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produced by The Japan Times Cube

Nomura finds new ways to design spaces for future

Unraveling Japanese companies

HIROKO NAKATA
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

If you walk down the streets in central Tokyo, you can come across many of Nomura Co.'s creations — the Tokyu Plaza Harakado commercial complex in the Harajuku district and Shinjuku Kabuki Hall's Kabuki Yokochō entertainment food hall, to name two. If you take a short trip, there is Ghibli Park in Aichi Prefecture. If you fly to Hokkaido, Es Con Field Hokkaido brand-new stadium welcomes baseball fans.

All these facilities are the output of the country's leading space creation company, with more than a century-old history. The company visualizes its mission as "Bringing people delight and passion through spatial design and engineering."

But for a start, what is "delight and passion" in space?

Nomura is asking this question to themselves and trying to understand and explain what factors consist of "delight and passion."

"Design is not art. So there should be some logic to decide certain designs," said Asako Harayama, a senior executive officer for Nomura. "In the past, we relied on our sensibility or experiences. But we're starting R&D (research and development) of scientific factors that could affect hearts and minds," she said in a recent interview, part of a monthly

series by Naonori Kimura, a partner for the consulting firm Industrial Growth Platform Inc.

The reason behind this is that the company believes it is essential to propose new values amid rapid social changes and digitalization, not just respond to existing issues. Toward this end, Nomura launched Future Insights Lab in 2021.

One of the laboratory's missions is to develop a new system to measure what moves people's feelings by gauging, for example, their brain waves and heartbeats in various spaces. Also, the lab studies what causes certain feelings by analyzing the sensory difference between walking on soft carpets or hard floors, how acoustics in a room affect people's power of concentration, and how wooden rooms affect people's psychology. "Sensibility is important, for sure, but we're also working on scientific evidence at the laboratory," Harayama said.

Other missions include forecasting people's lifestyles in the future to gain insights into the forms that future spaces may take, developing sustainable designs and materials to mitigate negative impacts on the environment, discovering value in preserved nature and traditional industries in local districts, creating inclusive spaces through artistic activities, and creating spaces with various technologies.

Nomura's history dates to 1892, when Taitsuke Nomura, a creator of scene-shifting services for local theaters, founded the



Asako Harayama, senior executive officer for Nomura HARUO MOTOHASHI

company in Takamatsu, Kagawa Prefecture. What made Nomura successful was large-scale equipment and mechanisms for chrysanthemum doll performances, which were popular as a form of entertainment at the time.

The company gradually expanded its business from entertainment to exhibitions and decorative displays. After World War II, it built its brand in the display industry, for example at department stores, art exhibitions, world expositions and amusement parks. Today it is the top company in the space creation industry, with ¥134 billion (\$900 million) in annual sales and more than 2,400 workers, including 618 planners and designers and 514 product directors. It handles a wide range of facilities, from luxurious hotels to large-scale commercial complexes and theme parks.

Nomura aims to cultivate these fields more deeply while developing new business possibilities. According to its medium-term

management policy for 2023-2025, exhibitions and decorative displays are the first two targets out of the total of seven.

One axis of the existing fields covers business sectors including sales, creative activity and production activity. Another axis involves how Nomura digs into markets for commercial complexes, entertainment events, hotels and other hospitality services, Harayama said.

As for new businesses, she referred to the potential of interior renovation and its synergy with outside spaces. "Society is paying more attention to how we can renovate the inside of existing buildings, because if we continue to build new ones, it will keep on increasing carbon emissions," she said. "Those who design interior spaces need to understand architecture as well when they renovate existing facilities." Such renovation is not necessarily limited to interiors, but mixture with exteriors would attract those who are fascinated by camping and outdoor

activities in nature-rich environments, she said.

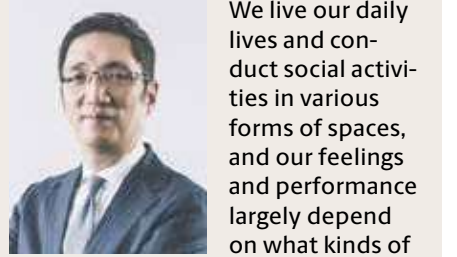
In doing so, interactions with clients are essential to explore new business fields with potential. "Not just imagining the world three years, five years or 10 years from now, but starting even a small step right away is good for creating new ideas," she said.

One example of combined interior and outside space is Es Con Field Hokkaido. The ballpark, the home ground of the Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters, held its first game in March 2023. Nomura oversees the planning, design, layout, production and construction of multiple areas at Hokkaido Ballpark F Village, which hosts the stadium. The baseball team asked Nomura to help build "a ballpark like nothing the world has seen." As a result, the village hosts the world's first hot spring facility where visitors can watch games and Asia's first hotel inside a ballpark with views of the field. There are a variety of seat options, including balcony suites with private spaces where spectators can dine while watching. "This is one of the projects that took advantage of our teams' knowledge and know-how, since we have handled a wide range of projects," Harayama said.

The company's willingness to explore new business is expressed in the medium-term management plan. During the target years until 2025, Nomura plans to spend more than ¥7 billion in growth investment, including R&D and digitalization. Although the pandemic dented its sales and profits in 2020, they are recovering year by year, with the group sales target in the business year to March 2026 at ¥143 billion and operating profits at ¥8.6 billion.

The important point is not just expanding business, but making it lean while demonstrating creativity. "There should be many things we can do to contribute to society by keeping existing constructions and reactivating inside spaces without scraping and building. We need to explore how we can do it," Harayama said.

NAONORI KIMURA
INDUSTRIAL GROWTH PLATFORM
INC. (IGPI) PARTNER



We live our daily lives and conduct social activities in various forms of spaces, and our feelings and performance largely depend on what kinds of spaces we place ourselves in. Therefore, a professional group of space production such as Nomura Co. is essential in order to make our society wealthier and more sustainable.

The source of what goes into creating good spaces for human beings is its people and their creativity. The company's medium-term management policy for the period 2023-2025 shows that its management is considering human capital to be the starting point and values mutual trust.

The unity of management and the professional staff nurtures a future-oriented corporate culture, bringing further possibilities of spaces being created through a combination of sensibility and science and leading to activities for social good that are sublimated into real activities, not just calls for furthering the SDGs (sustainable development goals) adopted by the United Nations.

Even if society is digitalized very rapidly and widely, our lives will not be separated from the spaces we inhabit. I trust that Nomura, an organization that always keeps on evolving for the future, will bring more "delight and passion" to society by expanding and enhancing its business.



Asako Harayama said that "society is paying more attention to how we can renovate the inside of existing buildings, because if we continue to build new ones, it will keep on increasing carbon emissions." HARUO MOTOHASHI

CCJA winner's nonprofit Charm helps sick foreigners

ESG/SDGs

MAIKO MURAOKA
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

This year's grand prize of the Champion of Change Japan Award (CCJA) went to Rieko Aoki, who runs Charm, a nonprofit in Osaka dedicated to improving access to health and medical services for all people, including foreigners living in Japan. The award ceremony and a reception were held at Dow Chemical Japan's headquarters in Tokyo's Shinagawa Ward on Oct. 17 to celebrate Aoki and four other awardees who were recognized for leading projects that help change society for the better and to provide a networking opportunity.

The CCJA was founded in 2017 by Atsuko Toko Fish, a Japanese philanthropist based in Boston, to recognize and encourage women leaders in Japan who contribute to society by tackling diverse

social issues. She is a founding trustee of the private Fish Family Foundation, established in Boston in 1999, and the founder of the Japanese Women's Leadership Initiative (JWLI). She was selected in 2013 for the Champion of Change Award, established by then-President Barack Obama, for her efforts in empowering women in both the U.S. and Japan. Inspired by this honor, she founded CCJA as part of the JWLI's program to shine a light on emerging women leaders in Japan.

Five winners were selected from 212 nominations, with two rounds of selection followed by an interview. The selection committee consisted of Kozue Sawame, president of the Japanese Women's Leadership Initiative, which is administered by the Fish Family Foundation, and five others representing five sponsors and partners. One of them was Minako Suematsu, chairperson and publisher of The Japan Times. There were also nine other sponsors and partners who supported the CCJA by providing the venue for the ceremony and additional prizes for the winners. Aoki received a cash prize of ¥1 million (\$7,000) and a crystal bowl donated by Tiffany and Co. Japan Inc., one of the sponsors of the CCJA. The other four winners each received ¥250,000 and a commemorative gift donated by Tiffany.

Aoki founded Charm in 2001 after seeing the lack of access to medical care for



Reiko Aoki receiving her award CCJA

foreigners living in Japan who had serious health problems access to medical care. "Around 2000, many women with AIDS symptoms were admitted to a hospital in Osaka specializing in the treatment of the disease. The medical professionals, social workers and counselors who dealt with these patients were surprised and wondered why they had not been seen ear-

lier," said Aoki.

She felt the need to create an organization that could provide health and medical information to foreigners in Japan and act quickly to support them when they needed to go to a hospital. Charm also provides interpreters. "The difficulty is that it can be expensive to hire professional interpreters to maintain the qual-

ity of the interpretation, which must be ensured to treat the patients adequately," she said. But she added that she had found hope through the CCJA, which provided opportunities to meet and network with people from different foundations and the private sector. Such meetings could lead to new funding opportunities to strengthen and expand Charm's activities.

Commenting on the award, she said: "Many people may feel that there is not much they can do to help when it comes to medical issues. But in fact, there are many things that anyone who is willing can do, such as listening to the worries of those who are alone without family, accompanying them to the hospital and so on," and encouraged members of the audience at the ceremony to help in their own way. She also said that since the coronavirus pandemic, some of Charm's activities have shifted to online methods through which anyone can join in and help remotely.

"We are based in Osaka, but similar support is needed across the country," she said, expressing the hope that Charm can work with people who share the same sense of mission and establish a base to provide support in different parts of Japan.

Although Charm was originally set up to help people with HIV and AIDS, in recent years it has expanded its support to people with other infectious diseases,



Atsuko Fish CCJA

including tuberculosis. "We have come this far because we could not ignore the problem of one person. The problems of a few may not attract the attention of governments or make business sense for companies. But through this award, we were encouraged to learn that there are people who recognize our activities to help the few who need help," she said.

She concluded by saying: "Civic activities are also called grassroots activities. Each root may be thin, but intertwined with other roots, they support the trunk. We hope that more people will join to make the roots stronger so that the trunk can grow large and solid to make society a better place for everyone." The room then filled with warm applause for Aoki and the four other award winners.



Four other winners tell of efforts for women and children

HIROMI TAKAHASHI
SAKURA NET OYAMA



I founded Sakura Net Oyama in 2016 in the city of Oyama, Tochigi Prefecture, to help children and their families in need. Twenty years ago, there was a brutal case of child abuse and murder in the city. At the time, I was working for a local child guidance center and hoped that the government would focus more on family welfare, which I believed was necessary to prevent child abuse. However, changes were only made to catch and punish parents who abused their children. Driven by a sense of regret, I quit my job and started the organization with like-minded people to help troubled families by providing shelter, food, counseling, educational support, and other services. I hope that more people will recognize the existence of children in need, even though they may not be easy to spot, and offer a helping hand.

KENKO NAKATA
COLEGIO SANTANA



Colegio Santana was founded in 1998 as a school dedicated to the education of Brazilian children in Shiga Prefecture. I am a second-generation Japanese-Brazilian and worked as a teacher in Brazil before moving to Japan. The company I worked for in Japan had about 400 Brazilian employees, and I noticed that their children rarely played outside of the company housing. I thought this was unhealthy, and with the support of the company, I started the school to create a better learning and playing environment for them and to help them realize their dream. We now aim to provide bilingual education in Japanese and Portuguese, while taking into account the special needs of Brazilian autistic children living in Japan. We welcome those who are willing to help us provide good Japanese-language education to our students.

KANAE NAKAMOTO
KANAKANA



Kanakana is a nonprofit organization in Okinawa that provides after-school activities for children and support for young mothers. It started as a coffee shop I opened 15 years ago out of my own need as a mother for a place where mothers with babies could gather without worrying about disturbing other customers. Then I started offering after-school activities for elementary school students when my own children reached that age and I realized that there were children with various problems, including family problems, who were not receiving adequate support. We provide support for these children, as well as girls who have become pregnant in their teens, who are also likely to suffer from isolation. I hope that our activities will inspire others to help such youths in other areas of Okinawa, thus expanding the network of support.

HIROMI FUJITA
PROUD KAGAWA



Proud Kagawa is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 in the city of Takamatsu, Kagawa Prefecture, to improve the quality of life for minorities by conducting activities related to LGBTQ issues. From the beginning, we held social gatherings for sexual minorities to support each other, which eventually led to awareness-raising activities such as lectures and training involving a wider range of stakeholders, as well as counseling. Over the years, we began to feel that we wanted to benefit the community and expand our activities throughout the prefectures. Since 2005, we have organized an annual film festival, and next year, for the first time Proud Kagawa will be hosting a parade. Anyone can help by showing interest, attending events, listening to those who have stories to tell and sharing their feelings with others.