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Japan's coolest of the cool — the CJPF Award 2025

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The annual CJPF (Cool Japan Platform) Award saw 18 winners announced on March 5. Now in its ninth year (including its predecessor, the Cool Japan Matching Award), it showcases some of the most innovative projects coming out of Japan. Through the years the entries have consistently drawn on Japan's natural, cultural and industrial heritages while often grappling with current issues significantly impacting its social fabric.

This year the themes covered by the entries ranged from anime, music, food, tourism, cosmetics and fashion to technology and more. The winners showcase Japan's innovative technology while at the same time highlighting deep connections to its history and traditions.

The Cool Japan initiative is positioned front and center of the Cool Japan Public-Private Partnership Platform, orchestrated by

the secretariat of the Cabinet Office's Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters. Videos and projects entered for the award are evaluated on how they address and enhance Japan's international appeal and contribute to its inbound tourism industry.

This year holds special significance for the CJPF Award, as Expo 2025 will kick off on April 13 in Osaka. During the expo's six-month duration, an estimated 28 million foreign visitors are expected to stream into Japan.

If the award is anything to go by, Japan is well up to the challenge. It has racked up over 2,000 entries since its launch in 2016 as the Matching Award. The minister of state for Cool Japan, Minoru Kiuchi, said in his opening remarks at the award ceremony: "This year, there were 268 entries in the video award category and 103 in the project category. They were all of impressive quality, and the judges had a hard job deciding on the winners. I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to the contestants, judges, staff and everyone involved in the CJPF Award project."



Winners of this year's CJPF Award pose for a group photo at the Cabinet Office building in Tokyo's Chiyoda Ward. CJPF AWARD 2025

Kiuchi added that CJPF plays a vital role in promoting Japan to overseas visitors. "Last year, over 36 million foreign visitors arrived in Japan, spending over ¥8 trillion (\$55 billion). We are confident in saying that Cool Japan has contributed greatly in transmitting the charms and appeal of Japan overseas." Touching upon the winners in the video category, Kiuchi said: "I've worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and know firsthand that videos are wonderfully effective when it comes to promoting and explaining the attractions of Japan. In that sense, the winners of this year's video category may well provide pointers and inspiration to the inbound tourism industry."

Winners in the video category

Two entries won the grand prize in the video category. The first was "Breath of Nagano: Creativity Born of Restriction," won by Nagano Prefecture. "Breath of

Nagano" is part of a multilingual video series created by the prefectural office to promote the region's artisanal and cultural heritages. It focuses on the city of Iida's traditional *mizuhiki*, woven cords used to decorate envelopes for festive occasions. Iida produces 70% of the *mizuhiki* in Japan. In the video, Iida's *mizuhiki* gain new life as a fashion item in Paris.

A representative from the Nagano prefectural office expressed their delight in winning the award. "We aimed to create content that highlighted a uniquely Nagano product that has global appeal. In doing so, we didn't want to just treat *mizuhiki* as a commodity but show its deep ties with Japan's spirituality and the tradition of showing consideration for others."

The other top winner was "The Heart of Noh: English Edition," submitted by grand master Tsunao Yamai of the Konparu school of noh. It was shot in Italy and France, putting a new twist on Japan's

ancient theater form.

"At its heart, noh is about peace, both in the world and within one's heart," said Yamai, whose school goes back 1,400 years. "I think that now, more than ever, we have much to learn from the spirit of noh. Last year, I suffered a stroke, and for a while I didn't think I would survive. But I've made a full recovery and feel that the reason I'm still here is because I have a mission to spread the word about noh."

Award presenter and judge Yoshiki Tsuji, chairman of the Tsuji Culinary Institute, one of Japan's most acclaimed cooking schools, said, "The grand prize winners breathed new life into two of Japan's ancient art forms. In fusing with cultures and markets overseas, they presented a new perspective to Japan's traditional cultures."

The runners-up in the video category went to "The Seri: Akashiura Fish Auction," won by Akashiura Fisheries Association in Hyogo Prefecture, and "Uji ni wa Monogatari ga Aru" ("Tales Exist in Uji"), won by the city of Uji in Kyoto Prefecture. The former focuses on *seri*, the uniquely Japanese art and ritual of auctioning just-caught fish at the harbor. The latter is an animated story about Uji, the birthplace of Lady Murasaki, author of "The Tale of Genji." The animations were created by Uji's Kyoto Animations, one of Japan's foremost animation companies.

Other awards in the video category went to "Rip Trip Okinawa City," featuring former NBA star Richard Hamilton; "Plastic Free Friendship," in which kids in a New York City public school are united with kids on Iriomote Island; "The Home of Aji Fry," promoting a famed Nagasaki mackerel dish; and "Choco Monaka Jumbo: A Tastiness Found Only in Japan," on one of Japan's favorite ice cream treats.

Project category winners

The grand prize in the project category was won by teamLab Planets Tokyo DMM.com for its enormous appeal to tourists both



TeamLab's "Floating Flower Garden: Flowers and I are of the Same Root, the Garden and I are One" TEAMLAB

inbound and domestic. TeamLab is listed by Guinness World Records as the world's most-visited art museum with works by a single artist.

The runners-up in the project category were Anime Times Co. in India, comprising 13 Japanese companies looking to spread anime in India, and the Dual Pilgrim project linking the pilgrimage routes of Kumano Kodo and Spain's Way of St. James and celebrating "World Heritage pilgrim culture."

Other awards in the category went to the Oita Prefecture city of Hita, the birthplace of the author of the "Attack on Titan" manga and anime; the Honseki Project in Gifu Prefecture, about knife and sword craftsmanship; Hiraku Sumo Hall in Osaka; the Ukiyo-e Immersive Art Exhibition, which features a 3D ukiyo-e experience; and a fully customized tour service in Hokkaido operated by Takarano Shima.

In the Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai, Japan Award, the winner for the video category was "Ryu no Sumu Umi" ("The Sea Where Dragons Live"), made by a group of students at Nihon Kogakuin College. The winner for the project category was Kyoto Obubuen's "Creating a Tea Wonderland With Tea Lovers From Around the World."

This article was sponsored by the Cabinet Office's Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters.



"Breath of Nagano: Creativity Born of Restriction" (above) by Nagano Prefecture and "The Heart of Noh: English Edition" by Tsunao Yamai were the grand prize winners in the movie category. CJPF AWARD 2025

G-net links young job seekers with businesses in the Gifu area

Sustainable Japan Award: Satoyama award winner

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G-net, an organization based in the city of Gifu that received the Special Award in the satoyama section of the Sustainable Japan Award 2024 presented by The Japan Times, has been a bridge between job-seeking youths and local enterprises for over 20 years.

G-net was founded in 2001 by Shoji Akimoto, who was then a university student in Tokyo. Shuji Minamida, the current representative director of G-net, said: "Akimoto was born in Gifu but went to university in Tokyo. He started to feel impelled to do something for his waning hometown instead of blaming the decline on economic downturn or other regional issues."

Akimoto and a few other students began publishing free magazines and organizing events to revitalize a local shopping street. "That was the beginning of G-net," Minamida said. "A major shift that shaped the current G-net came in 2004, when G-net established its internship program as a regional application of the long-term internship initiative led by the Tokyo-based nonprofit organization ETIC. This was because the founding members came to the understanding that community development begins with nurturing people who are willing to take on new challenges."

Through G-net's internship program, university students are given the opportunity to work for six months with leaders of small and medium-size enterprises. "About 20 years ago, such extended internship programs were rare, especially in rural areas,"

he said. But there were reasons why G-net believed this program would be highly beneficial for young people. "Local businesses have survived while facing numerous problems, such as the decline of their industry itself and labor shortages. The owners of such companies must be the region's biggest triers," he said.

Minamida himself was a university student when he was introduced to G-net, and began working for the organization as an intern while he was in graduate school, before becoming a full-time employee upon graduation in 2009. In 2012, G-net launched a recruiting service that connects new graduates with local companies, as well as a project-based matching service for side jobs and dual employment for people who want to make effective use of their skills and time to contribute to the region while maintaining their current jobs.

Collaboration is also underway with the tentatively named new Co-Innovation University, which aims to open in April 2026 in the Gifu Prefecture city of Hida pending ministry approval. G-net is responsible for developing a program for students to spend a year in selected communities, planning and implementing projects aimed at solving regional problems or revitalizing communities. "We are also communicating with various regions that may be interested in hosting students. It is an exciting opportunity for us to involve various stakeholders to create a greater impact than G-net could do alone," said Minamida.

There are many other ongoing collaborations with various regions. One example is a training program that connects employees of major companies in metropolitan areas, particularly Tokyo, with various local communities and companies throughout Japan. "All companies of different sizes, industries and locations have their own expertise and know-how. They could be greatly inspired by each other," Minamida said.

So far, about 300 people from 70 companies, including Japan's leading automobile and beverage manufacturers, have participated in the program, working on projects as diverse as industrial restructuring following the closure of a thermal power plant, creating new businesses using local forest resources, and addressing the issue of succession in a traditional rice-farming



Shuji Minamida, the current representative director of G-net. G-NET

method. In March, 16 participants who had completed their assignments in five different areas, including Kesennuma in Miyagi Prefecture and Amami Oshima in Kagoshima Prefecture, made presentations in Tokyo.

G-net also launched an initiative called Rookie of the Year to recognize young people who have chosen to build their careers in rural areas and are striving to make a difference. "The first one was held in Miyazaki two years ago, and the second one was held in Nagano in January. We will hold one in Gifu next year," said Minamida.

It is not only young people who are shaping their future in rural areas. "Businesses are also changing. We have seen companies that were barely surviving, as so-called declining industries, significantly recover their business performance with the presence of passionate young talents who are eager to work there," he said.

Minamida is confident that what Gifu, a medium-size municipality with a population of 400,000, can achieve can be applied to many other cities across the country. "What will be an asset for Gifu can also be an asset for other municipalities. We are beginning to cooperate with other organizations in other areas to share our expertise in creating solutions for revitalizing rural areas in Japan," he 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-japan-times.com/sjaward2024>



Seino drives collaborative, sustainable transportation

ESG/SDGs

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The logistics company Seino Holdings Co. Ltd. has been promoting an open public platform (OPP) with the aim of improving the industry's efficiency and reducing its environmental impact through collaboration among companies and the utilization of joint transportation and digital technology.

Based in Gifu Prefecture, Seino has supported society since its foundation 95 years ago by catering to changing needs for transportation and delivery services. It recognizes the mounting challenges that the logistics industry is facing right now, such as the so-called 2024 problem of a shortage in transportation capacity due to the introduction of a mandatory cap on paid overtime for truck drivers of 960 hours annually. This comes on top of a chronic and worsening shortage of manpower due to the declining birthrate and aging population.

"There is a growing common awareness within the industry that we need to undergo major changes through 'co-creation' beyond corporate boundaries to solve these issues, and this is driving various projects based on the concept of OPP," Seino says.

Especially for transportation to rural areas with declining populations, there

has been room for improved efficiency in the loading of trucks. To address this, Seino started cooperating with Sagawa Express, another major logistics company, to optimize transportation to such areas, starting with Aomori Prefecture's Shimokita district at the northern tip of Honshu.

Under this initiative, cargo destined for the district that comes from areas to the west of Iwate on trucks from both companies is consolidated onto a Sagawa truck at a Seino branch in Iwate Prefecture, to the southeast of Aomori. This achieves transportation efficiency and cost reductions, providing a potential sustainable model of transportation in rural areas.

Also as part of the OPP initiative, Seino has been promoting joint long-distance transportation with the Japan Post group. In a trial conducted from February to March 2024, the two managed to cut down on truck trips by efficiently combining cargo. Following this positive outcome, they will formally launch joint long-distance transportation, which is expected to optimize logistics hubs and lead to better transportation efficiency across the industry.

Seino also began collaborating with Tonami Transportation in early 2024 through a joint delivery project that leverages the regional strengths of both companies. For example, Seino trucks bring cargo to the Ishikawa city of Kanazawa, where Tonami has a strong presence, and transfer it to Tonami trucks. The reverse is done in the Aichi city of Okazaki, where Seino has a strong foothold.

"By doing this, we have been able to improve the loading efficiency of individual trucks, reduce the number of trucks in operation, ease the burden on drivers and reduce environmental impact," Seino says. Seino is also promoting initiatives



Seino is working with Japan Post as part of an OPP initiative. SEINO HOLDINGS

on automated transportation. Experiments have begun in collaboration with T2 Inc., a company that develops automated driving technology, since last October. These include test runs for long-distance transportation between Tokyo and Osaka with the goal of achieving Level 4 autonomous driving, in which trucks would operate without human oversight under normal conditions, based on the standards set by SAE International, a global association specializing in mobility engineering.

Japan Post and JP Logistics have joined these experiments with T2 Inc. since January, covering a route of 500 kilometers from the Kanagawa city of Sagami-hara to Osaka. In February, a 4-ton mixed load on cage trolleys and pallets was driven for about 180 km at Level 2 autonomy, which involves support for steering, braking and accelerating while still requiring a driver's engagement. "We are analyzing the data collected from these trials to identify the key challenges to achieving safety and successful operation and management," Seino says.

Through these initiatives based on open and innovative collaborations across the industry, Seino will keep striving to maintain convenience, enhance transportation efficiency and minimize environmental impacts.



G-net collaborates with universities and companies in their projects. G-NET



Seino has been catering to changing needs for transportation and delivery services since its foundation 95 years ago. SEINO HOLDINGS

Sustainable Japan Network

