

# sustainable japan

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Professor studies and advises on interface between law and practice

## Hitotsubashi's Catherine Wallace on business ethics

**Name: Catherine Wallace**  
**Title: Specially appointed associate professor at Hitotsubashi ICS**  
**URL: <https://www.ics.hub.hit-u.ac.jp/>**  
**Hometown: Sydney**  
**Years in Japan: 20**

Fast forward to the present, and Wallace is a professor of business ethics in the School of International Corporate Strategy at Hitotsubashi University, where she is the coordinator of the MBA program and oversees international student exchange. She has spent two decades working in Tokyo, first as a diplomat in Australia's foreign service and later in consulting and higher education.

### Agriculture to foreign affairs

Unsure of just how to get to Japan, Wallace embarked on the wool research, but later gave it up to join what was then the Department of Primary Industries and Energy (DPIE) under a competitive program for recent graduates. After a year of rigorous training in fields such as bilateral relations, Wallace chose to work in the Corporate Finance Division. In addition to an opportunity to hone her writing skills, the job offered chances to interact with various people and become involved with matters across the department's scope, including international fisheries.

"That's the area where I first came into contact with people from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), where I shared with them my aspirations to join their department, which was notoriously difficult to get into, not only for graduates, but just for vacancies generally. And they — in a sense, a particular person who was working with me on the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna, of which Japan and Australia are key members — that person in Foreign Affairs and Trade became a sort of mentor and champion for me to help me to transition to that department."

During her time in DPIE, Wallace started taking Japanese lessons and actually found her way to the Ehime city of Niihama on the JET Programme. Upon her return to Australia, she set her sights on joining DFAT and one day returning to Japan. A self-confessed lover of learning and excellence, Wallace was, of course, successful in joining DFAT, where she immediately started applying for overseas

### One year changed everything

Wallace's journey into Japan started with a year on the JET Programme, which led to a "world-expanding" experience in foreign affairs and a relationship with Japan that only keeps increasing in intrigue.

"There is so much packed into this country. And I could spend multiple lifetimes here and I would only scratch the surface of it. The more I learn about Japan, the more Japanese language I learn, the more I realize how little I know. And through that process of finding out more, discovering more, I can better contribute to this country, because I'm very invested emotionally in Japan now. I'm very interested in Japan's longevity, Japan's success, Japan's sustainability — and how I can contribute to them," Wallace said.

Born in Sydney and raised in Canberra, Wallace had never been overseas when, as an undergraduate, she saw a flier advertising a hospitality work program in Japan. That program did not fit her interests — but a signal, via what she describes as a clear inner voice, had been delivered to her brain that getting to Japan was important. She still hadn't quite figured out what to do, but she knew where to go.

### Leaders & Readers

**KERRY FURUKAWA**  
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

As a Ph.D. student in her native Australia, Catherine Wallace was immersed in studying the effects of the thyroid gland on the development of wool follicles in fetal lambs. The path ahead of her was clear: years of lab research and scholarship in an area she can still discuss with verve. One problem, however, was the inevitable solitude. She needed interaction. In addition, while she embraced the wide applicability of science and excelled in zoology and biochemistry, she still did not know exactly which career was right for her.



Catherine Wallace has spent two decades in Tokyo as a diplomat and then in consulting and higher education. COSUFI



COSUFI

### Interests: business ethics, labor laws

Catherine Wallace moved from Sydney to Canberra with her family when she was 5 years old. She studied science in university and later went on to complete a graduate diploma in East Asian studies and a master's degree in international relations. She has worked in government, including as a diplomat in Australia's foreign service, and is now a professor at Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo. Her research interests include business ethics, Japanese labor laws and long-lived Japanese businesses. She is increasingly active in advisory roles on cross-cultural collaboration, innovation and sustainability.

the Labor Contracts Act. The latter amendments, Wallace said, were intended to give security and benefits to workers who had spent years working under annual renewable contracts, but she found that while some employers were aware of the letter of the law, respecting the spirit of the law was a different matter. This led to her interest in ethical approaches to business.

Along the way, she has also developed an insatiable interest in Japanese history and ways to ensure that traditions endure for centuries to come. "One alarming [TV] program that I've seen many episodes of, is one in which they interview the last craftsman in Japan for that particular craft. And part of the reason why I'm looking for how I can contribute is because I don't want to see that. That knowledge, that expertise, that ingenuity, innovation — I don't want to see that disappear. Japan, over its history, has given so much to the world, so much amazing technology and innovation. There are initiatives that the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is putting forward, that the national government is putting forward, to help keep those things going. But I think we can still do more. We can do things at a faster rate. I just want to see those things that make Japan what it is, that make it different, that make it beautiful, maintained."

postings to Japan. It was five years before she was successful, becoming political first secretary in Tokyo in 2006.

"I believed that four years living and working in Japan as a diplomat would either get Japan out of my system or else deepen my interest in Japan. No prizes for guessing that it turned out to be the latter. My diplomatic posting was a wonderful experience — I reported on important developments in the bilateral political relationship, covered Upper House elections and managed visits to Japan by the Australian foreign minister and a Senate delegation. My job was interesting, varied and busy, but I knew that a large part of why I loved what I was doing was because of where I was doing it."

### Insatiable interest in Japan

Allaying family concerns at walking away from the security of a career in the foreign service, which could only have become more decorated, Wallace found a job in Japan before relocating. She said that first job was not everything it was promised to be, but she worked as an editor, a consultant and in various English-teaching roles before moving into higher education.

Throughout her engagement with the country, she researched various aspects of Japanese labor law. Her sub-thesis for her graduate diploma was on the impact of the introduction of the Equal Employment Opportunity Act on work opportunities for female junior college graduates, while later research focused on amendments in 2012 to

### Times Gallery



Dassai Sake President Kazuhiro Sakurai speaks at an event bringing together EO Tokyo Metropolitan and EO Hawaii, sharing how Dassai became a beloved global brand. EO TOKYO METROPOLITAN



Celebrating the Independence Day of Togo on April 27. Charge d'Affaires Doddzi E.K. Mouvy and his wife, with Yukio Saita, deputy director-general of the Foreign Ministry's African Affairs Department. EMBASSY OF TOGO



Panamanian Ambassador Carlos Pere and his wife, Elizabeth Huertematte, stand with Panamanian musician Danilo Perez, who performed at the Blue Note Jazz Club in Tokyo on April 23. EMBASSY OF PANAMA



Dominican Ambassador Robert Takata visits Yokohama's paella festival, supporting Fukushima's recovery and promoting Dominican rum, to highlight ongoing ties with Tepco after the 2011 tsunami and nuclear disaster. EMBASSY OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



Indonesians participate in Fukuoka's Hakata Dontaku Festival, held on May 3 and 4. The Indonesian team paraded through the center of the city wearing a variety of traditional Indonesian costumes, including Javanese, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Balinese. EMBASSY OF INDONESIA



Mexican Embassy personnel in Japan march for LGBT rights at the Tokyo Rainbow Pride event, united with global partners in the Equal Rights Coalition to spread love and acceptance. EMBASSY OF MEXICO



Berlin Mayor Kai Wegner (third from left) visits Tokyo on May 14, the 30th anniversary of the city partnership between Berlin and Tokyo. EMBASSY OF GERMANY



Central American Integration System ambassadors from Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic gather. EMBASSY OF HONDURAS

## Poppins helps working women and their kids build better lives

### Sustainable Japan Award: ESG Excellence Award

**MAIKO MURAOKA**  
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Poppins Corp. started providing services to support working women 37 years ago, when the concept of social entrepreneurship was not yet known in Japan. Last year it received the Sustainable Japan Award's ESG Excellence Award, presented by The Japan Times, for its long-standing contributions to helping women achieve their career goals.

"The first service launched by the founder, Noriko Nakamura, was a nanny service. Back then, the only child care option for a working mother was a nursery, which was only available for full-time working mothers," President Maiko Todoroki said. The company has continuously evolved to meet the needs of women in various stages of life with the various services it provides in the areas of infertility prevention, child care, after-school care, housekeeping and nursing care.

The company's child care philosophy is based on "Educare," a concept that it created to transform the traditional mindset of looking at child care only as part of social welfare to one that places a strong focus on education and developing children's abilities from a young age.

"It is about nurturing the ability to live their own lives through helping them acquire various qualities such as noncognitive skills, resilience and compassion in an inspiring environment," Todoroki said. To do that in an effective and scientific way, the company has been engaging in joint research with Stanford University on developmental psychology and Harvard University on cognitive science.

The collaboration with Harvard started in 2010, and a project that has been ongoing for

the last six years is themed "SDGs for Children." It involves members of Project Zero, an academic organization under the Harvard Graduate School of Education aimed at understanding and nurturing human potential, members of the Poppins International Institute for Child Sciences, nursery teachers and managers of Poppins nurseries across Japan as well as nurseries in the United States selected by the team at Harvard.

In it, various experimental projects and activities are held at participating nurseries on selected topics such as diversity and unconscious bias, and feedback from them is reported in monthly online meetings to facilitate deep discussions on identifying challenges and finding out what more can be done to overcome them.

An annual symposium is an important opportunity for the project to share its achievements not only with related parties but also with anyone from any part of the world who is interested in early childhood education. "During the coronavirus pandemic, we conducted the symposium in a hybrid manner, accepting participation both on-site and online, which resulted in a significant increase in the number of attendees, reaching around 3,000," Todoroki said. The 15th symposium, with the theme "SDGs for Children," will be held online on June 15, featuring a keynote lecture by Veronica Boix Mansilla, a principal investigator at Project Zero; a presentation of the joint research findings; and a panel discussion by Mansilla and three other experts from academia. Through the symposium, the company aims to disseminate up-to-date knowledge and insights about education in early childhood, the most important period for mental development.

The company has also donated a course that specializes in child care management to the master's program at Ochanomizu University, a Tokyo-based national university for women, to nurture human resources who can play central roles in promoting professional and scientific approaches to early childhood education, as it believes that the investment will contribute to the improvement of the social status of nursery teachers and workers as well as the further enhancement of support for working women who are in need of more and better options for their children.

Learning does not happen only in school.



Poppins President Maiko Todoroki HARUO MOTOHASHI

Poppins learns from problems that its employees encounter through various life events and tries to provide solutions, which also serve as important clues for improving and reinforcing the services it provides to its customers. Todoroki said each case is different and requires a separate "prescription." For example, the company offered a six-month fertility treatment leave to a female board member 10 years ago and allows employees to bring their babies to an annual training program that lasts for a few days. "We believe that solving our problems will lead to generating new services for society," she said.

She pointed out that while Japan continues to lag behind many countries on equality for women, ranking 125th out of 146 countries in the 2023 Gender Gap Index published by the World Economic Forum, it has been doing extremely well in one of the four subindexes, educational attainment. She also regretted the fact that the country has not been able to offer enough opportunities for half of its population to use their abilities to the full.

The company aims to offer many options for women in society so they can feel a sense of self-determination instead of having to choose the only option that is available, and create a society that does not criticize their decisions. "We believe that when women shine the world will change. And we will continue to be a game-changer in it, not a bystander," Todoroki said.

The Sustainable Japan Award commends individuals, companies and organizations who have made advances in sustainable efforts. To learn more, scan the QR code or visit <https://sustainable.japantimes.com/sjaward2024>