



Message from the Chairman



As Chairman of the Asian Council on Health and Education (ACHE), I am pleased to present the tenth issue of the Newsletter of ACHE to all our colleagues in the health and education sectors.

This issue highlights the trends, the latest news and interesting reports on health and education in the Asia-Pacific region. I hope that you will find the articles included in this Newsletter of great value, and look forward to your contribution to the Newsletter in the future.

Since assuming the Chairmanship in 2017, I have found this Council a valuable platform for information exchange and networking for all representatives from the region's health and education industries. Therefore, all CACCI members are encouraged to take advantage of the Council and the Newsletter as channels to voice their opinions and viewpoints.

My Best Wishes

Arash Anissian, MD
Chairman
Asian Council on Health and Education



Part I Health



Donors and Drug Makers Offer \$500 Million to Control Global Epidemics

By Donald G. McNeil Jr.

Stung by the lack of vaccines to fight the West African Ebola epidemic, a group of prominent donors announced on January 18, 2017 that they had raised almost \$500 million for a new partnership to stop epidemics before they spiral out of control.

The partnership, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, will initially develop and stockpile vaccines against three known viral threats, and also push the development of technology to brew large amounts of vaccine quickly when new threats, like the Zika virus, arise.

With enough money and scientific progress, the strategy could bring a drastic change in the way the world tackles pandemics.

Now the global response often resembles a fire department racing from blaze to blaze. The coalition wants something more like a military campaign, with stores of ammunition and different weapons systems ready to be deployed as soon as a threat emerges.

In theory, health officials could even act pre-emptively — inoculating a population against a dangerous new flu or coronavirus circulating in animals before it infects many people, for example.

“We’ll have to make sure we do better than we did against Ebola,” said Bill Gates, founder of

the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, one of the largest initial donors. He has often predicted that the catastrophe most likely to kill 10 million people in the near future is a pandemic rather than nuclear war, terrorism, famine or natural disaster.

The other donors, besides the Gates Foundation, include the governments of Japan and Norway, and Britain’s Wellcome Trust. Each is putting up \$100 million to \$125 million over five years; Germany, India and the European Commission are expected to announce donations soon.

Six major vaccine makers — GlaxoSmithKline, Johnson & Johnson, Merck, Pfizer, Sanofi and Takeda — joined in the coalition as “partners” rather than donors, as did the World Health Organization and Doctors Without Borders.

Marie-Paule Kieny, the W.H.O.’s assistant director-general for innovation, said her agency would help by working with governments to streamline regulations.

Ultimately, the coalition will need billions of dollars to fulfill its ambitious plans. Members made their announcement at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in the hopes that the billionaires and corporate leaders in attendance would take notice and chip in.

The announcement was welcomed by Dr. Anthony S.

Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, which designs vaccines but must partner with private industry to produce large amounts.

“I’ve been pushing for a global health emergency fund for years,” he said, “and half a billion dollars is a good start.”

Dr. Stanley A. Plotkin, a long-time vaccine researcher and scientific adviser to the new coalition, said members debated which of 10 diseases to target first and picked three because “taking a vaccine from soup to nuts costs at least half a billion dollars.”

Even if the United States is not now a donor, he said, it already supports vast amounts of vaccine research through its bioterrorism

budget, “so I hope they’ll supplement the coalition’s work with theirs.”

New epidemics can be expected to occur regularly and spread quickly thanks to air travel, public health experts warn. Stopping them early will save lives and billions of dollars. The long-discussed idea was given new impetus by the back-to-back Ebola and Zika epidemics.

Experimental Ebola vaccines that worked in monkeys had existed for years, but had never been tested in humans or stockpiled because vaccine companies had no financial incentive to make them. Ultimately, the 2014 epidemic killed 11,000 West Africans, and isolated cases reached Britain, France, Germany, Spain and the United States.



A child born with microcephaly caused by the Zika virus, during an evaluation at Fundação Altino Ventura in Recife, Brazil. A group of prominent donors announced on January 18, 2017 that they had raised almost \$500 million for a new partnership to stop epidemics before they spiral out of control. Credit Adriana Zehbrauskas for The New York Times

No experimental vaccine was ready when Zika exploded across the Western Hemisphere, but many research teams found them easy to create in the lab because there were already vaccines against two close viral relatives, yellow fever and dengue.

The coalition's first \$500 million will be spent pursuing two goals: further development of vaccines against Lassa fever, the Nipah virus and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS); and improving the latest DNA and RNA vaccine technology, which seems like the best hope to make a true "plug and play" vaccine platform.

Those viruses were chosen, said Dr. Penny M. Heaton, the Gates Foundation's director of vaccine development, because many experts consider them the biggest threats for which experimental vaccines are already in the works.

Lassa, like Ebola, causes hemorrhagic fevers; rodents — notably the African soft-furred rat — transmit it through urine and feces.

Nipah causes deadly encephalitis and pneumonia; it circulates in Asian fruit bats and is also caught from pigs that eat fruit gnawed by bats. Outbreaks usually begin among hog farmers or people who drink date-palm sap fouled with bat urine.

MERS is a coronavirus related to SARS that also causes acute, deadly pneumonia. It originates in bats and circulates among camels, and can prompt large hospital outbreaks, especially when patients are crowded together and staff members do not wear protective masks.

The coalition will pick two experimental vaccines against each virus and pay vaccine companies to prove they work in monkeys, are safe for humans and induce what are thought to be protective levels of antibodies in humans.

After that, modest amounts will be stockpiled — ideally within five years.

Scientists obviously cannot test vaccines by giving healthy humans lethal doses of incurable diseases. So the ultimate test will be to see if the stockpiled version stops the next outbreak that occurs in nature.

Bringing a new vaccine to market can take 20 years and cost up to \$1 billion, and candidates usually disappear in the "valley of death" — the many expensive steps required between showing that a lab-brewed concoction protects mice or monkeys, and rolling out a factory-line version proven safe to inject into millions of humans.

The coalition aims to move candidates far enough across that valley so they can stop an outbreak and see if full-fledged

production is justified.

RNA and DNA technology involves injecting a virus's genes to provoke the immune system to make both antibodies and white blood cells primed to attack the virus.

But RNA and DNA can break down, or fail to penetrate cell membranes or to trigger protein-coding. So various "platforms" are being tried, such as folding them into larger shapes or chemically gluing them onto microscopic beads.

Once the technical issues are solved, the method will have great promise. Large amounts of vaccine could be made much faster than, for example, growing vaccine in fertilized chicken eggs.

Thorny legal issues, however, remain — including who will hold patents on innovations developed with coalition funds and who will be held legally liable if anyone dies or is harmed during vaccine trials.

"We have not sorted out all the intellectual property problems yet, but I'm confident we can," said Dr. Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Trust.

Any fund recipient would have to guarantee that its vaccines would be priced for poor countries as well as rich ones, he said.

On the liability issue, Dr. Farrar added, the coalition likes an American model — the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program, under which vaccine makers cannot be sued but must contribute to a fund that compensates anyone hurt by a vaccine.

Andrew P. Witty, chairman of GlaxoSmithKline, or GSK, who joined the Davos announcement, said the industry preferred protection like that of the United States' 2005 Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act, which exempts vaccine makers from all liability — except for willful misconduct — once the secretary of health and human services declares a public health emergency.

The United Nations or W.H.O. will have to help protect the industry, Mr. Witty said.

His company is willing to devote a slice of one of its research facilities to the coalition's goals and to conduct up to \$50 million worth of research on a nonprofit basis. GSK will do so, Mr. Witty said, "first, because it's the right thing to do when the world is up against it, and, second, because it prevents disruption of our business."

The world's vaccine companies have no factories sitting idle for emergencies, he said, "so when a crisis hits, as the biggest





company, we get the first call — and we have to stop doing other stuff.”

With assurances that good manufacturing processes would be followed, he said, GSK could be willing during an epidemic to let vaccine companies in India or Brazil, for example, use the company’s patented techniques to make vaccines.

Source: The New York Times, January 18, 2017

Japan, Asian Development Bank to promote universal health care in Asia-Pacific

By Shusuke Murai and Kazuaki Nagata



Takehiko Nakao, president of Asian Development Bank, speaks on May 4, 2017 at the Pacifico Yokohama convention center during the ADB’s 50th annual meeting. | SHUSUKE MURAI

In response to rapidly aging populations in Asia and the Pacific, the government and the Asian Development Bank have agreed to cooperate on strengthening efforts to boost universal health coverage in the regions based on Japan’s health system.

The Manila-based financial institution and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), a governmental entity that carries out Japan’s official development assistance, signed a

memorandum of understanding to cooperate in areas such as health policy formulation and medical workforce development. The two institutions will also cofinance the building of basic health- and welfare-related infrastructure.

The signing took place at the international bank’s annual meeting, which kicked off on May 4, 2017 at the Pacifico Yokohama convention center in Yokohama.

Attended by some 4,000 people, including key officials of governments, central banks, other financial institutions and NGOs, the meeting, which also marked the 50th anniversary of the ADB’s establishment, is scheduled to run through Sunday. The officials will discuss issues in the Asia and Pacific regions, including poverty, women’s empowerment, sustainable societies, infrastructure development and health care.

“Health issues arising from aging are a critical challenge to Asia,” said ADB President Takehiko Nakao of Japan. To establish efficient health care systems is important for growth in the regions, where graying is expected to accelerate further, he added.

“In 2016, one in eight people in our region was aged 60 or above. By 2050, it will be one in four,” said Nakao. “In the face of this situation, promoting universal health coverage, which is fundamental to equality and fairness among people is essential to maintain sustained growth.”

Also at the event was Minoru Kihara, senior vice minister of finance. He said that, as a country where universal health coverage has been provided since 1961, Japan can become a role model for rest of Asia on how to establish a sustainable delivery amid an aging society.

“In the coming years, as many Asian countries are forecast to experience aging societies far earlier than European nations, we are facing a challenge of realizing UHC and training people to deal with prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases such as cancer, diabetes and dementia,” Kihara said during the meeting’s first session, which was hosted by the Japanese government.

Another speaker, JICA President Shinichi Kitaoka said: “As a pioneer country of aging, Japan is ready to share its experiences and lessons learned with other countries that will face similar situations in the near future.”

Meanwhile, Nakao dismissed the view that the rising profile of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, a China-led investment bank that is often cited as a potential rival of the ADB, would adversely affect ADB operations. He said it should be viewed as a cooperative partner rather than a competitor.

“I don’t think we would change our business model” because of the AIIB, Nakao said at a news conference after the first session.

ADB also announced it will launch initiatives to promote public-private partnerships in which public entities and private firms work together on projects that benefit the public by using more efficient private-sector expertise.

One of the new ADB programs, called the Infrastructure Referee Program, will provide consultations when public and private-sectors entities have disagreements.

Source: Japan Times, May 4, 2017

New Southbound Policy: Trade, medical help turns into shared policymaking

By Chen Wei-han / Staff reporter

SETTING AN EXAMPLE: Taiwan could help its partner nations build an efficient and affordable healthcare system, and offer training courses to medical professionals

The “new southbound policy,” launched by the administration of President Tsai Ing-wen aims to diversify and boost social and cultural ties between Taiwan and 16 ASEAN and South Asian nations, as well as Australia and New Zealand.

Extensive cooperation with partner nations is under way in the fields of medicine, agriculture and tourism. It is evolving the nature of relations from medical assistance and agricultural trade to healthcare policy planning and technological exchanges.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Taiwan has long cooperated with its Southeast Asian partners in epidemic prevention, birth control and treatment of rare diseases and deformities, and the scope of cooperation has expanded from a purely medical context to public health planning on a governmental level.

Taiwan’s medical collaboration with partner Southeast Asian nations has included organ transplants, orthognathic surgeries for cleft palates, bone marrow transplants, and surgeries for morbidly obese people and conjoined twins, but the focus has shifted toward public health policy planning and health system reform, a Ministry of Health and Welfare official said.

Taiwan is known for its affordable and universal healthcare system and hospital efficiency, and the nation’s experience has been emulated by nations seeking to develop an efficient healthcare system, International Cooperation Office Technical Superintendent Hsu Min-huei told the Taipei Times on May 18.

“For example, the nation’s healthcare smart card system allows public health authorities to manage personal healthcare information. Coupled with a well-designed insurance coverage and auditing system, the system reduces administrative costs and helps reduce healthcare fraud to almost zero,” Hsu said.

“In many nations, most health insurance premiums are paid for services that are not actually performed and Taiwan has paid what might be the lowest cost [in providing necessary services], which is a good example for nations that are developing an affordable healthcare system,” he said.

Malaysia has emulated Taiwan in developing its own universal healthcare system, he added.

Advantech Co Ltd, the nation’s biggest industrial computer maker, has developed a healthcare information system and surgical instruments with embedded information systems to enable the digitization of hospital management, such as a digital registration system and electronic medical records that are essential parts of an efficient healthcare system, Hsu said.

“The government and business sector are ready to help the nation’s partners transition to a more productive and cost-effective healthcare system,” he said.

Taiwan is offering training to partner nations to cultivate teachers in areas of essential and advanced surgeries, with at least 100 professional courses to be offered this year.

A group of Vietnamese physicians have received training on kidney transplants, and they will become pioneers in that area and pass on their expertise to new physicians, Hsu said.

The cooperation would involve government-to-government dialogue in which medical and public health goals would be determined, followed by their execution by a team of academics and private-sector specialists to ensure that medical agreements are followed through, he said.

The Global Cooperation Training Framework — an initiative by Taiwan and the US to expand cooperation on humanitarian assistance, public health, environmental protection, energy, technology, education and regional development — would provide a platform for cooperation between Taiwan and its partners, he said.

A workshop on the diagnosis of mosquito-borne diseases, such as dengue fever, Zika and Chikungunya fever, organized last month under the policy was attended by 15 of the 18 nations, which can be a basis for regular and extended cooperation, Hsu said.

A workshop on the diagnosis of mosquito-borne diseases, such as dengue fever, Zika and Chikungunya fever, organized last month under the policy was attended by 15 of the 18 nations, which can be a basis for regular and extended cooperation, Hsu said.

AGRICULTURE

The collaborative relationships between Taiwan and Southeast Asian nations have shifted from trade in agricultural products to more extensive technological exchanges and cooperation, with Taiwanese farmers and businesses exporting entire production lines to partner nations.

To cooperate with local industries and introduce sustainable and high-quality farming, priority has been given to the export of crop seeds and seed technologies, fertilizers, pesticides, animal feeds, halal-certified products, biological pest control



Ministry of Health and Welfare International Cooperation Office Technical Superintendent Hsu Min-huei speaks at a news conference in Taipei on May 8. Photo: Liao Cheng-hui, Taipei Times

methods and agricultural equipment and machinery, Council of Agriculture (COA) Department of International Affairs Director Grace Lih-fang Lin said on May 24.

Taiwan is seeking closer relations with core partner nations India, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as Australia and the Philippines, which have each signed a memorandum of understanding with Taiwan on agricultural issues, the COA said.

There are different agricultural collaboration plans for each nation: Taiwan is seeking to work with India on seed cultivation and production; with Malaysia on greenhouse farming; with Thailand on biological pest control methods and greenhouse farming; with Vietnam on pedigree boar and breeding stock; and with Indonesia on irrigation and high-value crop farming.

Explaining the so-called “whole factory export” model that is being promoted as the main form of agricultural cooperation, Lin gave greenhouses as an example, saying that an entire facility — from its “hardware,” such as sensors, control systems, automated irrigation and lighting, to “software,” such as seeds, fertilizers and grafting methods — would be exported to partner nations.

Such facilities, which are in high demand in Malaysia, could become a “demonstration garden” and introduce Taiwanese crops, farming techniques and agricultural machinery to partner nations to achieve large-scale cooperation and regional integration, she said.

“That provides a golden opportunity for both Taiwan and its partners, as they can transplant Taiwanese species and farming techniques — which are arguably more efficient than what is available locally — on their soil, allowing Taiwanese industries to better adapt to the local climate and business environment,” Lin said.

The gardens — which are to be first established in Malaysia and Thailand — have the potential to expand into a fully grown industry, such as greenhouse vegetable and organic farms, to integrate Taiwanese techniques with local capital, she said.

Taiwan also offers training to farmers from the partner nations to become seed teachers, and introduce Taiwanese farming systems and techniques to their home nations, Lin said. Training and short-term work permits had already been provided to Vietnamese, Thai and Philippine farmers, and following the advent of the policy, the practice was extended to Indonesian and Indian farmers, with the number of participants growing, she said.

TOURISM

Since the launch of the policy a year ago, Taiwan has added Thailand and Brunei to its visa-waiver program in addition to Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand. Indian, Vietnamese, Philippine, Indonesian, Burmese, Cambodian and Laotian travelers can also apply for a visa waiver if they hold a valid US or Canadian visa, and if not, they can apply for a Taiwan

travel authorization certificate online.

The waiver program and a streamlined visa application process work well with Southeast Asian tourists who often travel on last-minute flights and the policy last year led to one of the largest increases in the number of visitors from Southeast Asian nations, Tourism Bureau specialist Alice Ko said on May 19.

Visa-free entry for Thais has led to a 170 percent increase in the number of visitors from that nation, and there was a more than 50 percent increase in Vietnamese, Philippine, Indonesian, Indian, Burmese and Laotian travelers, government statistics show.

The Cabinet has announced a plan to extend the visa-waiver program to Indonesia, India, the Philippines, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia within three years to boost exchanges.

Efforts to transform Taiwan into a Muslim-friendly nation are under way, and a total of 104 hotels and restaurants in the nation have received halal certification, most of which are located in northern Taiwan, the most popular destination for Southeast Asian travelers, Ko said.

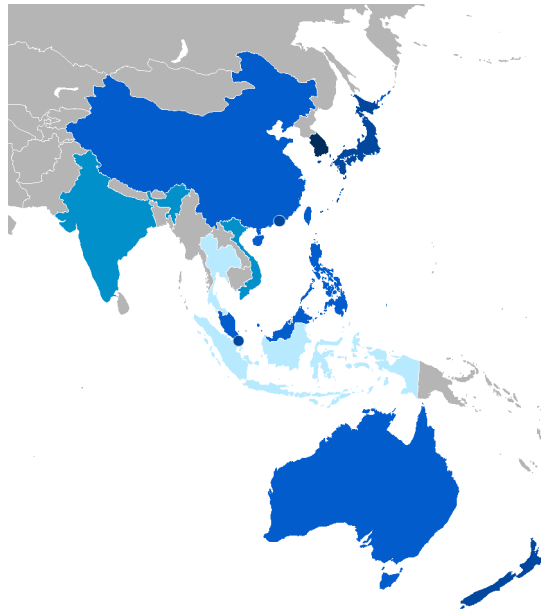
Despite being a non-Muslim nation, Taiwan is a popular destination for Muslims and the government is to expand the halal certification program, and increase the availability of prayer rooms and bidets, while seeking to harness the talents of Muslim immigrants and their children to connect with Muslim travelers, particularly with Indonesians and Malaysians, she said.

A tour-guide training program targeting Southeast Asian immigrants and students has led to an increase of about 200 certified guides and on-site tour guides are available at selected tourist attractions for visitors not traveling with a group, Ko said.

“The ‘human-centered exchange’ feature of the ‘new southbound policy’ will ensure that more Southeast Asian travelers can appreciate Taiwanese culture, which would lead to deeper business, cultural and diplomatic ties between Taiwan and the region,” Executive Yuan Senior Executive Officer Howard Song said on May 19.

The Taipei Times is to publish a series of articles focusing on President Tsai Ing-wen’s government’s “new southbound policy” in collaboration with the Office of Trade Negotiations of the Executive Yuan. The articles are to be printed every Saturday.

Source: Taipei Times, June 3, 2017



Thanks to ‘rejuvenation,’ definition of elderly should go up 10 years, Japanese researchers say

By Tomoko Otake / Staff Writer



A woman exercises with wooden dumbbells during an event marking Respect for the Aged Day at a temple in Tokyo on Sept. 19. A group of researchers is proposing redefining elderly to age 75 and older, saying senior citizens are rejuvenated compared with decades ago. | BLOOMBERG

In January, when researchers specializing in aging studies proposed that Japan redefine “elderly” as being aged 75 and older — instead of the current 65 — it raised more than a few eyebrows.

In a nation with a rapidly aging population, where the sustainability of the social security system is a top concern, the proposal set off fears in some circles that it could inspire the government to further push back the retirement age, forcing people to work beyond 65 and denying them pensions for another 10 years. It also left many young people worried that seniors will never leave the workforce, threatening their career prospects.

But Yasuyoshi Ouchi, who headed a committee of experts from the Japan Gerontological Society and the Japan Geriatrics Society that jointly came up with the proposal, said the conclusion was purely based on science. He said they found that older people in Japan are becoming “rejuvenated” by an average of five to 10 years, biologically and intellectually, compared with those a decade or two ago.

“We started our research with the question, ‘Why are over-65 people so robust and active these days?’” Ouchi, director at Toranomon Hospital in Tokyo who himself is 68, told a briefing at the Foreign Press Center in Tokyo last week. “Our proposal is not a political slogan. We tried to examine things from a purely scientific perspective.”

The current definition of elderly is based on the World Health Organization’s statement from 1956, which defines a society where people over 65 make up 7 percent or more of its population as “aging.” But the definition is out of sync with the situation today, as the health conditions of older people have significantly improved, Ouchi said.

He pointed to a number of studies that underscore the trend. The mortality rate and the rate of people seeking medical care for strokes have gone down since the mid-1990s, Ouchi

said, quoting a large-scale study of residents that compared the rates in three age groups: 65 to 69, 70 to 74 and 75 to 79.

A separate study by the National Institute for Longevity Sciences covers a randomly selected group of 2,300 residents aged 40 to 79 in two communities in Aichi Prefecture. The study revealed that walking speed has improved in recent years, with those aged 75 to 79 in 2006 walking as fast as those aged 65 to 69 in 1997.

A variety of IQ tests given by the institute in 2000 and 2010 showed that the intellectual capacity of people in their 70s in 2010 was comparable to that of people in their 60s in 2000, Ouchi noted. In one test, participants were asked to recite a series of numbers in the order given or in reverse, while in another, they were shown an unfinished picture and asked to complete it.

He attributed the improvements in health conditions to better medical and health care, as well as improved nutrition and sanitation standards.

“It is becoming harder for Japanese people to come down with illnesses,” he said. “Intellectual tests also show that, while results vary from test to test, overall improvements have been seen.”

Given the “rejuvenation” of physical and intellectual abilities by five to 20 years, Ouchi said the researchers decided on pushing to redefine elderly.

He emphasized that he wants the group’s proposal to spark discussion, both at home and abroad, on giving elderly people the option to remain productive in society after 65, instead of requiring that they all retire.

But he also noted that the key is ensuring flexibility in the system so they can choose whether to keep on working. “If the government tries to use our proposal to uniformly delay the age at which people can receive pensions to 75, we will oppose it,” Ouchi stressed. “There are a lot of frail seniors, and the safety net for them needs to be securely in place.

“But there are a lot of people who can work, in either paid or unpaid forms, in their old age. To create a system where such people are given the option to remain in the workforce is important, as they can help support the frail seniors and sustain our social security system. At the same time, we need to respect the views of people who don’t want to keep working, who want to chill out and enjoy themselves with hobbies.”

Will this “rejuvenation” trend continue in the future? Are we getting closer to achieving immortality? Ouchi is not optimistic.

“There is no guarantee

Yasuyoshi Ouchi | KYODO



that the trend will be here 50 to 70 years later,” he said. “Obesity among children is increasing, and young people are not exercising as much. If we don’t manage the health of young people now, the rejuvenation might end up being a fleeting phenomenon.”

A Matter of Health covers current research, technology or policy issues relating to health in Japan.

Source: Japan Times, July 26, 2017

The Best Thing to Eat Before a Workout? Maybe Nothing at All

By Gretchen Reynolds

For those who can stomach it, working out before breakfast may be more beneficial for health than eating first, according to a study of meal timing and physical activity. Its results indicate that when we eat affects how much fat we burn during exercise and also alters molecular activity within fat cells, in ways that could have long-term implications for our physical well-being.

Athletes and scientists have long known that meal timing affects performance. Most obviously, if you eat first, you have relatively high levels of blood sugar. Working muscles can readily use this sugar as fuel.

If, on the other hand, you have fasted before working out, your muscles must rely primarily on the body’s skimpy supply of stored carbohydrates or its larger reservoirs of fat. Accessing this fat, however, requires extra metabolic steps to become available as energy, which makes it a relatively inefficient fuel source during times of strenuous exercise. As a general rule, the body tends to turn to fat as its primary fuel source when exercise is more moderate.

Knowing this, many athletes experiment with meal timing, often training hard on an empty stomach, in hopes that this strategy will encourage their bodies to become more adept at using fat as a fuel.

But these efforts obviously have focused on sports performance. Far less has been known about how meal timing and exercise might affect general health.

So for the new study, which was published this month in *The American Journal of Physiology — Endocrinology and Metabolism*, researchers from the University of Bath in England decided to home in on relatively average people and their fat cells.

Most of us probably do not realize how busy and physiologically bossy our body fat can be. But in recent years, scientists have established that fat cells constantly make and excrete a wide variety of substances that influence other systems and organs in the body.

The British scientists suspected that eating before exercise might affect the production of these substances.

To find out, they first recruited 10 overweight and sedentary but otherwise healthy young men, whose lifestyles are, for better and worse, representative of those of most of us. (They did not recruit women because it is difficult to control for the effects

of the menstrual cycle on metabolism; they hope to study women in the future.)

They tested the men’s fitness and resting metabolic rates and took samples of their blood and fat tissue.

Then, on two separate morning visits to the scientists’ lab, each man walked for an hour on a treadmill at a moderate pace that, in theory, should allow his body to rely principally on fat for fuel.



Getty Images

Before one of these workouts, the men skipped breakfast, meaning that they exercised on a completely empty stomach, after a prolonged overnight fast.

On the other occasion, they ate a substantial, 600-calorie morning meal, supplied by the scientists, of toast, jam, cereal, milk and orange juice about two hours before they started walking.

Just before and an hour after each workout, the scientists took additional samples of the men’s blood and fat tissue.

Then they compared the samples.

There were considerable differences. Most obviously, the men displayed lower blood sugar levels at the start of their workouts when they had skipped breakfast than when they had eaten. As a result, they burned more fat during walks on an empty stomach than when they had eaten first. On the other hand, they burned slightly more calories, on average, during the workout after breakfast than after fasting.

But it was the impacts deep within the fat cells that may have been the most consequential, the researchers found. Multiple genes behaved differently, depending on whether someone had eaten or not before walking.

Many of these genes produce proteins that can improve blood sugar regulation and insulin levels throughout the body and so are associated with improved metabolic health. These genes were much more active when the men had fasted before exercise than when they had breakfasted.

The implication of these results is that to gain the greatest health benefits from exercise, it may be wise to skip eating first, said Dylan Thompson, the director of health research at the University of Bath and senior author of the study.

This was a very small, short-term study, though. It can’t tell us whether other types of meal timing such as, for instance, skipping lunch before an afternoon workout will produce similar

effects or if the acute changes seen in fat burning and gene expression after fasting will necessarily translate into lingering health improvements over time. The results also do not suggest, I am sorry to say, that fasting before exercise will accelerate weight loss. In fact, in this study, eating before exercise resulted in the men burning more calories during their workout than

fasting.

In other words, many questions must still be investigated before scientists can offer recommendations about eating before exercise, Dr. Thompson said. But he will not be surprised, he said, if subsequent data reveal that working out on an empty stomach has advantages.

“If we just think of this in evo-

lutionary terms,” he said, “our ancestors would have had to expend a great deal of energy through physical activity in order to hunt and gather food. So, it would be perfectly normal for the exercise to come first, and the food to follow.”

Source: News York Times, April 26, 2017

Worry too much? Optimism grows with age: poll

By Matt Sedensky, Associated Press (AP)

Feel down about getting older? Wish your life was better? Worried about all the problems that come with age?

A new survey suggests you need only wait: Many pessimistic feelings held by people earlier in life take an optimistic turn as they move toward old age.

Even hallmark concerns of old age — about declining health, lack of independence and memory loss — lessen as Americans age.

“The younger generation is less optimistic,” said Dr. Zia Agha, chief medical officer at West Health, a nonprofit focused on aging issues whose related research institute released the poll on March 22, 2017 with the independent research organization NORC at the University of Chicago. “Perhaps as they age they will build resilience and they build the capacity that will help them cope better.”

Generally speaking, optimism about growing older increased steadily with age, the poll found. Among people in their 30s, 46 percent described themselves as mostly or somewhat optimistic about aging, compared with 66 percent of people 70 and older.

Likewise, respondents showed a decade-by-decade increase in feeling confident, not helpless, about aging, and in assessing their household finances positively.

When asked to rate their quality of life, people noted an improvement as they moved from their 50s to their 60s and beyond. Among respondents 70 and older, two-thirds rated their life excellent or very good, compared to about half of 30-somethings.

Among some metrics, pessimism appears to grow as people move out of their 30s into middle age before falling late in life. Those 70 and older were least likely to express worry about age bringing poor health, a move into a nursing home or memory loss.

They also were least likely to fear old age could prompt them to be disrespected or become a burden on their families. People in their 60s and beyond had the lowest fear of losing their independence.

Other research has pointed to greater satisfaction, happiness and optimism among older people.

Agha said the latest survey reflects the idea that people often find in their later years a growing appreciation for facets of life they may have focused on less when they were younger,



In this April 1, 2005 file photo, an 81-year-old woman holds the hand of her 100-year-old mother in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. (AP)

including spirituality and personal relationships. Fulfillment from those things can help bolster overall happiness, even in the face of potential physical decline.

The NORC-West Health poll also found those 70 and older were also less likely than younger people to feel that seniors are forgotten in America today or that they receive too little respect.

Not surprisingly, older people were less likely to see the age of 65 as a marker of old age. About four in 10 people in their 30s regarded that number as symbolic of reaching old age, twice as large a share as those in their 70s or beyond.

Source: China Post, March 24, 2017

Hospital aims to make physical therapy more fun

By Lee I-chia / Staff reporter

As many people find physical therapy boring and frustrating, Taipei Veterans General Hospital has developed an intelligent rehabilitation system that combines therapy with gaming to help patients focus and find a sense of fun during treatment.

The system combines wearable sensor devices, virtual reality and cloud computing, which allows people to do physical therapy at home or in hospital. It was put to use last month after gaining approval.

During the initial deployment phase, the hospital is focusing on people with adhesive capsulitis — a condition also known as frozen shoulder, which is characterized by stiffness and pain in the shoulder joint.

Lee Si-huei, an attending physician at the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, said the hospital designed a game in which people with frozen shoulders perform movements along with cartoon characters that are displayed onscreen, making the treatment process more fun and easy.

“The patients do not have to remember the movements or how many times [they have to do them]. They only have to turn on the computer and do the movements along with the program,” she said.

The system can also pick up readings on the user’s physical condition and set a more suitable therapy session for them. The information can also serve as a reference for designing



better medical devices.

“Physical therapy could last for a long period, so we tried to add some fun elements, hoping to increase patients’ motivation and make them more focused during the process,” Lee said.

Physical therapy for people with frozen shoulders can take up to seven years and some people find it difficult to visit the hospital regularly, she added.

The hospital’s experiment on two groups of patients with frozen shoulders — two sessions per week for three weeks — showed that those using the intelligent rehabilitation system have seen a marked improvement compared with those using conventional therapy, Lee said

The system gives people more flexibility, as they can easily fit the physical therapy sessions into their daily schedules and do them wherever they want, and return to the hospital after a certain period to adjust their exercise regime based on their progress, Lee said.

As the system works through the Internet, family members of the patients who are often busy or live overseas can also participate in the physical therapy process, she added.

Source: Taipei Times, April 26, 2017



Tibetan medicine attracting people in search of drug-free treatment, cures

Agence France-Presse (AFP), DHARAMSALA, India

Before dawn in the Indian Himalayas, scores of patients clutching small vials of urine line up patiently to see Yeshe Dhonden, a Tibetan monk who became a legend as personal healer to the Dalai Lama.

Tibetan medicine, known as Sowa-Rigpa, draws on centuries-old techniques such as blood-letting, cupping, and moxibustion — burning herbs on energy points of the body — to try to heal ailments.

The practice draws on aspects of traditional Chinese medicine and India’s Ayurvedic system as well as its own unique theories and treatments. It also

features spiritual practices including meditation and Buddhist prayer.

Today it attracts devotees from all over the globe, hoping for help with conditions from back pain to cancer and degenerative diseases.

“If the sick come to me I will take care of them,” Dhonden said at his private clinic in McLeodganj, surrounded by Tibetan scrolls and beaming images of his most famous client.

Dhonden — who spent three decades tending the health of Tibet’s spiritual leader — relies on his senses to divine what ails patients.

“I don’t go for tests like X-ray

and all. I trust myself. I just test the pulse and the urine,” he said.

A touch at the wrist is how he ascertains the health of vital organs and blood pressure.

The urine, held in a white porcelain cup, is stirred with two small bamboo sticks. Color, bubble formation, sediment and smell can all shape the diagnosis.

Devotees swear Tibetan medicine works, though few scientific studies have been conducted into its efficacy. The teachings — contained in about 2,000 textbooks and the messages of the Buddha, considered the guardian deity for all spiritual healers — are believed to have

originated in Tibet.

However, as it features elements of both ancient Chinese and Indian healing practices, and is rapidly evolving from a niche tradition into popular alternative treatment, both nations have scrambled to claim it as their own.

The Asian giants last month nominated Tibetan medicine for inclusion on a UNESCO list for “intangible culture.” China and India have engaged in countless spats over the Tibetan community since New Delhi granted sanctuary to the Dalai Lama in 1959.

The traditions of Tibetan medicine are based on four root texts known as the “tantras” that evolved in two medical colleges, Chakpori and Men-Tsee-Khang, in the Tibetan capital, Lhasa.

These tantras classify thousands of diseases into separate categories, with unique mixtures of herbs and minerals — mostly sourced from the upper reaches of the Himalayas — listed as remedies for each ailment.

“We believe diseases are caused when our inner energies are imbalanced,” said Tsewang Tam Din, a medical practitioner at the McLeodganj branch of the Men-Tsee Khang school, one of many across India.

Taking a delicate golden hammer, Din demonstrated how healers heat the instrument over fire and place it against the body to offset pain and other common malaises.

“The idea behind our medicine system is that one should not have to take medication all his life for chronic problems like

arthritis and diabetes,” Din said in McLeodganj, nicknamed “Little Lhasa” for the large Tibetan community residing there.

The increasing popularity of Buddhism in the West, as well as a global Tibetan diaspora has helped spread awareness about its unique alternative medicine.

However, like other Eastern health treatments, it is viewed with skepticism among the conventional medical fraternity.

A lack of standardization and clinical trials means it will be some time before Tibetan medicine can go mainstream, cardiologist D. Prabhakaran from the Public Health Foundation of India said.

However, even doubters acknowledge the natural treatment appears to assist some patients in certain cases.

“I know of anecdotal examples where people with terminal diseases have lived much longer than predicted after taking Tibetan medicine,” Prabhakaran said. “I think there’s a lot of empathy towards the patient in Tibetan medicine. Basically it comes from the thinking of Buddhism and that may be one of the reasons why it’s becoming more popular.”

In 2010, India officially recognized Tibetan medicine as a “science of healing” and enshrined it within the nation’s health-care system, paving the way for future research and investment into the spiritual discipline.

Source: Taipei Times, May 15, 2017



Tibetan medical practitioner Yeshi Dhonden sits inside a room at his Tibetan Herbal Clinic in Dharamsala, India, on March 23, 2017. Photo: AFP

Entrepreneurs use their diseases as springboard for business success

By Tomoko Otake

Despite calls for diversity in the workplace and “work-style reforms” being debated in the government, Japan has yet to come up with a way to fully utilize the talent of all who wish to work, especially those with rare and incurable diseases.

Entering and remaining in the workforce is a huge challenge for them, as there are no established cures for their illnesses and their prognosis is hard to predict or control.

Jun Sakurai, a 29-year-old Osaka resident, is among a small but robust group of entrepreneurs trying to carve out a career while coping with such a predicament. They say they want to turn their medical conditions and experiences into something positive and propose unique business ideas and solutions, instead of only being on the receiving end of health care and welfare.

For Sakurai, who has battled a rare neurological disorder for more than two years, giving up one job after another due to stints in hospital has meant the only viable career option left was to set up his own company.

Sakurai founded the travel agency Sakura Star Travel in Osaka in December, aiming to meet the tourism needs of people with disabilities, including those in wheelchairs.

Sakurai said he chose tourism because that’s what he enjoys most and has expertise in. After graduating from university in 2011, he worked for a travel agency in Osaka, planning and selling tours to wealthy doctors.

But in summer 2014, when he visited a clinic for a cold, the doctor saw the way he was walking and detected something strange. A detailed checkup found that Sakurai could not walk in a straight line, tended to lose balance more easily than others and had lost reflexes in his limbs.

Soon he started tripping up on the small raised bumps on tactile tiles for visually impaired people on train station platforms. He was diagnosed with chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy (CIPD), a rare disease caused by damage to the covering of the nerves called myelin. The disorder affects only 1 or 2 in 100,000 people, with the number of patients estimated at 2,000 in Japan and 5,000-10,000 in the U.S., according to the health ministry and U.S.-based patient support group GBS/CIPD Foundation International.

By the time he entered a hospital for another long stay in November, he had quit four jobs — ranging from a tour



Sakura Star Travel founder Jun Sakurai poses with employee Keiko Ota as he receives a company registration certificate at the Osaka Prefectural Government in December. | JUN SAKURAI



Tsutomu Kushima, who runs a magazine for people with inflammatory bowel diseases, says it makes sense for people with rare diseases to set up their own business. | TOMOKO OTAKE

coordinator to sales and accounting — and had endured a series of intensive inpatient therapies, including a whole-body plasma exchange.

“I spend more than half a year in hospitals,” Sakurai recently said by phone. “I spend much of my time looking out the window, wanting to see a landscape far away.”

During the latest stint Sakurai made travel arrangements to visit the Koshiki islets, three small islands in Kagoshima Prefecture, where he had never been but had planned a group tour for the wealthy doctors during his first job.

With the help of a local acquaintance, who arranged pick-ups and visits to sightseeing spots, he thoroughly enjoyed the two-day trip, he said.

“I felt so happy, being congratulated by locals I met for having overcome my conditions to travel,” he said. “I felt so thankful and felt like going there again with a friend who is in a wheelchair.”

After coming back from the tour, Sakurai, together with the friend, Keiko Ota, who has an incurable disease called Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease, decided to create a travel agency that caters to the needs of others with mobility issues. The two met at an academic conference on chronic neurological diseases last August.

Ota, a 42-year-old researcher who teaches welfare policy at a nursing school, said the two aspire to create a sustainable business model where people with incurable diseases can earn an income by themselves instead of relying on disability pensions or other financial support from the government.

Experts say there are roughly 7,000 incurable diseases in Japan. Incurable diseases are defined as those where an onset mechanism is not clear, they have no established treatment method, and they are rare and require long-term care.

Of them, 306 are shitei nanbyo (designated incurable diseases), which meet the additional conditions of patient numbers not surpassing a certain size and having an objective diagnostic standard.

About 1.5 million people in Japan have designated rare diseases, with public health care available at a reduced cost (a 20 percent co-payment instead of 30 percent).

Many of them, including Sakurai and Ota, have also been certified as physically disabled. People with disabilities are

eligible for public assistance, such as disability pensions, tax reductions or exemptions, domestic help services and subsidies for welfare equipment, though the range of services available depends on the degree of their disability.

“I cannot work 30 hours a week, work five days or do overtime like other people,” said Ota, who uses a wheelchair. “I have problems with walking. But I can work from home, if I can rest when I need to. Setting up a business is possible, and I can work even at night.”

Tsutomu Kushima, a 53-year-old Crohn’s disease patient who runs a publishing company in Saitama Prefecture, agreed it makes sense for people with rare diseases to become their own boss.

For them to succeed in business, the key is to have someone else in the company who can take over when they get seriously sick, he said.

Kushima set up Mikumo-sha in 2000 with two other Crohn’s disease patients he became acquainted with through a mailing list for people with the disease, which causes inflammation of the bowels and can lead to abdominal pain, severe diarrhea, fatigue and weight loss.

The CC Japan, a magazine the company publishes every two months, is mainly geared toward the estimated 200,000 people in Japan with inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD), including 170,000 people with ulcerative colitis and 30,000 others with Crohn’s disease.

The magazine, which provides a range of feature articles, such as the latest therapies and interviews with patients who defy the statistics and thrive in whichever career they have chosen, currently has a circulation of about 20,000, according to Kushima.

“When we first started publishing the magazine in 2001, all of our staff were people with IBD,” he said.

“But we diversified our staff to include people with other kinds of diseases after all of us once wound up in a hospital at the same time.”

Kushima, who was diagnosed in the mid-1980s at the age of 23, has had serious bouts, and was hospitalized for months last year, including in an intensive care unit at one point.

He said the downside of running a business entirely staffed by people who are also patients was it could sometimes



Mari Matsunaga, a Crohn's disease patient who runs a bakery in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward, says working right next to home suits her needs. | TOMOKO OTAKE

lead to a situation where nobody sympathizes with you even when you get severely sick.

"You really have to be self-reliant," he said.

"At the same time, having consideration for other workers is important, because it's not just you who are trying to balance life and work."

Mari Matsunaga, 48, runs the Blau Mohn bakery in the trendy Yoyogi-Uehara district of Tokyo. A Crohn's disease patient, she set up the shop in 2000 along with her husband, a fellow Crohn's disease patient whom she met at a vocational school reunion.

Her petite bakery features a variety of bread, but some are "bowel friendly" types — which are low-fat, and free of additives or preservatives.

"It all started out from my need to bake bread that I could eat," she said at the bakery adjacent to the couple's home. "My disease requires me to reduce the intake of fat, as it can cause inflammation of the bowel system. I also must watch out for fiber. I can't eat mushrooms or wakame (seaweed), which could cause a polyp or an ileus."

Her love of bread-making has helped her overcome such constraints and create low-fat, trans fat-free bread that is not only healthy but tastes good.

The store is open on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, with Matsunaga spending the rest of her week making dough and seeing a doctor.

"The key to running a business is ensuring you love what you do. If you don't, it won't last," said Matsunaga, who has worked at several companies but had to quit, due in large part to the need to make frequent toilet trips.

"Commuting was highly stressful for me, so being able to work right next to home is most important."

Michiyo Ito, an industrial health expert and lecturer at Tokyo Health Care University, said that ideally everyone who wishes to remain employed should be able to do so.

Setting up a business should not be the only option left, as it is a high-risk career path, she said.

She said as it is, many people have been forced to quit their jobs because of their employer's lack of understanding on the instability and unpredictability of their conditions.

But attempts by people to utilize their disease experi-

ences should also be encouraged, Ito said, noting that more researchers were now shedding light on "stress-related growth" or "post-traumatic growth," referring to improvements in the quality of life and mental well-being of people who have survived severe life experiences, including coping with incurable diseases.

Ito echoed the view of Kushima that, for such people to succeed in business, it's important to have a backup system ready in case the business owner becomes sick.

"Whether that be working within a company or running your own business, the key is having someone else available to take over your job when needed," she said.

Source: Japan Times, March 24, 2017

Getting Older, Sleeping Less

By Jane E. Brody



Insomnia is like a thief in the night, robbing millions — especially those older than 60 — of much-needed restorative sleep. As the king laments in Shakespeare's "Henry IV, Part 2": O sleep, O gentle sleep, Nature's soft nurse, how have I frightened thee. That thou no more will weigh my eyelids down, And steep my senses in forgetfulness?

The causes of insomnia are many, and they increase in number and severity as people age. Yet the problem is often overlooked during routine checkups, which not only diminishes the quality of an older person's life but may also cause or aggravate physical and emotional disorders, including symptoms of cognitive loss.

Most everyone experiences episodic insomnia, a night during which the body seems to have forgotten how to sleep a requisite number of hours, if at all. As distressing as that may seem at the time, it pales in comparison to the effects on people for whom insomnia — difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep or awakening much too early — is a nightly affair.

A survey done in 1995 by researchers at the National Institute on Aging among more than 9,000 people aged 65 and older living in three communities revealed that 42 percent reported difficulty with both falling asleep and staying asleep.

The numbers affected are likely to be much larger now that millions spend their pre-sleep hours looking at electronic

screens that can disrupt the body's biological rhythms.

Insomnia, Dr. Alon Y. Avidan says, "is a symptom, not a diagnosis" that can be a clue to an underlying and often treatable health problem and, when it persists, should be taken seriously. Dr. Avidan is director of the sleep clinic at the University of California, Los Angeles, David Geffen School of Medicine.

So-called transient insomnia that lasts less than a month may result from a temporary problem at work or an acute illness; short-term insomnia lasting one to six months may stem from a personal financial crisis or loss of a loved one.

Several months of insomnia are distressing enough, but when insomnia becomes chronic, lasting six months or longer, it can wreak serious physical, emotional and social havoc.

In addition to excessive daytime sleepiness, which can be dangerous in and of itself, Dr. Avidan reports that chronic insomnia "may result in disturbed intellect, impaired cognition, confusion, psychomotor retardation, or increased risk for injury." Understandably, it is often accompanied by depression either as a cause or result of persistent insomnia. Untreated insomnia also increases the risk of falls and fractures, a study of nursing home residents showed.

There are two types of insomnia. One, called primary insomnia, results from a problem that occurs only or mainly during sleep, like obstructive sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome (which afflicts 15 to 20 percent of older adults), periodic limb movements or a tendency to act out one's dreams physically, which can be an early warning sign of Parkinson's disease.

Unless noted by their bed partners, people with primary sleep disorders may not know why their sleep is disrupted. An accurate diagnosis often requires a professional sleep study: spending a night or two in a sleep lab hooked up to instruments that record respiration, heart rate, blood pressure, bodily movements and time spent in the various stages of sleep.

The other, more common type of insomnia is secondary to an underlying medical or psychiatric problem; the side effects of medications; behavioral factors like ill-timed exposure to caffeine, alcohol or nicotine or daytime naps; or environmental disturbances like jet lag or excessive noise or light — especially the blue light from an electronic device — in the bedroom.

Among the many medical conditions that can cause insomnia are heart failure, gastroesophageal reflux (GERD), lung disease, arthritis, Alzheimer's disease and incontinence. Treating the underlying condition, if possible, often relieves the insomnia.

Regardless of the reason for insomnia, it can become a learned response when people anticipate having difficulty falling asleep or returning to sleep after middle-of-the-night awakenings.



They may spend hours lying awake in bed worrying about being unable to sleep, and the anxiety itself impairs their ability to sleep.

The more one frets about a sleep problem, the worse it can get. When on occasion I awaken in the wee hours of the morning and can't get back to sleep, I usually get up and do something useful, which takes the curse off my insomnia. If I'm worried about forgetting something important, I write it on a pad kept next to the bed, taking care not to turn on a light. (Bright light in the middle of the night can reset your biological clock; if you get up to use the bathroom, use a night light near the floor.)

Nonmedical causes of insomnia are often successfully treated by practicing "good sleep hygiene," a concept developed by the late Peter J. Hauri, a sleep specialist at the Mayo Clinic.

That means limiting naps to less than 30 minutes a day, preferably early in the afternoon; avoiding stimulants and sedatives; avoiding heavy meals and minimizing liquids within two to three hours of bedtime; getting moderate exercise daily, preferably in the morning or early afternoon; maximizing exposure to bright light during the day and minimizing it at night; creating comfortable sleep conditions; and going to bed only when you feel sleepy.

If you still can't fall asleep within about 20 minutes in bed, experts recommend leaving the bedroom and doing something relaxing, like reading a book (one printed on paper, not on a brightly lit screen), and returning to bed when you feel sleepy.

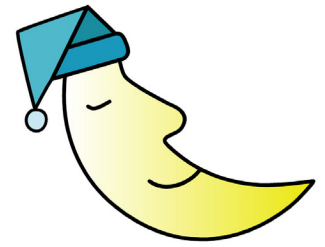
Many people mistakenly resort to alcohol as a sleep aid. While it may help people fall asleep initially, it produces fragmented sleep and interferes with REM sleep, Dr. Avidan and others report.

For those who still need help with insomnia, cognitive behavioral therapy has proved most effective in clinical trials, though finding a specialist may be challenging in some parts of the country.

Sleeping pills can be problematic, especially for older people who are more sensitive to their side effects, including daytime hangover. Even short-acting drugs like zaleplon (Sonata), zolpidem (Ambien) or ramelteon (Rozerem) can have side effects.

Alternatives include over-the-counter remedies like melatonin or valerian, which have more anecdotal evidence than research to attest to their efficacy. The brain makes melatonin, the body's natural sleepiness hormone, in response to darkness.

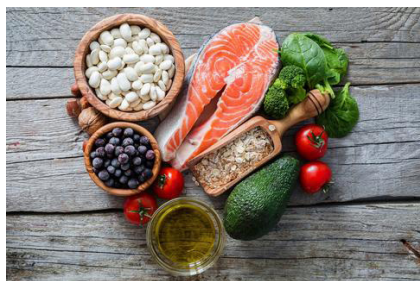
There may also be some useful dietary aids, like bananas, cherries, kiwis, oatmeal, milk and chamomile tea, though evidence for these is also primarily anecdotal. One friend told me she solved a longstanding sleep problem by eating a banana two hours before bedtime.



Source: The New York Times, January 16, 2017

It's time to address the lifestyle challenges affecting health in Asia

By Curtis S. Chin



With more than 10,000 known diseases affecting our world and viable treatments for only 500 of them, hundreds of patient advocates, researchers, investors and policymakers gathered here in America's financial capital at an annual Faster Cures conference in November 2016 with a clear focus. They were working to save lives by speeding up and improving the U.S. medical research system.

The shared purpose of the conference attendees is critical also to Japan and the rest of Asia — to foster the collaboration needed to speed medical progress and improve health outcomes. The nonprofit organization Faster Cures is a center of the Milken Institute, where I serve as the nonpartisan think tank's first Asia Fellow.

In developing Asia, governments remain vigilant in their focus on infectious diseases such as dengue fever, cholera and malaria as well as emerging threats like the Zika virus.

Even Japan has seen the threat of infectious diseases such as dengue and been on guard as travelers return from areas where such diseases are endemic. Yet, collaboration and commitment are also necessary in the face of a growing "noninfectious" threat to the region's health and well-being.

That is the rise of so-called lifestyle diseases. Diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure and heart disease impact the health of citizens of both developed and developing nations in ever larger numbers. Changing diets and increasingly urbanized and sedentary lives, as in the West, are driving an increase in the prevalence of such noncommunicable diseases in Asia.

Asia's developing nations have reduced mortality rates over the last 30 years as public health experts have focused on infectious diseases. Child mortality rates are down. Mothers are surviving childbirth. People are living longer in India and China, representing the vast majority of Asia's population.

These and other nations, however, must focus too on lifestyle-related health worries. World Health Organization data show dramatic increases in diabetes and heart disease as Asia has grown richer. Even Asia's poorest nations such as Cambodia, Laos and Bhutan are seeing lifestyle diseases take their toll.

A recent Milken Institute Asia Center report makes clear that poor nutrition and obesity pose a severe public health challenge across large parts of Asia, taxing public health systems and posing significant risks for future generations.

Data from the WHO underscore the challenge. Accord-

ing to a report from last March, the number of adults living with diabetes globally has increased to 422 million from 108 million in 1980. The western Pacific region, including China and Japan, now accounts for 131 million of that number.

Diabetes is expected to be the world's seventh-largest killer by 2030 if present trends continue without intervention.

While 60 percent of U.S., British and even Australian adults are now classified as overweight, developing Asia has some fairly heavyweight concerns of its own. In Southeast Asia, Malaysia leads with some 37 percent deemed overweight. Thailand follows with some 31.6 percent, according to the WHO. Japan, Malaysia and Thailand have also now surpassed the United States when it comes to the percentage suffering from diabetes.

Governments, businesses and development banks and aid agencies have helped reduce the spread of infectious diseases by addressing Asia's infrastructure shortcomings. The Asian Development Bank and Japan's own aid and development agencies have helped address a lack of sufficient water supply, sanitation and waste management systems in developing Asia.

Now, all sectors also must partner to address the growing lifestyle disease challenge.

Public health education will play a critical role in helping Asian consumers understand the consequences on their health of changing eating habits and reduced exercise and physical activity. Good nutrition must be made both accessible and understandable.

Businesses in Asia also must take more responsibility for the health consequences of their products and services. Restaurants and food providers voluntarily offering calorie information and smaller portion options would benefit these businesses, possibly by forestalling costly government mandates and labeling requirements.

And where there are new challenges, there are also new opportunities for businesses, including Japanese companies, from fitness centers to producers of diet foods. I know this well through my own work with Equator Pure Nature, a Southeast Asia-based company that has capitalized on Asia's growing demand for healthier products, such as its Pipper Standard-branded natu-



ral detergents, amid rising allergy and asthma rates and growing concerns about air pollution. Consumers are responding to the message that a healthier environment starts at home.

Among the United Nations' 17 new Sustainable Development Goals is a target of ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being for all at all ages. Ultimately, meeting this healthy lifestyle goal of the U.N. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development must include cutting through the roadblocks that slow medical progress and improved health care results.

As underscored by the most recent Faster Cures conference, impacting health outcomes will require the spurring

of cross-sector collaboration, cultivating a culture of innovation and engaging patients as partners in their own care.

Medical research as well as the delivery of health care can be complex, inefficient and underfunded even in the most developed of nations such as the U.S. or Japan.

Asia's leaders, in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors, must embrace a policy approach that speeds a more effective response to both infectious and lifestyle diseases. Doing so will further Asia's continued growth and prosperity, and help pave the way for a healthier and wealthier region. It is time to address the lifestyle challenge to a healthier Asian eco-

nomie environment.

Curtis S. Chin, a former U.S. ambassador to the Asian Development Bank, is managing director of advisory firm RiverPeak Group, LLC.

Source: Japan Times, December 5, 2016



Japan's health care system edges foreign care in expat survey

By Tomoko Otake

Just over half of non-Japanese residents feel Japan's health care system is generally better than that in their home countries, a trend particularly pronounced among U.S. citizens, with 3 out of 4 rating it more highly, an informal Japan Times survey has found.

The survey, which was conducted online from Feb. 5 till Feb. 9 and which drew responses from 263 people of 48 nationalities, including naturalized Japanese, also found that many think Japanese health care is affordable and high-quality but troubled by doctors' poor bedside manner and a system they say is too complicated to navigate.

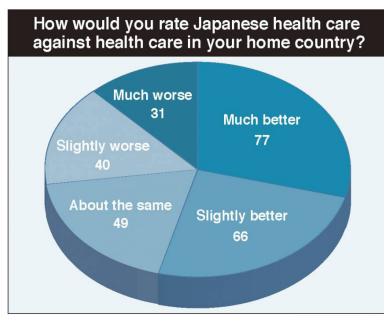
Of all respondents, 29.3 percent said Japan's health care was "much better" and 25.1 percent said it was "slightly better," followed by 18.6 percent who said it was "about the same," 15.2 percent who said "slightly worse," and 11.8 percent who said "much worse."

Asked to list the strong points of the Japanese system, 170 said affordability, followed by 132 who said generally high quality and 116 who said efficiency.

Asked to list the weak points, 123 said their doctors were not personable, followed by 107 who listed complexity and 74 who cited inefficiency.

For both questions, respondents were asked to select up to three strong points and weak points from a prepared list. The survey shows that foreign views of health care in Japan are heavily influenced by where each person is originally from.

Of the 263, 71 were U.S. citizens, the biggest group by nationality, followed by 22 British, 22 Australians, 17 Filipinos and 16 French.



For many Americans, the 2010 Affordable Care Act, popularly known as "Obamacare," and its impending repeal under the administration of President Donald Trump, led to relatively high marks for Japanese health care, which is characterized by universal coverage through public insurance schemes and free access to hospitals.

"Universal coverage, including for all dependents on my plan, is great to have," said Peter Durfee, a 46-year-old American editor and translator in Tokyo. "I've never had a problem with level of care; very professional, willing to work with me to find good outcomes."

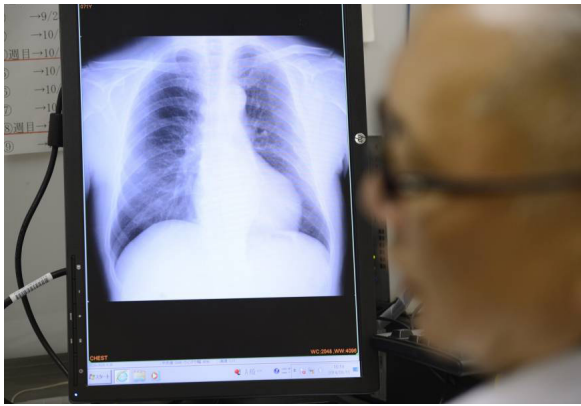
"My relatives back home have horror stories about navigating the expensive, limitation-filled swamp that is American health care, so I am very glad to have my family here in Japan."

Yokohama resident John Matthews, 30, also from the United States and covered by Japan's public insurance program, cited affordability as "the biggest win" for Japanese health care.

"Because hospitals are very well-informed as to what is covered and what is not by national health insurance, and because the coverage is transparent, there is no battling with insurance providers like there is in the U.S. The removal of those headaches, I think, significantly improves baseline quality of life for people here in Japan versus the U.S."

Bess, a 33-year-old English teacher from the United States living in Kagawa Prefecture, is covered by her employer's health insurance. She said she wants to stay in Japan for the rest of her life because she dreads the health care system in the U.S.

"I wish we had this at home," the woman, who requested her last name be withheld, said, referring to Japan's universal



A doctor examines an X-ray image at a hospital in Tokyo. An informal survey by *The Japan Times* has found that many users of the Japanese health care system view it as affordable and of high quality but rife with impersonal doctors and hard to navigate. | BLOOMBERG

health care. “Probably no hope of that even happening now, so I kind of want to live and work here forever because I’m afraid to go back home and face the current lack of reasonable health care.”

It’s not all praise, however.

Many people said they are confounded by the unclear diagnoses issued by Japan’s doctors and the lack of language support for people who can’t speak Japanese.

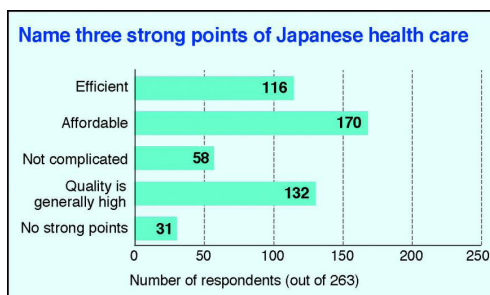
Even big hospitals, such as the University of Tokyo Hospital, don’t have English-speaking staff to provide language support, even for patients undergoing complicated procedures, said Heidi Wiltamuth, a 43-year-old American employed by a Japanese electronics conglomerate as a business trainer.

“Even if you can speak some Japanese, the Japanese staff get impatient and are unhelpful — they are either too intimidated, shy or busy to deal with foreigners. They have no experience with foreigners so don’t know how to communicate with nonnative Japanese speakers. This greatly increases patient stress.”

Gordon Higgins, a 32-year-old Jamaican architect and researcher, said Japanese diagnoses — often issued without sufficient explanation — are also often wrong.

“Doctors are fast to issue judgments and vague in their diagnosis,” said Higgins, who still rated Japan’s health care slightly better than Jamaica’s. “I and many friends have been misdiagnosed and had to be hospitalized once for a misdiagnosed condition.

“The lack of general physicians/family doctors means you have to navigate a myriad of specialists in a specific language. I’m not sure how someone who didn’t know Japanese or have a Japanese friend to help would figure it out,” he said.



One respondent called Japanese health care “racist.” “I was once denied attention at an ob-gyn clinic,” said Nuria, a 29-year-old Spanish web

designer in Kyoto who asked that her last name be withheld. “They said they had to cancel my appointment because I was a foreigner and the doctor didn’t feel comfortable accepting people whom he wasn’t sure he could fully communicate with. I was attending with my Japanese husband and went there recommended by a friend who was also a patient in said clinic. Racism is so common in Japanese hospitals.”

A Canadian resident who wished to remain anonymous for privacy reasons is battling cancer in Japan. She is full of anxiety due in part to the medical practitioners’ poor communication skills.

“The doctors have been nice, but I literally found out that I had cancer from them here and it was unbelievably awkward,” the 27-year-old exchange student said. “The doctor was trying to be personable, but it came off as insincere. I would’ve preferred him to be a little more serious, given the situation. After my diagnosis, I was left crying in the hallway and all that the Japanese nurse said was ganbare (hang in there). It didn’t help. Now I’m going through all of the tests leading up to surgery, and we’ve warmed up a bit, but I have no idea what to expect, and I’m nervous about what’s to come . . .”

Some pollees cited reproductive health and mental health as areas of Japanese health care that are particularly unsatisfactory.

“There is a misconception that STIs (sexually transmitted infections) are not an issue in Japan,” said Virginia Sweiger, 25, a Canadian teacher at a private high school in Hyogo Prefecture. “No one gets tested regularly. As it turns out, if you request to be tested, they charge you per disease. A full regimen of tests would cost about ¥30,000. As a result, very few people get tested preventively.”

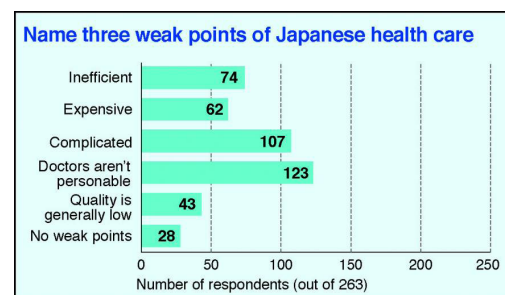
She also recalled the “awful” experience of getting a Pap smear at a clinic, where, instead of having a private room, she was given a sheet of paper to cover her face, while hospital staff walked by in front of her open legs.

A German resident in her 20s who declined to give her name recounted the short shrift she got when doctors prescribed her drugs.

“So-called mental health doctors pump you with a combination of pills and don’t even explain the dangers to you, (such as) not drinking alcohol or coffee while using them. Also, I’ve had one refuse to reduce the dosage after severe side-effects,” she commented. “There’s also absolutely no mental treatment, it’s just about getting medicine that calms you down and lets you fall asleep.”

Staff writers Mark Thompson and Shusuke Murai helped design and analyze this survey.

Source: *Japan Times*, February 19, 2017



Manufacturers help innovations for disabled evolve from idea to reality

Kyodo

Firms are launching innovative products aimed at making life easier for people with disabilities after incorporating ideas from the people who need them.

In May, medical sheet maker Teikoku Pharmacare Corp. released a shoulder strap for canes. Called ArukuTomo (which literally means “walking friend”), the strap allows people to let go of their canes when reaching for a wallet, taking the stairs or doing other things that require a free hand.

A 63-year-old man came up with the idea after a stroke left him paralyzed on his left side. After leaving the hospital, Kazuyoshi Endo attached a camera strap to his cane so he could hook it over his shoulder for walking practice without worrying about dropping it.

The strap drew attention when he visited his local rehabilitation facility — without a wheelchair. Impressed, the staffers asked Endo where they could buy one.

Convinced there was a market for his invention, Endo brought the idea to Naomi Matsumoto, who heads Hatsumei Labox, a Tokyo company that specializes in developing innovative products.

“Is it possible to commercialize this?” Endo asked.

Matsumoto saw the potential, not only for those with disabilities but for the elderly as well. Improving on the original idea, the company developed a prototype that subsequently attracted the interest of Teikoku Pharmacare President Mikiya Kasai.

Before the product was officially launched, Endo took a trip to his family’s grave in Kitakata, Fukushima Prefecture, a journey made easier by the new strap.

“It’s so great because it means I don’t have to stay at home,” Endo said.

ArukuTomo has a safety mechanism that prevents it from snagging on people or objects, and it automatically releases the strap should it get caught in a train door, the developers said.

It costs ¥9,800 (\$87).

Meanwhile, in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka Prefecture, cotton fabric processor Suzuki Industrial Arts Co. has launched a bag for women who use wheelchairs. The bag, which can be hooked to a wheelchair using a specially designed belt, sells for ¥14,018.

To make the product fashionable as well as functional, the company tied up with Semui, a nonprofit organization that publishes Co-Co Life Joshibu, a fashion magazine for women with disabilities.

The bag was developed based on ideas from a survey of readers, most of them in their teens through their 30s. The top factors included style, a zipper easy to use with one hand, and a wide strap to distribute weight evenly across the shoulder. One respondent, a 19-year-old reader nicknamed Miyu, said it is hard to find a bag easy to attach a wheelchair.

Tamitsugu Inoue, who guided the project at Suzuki Industrial Arts, said reader feedback was essential to the bag’s success.

“By listening to their opinions, we were able to come up

with a product that really meets the needs of the people who use it,” Inoue said.



Source: Japan Times, November 2, 2017

A 19-year-old woman nicknamed Miyu shows off a bag designed for women who use wheelchairs. The bag can be hooked to a wheelchair using a specially designed belt. | KYODO

Running May Be Good for Your Knees

By Gretchen Reynolds

Many people worry that running ruins knees. But a new study finds that the activity may in fact benefit the joint, changing the biochemical environment inside the knee in ways that could help keep it working smoothly.

In my many decades as a runner, fellow runners and nonrunners alike have frequently told me that I am putting my knees at risk. The widespread argument generally follows the lines that running will slowly wear away the cartilage that cushions the bones in the joint and cause arthritis.

But there is little evidence to support the idea, and a growing body of research that suggests the reverse. Epidemiological studies of long-term runners show that they generally are less likely to develop osteoarthritis in the knees than people of the same age who do not run.

Some scientists have speculated that running may protect knees because it also often is associated with relatively low body mass. Carrying less weight is known to reduce the risk for knee arthritis.

But other researchers have wondered whether running might have a more

direct impact on knee joints, perhaps by altering the working of various cells inside the knee.

To find out, researchers at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, recruited 15 male and female runners under the age of 30 with no history of knee injury or arthritis. The scientists wished to study people with healthy knees in order to better isolate running’s effects on otherwise normal joints.

These volunteers visited a clinic where they had blood drawn from an arm. The researchers also siphoned off a small

amount of synovial fluid, a lubricating fluid that reduces friction inside joints, from their right knee. Healthy knees contain only a soupçon of the stuff; arthritic and otherwise unhealthy knees tend to contain much more.

The volunteers next were delivered, in wheelchairs, to the university's nearby biomechanics lab. There, they either sat quietly for 30 minutes or ran on a treadmill for the same 30 minutes at their preferred running pace.

After either running or sitting, they again were wheeled to the clinic and the blood and synovial fluid draws were repeated.

Each volunteer completed both a sitting and running session on separate days.

Then the researchers looked for a variety of substances in the young people's blood and synovial fluid.

In particular, they focused on molecules that are associated with inflammation. Low-grade inflammation in the knee has been shown to contribute to the development and progression of arthritis.

So the researchers looked for changes in the levels of several types of cells that are known to either increase or blunt the amount of inflammation inside the knee.

They also looked at changes in the levels of another substance unpoetically known as cartilage oligomeric matrix protein, or COMP. This substance tends to accumulate in diseased knees and is often used as a marker of incipient or worsening arthritis. People with arthritis can have about five times as much COMP in their synovial fluid as do people with healthy knees.

Unfortunately, because it had turned out to be technically difficult to safely extract much synovial fluid from these healthy knees, the scientists wound up with complete numbers from only six of the runners.

But the data were interesting and consistent. In almost every case, the runners' knees showed substantially lower levels of two types of cells that can contribute to inflammation within the synovial fluid, compared to their baseline levels.

The runners also showed a shift in their COMP levels. After the run, they displayed more of the substance in their blood and less in their synovial fluid. In effect, running seemed to have squeezed the molecules out of the knee and into the blood.

Meanwhile, sitting had slightly increased levels of COMP inside people's knees, and also raised the concentration of one of the inflammatory molecules.

These findings suggest that a single half-hour session of running changes the interior of the knee, reducing inflammation and lessening levels of a marker of arthritis, says Robert Hyldahl, a professor of exercise science at B.Y.U. and lead author of the study, published in the *European Journal of Applied Physiology*.

But sitting for 30 minutes also changed the knee, he points out, which he and his colleagues had not expected. Sitting seemed to make the knee biochemically more vulnerable to later disease.

Dr. Hyldahl noted that this was a very small and short-



Getty Images

term study. He and his colleagues would like to repeat it with much larger numbers, "once we figure out how to get more synovial fluid" safely from healthy knees, he says.

They also hope to study longer running distances and different paces, to see how those variables affect changes within the knee, and to recruit older and injured runners, whose knees might have begun to respond fundamentally differently to the activity than the joints

of healthy people in their 20s.

But even with these limitations, the findings suggest that moderate amounts of running are "not likely to harm healthy knees and probably offer protection" against joint damage, Dr. Hyldahl says.

Source: The New York Times, January 18, 2017

Samsung takes aim at biologic drugs

Bloomberg

The Samsung brand is best known for its smartphones and wide-screen TVs. Yet behind the scenes, the conglomerate is also making a name as a contract manufacturer of complex medicines to treat diseases such as cancer.

On a piece of reclaimed land along South Korea's western coast, Samsung BioLogics Co is building a US\$740 million factory that is to give it the capacity to become the No. 1 producer by volume of a class of drugs called biologics, many of which are derived from mammal cells.

The Samsung group diversified into the pharmaceutical sector in 2011. Now, it is mobilizing its expertise in semiconductor making and engineering to make the way biologics are produced more efficient.

The market for biologic medicines, which are used for everything from cancer to arthritis, is projected to exceed US\$223.7 billion by 2021, according to a Bloomberg Intelligence analysis.

Being a force in biologics is crucial to Samsung — and South Korea. Galaxy smartphones and other consumer electronics face intense competition from Apple Inc and Chinese brands such as Huawei Technologies Co, and Samsung is grappling with the arrest of de facto leader Jay Y. Lee in a scandal that brought down former South Korean president Park Geun-hye. Meanwhile, the broader economy needs new industries as shipbuilding and heavy manufacturing slow.

If the past 40 years of global economic growth were fueled by technology, the next are to be fueled by where that converges with healthcare, Samsung BioLogics chief executive officer Kim Tae-han said.

In an interview at company headquarters in Incheon, Kim said he is preparing to ramp up production and is in negotiations for more than 15 new contracts.



Samsung BioLogics Co headquarters and production facilities are pictured in Incheon, South Korea, on April 19, 2017 / Photo: Bloomberg

The Samsung board gave him the green light and US\$2 billion to start the business about six years ago, he said.

However, on the strength of demand and business performance, “I’ve already spent US\$3 billion,” he

said.

Sales totaled 107.6 billion won (US\$96.36 million) in the first quarter, a 2.1 percent year-on-year increase, although the unit still posted a net loss.

More than 2,000 construction workers — most with ex-

perience building semiconductor facilities — are buzzing around the factory site about an hour’s drive from Seoul. It is called Edison and is the company’s third drug facility. Its five floors encompass 34m, making way for custom-made vats that are so big some shoot through several floors.

Biologic drugs are grown from cells. That necessitates a more complex manufacturing process than typical pills — a mixture of chemicals — but makes biologics more effective and capable of being targeted toward certain diseases.

Building a biologic plant is similar to building one for semiconductors. There are clean rooms that cannot tolerate dust or other contamination, so Edison is being built without nuts or bolts to prevent any drilling. Everything is welded and tilted to fit together.

One day, “contract manufacturing” could extend to helping clients build the factories, Kim said.

Source: Taipei Times, May 17, 2017

Biotech firm using mushrooms for cancer

By Chris Chang



After nearly a decade of development in China, Zhenjuntang Biotechnology Co. Ltd. returns to Taiwan to pave way for a rapidly expanding market in the biotech industry. (Morgan Lin, The China Post)

Since its establishment in 2009, Zhenjuntang Biotechnology Co. Ltd. has invested more than NT\$2.2 billion across the Taiwan Strait to manage 158 operation centers in 21 of China’s provinces.

The Taipei-based company aims to highlight the alleged benefits of stout camphor fungus, also called “niu zhang zhi” in Chinese, a promising medicinal mushroom from Taiwan, in the fight against cancer.

Over the years, as a pioneer in the technological research and development of stout camphor fungus, Zhenjuntang Biotech has not only dedicated itself to the artificial cultivation of the mushroom, but also its pharmacological extraction and detailed analysis and the various potential clinical applications it offers.

To this extent, the company has especially invited Doctor Chen Wei-chen from Anubis Biomedical Co. Ltd., to jointly formulate with a number of experts and professionals from

Tatung University, a DNA testing method to identify the different species of a tree on which varying subgroups of stout camphor fungus can grow.

Simultaneously, Zhenjuntang Biotech also plans to launch a tumor research center in Xiamen and open three chain stores in the cities of Zhangzhou, Quanzhou and Shishi and three cultivation facilities in Xiamen, Sichuan and Anhui.

Taiwan Medicine in the Making

Moving forward, Zhenjuntang Biotech aims to establish a standardized research and supply chain specialized for the development and cultivation of stout camphor fungus, with DNA profiling and genome sequence mapping for visible traceability.

As an ongoing goal, the company will also be working closely with medical research centers in both Taiwan and China to actively develop and manufacture a series of target medicines for the treatment of severe cancers, such as leukemia, liver and gastric cancer.

By utilizing the benefits of stout camphor fungus to the fullest, Zhenjuntang Biotech hopes to deliver a brighter future that patients can look forward to.



Source: China Post, February 23, 2017

Japanese goldfish experts explore use of bubble eyes in medicine

By Chunichi Shimbun

Known as a center of the goldfish industry, the city of Yatomi, Aichi Prefecture, is exploring a medical spinoff from the bubble eye goldfish.

Experts believe the fluid in sacs beneath the eyes could be a cell growth stimulant with valuable uses in medical research.

The research is being conducted at the Aichi Fisheries Research Institute's inland water fisheries research center, which has a tuition center in Yatomi.

Yatomi and the city of Yamatokoriyama in Nara Prefecture are both known as centers of goldfish breeding. However, as with other industries, goldfish breeding experts are aging.

The number of goldfish produced in Yatomi hit a peak in 1975 of 71.57 million and has been decreasing since then, falling to 8.53 million in 2015.

The city has been looking into developing business opportunities for goldfish other than as an ornamental fish. In 2007, it launched joint research with Satohiko Araki and other researchers from Nagoya University Graduate School of Science's Sugashima Marine Biological Laboratory in Toba, Mie Prefecture.

The research is aimed at replacing the widely used fetal bovine serum (FBS).

Using the fluid from goldfish is considered highly safe as humans share fewer common illnesses with fish than with cows.

Moreover, FBS may contain harmful elements such as prions, which can lead to bovine spongiform encephalopathy and its human equivalent.

However, the amount of fluid that can be extracted from a wild fish is a small fraction of its body weight, which means a great number have to be sacrificed.

The researchers eventually started examining bubble eye goldfish, which were developed through crossbreeding mutated crucian carp.

Using a syringe, they can extract 40 milliliters of fluid, close to 30 percent of the fish's body weight, from a mature goldfish measuring roughly 10 cm.

The sacs deflate once they are empty but fill up again in a few months, allowing researchers to extract fluid from the same fish repeatedly.

The fluid has been shown to stimulate the growth of human cells.

An experiment was conducted to compare how many vascular endothelial cells grow in 10 days using a cell culture



Bubble eye goldfish have fluid-filled sacs that refill naturally after being drained by syringe. Experts believe the fluid can function as a cell growth stimulant. | CHUNICHI SHIMBUN

solution containing fluid from a bubble eye, compared with an FBS solution and one lacking a growth stimulant.

The results showed that the bubble eye batch was 1.14 times more effective than the FBS solution, and 4.89 times more than the third one.

The researchers acquired a patent for this cell growth technology in December.

Meanwhile, there remain issues to be resolved before the fluid can be put to practical use.

Cells from human skin and organs increase by attaching themselves to surrounding cells.

To culture cells artificially, the stimulant must have strong properties of adhesion so the cells can attach themselves to the basic container.

However, the fluid from bubble eye goldfish is not as adhesive as FBS.

The researchers believe its adhesion can be improved if the surface of the container is treated or if activated carbon is added.

"Cell culture is essential to many aspects of the medical industry, from the diagnosis of illnesses and the development of drugs to gene therapy and regenerative medicine," said researcher Junpei Arakawa of the institute.

"We hope that the fluid sacs of artificially created ornamental fish can be useful in the medical field," he added.

The bubble eye goldfish has been around since the Qing dynasty. It was treated as a closely guarded treasure in China.

The fish were imported to Japan for the first time in 1958. They are now widely available in pet stores at a cost of about ¥1,000 each.



Source: Japan Times, October 11, 2016



Part II Education

‘Rakugo’ comedy no joke for students keen to hone English skills

By Magdalena Osumi

Japanese tend to be known for their shyness and stoic demeanor. But as Japanese companies increasingly think more globally, workers are feeling the need to communicate and express themselves clearly in front of people of various nationalities.

As a result, some are turning to traditional rakugo comedy to brush up their skills.

“It does help you liven up the atmosphere and better communicate,” Takuya Omine, 43, a native of Okinawa who works at a printing firm in Tokyo, said as he attended a workshop in Tokyo’s Adachi Ward in September.

Omine, whose rakugo stage name is Yuntaku, or “talker” in the Okinawan dialect, has been attending an English rakugo class, run by Tatsuya Sudo, 57, an English teacher and rakugo performer, for the past five years.

Fascinated by the lessons, Omine spread the word among his colleagues, some of whom later joined the class. Rakugo is a traditional form of verbal entertainment dating back to the Edo Period (1603-1868). Donning kimono, performers sit on stage to unravel stories based on puns and wordplay, told through dialogues with several characters.

They act out different scenes by changing the tone and pitch of their voice, turning their head to help the audience identify the speaker,



Rakugo teacher Tatsuya Sudo instructs a student on how to make use of props when conveying a story to the audience at his English class in Tokyo in August 2016. | MAGDALENA OSUMI



Tomomi Takeshima, whose stage name is Hotaru, performs rakugo in English at the Oedo Ryogokutei in Tokyo’s Sumida Ward in August 2016. | MAGDALENA OSUMI

using only sensu fans and tenugui handkerchiefs as props.

At Sudo’s class, students perform rakugo in English, hoping to improve communication skills that will help them in a global business arena.

On a day in August 2016, students were preparing for a show held twice a year at Oedo Ryogokutei, a rakugo venue where well-known storytellers, including the late Danshi Tatekawa, have performed.

Tatekawa, a former host for the popular “Shoten” TV rakugo show who was also known for his sharp tongue and foul temper, was Sudo’s inspiration and tutor.

Sudo, also known by his stage name Eiraku — which roughly translates to “Fun English” — established his school in 2007. He has about 50 students aged in their 20s to 60s, who meet once a month to brush up their English skills and get feedback. Students perform rakugo based on a script

Sudo has translated into English.

One of the students, Tomomi Takeshima, 42, joined the class this spring, with English a necessity in her job at a U.S. health care consultancy firm.

After living two years in the U.S., Takeshima first enrolled in an English course on speech training. But it was not enough for her to learn how to better express her thoughts.

“Here, I can learn how to communicate emotionally,” she said.

While many come to the class to brush up their communication and language skills, it also helps them discover the treasures of traditional culture.

Student Yasuhisa Takemura, 51, a college administration staffer, says performing in English gives her knowledge of cultural differences, helping her to better explain the intricacies of Japanese culture and customs.

“There are so many interesting stories to tell and we need to think hard how to do that,” Takemura said. “The stories are fun to watch not only because they’re good stories but also because the performers are doing their best to convey it.”

Sudo, who has been learning English since elementary school, said he believed rakugo can help performers become more confident speakers. He instructs his apprentices to speak louder and more clearly, and encourages them to overcome their shyness even when they make mistakes.

For Junya Otsuki, 36, rakugo classes are a good way to

practice speaking in front of many people — a skill required at his work.

While Otsuki says acting is a pure pleasure and an escape from his busy schedule, it also helps him better prepare to convey a message to the audience.

“In rakugo, you need to pay attention to the smallest details to convey the story in the most realistic way,” he said. “This is something rakugo and work-related presentations have in common.”

Sudo, who teaches English at the Kanda University of International Studies and the Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages, encourages his apprentices to use creativity when performing.

“There are rules that rakugo performers need to obey ... but they’re



A rakugo apprentice sits on stage with a traditional tenugui cloth and sensu fan during a rehearsal in Tokyo's Adachi Ward in August 2016. | MAGDALENA OSUMI

allowed to make changes in the script and even translate parts of it (from Japanese) on their own,” he said.

In the future, Sudo hopes to invite foreign tourists to his class to experience Japanese culture, an idea he came up with after a British visitor joined the group during a brief stay in Japan last year.

“If more foreigners knew about the course, more would probably come to learn rakugo,” Sudo said.

“Through performing it in English, we can showcase our tradition to foreigners. (They) tend to think that Japanese people lack humor but it’s not true. We have this traditional form of (storytelling). This is something I’d like to help foreigners discover.”

Source: Japan Times, October 14, 2016

Meet the tutors making millions from Singapore’s ‘educational arms race’

By Sam Bradpiece

Soaring demand for after-school tuition has spawned the rise of millionaire ‘super tutors’ in Singapore. But what is driving the growth of the industry, and is it negatively impacting social mobility?

In 2014, it emerged that a three-year-old in Singapore was enduring three hour-long tuition lessons each week after nursery school. Toddler Gabriel Tan was learning Chinese with the help of flashcards, as well as basic abacus skills – on top of regular piano and tap-dancing classes. His mother hoped the rigorous regimen would allow her son to “keep up” once enrolled in primary school.

The case shone a light on Singapore’s ‘educational arms race’, a term coined by Christopher Gee, a senior research fellow at the Institute of Policy Studies. Yet it is far from unique: an increasing number of Singaporean families are spending ever-larger amounts on private tutoring for their progenies.

Last year, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development declared the Singaporean schooling system to be the best in the world. Despite such high praise, the country’s tutoring industry is booming. In 2004, the sector, which provides supplementary instruction to Singapore’s students, was already worth SGD650m (\$476.8m). Today, it is valued at more than SGD1 billion (\$733.5m) annually.

And a survey conducted in 2015 by Nexus Link showed that 80% of Singapore households with primary school children

paid for private tuition, while corresponding figures were 60% for secondary education and 40% for pre-primary education. According to educators, there are now thousands of tutors scrambling to carve a niche in this swelling pedagogical bubble. Rising

to the top of the class however, is a new breed of after-school educators: the ‘super tutors’.

This small, but growing, group of private tutors is earning big bucks from the increased demand for private tuition. At least ten members of this educational elite rake in annual incomes exceeding SGD1m (\$721,000), according to Singapore’s Straits Times newspaper.

Among them is Anthony Fok, a confident, accomplished 30-something who is studying for a PhD. He was a well-paid accountant at one of Singapore’s ‘big four’

audit firms, before quitting the “mundane” job in 2007 to tutor teenagers in economics. “I preferred interacting with students and sharing my knowledge with others,” he said.

Fok’s services do not come cheap – \$308 will cover the cost of a four-lesson package. Despite this, students from across Singapore attend his weekly classes, with some even venturing over the border from Malaysia. Each session typically lasts 1.5 hours and contains between 30 and 50 students, with a waiting list of about 20 would-be pupils.

He has been offered grand sums by wealthy parents to ensure top results. “I remember one parent offered me SGD20,000 [\$14,600] to guarantee her child an ‘A’ grade, just



Former teacher Wynn Khoo left behind the profession to become an after-school tutor in Singapore

one month before the A-levels,” Fok said. He turned down the offer.

Gary Ang, 37, is another tutor operating in the city-state, bringing in five figures monthly. He conducts 24 hours of maths tuition weekly, between studying for his Master’s degree in mathematics. His two-hour classes cost up to \$62 per session and generally seat about 15 students, catering for those aged between 15 and 18.

Ang puts his success down to his ability to inspire students’ interest and communicate ideas clearly. He recalled a student who approached him demoralised by his mathematical inability, but who went on to score highly in his exams. “I don’t think I taught him anything different. But it was how I coached him and made him realise his potential that made the difference,” he said.

Although Fok stressed that “no tutor can guarantee success”, more than 60% of his 200 to 300 students earn distinctions in their A-level and O-level examinations each year. He acknowledges this is not entirely down to his efforts. “I believe the school teachers played an important role, together with the supportive parents,” he said.

When it comes to the ingredients necessary to succeed in the industry, the tutors espoused varying recipes. Millionaire tutor Fok believes that offering services that go beyond the standard gives him a competitive edge. “All students have my personal number and they can SMS me, even after tuition hours. Many students message me in the middle of the night, and I still reply to their messages,” he said.

Of course, these tutors’ feats cannot be solely attributed to their individual talents as educators and businessmen – they have been abetted by a rapid growth in demand for private tuition in Singapore.

One might assume that the high demand for private tuition indicates shortcomings in Singapore’s public education system, but the evidence is stacked to the contrary. However, the country has a highly stratified education system. The high-stakes Primary School Leaving Examination tests children in English, an Asian language (often Chinese, Malay or Tamil), science and mathematics. Children who perform well are more likely to be accepted into the secondary school of their choice, thus improving their life chances.

The colloquial Singaporean-English term *kiasu* can be translated as ‘afraid to lose out’, and is often applied to the competitive attitude of parents. Mark Bray, UNESCO’s chair professor in comparative education, believes this mentality lies behind the growth of Singapore’s private tuition industry.

In addition, the country has few natural resources and has always relied on its human capital to compete on the world stage. “Singapore has always been conscious of its small size in a challenging environment, requiring diligence and innovation to survive and prosper,” Bray said.

And Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Korea, Japan and Singapore have traditionally been hubs of scholarly competition. Bray attributed this to a Confucian culture of diligence and respect for authority.

“In Europe and elsewhere, students who are not good at mathematics may simply say that they are not good at mathematics. Confucian cultures are more likely to say that they don’t try hard enough. Tuition is a way to show diligence,” he said.

Meanwhile, globalisation has become a modern driving factor in the growth of tutoring. “The forces of globalisation, with awareness that factories can move and that services can be outsourced at the click of a computer mouse, make families in all countries mindful of competition,” Bray said.

He argued that the rising numbers of private tutors also reflects the spread of neoliberalism – a form of capitalism that holds state intervention in disdain, even in the sphere of traditionally public services such as education. “Parents can purchase education. It is an increasingly marketable service.”

But paying large sums for after-school tuition is not an option for all. The Straits Times found in 2015 that households earning more than \$4,400 a month spent more than double the amount invested in private tutors by those earning below \$2,200.

Ang said he occasionally provides discounted or free lessons to underprivileged children, and admitted that the prevalence of private tuition concerns him. “With so much after-school tuition, it seems like students from more

privileged families have an edge since they can afford more tuition classes and more coaching. This, in my opinion, has an adverse effect on social mobility,” he said.

Bray suggested that tutors offering discounted services to poor students were the exception rather than the norm. “Some tutoring companies, for social reasons, want to be seen being nice people, but I wouldn’t believe there is too much of it because, otherwise, they’d go out of business.”

Several parliamentarians, including then-education minister Heng Swee Keat, last year spoke out against the private tutoring industry during a debate on education, arguing it was unnecessary and undermined students’ ability to think independently.

Among them was Yee Jenn Jong, a non-constituency MP who told a parliamentary committee that “we need not have this competition”, arguing that schools ought to move away from a strong fixation on academic results.

But despite this, there are a number of government-subsidised welfare groups in Singapore, including the Council for Development of Singapore and the Singapore Indian Association, that provide tuition, often for a small fee.

Writing in the *Journal of Youth Studies* in 2009, the Institute of Education’s Jason Tan observed that “the Singapore government, by providing financial assistance to these organisations, is directly sanctioning the practice of private tutoring”, and



Formerly a well-paid accountant at a ‘big four’ Singapore audit firm, Anthony Fok is now one of the city-state’s millionaire ‘super tutors’

at least partly contributing to increased demand.

The ministry of education declined to comment while minister for schools Ng Chee Meng did not respond to questions from Southeast Asia Globe.

Although private tuition can be seen as damaging to social mobility in Singapore, experts also argue it should not be viewed in an entirely negative light. “Private tuition may contribute not only to personal advancement but also to disciplined behaviour and human capital for national development,” Bray said.

“It can be argued, for example, that investments in education, including shadow education, were a major factor underpinning South Korea’s rise from an impoverished country to a prosperous state during the decades following the 1950s Korean

War.”

Using Japan as an example, Bray explained how attempts to level the educational playing field can be self-defeating. Governmental efforts to equalise the education system in Japan, by removing some of the streaming processes in schools, engendered a sharp growth in private tutoring rates.

“If education is inadequately stratified, they [parents] will seek to stratify outside the school. It is like poking a balloon – if you push it down in one place, it will rise somewhere else.”

Source: Southeast Asia Globe, November 17, 2016

Children’s charity says their education is mostly overlooked in wake of disasters

By Thomson Reuters Foundation

From earthquakes in Nepal to flooding in Myanmar, disasters damage or destroy thousands of schools leaving hundreds of thousands of children unable to go to class, yet education is often overlooked in humanitarian responses, a charity said.

Deadly earthquakes in Nepal in 2015 damaged or destroyed more than 8,200 schools, leaving 870,000 children without access to classrooms.

Nearly a year later, many children are still taking lessons in makeshift facilities without walls, exposed to cold winter weather, Save the Children said in a report on lost education due to disasters in the Asia-Pacific region.

Part of the problem is that less than 2 percent of humanitarian aid is earmarked for education, leading to delays in the reconstruction and repair of damaged schools, the global aid agency said.

“Regardless of the size of the disaster — it doesn’t matter if it’s small or big — education is disrupted, and students’ lives are impacted,” said Sarah Ireland, the author of the report, by telephone from Melbourne, Australia.

The report, to be launched on June 21, 2016, details the impact on schoolchildren of five disasters in 2015, including flooding in Myanmar that put 4,100 schools out of action, leaving 250,000 children in limbo for several months.

“Education needs to be prioritized as part of a holistic response,” said Ireland, the humanitarian advocacy and policy adviser for Save the Children.



A resident stands amongst a pile of debris washed inland along a road in Tacloban, Philippines, in November 2013, three days after Typhoon Haiyan hit. Following natural disasters, a Save the Children charity says in a report that education is often overlooked in humanitarian responses and that children are often unable to go to school. | AFP-JIJI

“If education is supported before, during, and after disasters, it can save lives, protect children and benefit whole communities and countries.”

For example, many children attend schools that are not built to withstand the impact of natural disasters, Ireland said.

“If you consider how much time a child spends in schools, if a disaster hits, like an earthquake or a flood, that school is likely to cause injury or loss of life,” she said. “We need to ensure the school is a safe place for children to go.”

Schools — that are still standing — often play an important role in the humanitarian response to a disaster, serving as a community hub

where disaster-hit families can access health care, clean water and food in safety.

“If children are in a school ... their parents can actually go about their business rebuilding their lives, knowing their children are in a safe place and that their children will be less vulnerable to trafficking, abuse or exploitation,” Ireland said.

Save the Children’s “Education Disrupted” report is due to be launched in Bangkok on the sidelines of a United Nations conference on disaster risk reduction.

Ireland said the report aims to provide information that will help improve future data collection and thereby improve post-disaster support and response.

Source: Japan Times, June 20, 2016

Firms tap state subsidies to start day care facilities to woo working moms

By Yoshiaki Nohara

Faced with a shortage of workers, Japanese companies are taking matters into their own hands, helping the government fix a chronic lack of day care facilities that is blunting efforts to get more women into the workforce.

Nichiigakkan Co., which provides hospital administration and care services, is among more than 500 companies approved for new subsidies to start their own nursery schools. It plans to have 100 by the end of next year, with the first 31 to open this April.

"It's important for the private sector to build child care facilities near workplaces in a flexible manner, because it has become a major challenge to secure employees," said Shoichi Iida, a spokesman at Nichiigakkan, which has 95,000 employees. "We can't leave the matter to municipalities alone."

Fixing the child care shortage is seen as essential to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's push to get women to play a greater role in the workplace. Japan's aging, shrinking population has driven the unemployment rate to a two-decade low.

Companies have struggled to fill positions even as the employment rate among working-age women has reached a record high of 66 percent, according to government data.

Responding to a public outcry after a blogger's tirade, Abe last year vowed to do the "utmost" to eliminate waiting lists for day care facilities entirely by March 2018, as the government pressed forward with a plan to create space for an additional 500,000 children by then.

But Abe told the Diet last month that meeting the goal would be difficult because the number of working women had grown more than expected.

In fact, the government's push has led to the creation of new capacity for more than 300,000 children in the three years through March 2016, but the waiting list has grown, reaching more than 23,000 last year, according to the labor ministry.

In Tokyo's Setagaya Ward, about 1,200 children were waiting for nursery places as of April 2016, the longest waiting list in the country, the ministry said.

The ward is adding about 2,000 openings for the year starting this April, but has received a record 6,680 applications, according to Takashi Uemura, who works in the ward's nursery coordination division.

While Abe has poured money into the problem, he chose not to tackle the subsidy system and regulations that analysts say are holding back such efforts.



Children enjoy a snack at a nursery run by a private company in Noda, Chiba Prefecture. More Japanese firms are opening nurseries to meet a chronic shortage of day care services. | KYODO

The government will provide generous subsidies, often more than half of the cost, but in exchange it requires operators to limit worker pay to about a third less than the industry average, making it difficult for them to hire staff. Meanwhile, the subsidies make it hard for independent operators to compete.

Subsidies for companies to start their own facilities were introduced last April. As of February, more than 500 companies had won subsidies to open more than 600 day care centers with a capacity for about 14,000 children,

according to the Foundation of Child Well-Being, which handles subsidy applications.

The subsidies will cover about 75 percent of the cost of starting a nursery school and up to 80 percent of the cost of running one, according to Nichiigakkan's Iida.

The problem is actually bigger than the official government estimates because they don't count the many mothers who have become too discouraged to apply for day care, according to Naoko Kuga, an analyst at NLI Research Institute.

Many women in their 20s and 30s with temporary, part-time jobs simply quit after having a child, which reduces their chances to secure an opening later, Kuga said.

One solution is to encourage the private sector to do even more, said Kuga, who has two children of her own.

"It's a way to manage risk, for companies to secure staff," she said. "As private players get into the market, competition for service quality and prices will rise. Right now, parents have to settle with what they can get because waiting lists are too long."

Bic Camera Inc., an operator of retail electronics stores, is scheduled to open its first child care facility in May using the government subsidies, according to Hiromi Kinoshita, a Bic human resources manager. It will host 30 children and be located in a condominium building in Tokyo.

"We are getting more women and mothers as employees," Kinoshita said. "We found out some leave us to focus on child-rearing, and we are starting this so that they will stay with us without quitting."

Source: Japan Times, March 2, 2017

Australia to help Sri Lanka combat dengue

Associated Press (AP)

Australia is contributing funds to help Sri Lanka combat its worst outbreak of dengue fever, which has claimed 250 lives and infected nearly 100,000 people so far this year in the Indian Ocean island nation.

Visiting Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Julie Bishop at night on July 19, 2017 said that Australia is giving A\$475,000 (US\$377,000) to the WHO to implement immediate dengue prevention, management and eradication programs in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's hospitals are overcrowded with patients, and the government has deployed soldiers, police and health officials to inspect houses and clear rotting garbage, stagnant water pools and other potential mosquito-breeding grounds across the country.



Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Julie Bishop, left, shakes hands with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe before a meeting in Colombo on July 20, 2017. / Photo: Reuters

Health officials blamed the public for their failure to clear puddles and piles of trash after last month's heavy monsoon rains.

The number of infections nationwide is already 38 percent higher than last

year, when 55,150 people were diagnosed with dengue and 97 died, according to the Sri Lankan Ministry of Health. Cases were concentrated around Colombo, though they were nationwide.

Bishop is on a two-day visit and was scheduled on July 20, 2017 to meet with government leaders.

She said Australia is offering an additional A\$1 million for a research partnership between Australia's Monash University and the health ministry to test the introduction of naturally occurring Wolbachia bacteria to eradicate dengue fever from Sri Lanka.

The bacteria "prevent transmission of dengue virus between humans" and that it has shown success during the past six years in several nations, she said.

Source: Taipei Times, July 21, 2017

Journalism students headed for Kyoto in cultural exchange

Associated Press (AP)

Journalism students from universities will have the opportunity to travel to Kyoto and report on Japan with the help of local peers under a new cultural exchange initiative launched recently.

In September 2016, the Institute for Education in International Media, a U.S. group that offers journalism students the chance to study abroad for a few months, picked Japan's ancient capital as the next destination for its program.

To run from June to July next year, participants in the Kyoto Project will work with students from the Kyoto University of Foreign Studies to conduct interviews and write articles on topics of interest.

It is the first time the organization will be taking students to Japan.

"The most important thing that the visiting students will learn is how to overcome cultural barriers, understanding different customs and ways of thinking," Laird Harrison, a director of the institute, said.

"Study abroad is very important today because we live



Freelance journalist Laird Harrison, who also serves as director of the Institute for Education in International Media, works with students at the Kindai University during a visit to Kyoto in June 2016. | COURTESY OF RACHELE KANIGEL

in a global society, we live in a shrinking world — a world where people from different cultures and different countries are interacting all the time," he said.

Rachele Kanigel, a fellow institute director and associate professor of journalism at San Francisco State University, and Harrison, a freelance journalist who has written for Reuters, CNN and Time magazine, will also visit Kyoto with the students to help with writing and interviewing.

"We are hoping for students interested in journalism, and either Japan specifically or the idea of being an international journalist or correspondent" to participate in the program, said

Kanigel. "There are interests, particularly among young people, in Japanese culture, so we are hoping to have students who are interested to (learn) more about Japan and Japanese culture."

Kanigel and Harrison have previously taken students to places such as Turkey, Jerusalem and France. They said Japan is safer by comparison and that will allow students to explore the city in greater depth.

Craig Smith, a professor at the Kyoto University of

Foreign Studies, said he believed the project gave his students an opportunity to be “thinking outside the box.”

“It’s a wonderful experience for the students” to work in international teams, he said, adding that his students, especially those applying for jobs that will require them to work in a multinational environment, will benefit from engaging in conversations and providing translations for native English speakers.

“When they’re with their own classmates, they give themselves permission to not be so engaged and take it easy,” he said. “To do research in Kyoto city this time, with a (national) tourism target of 40 million people by 2020, is absolutely the best timing.”

Founded by Andrew Ciofalo, a professor emeritus of communication and journalism at Loyola University Maryland, the Institute for Education in International Media has since 2001 taken its students to more than 10 locations.

Kanigel said that the institute will be preparing a special website to publish students’ articles.

“When we ran a similar program in Jerusalem, a couple of students published their works in The Jerusalem Post and The Huffington Post,” she said.

Source: Japan Times, October 14, 2016

Cram schools help children with developmental disabilities prepare for future

By Magdalena Osumi

Following his teacher’s instructions, 7-year-old Eita slid out of his chair, tidied it up and then — in front of his fellow group members and teachers — said a few words about his performance during an after-school programming class he attended in April.

Eita and two other boys were learning the basics of coding by collapsing blocks in a computer game.

“This game, it was really interesting. Eita Ide,” he said with confidence.

Although this scene may not seem exceptional, it takes Eita, who displays some traits of autism, more effort to communicate his thoughts and emotions.

Eita attends the recently opened Kid’s Tech in Tokyo’s Ota Ward, one of a growing number of cram schools catering to children with developmental disabilities amid a growing need for such assistance.

Operators of such after-school cram schools hope that skillfully designed educational programs with increased teacher praise and goals developed to promote the social skills of children with disabilities will help them actively participate in society.

Lessons at Kid’s Tech are designed for children with pervasive development disorder, a term describing a spectrum of developmental disorders that cause problems with social interaction, communication, inflexible behavior or autism.

The school helps children tackle their behavioral and communication problems. Children of the same age and with traits of similar disorders are grouped together.

“Such an environment helps them learn how to communicate and work in teams,” Takeshi Sumiyama, president of Kid’s Tech operator Plus Innovation Inc. said in a recent interview with The Japan Times.



Takeshi Sumiyama | SATOKO KAWASAKI

“Society has been focusing on the children’s weaknesses,” Sumiyama said, referring to prevalent social-interaction difficulties and a tendency in people with autistic spectrum disorder to engage in repetitive behavior.

“But many possess a natural gift — many such children demonstrate enhanced ability to maintain intense focus on details and things that interest them and are highly creative,” he said.

Children with autism have exceptional abilities, including above-average math skills tied to patterns of activation in a particular area of their brains, according to a study by researchers from the Stanford University School of Medicine.

Plus Innovation, based in Hyogo Prefecture, operates two schools. One is in Tokyo, which opened in March, and another is in Amagasaki, Hyogo, which also offers programming classes for children like Eita.

Kid’s Tech enables its users to benefit from the government’s social welfare grants, which cover a large part of the tuition cost and are guaranteed by the Child Welfare Act. The law was revised in 2012 to strengthen support for children with disabilities and included detailed guidelines aimed at improving services offered at places where children spend time after school to help foster their independence.

The number of children in Japan with developmental disabilities is still unclear, but the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry speculates it might be increasing.

According to the ministry’s 2011 data, of 215,000 children with disabilities of all sorts, 152,000 have been diagnosed with intellectual disabilities that include developmental disorders.

But a survey conducted by the ministry in 2012 of elementary and junior high school students across the country showed a significant number of children who haven’t been diagnosed with any intellectual disorder had problems studying.



Eita Ide (right) studies computer programming at Kid's Tech, a newly opened cram school catering to the needs of children with developmental disabilities in Tokyo's Ota Ward in mid-April. | SATOKO KAWASAKI



Students with developmental disabilities study how to plan and prioritize their work at Teens in Tokyo's Shinjuku Ward. | SATOKO KAWASAKI

Of 52,272 cases the surveyed schools reported, an estimated 6.5 percent of children attending regular classes had significant learning or behavioral problems, indicating that two students per class might have a suspected disability.

It was the first nationwide survey conducted on a large scale in all prefectures excluding Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, which were severely affected by the March 2011 disasters.

Sumiyama lamented that many after-school classes operate without specially designed programs or consideration for such children's conditions.

"Children with developmental disabilities are often put into one room with those with other disabilities and end up watching TV and eating snacks," he said.

He pointed out that without adequate support, many of them eventually refuse to go to school, struggle with adapting themselves to the school environment or are picked on by bullies, which stops them from pursuing higher education or a career.

Children coming to Kid's Tech can learn the basics of computer programming included in a mandatory program to be introduced to elementary schools from 2020 under the education ministry's guidelines.

Sumiyama said that in 10 or 15 years, many of the jobs that people with autism tend to choose, such as factory line or data input work — which don't require communicating with coworkers — will likely disappear.

By acquiring programming skills, the children can turn their disabilities into strengths, which would help them secure jobs in such sectors like programming, database and systems engineering, he said.

Eita's mother, Mika Ide, told The Japan Times she was grateful that her son is given a chance to learn something useful for his future career, adding that she is seeing her son become more interested in learning.

"I'm looking forward to seeing his further progress, step by step, over the long run," Ide said.

Tokyo-based Kaien, a company that also assists disabled people with finding employment, runs cram schools with programs focusing on helping children build their self-esteem.

Sanae Iijima of the company's education unit explained

that the lack of confidence in people with developmental disabilities often leads to struggles with securing jobs.

"Our program is to help children acquire skills useful in building their careers, such as communication skills, the ability to organize their work and to boost self-confidence," Iijima said.

The firm runs classes where children can have a glimpse into working environments through its work-experience program.

Children are also taught how to plan and prioritize their work effectively as the lack of such skills contributes to failures during the job search as disabled people struggle with preparing documents for recruitment processes, Iijima said.

At Kaien's school, children learn how to cooperate and communicate with their future colleagues in an office based on their position, or with customers, as well as how to report their work progress, Iijima added.

In 2013, Kaien opened Teens, a cram school that enables elementary, junior high and high school students with developmental disabilities to benefit from public financial aid. The school's five branches in Tokyo and Kanagawa Prefecture have about 400 attendees in total.

Iijima said that many children coming to Teens are in the "gray zone," meaning they have not been diagnosed with any disorder, are unaware of their often hardly noticeable disabilities and are likely to face hurdles in their adult lives.

Since 2011 the firm has also been offering programming classes, which are not subject to the governmental aid. Iijima praised the government's recent efforts to enhance support for children showing symptoms of other developmental disorders at public schools.

"But I'd like the government to speed up work on support for college students" who haven't been covered under Japan's welfare program, she added. "The (child welfare) law was established based on the premise that disabled children would not pursue higher education. But now it's a natural thing."

She also lamented that despite the relatively increasing availability of similar services, developmental disorders are still considered taboo in society, causing parties concerned to refuse to accept such help.

She recalled a case in which a school denied coopera-

tion and rejected the possibility that any of the school's students may have a developmental disability.

Kaien plans to increase the number of its facilities and establish partnerships across the country to respond to the needs in other regions where access to such assistance is limited.

Source: Japan Times, May 4, 2017

Program launched to offer students internships in India

Staff Writer, with Central News Agency (CNA)



Taiwanese students interested in working as interns in India now have the opportunity to do so through the “Intern India” initiative, which has been developed by the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center in Chennai and St Britto's College. The initiative is to provide more than 100 internships at companies and establishments in the southern Indian city, center Director Charles Li said.

“Participating firms include businesses in the logistics, hotel, education and restaurant sectors, and other establishments that have contacts with St Britto's College,” he said. Students interested in participate in the program must submit an application and undergo an online interview with St Britto's, Li said.

Successful candidates are to be put on a shortlist and their names posted on the institution's Web site, after which the school's placement team would determine which organizations match their needs.

If applicants make it onto the shortlist, they must then pay an initial deposit to officially become enrolled in the internship program and receive help from the placement team on their



professional development, career counseling and lodging, St Britto's said.

Commenting on housing, Li said a newly renovated apartment has been set aside by St Britto's to accommodate the interns.

“Accommodation, food and transport are available at a price,” he said, adding that various activities would also be available on weekends for Taiwanese interns to learn about Indian culture, history and religion.

St Britto's College is part of the St Britto's Group of Institutions headed by Vimala Britto, who is also founder of the Seek Foundation, a non-governmental organization for the underprivileged in India.

An application form for the program can be downloaded at: stbrittoscollege.edu.in/internship-application-form.

Source: Taipei Times, April 25, 2017



Asian nations lead in latest OECD education rankings

By Andrea Graells Tempel and Jonathan Jacobsen, Agence France-Presse (AFP)



Asian countries dominated the top places in the latest PISA survey, but the report criticized the teaching of science in many countries.

The PISA survey is an international study of high school students' abilities.

Taiwan was ranked both among the top-performing countries and the countries criticized by the report.

The survey of 72 countries and economies found that the quality of science lessons was more important than equipment or even staffing levels.

And it confirmed earlier findings that loading students down with homework was rarely the key to success in science.

Singapore came top of the table for its teaching of science, reading and mathematics. Its students scored an average of 556 points, compared with the average among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries of 493.

Where once Finland led the way in educational excellence, Singapore is now the example to other countries, the report said.

"Everyone used to go to Finland. Now you have to go to Singapore to see what they are doing," OECD Chief of Staff Gabriela Ramos told reporters ahead of the report's launch.

Nearly a quarter of all students in Singapore (24 percent) also scored in the top two categories in science tests, compared with just 8 percent across the OECD countries.

The five top-performing countries in the PISA tests, which were carried out in 2015, were Singapore, Japan, Estonia, Taiwan and Finland.

The report found however that around 6 percent of students in OECD countries, many of them in Europe, reported they did not get regular science lessons. These students scored significantly lower in the tests.

Schools that did not offer dedicated science lessons tend to be in poorer areas of countries, the report noted. The problem was particularly bad in Austria, Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Slovakia and Taiwan.

In School, Not at Home

The results also suggested that the key to success in science teaching, even more than well-equipped and well-staffed departments, was how much time was spent teaching the subject.

Those teachers who actually demonstrated scientific ideas and who adapted their teaching to meet students' needs

produced better results, the report said.

That tended to happen in smaller classes, and students who received this kind of teaching were more likely to go on to a science-related career, it added.

"Students score five points higher in science for every additional hour spent per week in regular science lessons, after accounting for socio-economic status," the report noted.

But the results also suggested that the study needed to be done in school, not at home.

"School systems where students spend more time learning after school, by doing homework, receiving additional instruction or in private study, tend to perform less well in science," said the report.

Perhaps predictably, head teachers told the researchers that truancy was one problem that hindered student learning the most. But another significant factor they reported was staff resistance to change.

Bullying and students' use of alcohol or illegal drugs were reported as far less significant.

Asian countries dominated the top 10 of the PISA table, with Japan recording the second-highest average score behind Singapore.

Macao, Hong Kong and the mainland Chinese territories that were tested also featured in the top 10, as did Taiwan and Vietnam.

Source: China Post, December 7, 2016



Million-dollar teachers?

Instructors cashing in by selling their lessons online

By Carolyn Thompson / Associated Press (AP)

Miss Kindergarten is in the million-dollar club. So are Lovin Lit, the Moffatt Girls and about a dozen other teacher-entrepreneurs who are spinning reading, math, science and social studies into gold by selling their lesson plans online to fellow teachers around the world.

Despite worries from some educators, such online marketplaces are booming, driven by rising standards and the willingness of teachers to pay out of their own pockets for classroom-tested materials.

"I am so thankful and blessed that it came into my life and that my passion and career can kind of mesh into one," says Miss Kindergarten, aka 32-year-old Hadar Hartstein, of Lake Forest, California, who says she has earned more than US\$1 million in sales over the past six years, enough to take this year and maybe the next few off from her teaching job to be with her newborn daughter.

Her more than 300 offerings on the popular Teachers Pay Teachers site range from free alphabet flash cards and a US\$1.50 Popsicle party counting activity to a US\$120 full-year unit on math and literacy, all of them widely promoted on her blog and social media accounts.

"You definitely have to look at it as another full-time job," she says. "You have to put a lot of effort into it."

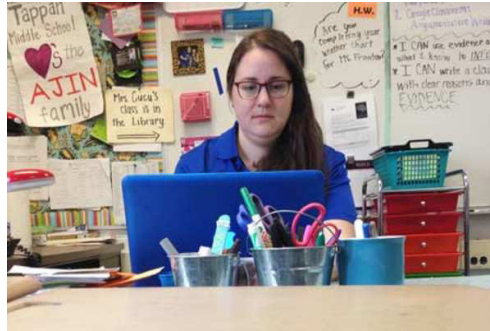
Teachers Pay Teachers contends that it hit a milestone last year, when its 80,000 contributors earned more than US\$100 million, and that at least a dozen have become millionaires since the site launched a decade ago. Other major sites including Teachwise and Teacher's Notebook, and recently such corporate players as Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and Amazon, have launched sites of their own.

But some educators worry the increasing monetizing of lessons will stifle the longstanding practice of teachers freely sharing their ideas. And legal experts question whether teachers actually have ownership of the lessons they are selling.

For teachers buying the materials, however, it's a major time saver, allowing them to reclaim the nights and weekends otherwise spent starting lessons from scratch, often for no more than the price of their morning coffee.

Ann Arbor, Michigan, middle school teacher Samantha Cucu said that when she first started teaching three years ago, she created her own materials but was swayed by colleagues who made a compelling argument: "Why are you reinventing the wheel?"

She has since bought about 120 resources and gotten 132 others from Teachers Pay Teachers' free offerings. "Sometimes they're super-easy small purchases, like US\$1.20 here, US\$2.50 there, and sometimes they're larger. I try not to spend over US\$15," says Cucu who estimated that her prep time



In this April 3 photo, Samantha Cucu types on a laptop inside her classroom at Tappan Middle School in Ann Arbor, Michigan. (AP)

for school plummets from 20 to 30 hours a week to two hours if she can find what she needs online. "It's huge," says Cucu, who has a year-old baby.

At Teachers Pay Teachers, teachers set their own prices for 2.5 million resources and give a commission to the site. With a US\$59.95 premium membership, the commission is 15 percent. With a free basic membership, it's 40 percent.

"My first sale was 80 cents. It was the best 80 cents I've made in my entire life!" says Mary Beth Nerone, who has been stocking her online store, Brain

Waves Instruction, on the site with writing, poetry and other exercises for three years after budget cuts eliminated her job as a middle-school language arts teacher near Rochester, New York.

"Some people are psyched and say I get Starbucks money each week ... some people get to a space where they can meet or surpass their teaching income," Nerone says. "And some people get to a space beyond their wildest dreams of income."

Source: China Post, April 14, 2017

Universities sign MOU to conduct research on brain

By Lee I-chia / Staff reporter



Taipei Medical University (TMU) and National Taipei University of Technology (NTUT) announced on October 31, 2017 the establishment of a cooperative research platform focused on brain science.

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the establishment of an intelligence brain technology science center platform was signed by TMU vice president Wu Chieh-hsin and NTUT vice president Yang Che-hua in Taipei.

The memorandum is to serve as a platform for research focused on the brain, artificial intelligence, big data and the me-

chanical engineering of brainwave measurement equipment.

The platform's goals include improving the quality of long-term care for people with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis or who are in a vegetative state.

TMU has expertise in medicine NTUT has expertise in information and engineering, so the two schools hope to complement each other and improve the medical industry by cooperating through the platform, Wu said.

"A short-term goal is to find focal points for the brain science research conducted at the two universities," Yang said.

Although NTUT does not have medicine-related departments, its professors have cooperated in research with healthcare facilities for more than 20 years, and achieved outstanding results in the fields of electronics, electrical engineering, chemical engineering, biotechnology and design, Yang said.

TMU College of Management dean Shia Ben-chang said that the school is planning to launch three or four minor interdisciplinary programs for students from the two universities who will be able to take several courses in the other school, starting from next year.



Source: Taipei Times, November 1, 2017

How the digital revolution is bringing books to Cambodia's children

By Paul Millar

Forty years after the Khmer Rouge waged a devastating war on education, Cambodia's children still cannot access the reading materials they need to start a new chapter in the nation's history. Now, a handful of NGOs are using technology to change that

In Matilda, the story of a girl who grows up seeking shelter from her neglectful family between the covers of her books, children's author Roald Dahl wrote lovingly of the power of literature to transport young minds to worlds far from their daily lives.

"She went on olden-day sailing ships with Joseph Conrad. She went to Africa with Ernest Hemingway and to India with Rudyard Kipling. She travelled all over the world while sitting in her little room in an English village," he wrote. "These books gave Matilda a hopeful and comforting message: You are not alone."

In Cambodia, though, the children's book industry is almost nonexistent, while a lack of infrastructure to distribute books has left many students struggling to find the stories fundamental to the first years of their lives.

Rewriting history

It is a tale best told in the context of a country rising from the ashes of decades of civil war. Although the Khmer Rouge was not, as is sometimes said, fundamentally opposed to reading and writing – indeed, the belief that one should read "as a peasant", uncritical of the propaganda pumped out by the Angkar administration, was in many ways the bedrock upon which it planned to build its new unquestioning utopia – it would be difficult to overstate the debilitating impact those years had on the country's education system.

Of the more than 20,000 primary school teachers working in Cambodia, fewer than 3,000 survived the regime's assault on education, according to figures from the US Library of Congress. The nation's body of literature was similarly devastated, with an estimated half of Khmer-language written material destroyed.

While the literacy rate has risen sharply over the past decade, the Unesco Institute for Statistics stated that one in five Cambodians over the age of 15 remained illiterate as of 2013. In a joint opinion piece in the Phnom Penh Post on the 50th anniversary of International Literacy Day in September, former education minister Hang Chuon Naron and Unesco representative in Cambodia Anne Lemaistre wrote that improving literacy rates was essential to fight many of the deep-seated inequalities within the country.

"Literacy is vital for poverty eradication, gender equality and more inclusive and sustainable societies," they wrote. "Literacy is more than just reading, writing and counting abilities. It is the use of this ability to improve the quality of life for

ourself [sic] and others around us.”

Building the basics

Despite this apparent goodwill, though, there remains a stark dearth of reading material for young Cambodians outside of their official school textbooks. Wendy Rockett, senior communications officer for The Asia Foundation’s Books for Asia programme, said the country’s fledgling children’s book publishing industry was being hampered by a lack of fundamental infrastructure.

“There isn’t a public library system, so books are either being sold in the handful of bookstores that there are in the country, or in the markets,” she said. “So there isn’t that kind of distribution system that you see in the West, where books can be sold and accessed by the public.”

Launched in November 2015, the Books for Asia Library for All pilot programme runs digital libraries in five Cambodian primary schools, each equipped with Android tablets and 100 digitised books in both Khmer and English. By providing about 4,700 children with access to an easily updated range of high-quality children’s literature, the programme hopes to kindle a passion for reading from an early age.

While Rockett said the schools had seen in a surge in library use compared with schools outside the pilot, she stressed that poor conditions within schools made gauging its full impact difficult. “Some of the biggest issues we’ve faced is the lack of technology infrastructure in the schools,” she said. “In four of the five schools we’re currently working in, internet is not available.”

In schools with more traditional library programmes, the problems are only more pronounced. A July 2016 survey by World Vision canvassing the reading habits of children in grades four to six in 39 schools across Cambodia revealed that while students were broadly satisfied with their school libraries, the range of reading materials left much to be desired. In addition, the libraries’ opening hours tended to be sporadic and unpredictable.

“Eighty-five percent of all students from 32 schools reported having a library at their school. However, from their report of opening day and hour of library [sic], the survey showed many libraries are not consistently operating,” it read.

Of the students surveyed, more than a quarter reported typically spending less than five minutes in the library at a time. Another 22.7% stayed just six to ten minutes. Less than 2% spent more than an hour in the library in a single session.

Turning a new page

According to World Vision education and life skills technical lead Jill Reimer, lack of access to reading materials was only exacerbated among families from poorer backgrounds. “It is difficult for rural families to access what Khmer language books exist; either the books are not available for sale in their area, or they do not have the financial resources to purchase them,” she said.



Learning materials: young children read a picture book during a mobile library session put on by Sipar.

Huot Socheata, publishing programme manager of NGO Sipar Books, said many parents did not understand the importance of early reading programmes for their children and had seemingly little regard for the works of fiction so integral in developing their passion for reading. Even when parents had access to early learning materials, Socheata said, they tended to veer toward thick, cheap books that came in both English and Khmer – regardless of their quality, or the age of their children. “[They focus on] educational tools, because books have to provide knowledge. Fiction is the second

choice. It’s a story – they don’t have the idea that documentaries and stories are complementary,” she said.

According to Reimer, many parents in rural areas believed they lacked both the time and education to encourage their children to read. “They feel they cannot contribute to educating their own children, but that is not true,” she said. “The single most effective way for parents to promote reading skills in children is to spend time reading with children, including being read to by children if the adults themselves are not literate, and otherwise interacting around the books.”

Yet Rockett said the severe lack of available children’s books was a problem with no easy solution. “That’s a much more tricky issue,” she said. “With children’s books in Cambodia, there are many factors to why there aren’t as many as there should be. There aren’t enough content creators, and that’s because of a lack of opportunity to publish.”

The next chapter

It is this hole that Books for Asia hopes to fill with its latest project. Centred around a series of “hack-a-thon” events, the project brings together local authors, illustrators and e-book developers in day-long creative marathons to produce fresh e-books aimed at children. While the first session in October was targeted at authors already experienced in creating children’s literature, the programme will eventually expand its circle to include those outside the industry.

The Asia Foundation estimates that the marathons may cut down e-books’ time in post-production to as little as two months from the first stroke of the pen. Although available in a print-friendly format, the emphasis on digital content is designed to slash printing and distribution costs – two major expenses in a developing country such as Cambodia.

It is this belief in the potential of digital media to connect young Cambodians with their nation’s available literature that sparked international NGO Aide et Action to launch its Khmer LEARN platform. Riding on the back of rising rates of smartphone use among Cambodians – owned by almost 40% of Cambodians, according to The Asia Foundation’s estimates – their flagship project, the Khmer Library, is an app containing more than 1,000 books in Khmer and other languages available for free download. Regularly used by more than 38,000 Cambo-

dians, the app contains dozens of books targeted at children to promote love of literature from an early age.

Aide et Action's communication director Sek Barisoth said the digital platform gives Cambodians easy access to content not readily available in print form.

"If they want to read a book, they don't have to travel to the city, to spend time in a library to borrow the book and then return the book – they can just click on their phone and they can read from that, and learn from that," he said.

Acknowledging that smartphone ownership was rarer among readers from poor backgrounds, Barisoth pointed to his NGO's pilot programme equipping seven targeted primary school libraries with tablets and televisions to create communal spaces for children to develop a passion for reading.

"We want students not just to go through to learn or to read, but to get

entertained by using the technology – and to learn at the same time," he said.

Rockett also maintained that technology would be critical in connecting young people with the kinds of works their school libraries lacked. "We're seeing that technology can attract young people to reading," she said. "And we're trying to really

see how we can capitalise on that to improve Cambodians' attitudes towards reading because... the culture of reading in the country is pretty poor."

For Socheata, though, it is this perception of Cambodia that needs to be overcome if the country is to once again become a place where children can find their voice between the pages of a book. "We cannot blame the children, or the people here [and say] they don't like to read – because there is nothing for them to read," she said.



Under lights: child garbage pickers gather around to read a book they found as they work late at night recycling trash at a Siem Reap dump.

Source:
Southeast Asia Globe, November 10, 2016

Program to teach Southeast Asian languages, cultures

Staff writer, with Central News Agency (CNA)



Radio Taiwan International (RTI) and Chunghwa Telecom Co on August 1, 2017 launched a Southeast Asian-language program to meet growing demand as the nation seeks to advance ties with the region.

RTI is to produce 10-minute Indonesian, Thai and Vietnamese lessons to be aired on Chunghwa's multimedia-on-demand

(MOD) system.

The state-funded radio station said it hopes the program would benefit Taiwanese interested in investing in Indonesia, Thailand or Vietnam, as well as people who have employed workers from those nations.

It also targets tourism industry workers, as well as Taiwanese interested in traveling, studying or working in Southeast Asia, RTI said.

In addition to teaching language, the program is to also introduce cultures and customs, the station said.

In the Thai segments, viewers will learn about important Thai festivals, including Songkran — the Thai New Year — and Khao Phansa, a Buddhist holiday that marks the start of the rainy season and a three-month retreat for monks, program host and teacher Anchan Songphut said.



They will also learn about Thai customs, such as the traditional greeting of pressing palms together, and different hand positions, Songphut said.

"More Taiwanese are interested in learning Thai, especially young people who want to invest in Thailand, travel there as backpackers or find a job there," she said.

Maria Sukamto, who hosts and teaches the Indonesian segments, said she will introduce Ramadan rituals; the tradition of batik, a fabric dyeing technique; and other customs.

She will also introduce the art, lifestyles and food of Indonesia, as well as information on traveling and doing business in the country, she said.

The program is to be available for viewing on RTI's Web site starting on August 1, 2017 and on mobile devices through the Chunghwa MOD app starting on September 1, 2017.

Source: Taipei Times, August 4, 2017

UT, Indian institute sign MOU

Staff writer, with Central News Agency (CNA)

GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING: UT is expanding its exchanges with Singapore's Nanyang Technological University and Illinois State University in the US, president Tai Hsia-ling said

The University of Taipei (UT) on August 1, 2017 signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with an Indian college as part of a bid to become one of the top 500 colleges in the world, university president Tai Hsia-ling said.

In the memorandum, UT and the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi agreed to collaborate on teaching and learning resource exchanges, faculty and student research exchanges and joint research projects.

UT also agreed to offer 10 scholarships of up to NT\$90,000 per year for students from the institute for airfares, accommodation and living expenses.

The institute is to provide free board and a monthly allowance of 5,000 rupees (US\$79) to exchange students from UT.

Delhi Bodh Raj Mehta, dean of the institute's research and development department, said he was optimistic about the partnership, adding that his school and UT are about the same size and are facing some of the same challenges.

Meanwhile, at a swearing-in ceremony for her second term as UT president, Tai said that by improving teaching and research quality and raising the school's international profile, it



University of Taipei president Tai Hsia-ling poses at the university in an undated photograph. Photo: University of Taipei Web site

has been able to overcome some of the challenges it has faced.

She cited as an example the challenges brought on by the merging of the Taipei Municipal University of Education and the Taipei Physical Education College in August 2013 to create UT.

During her first four-year term, she said the university also faced higher-education budget cuts and falling enrollment nationwide as a result of the nation's low birth rate.

Nonetheless, its enrollment rate has remained among the top three in the nation, and its sister-school cooperation programs have doubled, Tai said.

She said she was committed to improving UT's ranking to the top 500 worldwide as a high global ranking is crucial to attracting more international students.

As part of the plan, the university is building links with overseas schools such as the Indian institute and is to expand its academic exchanges with Nanyang Technological University in Singapore and Illinois State University, she said.

UT, which is about 120 years old, is ranked 67th in Taiwan and 2,934th globally, according to Webometrics Ranking of World Universities, a university lineup released by Cybermetrics Lab, a research group affiliated with the biggest public research organization in Spain.

Source: Taipei Times, August 4, 2017

Woman raises NT\$1 million for school

By Lee Ya-wen and William Hetherington /Staff reporter, with staff writer



Yeh Teng-tzu, who donated NT\$1 million to New Taipei City's Sinjhuang Elementary School on July 17, 2017, collects recyclables in an undated photograph. Photo: Ho Yu-hua, Taipei Times

FOR THE CHILDREN: Yeh Teng-tzu said that she was driven by memories of economic hardships in her own family to raise money for underprivileged students

An elderly woman in New Taipei City on July 17, 2017 donated NT\$1 million (US\$32,833) from her own savings and other sources for underprivileged children at an elementary school in the city.

Yeh Teng-tzu, 78, who last year donated an ambulance to the New Taipei City Government, on July 17, 2017 made the cash donation to Sinjhuang Elementary School, drawing comparisons from local residents to philanthropist Chen Shu-chu from Taitung.

With her children married and working, Yeh spends her days collecting recyclables and volunteering at local temples, government offices and schools.

Yeh said she normally does not return home until 10pm.

Yeh volunteered at Sinjhuang Elementary School as a

crossing guard for 20 years, retiring two years ago on the advice of fellow volunteers who worried the work was unsafe at her age.

Yeh said she remained concerned about the students even after giving up her role and in May she discussed with parents and school administrators the issue of arranging a large donation for needy children.

She was driven by memories of economic hardships in her own family, she said, citing the inability to buy her children yearbooks when they graduated from elementary school.

The donation is intended to help disadvantaged children with things such as buying yearbooks and attending graduation trips with their classmates, she said.

Sinhuang volunteer fire brigade captain Liang Pi-tsun said that when the two met last year, Yeh asked him how she

could acquire an ambulance to donate.

"I told her: 'If you collect the money, someone can help you with the rest.' I never imagined she would persist to the end and [succeed in] donating an ambulance," Liang said, adding that he has been impressed seeing Yeh collecting recyclables as late as 12:30am.

"She is truly an incredible person," Liang added.

School principal Tsai Ming-jo said Yeh would not relax until the donation was handed over.

"It really left a deep impression on me. The school will be sure to use the money just as she wants," Tsai said.

Taipei Department of Education Commissioner Lin Yihua in a statement on July 17, 2017 thanked Yeh for her selfless contribution.

Source: Taipei Times, July 21, 2017

Local universities launch int'l internship program

By The China Post news staff

More than 400 people from universities and industries across Taiwan attended the official launch of an international internship exchange program on October 28, 2016 in Tunghai University in Taichung.

Tunghai University is promoting the international exchange program allowing Taiwan's student to do internships in other countries, with many local and foreign universities and companies participating. The Taichung-based university said the program, headed by Prof. Hsu En-te, also arranges for foreign students to do internships in Taiwan.

The universities will select students to be sent to the participating companies, which will offer scholarships as well as internships.

Hsu said students doing overseas internships would work in very different environments, depending on which country they worked in. In Germany, interns could earn as much as NT\$60,000 a month.

"It is important to combine the resources of universities and enterprises in Taiwan and other countries to let our students be more competitive in the world," said Peter J. Sher, Chairman of the Corporate Synergy Development Center (CSDC). CSDC is a key organizer of the program, which is responsible of finding local and international enterprises that are willing to accept interns to their companies.

Students are also positive about the program. "I did my internship in an accounting firm for one year," said Chung Chia-wen, a senior at Tunghai University, "Now I am going to graduate and the firm wants me to work for them and said they are willing to offer me a higher salary than other new colleagues."

Wu mei-fun, an international student from Vietnam who did her internship in Cheng Shin Rubber Ind. Co., said she would



Hsu En-te, right, a professor in Tunghai University, and Peter J. Sher, Chairman of the Corporate Synergy Development Center, explain the international internship exchange program to reporters at Tunghai University in Taichung. Friday, October 28 (The China Post photo)

like to remain in Taiwan after her graduation. "Through the internship, I know Taiwan better and know what I am going to do in the future."

Local universities participating in the program include National Cheng Kung University, National Taiwan Ocean University, National Chi Nan University and Feng Chia University.

Source: China Post, October 29, 2016

Pakistani youth facing education challenges

Reuters, ISLAMABAD

Pakistani private schools, charitable institutions and religious seminaries are stepping in to supplement government-run schools to help deal with the education needs of a fast-growing nation with an estimated 50 million school-age children.

Despite 220,000 schools nationwide, Pakistan has more than 20 million out-of-school children, a government report issued in 2016 said.

The government has pumped money into schooling, with the education budget swelling by 15 percent every year since 2010, education consultancy Alif Ailaan said.

The UN puts the current budget at 2.65 percent of GDP, about US\$8 billion, or about US\$150 per student.

However, experts have said the government cannot meet all the education needs and part of the problem lies in quality of



teaching rather than just dearth of money.

“It’s not the number of schools, it’s the quality, the attitude,” said Zeba Hussain, founder of the Mashal Schools, which educate children displaced by war in the country’s north.

Situated on the outskirts of Pakistan’s capital Islamabad, the charitable schools began when Hussain met a group of refugee children while visiting the hills encircling the city.

Many private institutions criticize what they describe as a deeply flawed government education system.

“Students are labeled ‘smart’ or ‘stupid’ right from the start,” said Shaista Kazmi from Vision 21, a privately-funded non-governmental organization that runs speed literacy programs for out-of-school children that compress five years of reading proficiency into one.

Pakistani Federal Directorate of Education Director Tariq Masood strongly disagreed with critiques of teachers, adding that population growth and funding were the biggest challenges faced by government schools.

“No one who is underqualified can enter the government system, there are fewer checks in the private system,” Masood said.

Government schools adhered to a nationwide curriculum that was



being constantly reworked and innovated, Masood said.

The country’s poorest often send their children to one of the thousands of religious madrasahs (Arabic for school) where students are boarded, fed and given an Islamic education.

Most operate without government oversight.

Pakistan’s madrasahs have become synonymous with creating militant fighters through hardline teachings of Islam and many have been linked to organizations such as the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

However, many provide shelter, three full meals and a good education to young people whose families are unable to make ends meet.

“In certain cases people send their kids because they can’t even afford to feed them,” said Irfan Sher from the al-Nadwa Madrasah, where all subjects are prioritized and students are capable of analyzing what they are taught.

Sher said that the country’s future hinges on what its youth are taught.

“The overall policy should be changed ... they should understand that if they want to change the country the only way is to spread quality education,” he said.



Source: Taipei Times, October 28, 2017

About CACCI

The Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CACCI) is a regional grouping of apex national chambers of commerce and industry, business associations and business enterprises in Asia and the Western Pacific.

It is a non-governmental organization serving as a forum for promoting the vital role of businessmen in the region, increasing regional business interaction, and enhancing regional economic growth. Since its establishment in 1996, CACCI has grown into a network of national chamber of commerce with a

total now of 29 Primary Members from 27 Asian countries and independent economies.

It cuts across national boundaries to link businessmen and promote economic growth throughout the Asia-Pacific region. CACCI is a non-governmental organization (NGO) granted consultative status, Roster category, under the United Nations.

It is a member of the Conference on NGOs (CoNGO), an association of NGOs with UN consultative status.

Published by the Secretariat, Confederation of Asia-Pacific Chambers of Commerce and Industry

Ernest Lin, Director General; Amador R. Honrado, Jr., Editor

Wendy Yang, Contributing Editor; Teresa Liu, Assistant Editor

7F-2, No. 760, Sec. 4 Bade Road, Taipei 10567, Taiwan; Tel: (886 2) 2760-1139; Fax: (886 2) 2760-7569

Email: cacci@cacci.org.tw; Website: www.cacci.biz