human body — and multiorgan networks, facilitated by artificial intelligence technologies and quantum computing. Keio was also ranked ninth in the Nature Index Japan this year.

Keio also supports startups based on technologies originating from the university. Keio launched a venture capital firm, Keio Innovation Initiative, in 2015

to finance promising startups.  The ESG Talk series are interviews with business leaders who are active proponents of ESG investing and practices in Japan. 



Kohei Itoh and The Japan Times chairperson and publisher Minako Suematsu go over the University's actions in the past decades KEN SHIMIZU

## Suntory restores healthy forests to recharge clean natural water

### ESG/SDGs

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"Today Birds, Tomorrow Humans." This is the slogan created by Japanese beverage giant Suntory Holdings when it started bird conservation activities in 1973. It indicates that various environmental risks affecting wildlife will come to hurt people as well. The company initially established a bird sanctuary at the Suntory Hakushu Distillery in Yamanashi Prefecture and published its first newspaper ad advocating the importance of conserving nature, with an illustration of wild birds. That was followed by a series of more than 100 ads published across different newspapers. In an era of rapid economic growth, the industry-leading company's running of ads that didn't tout its products at all gained plenty of attention and received the Asahi Advertising Award.

Instead of using its profits only to expand and improve its business, Suntory follows a corporate value of "Giving back to society," part of its ethos since Shinjiro Torii founded the company in 1899. Society cannot exist without the blessings the natural environment provides. "Especially for us, no natural water means no business. Our founder and predecessors knew that from the start," said Shigeaki Kazama, executive officer and deputy division COO of the Sustainability Management Division. He explained that this outlook is what made the publication of such forward-thinking ads possible almost 50 years ago.

In 1989, the company established the Suntory Fund for Bird Conservation. It has granted a total of more than ¥620 million



Suntory employees pruning trees SUNTORY

(currently \$4.5 million) to 472 organizations, producing remarkable results including the recovery of red-listed birds such as Japanese wild geese, Okinawa rails, grey-faced buzzards and oriental white storks. "It takes long-term efforts to make any achievements in this kind of conservation. We should not let them give up just because they are short of funds to continue their efforts. Our intention is to support various organizations until they take off and get on track to achieve their goals," Kazama said.

The Japanese Association for Wild Geese Protection is one of the organizations that have received the grants. Migratory birds that went locally extinct decades ago are coming back to Japan as a result of joint Japan-Russia efforts led by the organization to conduct research and to raise and release the birds. The director of the organization, Masayuki Kurechi, received two honorable awards this year: the Yamashina Yoshimaro Award, which recognizes contributions to ornithology research and bird conservation in Japan, and the Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award, which honors achievements in promoting the conservation and wise use of wetlands globally.

The fund launched a global program in 2021 to accept applications from overseas bird conservation organizations. "There are no borders for wild animals, especially birds," Kazama said. He stressed the importance of taking collaborative and holistic approaches in the conservation of birds and their habitats. Suntory goes beyond providing financial support to those who engage in bird conservation activities. It runs the Japanese Bird Encyclopedia website, which introduces over 200 species of wild birds through illustrations, photographs, explanations and audio samples of bird calls. The company is also a main sponsor of eBird Japan, an application that allows users to not only search for information on birds but to add data such as what birds they observed, and when and where. eBird is among the world's largest biodiversity-related science projects, with an enormous database on birds developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at Cornell



Aleutian cackling geese SUNTORY

University in the United States. By sharing information on birds through these efforts, Suntory aims to raise awareness about the importance of protecting birds and environments in which diverse wildlife can live.

Suntory's bird conservation activities are also in sync with its Natural Water Sanctuary Initiative, launched in 2003 to conserve forests in 21 locations across the nation and improve their ability to recharge water resources. Suntory is now cultivating more than twice the amount of groundwater that its production facilities actually use.

"To improve the water-recharging capability of forests, the balance of all the wildlife, including animals and plants, needs to be regained," Kazama said. He explained that forest management, including thinning and pruning, is necessary to maintain an adequate amount of sunlight streaming through trees, keeping not only the trees but also the whole ecosystem healthy.

Forest management also contributes to preserving apex predators like large raptors. When initiatives began in the Natural Water Sanctuary Northern Alps in Nagano Prefecture, traces were found of goshawks but the birds themselves were nowhere to be seen. "Hawks tend to fly low among trees when they are trying to find places to build their nests. If trees are too dense, they cannot fly low," said Kazama. He explained that they cut down some trees to make room for goshawks to fly, and that the thinning was also good for the forest and its biodiversity. In two years, they confirmed that the birds had returned and were using nests placed by the conservation team. "Large raptorial birds sit at the top of the biodiversity pyramid of a forest. They are a barometer of the forest's health," Kazama said.

## Sumitomo Forestry's long history of environmental consciousness

### Unraveling Japanese companies

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Sumitomo Forestry Co. always looks back on what happened to the Besshi Copper Mine in Ehime Prefecture, which opened about 330 years ago and was one of Japan's biggest copper mines.

Sumitomo Forestry's history goes back to 1691, when the House of Sumitomo opened the mine, as they needed wood to support mine tunnels and to fuel smelters. But the excessive logging and the smoke from the smelters had turned the mountain devastated by the end of the 19th century. In 1894, a project to regenerate the land was kicked off.

"It took more than 100 years to make the mountain how it used to be. That is the origin of the company and our spiritual pillar," said Tatsuru Satoh, executive vice president for Sumitomo Forestry.

When a strong typhoon hit the region in 1899, landslides from the mountain devastated the mining facilities. A large amount of soil was brought in to afforest the mountain with Japanese cypress, a type of tree that grows well in shallow soil, Satoh said.

They planted more than 1 million trees every year until the mountain was fully regenerated. The copper mine was closed in 1973, but nature has continued to be restored. Today, Sumitomo Forestry manages a total of about 48,000 hectares of

forest from Hokkaido to Kyushu, about one eight-hundredth of the country's overall land and the third-largest amount of forestland owned by a corporation.

The company is also aware of the significance of its businesses at a time when climate change is an increasingly urgent issue. Satoh said one of the major roles that Sumitomo Forestry plays in mitigating climate change is to systematically fell old trees and plant seedlings every year because the amount of carbon dioxide that trees can absorb declines as they grow older. Furthermore, carbon stored in trees remains even after harvested. "We believe that, based on the sustainable forest management, using more timber and wood products and replace old trees with young ones would lead to a larger carbon storage of the whole society," Satoh said.

"We hope to establish an ecosystem that enables coexistence of the nature and business; expanding forests itself should sustain as business," Satoh said. He said a total of about 178 million hectares of forest disappeared in the past 30 years, and in recent years, 70% of the drive behind deforestation is conversion to farmland.

To contribute to building a decarbonized society, Sumitomo Forestry announced in



Tatsuru Satoh, executive vice president for Sumitomo Forestry. THE JAPAN TIMES

February its plan to launch a global forestry fund with the scale of ¥100 billion (\$700 million). In North America, Oceania, and Southeast Asia, sustainable forest management is already established and with these


forest assets as its core, the fund will create carbon credit through forest restoration and conservation in South East Asia. Investors will receive profits from timber and carbon credits.

Sumitomo Forestry will also provide consulting services for forest management and conservation. For example, the company succeeded in establishing a peatland management technology in Indonesia's West Kalimantan province. The firm tied up with IHI Corp., which owns satellite weather observation technologies, to precisely measure the water level and preserve soil, where in the past, illegal logging and slash-and-burn practices were repeated, leading to massive CO2 emissions.

Sumitomo Forestry currently owns and manages about 230,000 hectares of forestland overseas, most of which is in Indonesia and the rest in New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. "Our goal is to expand the forestland at home and abroad to 500,000 hectares by 2030,"  Satoh said.

Wood Cycle concept, which brings together its efforts on decarbonization: planting trees, logging them and storing carbon, using them for construction, and recycling them for renewable energy. Owning one eight-hundredth of the country's land, Sumitomo Forestry not only has a viewpoint as a business, its long-term plans — taking into account a broad view of the whole country and the global environment — prove that it retains its corporate DNA stemming from a century of restoring nature at the copper mine. The company also aims for a better working environment where many workers feel satisfied, declaring respect for diversity as one of its corporate values.

What unifies Sumitomo Forestry's diverse business and human resources is its identity originating in the Besshi Copper Mine, helping its customers and workers share its philosophy. I believe its business management approach of cooperating with nature while wielding a strong unifying power and taking an extremely long-term perspective has been sustainable since the foundation of the company.

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