

**By Richard Alan Posner**

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# 101 Hidden Niche Opportunities in Japan

## *One-Touch Business Ideas From Japan Which Will Turn Your Fortune Into Fortunes*

### **City Redevelopment**

Many schools and other government-controlled offices in the center of big cities are closing because of the declining birthrate in Japan. More than 2,000 elementary, junior high and high schools nationwide have been forced to close over the past decade and an estimated 300 more schools a year are scheduled to shut their doors over the next several years. These old schools are being converted to geriatric centers and art enclaves.

If you refer to the chart of the [Ministry of Education, Culture, Health and Sports\(MEXT\)](#), school closures are increasing steadily because of the lower birthrate.

Just recently one of the largest developers in Japan, Mori Building, took a worn-down neighborhood block in the pricey Shibuya/Harajuku District of Tokyo and built a very upscale shopping mall called [Omotesando Hills](#).

On Kyushu Island, in the tired hot spring city of Yufuin, a surge of fashionable boutiques and artisan enclaves have arisen from the dank environs. New capital and new businesses have pumped life into the area.

With the re-designation of so many old schools and ramshackle buildings throughout Japanese metropolitan areas, this is an opportune time to negotiate with local districts to buy or lease such properties for quality convalescent homes, vocational schools or a host of other artistic endeavors. Japan is in the Baby Boomer retirement bubble and now is the time to strike.

### **20 Best Resources for Exploring Opportunities in Japan**

Some people would - without major objection - classify me as a lunatic or a fanatic. I'm an information collector. My [Japan Directory](#) of 4000+ Japanese-based sites in English and the [Success Arsenal](#) were both compiled over hundreds' of hours combing the mainstream Internet highway, its alleyways, its sewers and its deserts. There were some very well-designed and fascinating websites discovered in my quest, yet quite a few of them were disaster zones (at least, on the English side of their site).

I realize that you don't have the time or the mind to comb the Internet, glean valuable information, and then apply it to your business or educational pursuits. On the other hand, I love to do that. And I love to cut the fat from your search efforts so that you can concentrate on meaty results which can catapult you to success.

What follows is my mostly free list of my top 20 sites for business and cultural research

in Japan. Not everything on these sites is free or fully accessible, nor should it be. There is no sin in collecting money from knowledge-hungry people who are too time-challenged or language-handicapped themselves to do the leg work.

Please note that there will be in-depth coverage about most of these sites later in this ebook. [JETRO](#), one of my favorites, was discussed above.

### **My Best List**

[Corporate Information](#), [Customs and Tariffs](#), [Japan Customs](#), [Entrepreneur Association of Tokyo](#), [Japan Inc](#), [Japan Direct Marketing Association](#), [Japan Association of New Business Incubation Organizations](#), [AsianNet Japan Suppliers](#), [Tokyo Business Entry Point](#), [Trends in Japan](#), [International Business Contacts Index](#), [Japan Telephone Directory](#), [All Japan International Traders' Association](#), [Go4JapanBusiness](#), [Ministry of Economy, Trade & Industry](#), [Business and Professional Association Directory](#), [Japan Marketing Consultants](#), [Japan Tax System](#), [Japan Entrepreneur Archives](#)

Note: If you are a permanent resident in Japan, there is a good chance that you can successfully apply for an up to 7.5 million, low-interest yen [loan](#) to start up an NGO or NPO organization. Who says foreigners are either rich or relegated to English teaching pastures? Many opportunities lie in between.

## ***Manga Goes Mainstream Outside of Japan***

Former Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso heeded the advice of a cultural advisory group. Long isolated because of language and culture barriers, the ministry wants to use Japanese pop culture, including manga and anime, as a diplomatic tool.

[The Council on the Movement of People Across Borders](#), the panel's namesake, proposes that Japanese pop culture has a growing fan base overseas which can be exploited. In fact, on the day of this writing eBay had classified nearly 2000 items for sale in the manga genre ranging from figurines to antique manga magazines to chains and other accessories. Prices for these items ranged between \$2 and \$250.

Tap into this ongoing craze. The manga magazine trading business is a thriving one. Gain permission from the publishers of anime and such to market stationary goods and clothing featuring the major characters in these comics and whatnot.

For those of you not into manga, gaming and such, what follows are the results of a recent poll released by the Cultural Affairs Ministry. Their survey listed [Godzilla](#), [Game of Life](#), [Othello](#), [Super Mario Brothers](#), [Final Fantasy VII](#), [Yawaraka Sensha](#), The Phoenix, [Doraemon](#), [Black Jack](#), [Jojo Bizarre Adventure](#), [Slamdunk](#), [Full Metal Alchemist](#), The White Snake Enchantess, [Astro Boy](#), [Nausica of the Valley of the Wind](#), [Neon Genesis Evangelion](#), and [Mobile Suit Gundam](#) as the most popular gaming figures and manga heroes from Japan.

Alternatively, you could create similar characters - free of copyright restrictions - and make your own goods to sell on manga and gaming-related sites.

And remember that these niche ideas are not to paint me as the imagination man, but to give you a chance to consider how to exploit a given goldmine. Anime has endless possibilities.

## **A Barrage of Brain-Thumping Ideas**

Nobody else was doing it well in Japan, so I decided to give it my best shot. When the niche opportunity idea dawned on me, I knew there was a lot of news that even locals overlook in their daily rush to pay the bills and get through the day.

Here are four mini salvos to get your noggin churning.

1) The Japanese cherish space. The once dank and barren station corridors – home to homeless folks – are now the rage for innovative concept shops, mostly boutiques. In the major population centers these spaces are being built up rapidly. But four out of five stations in Tokyo are cautiously approaching this commercial buildup. A foreign architect with space efficiency in mind and unique design concepts could rapidly find shopkeepers wanting fashionable stores in these once-forsaken stations passageways.

2) Every now and again one comes across here a totally acculturated and dedicated crafts person of non-Japanese heritage who has built a strong following in Japan and throughout the world. Some of these adventurers design musical instruments like the flute called "[shakuhachi](#)," while others design Japanese pottery called "[yakimono](#)." Whether artisan, performer, or savvy entrepreneur, opportunity abounds in the artisan world of Japan.

3) The huge list of [associations](#) I have put together in the Success in [Japan Directory](#) offer tremendous leads to companies, individuals and innovations in Japan. Seeing that the above list is linked only to English websites, you can try to contact the association itself or its members. If that doesn't work, [please contact me](#) and I'll see if I can arrange some kind of communication or meeting for a modest consultation fee.

4) For bio-techies and start-up companies in biotechnology, did you know that a [Biotechnology Business Competition](#) is held annually in Japan with a first prize of 5,000,000 yen and that submissions can be made in English? I smell a chance for you to get your proverbial foot in the door.

## **You Should Be On Chemicals**

One must keep in mind that the chemical industry and the nation of Japan as a whole are fully dependent on vast reserves of overseas petroleum and petroleum byproducts. But don't let that fact be mistaken for a soft underbelly for petroleum-dependent industries and refineries here.

For many years into the future, according to one of my chemical industry sources, this industry will thrive because there is no affordable, viable substitute for oil. Whether or not prices double, triple or quadruple for petroleum, demand for petroleum-based finished products will continue unabated.

The manufacturing industries in Japan will of course gradually pass on these increased costs to the consumers. Yet our huge appetite for products such as computers and i-Pods, produced with giant gulps of oil, will continue unabated.

Notably, Japan's chemical industries are now developing several cutting-edge processes to reduce oil consumption during the production of semi-finished and finished products. These innovations will offset price fluctuations triggered by rapid rises or falls in oil futures.

Oil-saving breakthrough technologies and devices will bring huge profits to private/public researchers or research corporations in Japan. To learn more about the

chemical industry vision, please click [HERE](#). If you have ideas, I believe the domestic industry will await you with open arms.

## **The Extraction Factor**

According to a growing school of thought, as summed up by [Shred Tech's](#) David Yamamota: "The recovery of precious metals from electronic hardware can be more lucrative and cost-effective than is the mining the metals."

Computers and peripherals can no longer be dumped for free in Japan, so scrap dealers comb the neighborhoods looking for throwaways.

There are two obvious options here: the first is to develop an [electronic recycle business in Japan](#) and the second is to invent a cost-effective way to extract these precious metals and then sell your know-how to the electronic giants and recycling firms of Japan.

## **Getting Soft on Patents**

A huge need has arisen for Japanese companies to be able to do a thorough prior art software patent checks, especially since the [property protection laws](#) changed a few years' back. Japanese enterprises need to know about prior art for software to support their research and development programs. Such searches are critical to increase the probability of a software patent application being approved and issued as a granted patent.

Opportunities abound for creating easy-to-use Japanese database search software related to prior art. The window is small yet lucrative and in demand!

## **The Bible of Japanese Construction**

Do you aspire to sell pre-fabricated housing or construction materials in Japan? Then please become familiar with the regulations by clicking [HERE](#).

In recent years [new housing starts](#) have exceed 1,000,000 per annum, and there is an increasing demand for stylish kitchen and bathroom designs, as well as bay windows and lofts. The keyword in all things is economy of size without compromising stylishness.

## **Putting the Brakes on Dementia**

How's your brain holding out? Better than most? A little short of change upstairs?

If the latter describes you, you're not alone. Presently over 1.7 million of Japan's 65+ population suffers from dementia. By the year 2015, as the bulk of Baby Boomers here surpass 65, the number of senile people is expected to soar to 2.5 million.

Since 2003, the sale of brain-training materials has been on a steady increase. Books and computer games offering mental training exercises have become popular among the middle-aged and senior citizens.

Do you have a superior visual or auditory product or service of this ilk in your native

language? Then go to [e-lance.com](http://e-lance.com) or [rentacoder.com](http://rentacoder.com) and find a reasonably-priced translator/interpreter to get your winner localized. Hurry before everyone gets too old to care!

### **The Resurrection of Cloth**

A shop dating back to the 17th Century is in the final stages of creating dye cloth from rice straw and hulls. If this new technique pans out, Reiko Yamaguchi, the wife of the owner of this thirteen-generation shop located in Niigata Prefecture, will be credited for the achievement.

At present, she is working in cooperation with a local textile plant. Ms. Yamaguchi has a method which could be worth millions, if for no other reason than it will become an [exotic art](#) from the Orient.

A soft and professional nudge from someone outside her small Japanese world may bring stardom to this local and her sponsor. If you are in the textile trade, then this may well be an avenue to pursue.

### **Will Foreigners Ever Find Gainful Employment Here?**

The present government system for training unskilled foreign workers is about to be scrapped. It will be replaced with a short-term employment scheme.

While the new system would liberalize laws regarding the type of employment such workers could do in Japan, the period of stay would be for non-renewable and set at three years maximum.

The original program was intended to transfer technology and cutting-edge skills to undeveloped and under-developed nations. In reality, however, the workers have are used as a cheap source of labor with little or no skills passing from the Japanese to the trainees.

Under the new regulations, organizations with ministerial permission would recruit foreigners and introduce them to domestic companies indiscriminately.

Now is a golden chance to set up an enterprise in Japan which is labor-intensive and slanted toward a customer base of English speakers. The labor pool for your new business would be vast and endless.

### **Home, Home on the Paddy**

A lot of people, stressed by overworking and hectic lifestyles in Japan's crowded metropolitan areas, are yearning for their rural or agrarian roots.

Agricultural industry tours are attracting Japanese Baby Boomers and their offspring to the backwaters of Japan. The allure of this idyllic, back-to-basics' lifestyle is causing many of these workaholics and their estranged families to seriously consider alternatives to the rat race.

These tours are giving participants a chance to have a hands-on experience and many are walking away hooked by the tranquility and freedom available outside of the big

cities.

The government in cooperation with the [National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations](#), is now preparing various courses for young, middle-aged and seniors to urge them to engage or re-engage in agriculture.

One such program is aimed at *freeters* - NEETS (people not involved in education or employment) and others who constantly change jobs and don't settle down. The program, dubbed "Challenge Farm School" will soon be accompanied by a website with the same theme.

Western agricultural technology and know-how is in greater and greater demand in Japan. Websites marketing back-to-earth agrarian tools and equipment suitable for novices could be a hit. A website and country-wide workshop format could hit pay dirt. Additionally, why not set up a Japanese-language portal site to introduce the homesteading concept in earnest to the natives?

### **The Keikos and the Ries Emancipate Themselves...Finally!**

An emancipating era for divorced women in Japan commenced on last April. From that time, divorcees became entitled to 50 percent of their company-employed, *ex-husband's* pension.

Civic groups are anticipating sky-rocketing divorce rates as the law begins to kick in and indications are that these groups were dead on right.

Explanatory sessions are now held nationwide. A large number of the participants have been middle-aged and older housewives. Traditionally, housewives in unhappy or broken marriages have found neither scant relief nor support from the legal system.

Although many women get cold feet trying to sue their divorced husband and having to live on modest means after separation, very clearly this is the optimum time to promote SOHO businesses for these newly-emancipated women.

They will need products and services such as How to Invest, How to Set Up a Home Business, How to Make House Repairs, and even How to Find a Mate in Middle Age and Beyond.

According to the Dai-ichi Life Research Institute, more than 42,000 people will have divorce their husband in the initial months after the law change. The time is NOW to map out a strategy to deal with this major social change which is sweeping Japan.

### **Eyes Turn to the Philippines**

Many Asian countries which don't have English as the language of business are turning to the Philippines as a training ground. Over 800 such schools and institutions in the Philippines now cater to the growing demand for low-cost English-language training.

In fact, close to 100,000 Koreans have participated in such English mastery programs in the past few years. Only a five-hour flight from Seoul/Tokyo puts the learner in a total immersion learning circumstance in Manila.

Why not become a broker in Japan for the more reputable schools in the Philippines?

From my personal experience of living in Japan for 28 years, I have concluded that a majority of English schools in Japan suck! There are two reasons why. First, teachers

have spotty qualifications and scant experience. Secondly, the lessons are totally contrived and unrealistic.

True communication only happens where English is spoken in business and real life. Frustrated English teaching slackers should please take note. The Philippines – while not ideal for English-language learning, is a far more natural than downtown Tokyo.

### **Class On Demand**

[President \(Shacho, jp.\) TV](#) is an Internet video program which gives a glimpse into the secretive world of big bosses in Japan. This idea was the brainchild of Aoyama Planning Arts Inc.'s chairman, Akifumi Onaka. The site, in recent months, is averaging 800,000 hits.

On a regular rotation many Japanese up-and-coming managers and specialists are assigned overseas postings. Far too many of them have questionable communication skills.

If a visionary media company could put together a series of on-demand mini-training sessions online to familiarize Japanese with overseas office and private life one-point lessons in English (with Japanese subtitles), the traffic to your website would increase exponentially because targeted traffic is much easier to convert to paying clientele.

Another idea might be to approach Aoyama with the idea of producing and distributing the Japanese site's interviews with company presidents in your native language. Many foreigners want to have hands-on understanding of what makes the Japanese business juggernaut work.

The Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology is now allowing private fertility centers to preserve the eggs of unmarried women when they are treated for cancer. That right had been granted to married couple for years, but not for singles.

### **A Fertile Opportunity**

There are 130 fertility centers across Japan. Nine of them will be designated for these unmarried women.

These type of clinics are seldom approached by outsiders (foreign concerns) with [new products](#) and technology in the cryogenics field. There have been [breakthroughs](#) in this field worthy of introduction into Japan.

Find out about them, form an agency relation with the inventor or invention corporation, hire a medical interpreter in Japan, and visit the designated clinics to get started. Then solicit the other 121 clinics.

### **A Business is Brewing**

*Doburoku* is the Japanese word for a thick home brew made from rice. It is only brewed and sold in certain rural communities; zoning and other regulations limit the supply.

In Niigata Prefecture, devastated by a massive earthquake a few years ago, several local farmers have remodeled their toppled farmhouses into no-frill inns featuring the potent



brew and regional cuisine.

Do you have such a local brew from your country? Many rural areas of Japan are begging for residents, accompanying investment, and in some cases homesteaders to sustain these beautiful regions of Japan.

Why not consider setting up a Niigata-type inn or village featuring your country's local brew and regional delicacies?

## **A Window of Opportunity for Foreign Universities Wanting to Set Up Shop in Japan**

The Japanese government has decided to remove the regulation which required private universities to own the land and buildings on which they operate. This new law (effective since the spring of 2007) also insures that land and building leaseholds will span at least 20 years, to ensure continuity of such institutions.

Clearly, private educational institutions wishing to locate in major urban areas will find it significantly easier to make the investment decision under the new guidelines.

And for institutions wishing to find true bargains, several outlying regions will be more than willing to lend land on the cheap in order to revitalize such areas. Opportunity 2 and 3 could easily compliment each other.

## **A True Fish Story**

Here's a fish story for you. Japan has always been a fish-centric nation. This staple food category - even in the fast food age - still plays a decisive role in the diet of the Japanese.

The price of fish, however, has skyrocketed due to three factors: international catch quotas, a decline of the fisheries industry due to the aging of the workforce (with no apprentices to step in), and the lack of funding and urgency by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

Fishing, like agriculture, is not an industry which requires a high degree of Japanese language skill. Find a sponsor who can collaborate with you to start an Asian people's fishing village within Japan. Visas could be easy to come by if you have proven skill and know-how obtained in your home country which could qualify you as a specialist.

The [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) (MOFA) has a working holiday visa (usually for six months with possible extension) which allows citizens of Korea, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, France, Canada and the UK to come here to work and live.

For those of you living in those countries, that would give you time to explore this possibility. Others would admittedly face more bureaucratic challenges.

Better yet, sell your catch to Japan. Bluefin tuna commands a king's ransom. The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization estimate that Japanese people eat 30 percent of the world's fresh fish. That adds up to 80 kg for each man woman and child.

However you can tap into this market as a supplier, fisherman or broker. Japan is hungry for sea creatures.

## **Social Networking Is Sizzling**

[Mixi Inc.](#) is the largest social networking service (SNS) in Japan is now listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange's Mothers Market.

This new generation of Internet business is all the rage here, much like the massive attention in the US to U-tube and MySpace. According to the Japanese Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry, 7.16 million people are using SNS, a 550 percent increase over the previous year.

Mixi has independently developed a function for users to cross-browse personal diaries, a function that U.S. SNS firms have yet to perfect.

Clone Mixi's browser, if you have the knack and a [translator](#) to collaborate with you.

Additionally, if you are fanatical and technically skilled with SNS development, team up with a Japanese techie. In that case, I may be able to introduce a [partner](#) to you.

## **Yamagata Prefecture Seeks Suitors**

Japan is seldom called a bargain shopper's paradise. Even though a bout of deflation set in a few years ago following the Bubble *Keizai* (economy) era, prices for most goods are still comparatively higher than most developed nations. Thus, Japan has often been associated with being an exporter of high-valued consumer goods and an importer of only goods not available domestically.

Clearly, private educational institutions wishing to locate in major urban areas will find it significantly easier to make the investment decision under the new guidelines. And for institutions wishing to find true bargains, several outlying regions will be more than willing to lend land on the cheap in order to revitalize such areas.

Opportunity 2 and 3 could easily compliment each other. That paradigm, however, is quickly becoming history. Japanese regional food specialties are finding increasingly profitable markets, especially in the Asian region.

Several remote regions of Japan are shipping fish, sea urchins and assorted other local delicacies to hungry buyers abroad. If you are looking for peaches, cherries and La France pears, then Yamagata Prefecture is waiting for your business.

The Tohoku Region of Japan where Yamagata is located is offering local delicacies and juicy fruits from six prefectures. Take advantaged of this government-sponsored drive to increase food exports from the paltry 331 million yen at present to one trillion yen by 2013.

## **Smoking May Be Down For The Eight Count**

A recent headline in the local newspaper stated the obvious: "Japan is still choking on secondhand smoke."

Japan is a signatory to the WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). Member nations of this treaty are supposedly determined to prevent the harmful effects of tobacco, restrict the sale and advertisement of cigarettes and implement measures to combat passive smoking.

Compared to other nations, Japan has made the least progress on all these fronts. Based on my 28 years of experience here, Japanese are NOT going to change their collective

attitude toward smoking or secondhand smoke anytime in the foreseeable future. The best that can be hoped for is in the design of buildings and in filtration systems and devices.

If one can trust the statistics about tobacco, then the truth is that 50% of Japanese don't smoke. That being the case, many of these non-smokers silently suffers from the rude, overbearing puffers. To add insult to injury, many of those secondhand smoker sufferers are highly allergic to dust and pollen. Masks are worn everywhere.

Thus, there is a market for inexpensive, highly functional [air filters](#), masks, and other apparatus to make breathing easier. Why not compile the best of these things and begin an Internet affiliate program to [drop ship](#) them in Japan?

### **For The Nibbler In You**

I'm a sampler. The delectable morsels on the counters of large department store food sections can become a meal in itself. Japanese take this sampler culture for granted and no large store operates without these free goodies.

A new kid on the block has taken this concept to the next level. In the trendy Harajuku District of Tokyo, a *tryvertising* lab has arisen.

Sample Lab is a members-only space that invites consumers to sample and test new products. Sample Lab offers everything from [BBQ sauce and exercise equipment to pantyhose and moisturizer](#). Besides trying everything out in the shop, members can take home up to 5 items per visit.

To harvest their precious feedback, Sample Lab asks visitors to fill out surveys about the products they've tested. The concept was created with the dual purpose of collecting user feedback and sparking word of mouth advertising.

Certainly this concept can be duplicated by country or product type and will be wildly popular among the Japanese. The people here have money to spend and are very trendy.

### **The Rising Obesity Class In Japan**

Over 16 million Japanese either suffer or are at high risk from diabetes. Lifestyle diseases are steadily taking their toll on this once healthy nation of fish and rice eaters. More than four million diabetics who should have insulin injections are foregoing treatment.

These "at risk" patients are of great concern to government officials. Thus a pilot program of more than 1200 patients has begun in the Tokyo area. This program allows doctors to act as intermediaries in introducing patients to diabetic counselors. The counselors, in turn, keep in touch regularly with the diabetic sufferer.

The government program will expand to 30 areas around Japan by 2008.

Opportunity always abounds in a world of ignorance, misinformation and neglect about this degenerative disease. A forum or portal site is greatly needed and desirable. On this site, of course, relevant products and services could be introduced. With the steady rise of obesity in Japan, the timing couldn't be better to seize the opportunity.

## ***I Want A New Drug***

In 2009 the Japanese Pharmaceutical Affairs Law is set to go into effect. This event will change the face of retailing in Japan. At that time the strict division between drug stores and convenience stores and supermarkets will vanish. All three will have the ability to cross-sell.

This coming retail era will lead to all sorts of ways to attract niche customers. For example, stores may be designed around a theme such as middle-age women concerned with optimum health and fashion that kills.

Now is the time to stake your claim on this Wild West transition – become a food and nutritional expert with a niche market in mind.

As your name becomes familiar among your target market, you can then arrange a series of streamed interviews with English voice faded out and Japanese subtitles to further prepare the reader/listener to the launch of your concept store come 2009. A PDF file of each interview or training should be translated into Japanese and then transcribed for download.

## ***Education In The Urban Jungle***

The Japanese government has lifted a regulation which required private universities to own the land and buildings on which they operate. The government will also insure that land and building leaseholds will be for at least 20 years in order to ensure continuity of such institutions.

Very clearly those private educational institutions wishing to locate in major urban settings will find it significantly easier to do so under the new guidelines.

And for institutions wishing to set up shop in outlying regions, regional governments will be more than willing to do what they can to attract people and jobs to bolster the economy of these depressed regions.

## ***Something To Sneeze Over***

In certain seasons, the ubiquitous surgical face masks seem to turn Japan into a nation of bandits. There are two main reasons for their popularity:

- \*Germs and disease can spread quickly in the jam-packed urban regions.
- \*Allergies, mostly from cedar trees and pollen, wreak havoc in the springtime.

The latter problem annually pads the coffers of respiratory doctors and the pharmaceutical companies which collaborate with them.

A portal site in Japanese which offers a wide range of alternative treatments for the afflicted could prove to be hugely popular. It must be done with a maximum of verifiable facts and studies and a minimal of sales hype.

A good starting or reference point may be to contact picture book writer, Mika Muraoka, whose book, "Thank you, Mr. Asthma: Mikako's Colors of the Stars," has proved hugely popular with Japanese children suffering from asthma.

## **Meaningful Retirement**

This year marks the tidal wave of retirement of baby boomers in Japan. Many of these retirees bring a lifetime of rich skills to the table which will go to seed, if these individuals return to their hometowns. Most of rural Japan has not fully participated in the economic growth wave of the last 30 to 40 years and offer few if any opportunities to utilize the talented, educated, accomplished retirees wanting to continue a lifetime of service.

Pasona is a large recruitment and employment agency in Japan. They have started a new program to get these retirees back into the economy in their golden years. Many talented retirees are training farmers and fisheries and such tasks as how to turn a profit and how to diversify. In return for giving these lectures, Pasona is trying to place speakers in jobs with these rural industries.

If you think Pasona is on to something, then you need to find a Japanese partner and copycat plus add value to what they are doing.

The underbelly industries scattered around the rural regions of Japan cannot compete well in international circles. But with a labor pool of highly-experienced older retirees as your backbone, you could march from one side of the archipelago to the other with a magic turn-around formula for depressed industries and regions.

Being old can be both beautiful and profitable.

## **Turning An Everyday Event Into Cash**

Some Kansai-area university students have come up with a unique twist to both serve the cash-strapped academic community and provide cold cash for paying their tuitions. They have a free printing service for students paid for by selling full-color advertising on the reverse side of each printed page. Advertisers pay 400,000 yen to advertise on 10,000 sheets of paper.

This concept could work in any cranny on our blue planet. Once again we find an idea which can take small, inconsequential, sleepy cottage businesses throughout Japan turn them into profit centers.

Whatever the indigenous product or service may be, a link in the advert to a simple website with an order form could raise the bottom line for many shopkeepers with unique regional products.

## **Taking You To The Cleaners**

One of my great regrets is that I didn't master the Japanese language in all my years of living here. But just like a three-legged dog learns a new sense of balance, so do the foreign survivors here.

Frankly, an old foreigner in Japan with only a smattering of Japanese may be in for a miserable retirement unless he or she begins thinking out of the box.

The growing hoard of non-fluent foreigners is a rich source of insider information and many of them can handle the language sufficiently enough to find products or suppliers for you.

One such opportunity is in the cleaning business. Many Double-Income No-Children

(DINC) households are starting to employ cleaning services to periodically or regularly come to their residences and do a thorough housecleaning.

Big companies such as Duskin command close to 60,000 yen (about \$700) for such a sweep. The elderly and enfeebled are also utilizing such services.

With the aging population in bloom and reasonably well off, isn't it your time to tap into this new cleaning boom?

## **Pigging Out**

I will stick my neck out and say that the younger generation in Japan are as much obsessed by and addicted to food as their obese American counterparts.

Moreover, the market for premium varieties of common foods, such as donuts, has taken hold across the archipelago. Some stores are selling special donuts for 350 yen each! The appetite for gourmet foods is likely to continue its ascent.

Let's face it - competing against the big players in any industry is tough or plain impossible. One store, Crispy donuts, opened their flagship store in Shinjuku, Tokyo, some six months ago and the line still backs up hundreds of feet all day long.

At a fancy suburban shopping mall in the northern suburbs of Tokyo, an American buffet-style ice cream parlor is always elbow-to-elbow.

What's your special product? The Japanese ARE hungry for upscale, calorie-laced food ideas. Make a trip over here and check it out.

## **See The Light**

Shotoku Glass Company is not just another cottage-type industry employing a mere 33 people. They produce e-ware. E stands for ecology and excellence.

The glassware produced in this factory is certified by the Japanese Environment Association, which means that the products contribute to protecting the environment.

This 85-year-old company removes mercury from fluorescent lamps and then recycles them. They are the first company to do so in Japan.

The company specialty has long been able to produce *usuhari*, a very thin and smooth glass less than one millimeter thick. The technique produces glasses and vases that have a greenish hue and small air bubbles are trapped inside. This is not only unique, but an exotic import for people outside of Japan concerned about environmental issues.

Why not contact them at [http://www.stglass.co.jp/index\\_e.html](http://www.stglass.co.jp/index_e.html). They have an English website. They need technology and know-how to increase their production of these unique products, as well.

## **Smoke Gets In Your Eyes**

The Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry is stepping through the smoke to propose cutting the smoking rates drastically by the year 2010.

Presently, 43 percent of men and 12 percent of women smoke (though I believe that is

badly underestimated.). The government wants to cut those rates by approximately 30 percent.

If you have ever been to Japan, you can't help but be struck by the overwhelming number of smokers, many of whom are extremely discourteous. The government task is admirable.

A portal website on smoking cessation accessories and treatments would find favor among bureaucrats concerned with this rate cut initiative. Additionally, I think the Japanese may, with a government nudge, accept such methods as hypnotherapy and acupuncture as health-insurance-covered treatments.

Come to Japan and observe the smoking culture. Then draw up a marketing plan. This niche could become huge, especially since non-smoking sections of restaurants and government buildings are on the rise.

## **Radio GaGa**

Baby Boomers are front and center in aging Japan. The manufacturers of high-end audio equipment of 1970s vintage - popular with well-healed boomers - are releasing nostalgic (yet up-to-date) versions of their most popular units.

This marketing gimmick brings tears to the eyes of many older Japanese audiophiles.

Kenwood, for example has revived its defunct Trio brand which had been unavailable for the last 20 years. The hefty price for high-tech Lazarus is more 600,000 yen.

Pioneer, for its part, is marketing their S-IEX-LTD speakers for a whopping 630,000 yen.

This trend screams for attention. Any craze from the boomers' generation can, with proper marketing and packaging, find hungry, retired consumers with cash to spare. Get your thinking caps on. Then [CLICK HERE](#) to whet your appetite to the sea of possibilities. Nostalgia sells!

## **Coloring by the Numbers**

Doctors and painters around Japan are being asked to give lectures and training on the therapeutic effect of [nuri-e](#), the coloring of outline drawings similar to the coloring books of the western world.

This technique allows millions of ungifted Rembrandt wannabes a chance to enjoy the creative feel of being an artist.

Patients at rest homes, people with disabilities, stroke victims, children and those suffering from dementia of varying degrees can derive pleasure and benefit from this technique.

*Nuri-e* may be a Japanese phrase but it is not an exclusive idea created by and for Japanese. Just like there are now many manga artists in the US, so too can *nuri-e* gain an avid following.

It may be just an exotic word for coloring book, but ideas from Japan sell well worldwide. This is just another baby boomer idea whose time has come.

Why not create your own *nuri-e* and then market them to hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and kindergartens? As a way of introduction, set up a booth at local fairs and

school events and let future customers and proponents dabble in the art.

### **Hidden Employment Pool**

Coming to Japan on a budget? Looking for a quick labor pool of translators, engineers or high tech professionals? Then try the [Net Cafes](#).

There has been a recent influx of underemployed or unemployed college-educated people crashing at Internet cafes because they do not earn enough money to move into more comfortable surroundings. These people - numbering about 6000 nationwide - are desperate for work.

Why not check out the net cafe scene and have a Japanese flier (*chirashi*) made which can be circulated in such establishments? Take advantage of this underground economy.

### **From Blighty to Mighty**

Kabukicho has been a nest of prostitution, gangster offices, unlicensed bars and gambling for half a century or more and the community, the government and the citizens want to see it cleaned up. Actually, since 2004, the police have been increasingly tough on the seedy establishments in the district, which is part of the urban center of Tokyo called Shinjuku, and closed down a large number of these scummy businesses.

This social renaissance referred to as the "Kihei Project" is happening and the cost of renting some of the more seedy government buildings is very attractive priced to some companies and entrepreneurs.

One such company, the comedy theater company, [Yoshimoto Kogyo](#), has rented a 3.8 million yen per month space and is now renovating the 4700 square meter former school to accommodate up to 1000 patrons per performance.

This is truly a ground-floor opportunity to participate in the resurgence of this blighted area in the heart of Tokyo. I suspect this area will become the next Asian Bollywood or Broadway. The infrastructure is superb and now that the police are cleaning out the dregs, the time to act is now.

### **All Aboard**

Let's turn to the fairer sex. Railway enthusiasm has been seen as a small niche market predominantly followed by men called *tetchan*, or rail enthusiasts. In the last year, however, the female equivalent called *tetsuko* has started to emerge.

Growing legions of women are enjoying traveling incognito fueled by the resurgence of a cartoon series called "*Tetsuko no Tabi*, (Tetsuko (or train) Travel) about a female cartoonist traveling together with a male railway buff.

This year Jigokuhyo Kentei Kyokai (The Railway Timetable Certification Association) is offering beginning enthusiasts a trial examination for the railway timetable reading



certificate. Twenty-five percent of the enthusiasts applying for this at-home test are women.

The traveling industry in Japan is keeping close tabs on these new women enthusiasts, and so should you. If you come from a country with an interesting and varied rail system, then why not design a rail tour for Japanese women? Then approach a company such as [Nippon Travel Agency](#) - which is already active in this niche market - with your Japanese women railway tour concept for your country or region.

## **Green Storming for Cash**

The government of Japan is studying how to implement a system that would allow domestic firms to buy and sell greenhouse gas-emission credits. The foreign minister, economy, trade and industry minister met and discussed the best way to move forward.

Two global trading partners are about to introduce such a plan, and the European Union already has one in force.

These standards are expected to be in force worldwide by the year 2010. Great concern exists among the nations to this proposal that it is difficult to determine parity.

The government needs innovative ideas because they want to be seen as visionaries in the environmental field. The plan they want will unlikely arise from a bureaucracy which doesn't understand market forces in a free-wheeling economy.

The idea for credits will most likely come from an entrepreneur who can develop a model which is a win-win for the companies and countries involved.

Are you such an entrepreneurial visionary? If so, you could well become the designer and consultant for an emerging commodity market.

## **Hands-On Eco Tourism**

Once one leaves overcrowded big-city Japan and heads out to the more rural regions of the archipelago, the breathtaking natural charm and serenity of old Japan quickly become evident. But also what comes into focus is that the relic buildings and houses from bygone years are becoming increasingly rundown due to erosion, corrosion, neglect and relative poverty in those regions.

Many of these rundown areas were involved in the timber industry, and when cheap foreign lumber began to flood the Japanese islands in the 1980s, young people - tired of farming and eking out a living - swarmed to the greener economic pastures of urban centers.

A group of residents in one such neglected region with many traditional thatched homes, Katsuyama in Fukui Prefecture, has begun a concerted effort to restore or repair abandoned homes and buildings. They are doing this by sponsoring eco-tours. The first one attracted 25 participants.

Optimally, win-win situations in business are what we should all strive for. These eco-tours in Fukuyama are only the tip of an economic iceberg.

In fact, there are more than 10,000 such settlements scattered throughout the islands' of Japan. For domestic and overseas'eco-conscious tourists wanting hands-on experience in restoring such buildings and homes, this will be a great chance to experience rural Japan and make a significant difference.

The ecological visitors can infuse much-needed cash into these intrinsically exquisite villages and at the same time can offer overseas tour operators a chance to make handsome profits.

### **A Concrete Idea Required**

The Construction and Transport Ministry has succeeded in recycling lime sediment from a dam as cement material.

The sediment buildup was from the Shinkai Dam. The lime sediment has built up because it was the only way to neutralize the highly-acidic wastewater from the nearby Kusatsu hotspring resort which had made aquatic life in the river impossible. Fish and organisms are now returning.

The authorities have discovered that the lime which had settled at the bottom of the damn and was being extracted regularly and dumped in a mountain area had similar properties to the sewage and waste soil often used in the production of cement.

The Shinkai Dam Water Quality Control Office has stated that several issues must be resolved before this newfangled cement has commercial viability. One difficulty is that the new type of cement is sticky and has a tendency to adhere to machinery during processing. The second problem is that the cost of transporting the sediment to the factory must be reduced.

If you have solutions to these two problems, then the Shinkai Dam is only the beginning for you. Japan is dotted with hot springs near such dams using limestone to cut acidity. Opportunity is evident and ample.

### **Silent Diseases without Remedies**

Hospital sanitation and the spread of air-borne germs in hospital wards is becoming of greater and greater concern throughout Japan.

Especially lethal are the methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus ([MRSA](#)) via un-predicted sources of infection. MRSA and other germs causing in-hospital infections are being closely monitored by about 500 medical institutions nationwide.

Under the radar of public concern, about 18,000 cases of MRSA and about 700 cases of MDRP, a nasty variety resistant to most antibiotics, have been found annually.

This medical debacle, along with the gradual spread of AIDS, threatens not only Japanese but Mankind.

Yet Japan is chronically short of experts to work on the prevention of in-hospital infections and to research the infection routes. This makes it nearly impossible to keep pace as the problem spreads.

Do you have potential techniques to counteract this epidemic? Do you have cleansers, masks, sterilized products which can stem the spread of such deadly infections? Then Japan needs your help, regardless of your country of origin or native tongue.

## **A Penny Earned**

The early 1990s in Japan saw scandal after scandal about usury splashed on the front page of Japanese dailies. The bubble economy had burst and people were scrambling to pay off bills incurred during the good times. Concurrently, the vultures were out to exploit the raw wound as the economy swooned.

In recent years, Japanese have become somewhat savvier about investments and protection from creditors.

Enter the ring, Terumi Hironaka, the wife of a bankrupt businessman with creditors pounding on their door. She began to study laws about unreasonable creditors and learned how the [Moneylending Control Law of Japan](#), if understood and utilized properly, could protect people like her from financial loan predators. She has spent the last few years acting as a crusader and consultant for other Japanese deeply in debt, as she had been.

Yes, there are some quality investment consultants in Japan, but not many understand how to market their service through info-products and affiliate programs.

I personally know one such consultant who wastes tons' of time and traveling expenses going around Japan training family business owners how to stay afloat. His work and skills are admirable, but he leverages his time poorly.

If you are a marketer with investment savvy, then come to Japan and teach professional investment counselors and get-out-of-debt coaches how to broaden their reach. For great examples of such enterprising people, see the sites of [Rich Dad, Poor Dad's Robert Kiyosaki](#) and [Live Out Loud's Lorel Langemeier](#).

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## **Become a Nurse in Japan**

Japan has a chronic shortage of nurses in rural and less-populated regions. Young people often will choose a job in an urban area for convenience of living and to obtain higher wages. The Japanese hospitals in outlying areas go begging for medical personnel, especially nurses. And with the rapidly aging society of Japan, this doesn't bode well for the future.

Amazingly enough, becoming a Japanese nurse does not require you to be a citizen of Japan. That's the good part. The more challenging part is that you will have to sit for the nursing license exam after attending a Japanese nursing school.

This means that while you can become a nurse in Japan, you will have to master Japanese in your home region or come to Japan for training and mastery.

If you can overcome those obstacles, then you could qualify and be hired as a full-fledge nurse here.

However, under the current regulations, you will only be entitled to work for four years before returning to your native country.

Why not work with me on this idea. My wife is a head nurse with 25 years of experience and a nursing administrator's license. I can arrange for the general and nurse-specific language training here in Japan for nurses registered in their native land. Contact me at [nurseop@successinjapan.com](mailto:nurseop@successinjapan.com).

## **Lunchbox Delicacies**

Housewives in Japan are noted for the perfection of lunchbox (*bento* in jp.) menus for their schoolchildren and even their husband. They take great pride in the aesthetics, variety and taste of these daily lunches. After they have prepared such bento lunches, many of these ladies - with time on their hands and money to spare - look for hobbies (*shumi* in jp.).

Wouldn't it be something if you put together an online English training lesson - complete with Japanese translation - teaching them how to make ethnic delicacies for these lunchboxes?

You could sell these English lessons as part of a membership package. That package could include an online ebook download of "Bento Offerings From Around The Globe", "Cooking Condiments and Utensils for Busy Mothers, and even arrange regional weekend workshops once or twice per year for a nominal charge for members (with many back-end offerings on hand and display) and participative cooking classes in English.

Live video classes could easily be set up using such low-cost services as Rick Radditz's [Xiosoft](#) products which I have tried and highly recommend.

## **Agrarian Revival**

Japan is traditionally an agrarian culture. It is only in the last 150 years that modernization brought urbanization and urbanization brought industry. The Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Ministry is looking to reverse that trend to an extent by encouraging private sector participation in agriculture. Food self-sufficiency in Japan is now slumbering at less than 40 percent.

The Ministry has liberalized the regulation on farmland leased to firms. This policy marks a major shift in postwar agricultural thinking. Until now the lease of farmlands to corporate concerns was limited to large areas where agriculture had been abandoned.

The designated areas, offered by 600 municipalities were, until recently, often poor quality land with little or no accessible water source. Thus, corporations shied away from investing in these areas.

The Ministry has now opened up the good farmland to corporations. If you have backers, irrigation technology, or farming skills, then this chink in the Japanese armor may open up opportunities to serve the Japanese consumers, albeit through a Japanese proxy corporation. The lease of these farmlands is for up to twenty years, with extensions possible.

## **Middle-Age Women Choosing Not to be Drab**

Japanese women in their 40's were probably the first generation of the fair sex to go on a shopping spree during the heady bubble keizai (bubble economy) years. They spent lavishly and yearned for fashion like no other generation preceding it.

Well those same ladies are now in their forties and still spending lavishly despite the relative decline of the Japanese economy. Two new magazines, Grace and Marisol, have hit the book stores with the goods to exploit this shopping hunger of women now in their 40s.

These women are not willing to grow old with grace. They are proactive, spending billions of yen on facial treatments, shapely clothes which make them look younger, and therapies which make them feel more vital.

They are a working crowd and many of them are childless or still unmarried. Using those demographics and an understanding that they have money to burn, start to seriously study this market.

A good starting point would be to read the article titled "[The New Lifestyles of Japanese Women](#)," to get some perspective of the mindset and demographics of this emerging market in Japan.

## **Selling Ice to the Eskimos**

In the past dozen years, manga translations into non-Japanese languages have grown exponentially. This, in turn, has spawned an anime industry which had little exposure overseas since the Tezuka hit cartoon "Atom Boy." Blockbuster anime and manga-based

films such as *Transformers* and *Kill Bill* are modern-day testimonials to the wealth-creating possibilities of the Japanese art form.

The translation of American superhero-type comics into Japanese has scantily been tried. Some might categorize doing that as a selling of ice to the Eskimos. It is assumed that such comics could not compete with the local genre.

Remember: Many people were rabidly skeptical that Japanese would not chomp down on Big Macs and Mr. Donuts' jelly rolls as well.

Find a native Japanese collaborator who can assist you to translate the works of aspiring westerners creating unknown superhero comics in the States. Introduce it through the extensive, viral [\*otaku network\*](#).

### **Used Cartridges Turned Magically Into Vaccines**

To generate a profit while at the same time contributing to the welfare of Mankind is a model worthy of duplication.

A group in Fukui Prefecture, Japan, is doing just that. They have launched a campaign to send vaccines to developing countries with the proceeds obtained through recycling of used ink-jet cartridges.

The group set up collection boxes around the city of Maebashi. As of this writing, they have collected 300+ of such cartridges. With the sympathy and active support of a local recycler who offered an overly generous 300 yen per cartridge, they have collected over 9000 yen.

This may not seem like much, but it may be a model for other municipalities. And the beauty of this model is that the proceeds were then handed over to the Tokyo-based Japan committee, Vaccines for the World's Children, which supports developing countries' vaccination programs.

According to the Committee, one polio vaccine costs about ¥20, while a measles vaccination costs a modest ¥95. Nine thousand yen infusions' of cash can make an immeasurable contribution to helping those most in need.

Granted, there is not much profit potential here for an entrepreneur. That is, unless we think of saving children's lives is a worthwhile endeavor. In our throwaway societies, there are so many things which we deem as junk that could be salvaged and recycled. Ebay is the exclamation point for those who thought junk was junk.

For example, old, throwaway clothes and sheets could be turned into a quilt. I even received a gift from a Japanese woman of a macramé insect made from bamboo leaves. Such innovative methods of creating small revenue streams from junk and our natural surroundings is an invaluable contribution each of us can make with a minimum of effort to care for the billions of unfortunate human beings scattered around our planet.

### **Xenophobic Attitudes and Rightful Fears Make Japan Go Back to Roots and Such**

Food from China - once a mainstay for the Japanese consumers- has fallen out of favor due to recent scandals.

One such item is the precious matsutake mushroom, so prevalent at holiday meals. The ones imported from China have been 50~80 percent cheaper than the domestic variety. Consumers, however, have become unwilling to buy the cheaper mushrooms of their Asian neighbor due to food safety concerns.

Concurrently, falling production of the domestic variety because of unprofitably in competition with China, has led to a spiraling effect on the price of the delicacy. The result is that fewer and fewer Japanese are buying matsutake. That is...

Unless some other growers of matsutake in foreign countries step to the plate quickly. Frankly speaking, the high price of matsutake mushrooms stems (no pun!) from the difficulty of cultivating them.

Soil, tree, and climate conditions must be optimal and closely monitored. Knowing that there is a hungry market for these special mushrooms should get your mental jets humming. A good starting point for understanding the exacting conditions for cultivating them can be found by clicking [HERE](#).

## **Fido Wants To Live In The Ritz**

With the birth rate in Japan declining precipitously, the Japanese love to purchase designer goods and new things to replace the missing human tots. From Gucci to Coach Bags to exotic (and endangered!) animals, most people want to be fashionable at almost any price. Keeping up with the Tanakas is an unspoken truth of cosmopolitan Japan.

The newest craze for locals is designer dogs. They treat their pricey canines much like Barbie Doll owners treat Barbie and Ken. These animals are dressed to the nines with all the gowns, coats, hairpins and booties which can be stitched together in Third World sweatshops. Man's best friend must look "cute" and drip of the pedigree the owner(s) may lack.

Cities and businesses are adapting to this pedigree dog boom. One accommodation, Yatsukate Wan Wan Paradise in Yamanishi Prefecture, offers 40 cottages in which guests may stay with their canine companion/dolls.

[Dog city!](#) Since an increasing number of hotels and inns are accepting these *cuties*, the time to build a year-round dog village has dawned.

Several pristine, depopulated areas within a three-hour drive of metropolises around Japan are looking desperately for economic revival. Locals would be happy to see an influx of cash-rich tourists coming for R&R while their canine buddies lap in luxury.

The villages could contain a dog obedience school, a dog Disneyland, a dog nutrition clinic with first-class canine treats to go, dog seminars (for owners!), low-cost spaying and neuter clinics, dog grooming boutiques, and daytime dog housing with a run. While Fido is lapping up dog beef stroganoff, the owners can be dipping in a soothing hot spring bath or a lap-of-luxury public bath (called *sentō*).

## **Grandpa And Grandma Can Do Much More Than Groan**

In Japan as elsewhere, the care of the elderly can end in tragedy. Many poor and isolated senior citizens fall through the cracks of government social welfare agencies. Countless cases of suicide pacts between elderly couples too sick or exhausted to go on with life splash across daily newspapers around the globe.

The Japanese Health and Welfare Ministry has decided to take a more proactive approach to the elderly. It is encouraging healthy elderly volunteers to help their sicker brethren. These volunteers can earn points - depending upon their social insurance payments - to be used toward their own nursing care premiums.

Wherever you may reside, the aging of already mature societies is upon us. Creating win-win situations where elderly are utilized for the benefit of the community is a paradigm shift whose time is arriving.

Japan has many vital and ambulatory seniors with the skills and patience to help you launch a business here. Don't overlook this demographic, as the Japanese themselves have flippantly done in the private sector.

## **Robotics And Centenarians Befriend Each Other**

Japan is growing older by leaps and bounds. The Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry report that there are now more than 32,000 centenarians. Many of these older people are well-heeled.

Robots are one area under development to support the elderly. Japanese researchers are racing against time to build robots smart enough to serve the needs of the elderly in a country in which over forty percent of the population will be over 65 by the year 2055.

Many companies such as Toyota, Honda Fujitsu Laboratories, and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries are in varying stages of developing robots to serve the elderly.

Fujitsu Frontech and Fujitsu Laboratories, as an example, are developing "*Enon*," a guide patrol robot designed for use in shopping malls and corporate facilities. This upper-body humanoid device is equipped with a touch screen on its chest and stomach and a space in its belly to carry payloads up to 10kg. It can detect guests and guide them by pointing in the right direction while a map appears on the screen.

Get your brains humming about how you can exploit this aging, rich culture. Stay abreast of the innovative ideas flooding out of laboratories here. Carnegie Mellon and MIT haven't cornered great scientific minds studying robotics.

If you have prototype ideas, the Japanese corporations will listen. One only needs a proper introduction.

## **Wood With A Finish Second To None**

The word *japanning* was coined by the first European and American settlers and traders in Japan. It was an attempt to imitate the glossy finish of wood boxes, trays and vessels made from indigenous lacquer trees.



Lacquer in its natural form actually comes from the sap produced by the Rhus Verniciflua tree found mainly in Japan, and its applications date back more than 1500 years. Objects with lacquer finish are renowned for their beauty, durability and simplicity of brush design.

Unfortunately, for the copycat foreigner artisans, there ain't nothing like the real thing, baby. This is especially so for wood objects adorned with *yuzen* (seven-color paper illustrations) brush paintings on special paper inspired by beautifully-designed lacquer ware and *maki-e* (a gold lacquer used to finish objects with delicate small gold flecks.).

Fortunately for you, this is a sleeper market. While imitation japanning products are commonplace in western nations, the "Real McCoy" lacquer ware is much more precious and in demand. Antiques can command hefty prices on auction sites.

Consider a buying trip to Japan to the key regions which originated this art form: Aizu Ware, Fukushima Prefecture; Johana Ware from Toyama Prefecture; Negoro Ware of Izumi Province (which now comprises most of Osaka Prefecture minus the city itself); Ryukyuan Ware from the Ryukyu Islands (now Okinawa Prefecture); Tsugaru Ware from Aomori Prefecture; and Wakasa Ware from Fukui Prefecture.

### **Family Biz With No Successor**

A few years back, I provided private lessons to a self-made entrepreneur who had watched his family's clothing store business crumble because of poor management and ultimately no successors. His failed business led him, much to his wife's dismay, to hit the books and develop the skills and obtain the licenses necessary to help small family businesses nationwide to survive and even thrive once again. He is doing quite well these days and is in high demand.

In a society with a birthrate declining and a strong pull for younger generations to head to the city for the plum jobs, the idea that a successor must be a son is fading as fast as cherry blossoms in the spring.

From sushi shops to lacquer ware to pottery, the consultant field to preserve the sublime and widely-admired traditions that make Japan special may well fall on foreigners willing to learn the culture, the language, and assimilate. Give it a thought. Some such foreigners are mentioned in the [Artisans section of the SIJ Directory](#).

### **Eco Bags Catch Fire**

Green awareness may be just a fad among many Japanese, but some citizens are taking this concept seriously on a political and financial level.

Eco-bags that replace plastic bags at shops) are becoming a common fashion statement among trendy and socially-concerned Japanese. One such bag has reportedly seen sales of more than 1 million units. Such brand designers as Anya Hindmarch and Gucci are leading women shoppers to line up for hundreds' of feet. Some stores have even seen scuffles over this trendy, in-demand bag.

Selling for between 500 and 2000 yen, these bags are retrieving up to ten times that amount on auction sites. Get a head start on understanding the feasibility of adding this niche market to your repertoire. It's money in the bag.

## **Exporting Back-Burner Entertainment To Japan**

[The International Drama Festival](#) was recently held in Tokyo and the honchos of public and private broadcasters huddled up. What they were discussing is how to copy the successful formula of exporting manga and anime to the Japanese TV drama genre.

To get the interest of the international participants, several dramas were shown during the festival. Exports of all TV programs last year totaled about 10 billion yen, but only 3 billion of them were dramas. The organizers are holding competitions for directors who can produce TV dramas with the greatest international appeal.

Manga and anime are now front and center in many cultures. I have little doubt that in the vast TV wasteland (in all countries) are gems which, with a little tweaking, could garner mass worldwide appeal.

Keep abreast of these dramas in English and other languages and become the first kid on your business block to see this creative product as a business opportunity worthy of study. There are some problems which are being ironed out here in Japan concerning copyrighting issues.

## **Gardens As Business Magnets**

The Japanese have been called by outsiders as imitators and rip-off artists. Fortunately, both the Japanese and most of their critics have outgrown that sentiment and can now have a more respectful relationship with each other.

Flowers are on my mind because of their unquestioned beauty and their ability to attract crowds. Flower carpets are not new - they are known in Italian as *infiorata* – but a new display in central Tokyo is certainly a splendid example of the artistic skill of Japanese....children. Seventeen flower carpets using 120,000 roses line the sidewalk in Harumi Triton Square, Tokyo. They were planted with uncanny ability by 520 primary school children and depict the Showa Era.

I'm a New Yorker who is not easily impressed with bigness and ultra-modern skyscrapers. But the Japanese propensity to take small, cramped places and turn them into verdant wonderlands ceases to amaze me after 28 years here. One under-utilized advantage of such serene gardens is that they attract people to a place of business or a neighborhood, if thoughtfully designed.

Pay attention to that reality when you design your store or business inside Japan or elsewhere. To get a glimpse of gardens which may capture your imagination, [CLICK HERE](#)

## **Breaking Down Barriers**

They are the basically unnoticed members of society. The disabled in Japan don't get much respect, although there is a lot of lip service paid by local governments to providing adequate access and facilities to these citizens.

Crayon Box, a workshop in Nagoya for disabled people, recently surveyed local city restaurants in order to determine the ability of wheelchair-bound disabled to enter them. The survey covered seventy essential points about access. Results are due out soon.

As I stated, most governments and businesses give cursory respect to the handicapped. It is costly to do so and, to some members of society unfamiliar with such people, uncomfortable. This can lead to a win-win situation for access architects and equipment designers outside of Japan with viable, profitable designs and equipment in place.

According to the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, close to 3.5 million people are disabled nationwide. This is a huge market for well-received designers which can work in small spaces with minimum costs.

Do you know anybody who has such a business whom you could team up with to bring unique concepts for the disabled to Japan?

### **Legal Urban Squatting**

A common complaint from people setting up shop in Japan is the high price of renting a space in metropolitan areas. You often have to pay the equivalent of six months' rent (or more) to move in. That is an example of a non-tariff barrier.

Depending upon whether your business needs to be located in a metropolitan area or not, an alternative to getting started in Japan may be available to you.

Many local governments in depopulated regions of Japan are offering "vacant house bank" services. Other urban areas are also joining the act.

Because Baby Boomers are retiring in record numbers, these economically-depressed regions are seeing this retirement trend as a golden chance to lure back city dwellers. Over 120 [local governments](#) are offering information about vacant houses.

### **Baby, You Can Be A Star**

There was a time when studying English, driving, or playing tennis or golf were the rubberstamp answers when people were asked "What are your hobbies?" No longer is that true. The list of hobbies nowadays is long and deep, and the three hobbies above are often also-rans among young Japanese people.

The desire to learn and to have hobbies has also taken a non-stop turn to the visual world of cable, and no doubt the next step will be for these cable channels to present these recorded programs online.

Citizen-produced cable TV programs offering localized information and are featuring talented, lesser-known local community members are taking off. These programs have a two-fold purpose: to revitalize community ties and to offer debuts to talented teachers and lecturers.

All over Japan, cable TV companies are actively encouraging local community people to actively assist in producing programs.

For foreigners living in such communities this is your chance to step up and stand out. Check with your local communities to find out what stations are in the area. Make a name for yourself locally, perhaps nationwide, and even internationally. For a listing of cable channels nationwide, [CLICK HERE](#)

### ***In the Macho Age When Men Jog Home From A Vasectomy***

Fifteen years ago, the only men in Japan who would dare to wear gaudy accessories or designer watches would be the gays and eccentrics of Japanese society. A simple Casio watch was as wild as it got. Standing out was truly taboo. The *salarymen* (white collar workers) dressed in drab blue or black suits and did their best to NOT stand out.

Men have come full circle in recent years. From tattoos to earrings to gold pendants - the market for up-scale men's accessories has begun to skyrocket. Anything goes for the accessory startup now.

What's selling? Try gold pendants and crucifixes for starters. And get this, false mustaches and beards have caught fire. Moreover, Japanese men are moving in droves from cheap silver jewelry and accessories to high-end diamonds and gold.

The elegant department stores such as Isetan are doing a smashing business with this suddenly-fashion-conscious group of young, male office workers.

If you make or market products of such ilk, now is your moment for action. Read more about this trend and opportunity by [CLICKING HERE](#)

### ***You're So Vain, You Probably Think This Song is About You***

If you want to look better or at least entertain that thought, then Japan is your place. I first saw this phenomenon on a TV show where they took a mildly ugly woman and in a matter of months transformed her into quite passable - perhaps beautiful - lady. A similar kind of program offered reformations of dull or drab small apartments into stunningly-designed flats.

People in Japan like the concept of the instant makeover, and it is infiltrating all aspects of life here. The low costs of such services, which are offered for as little as 2,000 yen, give this fad a chance to be more long-lasting.

Photography makeovers with a professional to brush your hair and apply makeup properly before the shoot are now quite popular.

The most popular services are called *henshin* (transformation) studios. They specialize in 15-minute speed makeup and hairstyling treatment. In some of the more fashionable of these shops, you can bring a clipping of your favorite actress or model and ask to have your face made up like the photo.

The age of the customers vary widely, with some in their twenties and others in their sixties. Recently a growing number of men have been frequenting the studio to receive eyebrow trimming services and massages.

There are also photography studios for people who want to record their post-makeover selves for posterity. Japanese people are increasingly vainer; this makeover idea could easily become your wedge into Japan.

## **Aliens Knocking at Japan's Door**

With the birthrate declining rapidly in Japan and the Baby Boomer aging of its society, Japan is probably in a slow-bleed which will see future generations of businesses more and more dependent on outsourcing in Asia.

This trend toward an Asian Century is a great vehicle for forging a social, economic and perhaps political alliance among ASEAN members and other Asian countries at peace.

City and town volunteer associations nationwide are inviting Asian visitors to visit Japan, observe classrooms or factories, and actually interact with the natives.

To find out more about such scholarships, exchanges and grants, [CLICK HERE](#) or [HERE](#).

Eventually, we will all live without borders or arbitrary restrictions. Sharing of ideas broadens understanding and DOES eventually lead to endless economic opportunities.

## **Ambulance Chasers Need Space**

If you are in America and fall down iced-over steps at a hotel and injure yourself, the knee-jerk reaction is to sue the hell out of the hotel.

In Japan, until recently, that scenario was way beyond the means of the average citizen because of the high legal costs and the lengthy litigation process.

That long-term reality about the legal system is about to change. The extremely difficult bar examining committee is about to lower the bar and start letting in 3000 lawyers each year compared with the skimpy 1000 at present.

This new competition reality in the lawyer ranks means more and more lawyers are choosing to go independent earlier. This has led to a posh office rental spaces springing up in Tokyo, Osaka and other major metropolises across Japan.

It normally costs 6-10 million yen to set up a prestigious office in urban areas, causing many aspiring lawyers to have second thoughts about going independent. The new rentals, such as those provided by [Kokuyo Business Service](#), offers European-style office luxury with all the bells and whistles for a relatively paltry, all-inclusive rental fee of 200,000-900,000 yen per month, with initial startup costs in the one million yen range. The lobbies of such centers can resemble those of first-class hotels.

The opportunity to design, furnish or supply such offices for up-and-inspiring lawyers and other professionals is in the making.

Because of the closed and staid nature of the legal profession up to now, maybe such websites as the [Legal Store](#) has had no Japanese equivalent. Give a thought as to how you can take advantage of this paradigm shift in the legal profession.

### **Get High on Tech**

It is a ubiquitous disease of sorts. It's a 150 billion dollar business that is still growing and has room for newcomers.

In Japan, there is one cell phone for every inhabitant. Most people use their phones for calls, internet, messaging and paying bills. Land lines are feeling abandoned. It's called the telecom industry and if you haven't a clue as to what it is all about...then, my friends, you will not even make a single tread mark in this economy.

Try your best to not be a dinosaur. I have collected a series of mini reports for the serious players and wannabes of the high technology arena. Invest in them now by [CLICKING HERE](#)

### **Ernest Hemmingway Would Have Killed for this PR**

Did you know that three Japanese novels that were originally published on cell phone Web sites became the best selling books on and offline in 2008? Moreover, five out of the ten best sellers in Japan also originated first on cell phones. Did you know that such books are published unconventionally, with text laid out horizontally rather than the conventional vertical for novels?

Will cell phone novels and other literature kill traditional publishing houses? I don't think so; it's a long-standing Japanese tradition to stand and browse in bookstores.

But the time is now to get up to snuff on this technology and to use it in your marketing efforts here in Japan and elsewhere. The most popular of sites offering literary content is called Maho i-Land with over six million - Hello?! – subscribed readers. Other trail-blazers getting a cut of the action in this skyrocketing genre are Starts Publishing and [Goma Books](#).

This torrent of change is great for foreigners willing to take the steps necessary to profitably promote literature, games or even new software applications to the Japanese. You can get more of any overview by [CLICKING HERE](#)

### **Latching onto the Auctioneer's Gavel**

One of the primary reasons why many foreign business people never consider putting Japan on their strategy map is the language barrier.

When it comes to online auctions, the same has applied until now. But in a stunning development, Yahoo Japan Corporation and eBay Inc. of the United States have agreed in principle to allow members of the two firms to easily cross-bid. Yahoo pretty much has controlled the roost in Japan and eBay likewise in North American and elsewhere. The

bidding in the respective markets is expected to be listed seamlessly in Japanese and English sites.

Undoubtedly this will be a windfall for all auctioneers. My sense is that although traditional auctions will still be the mainstay in this cross-cultural marketplace, other more non-conventional opportunities will arise.

I foresee many bankruptcy auctions arising. With the use of less costly payment systems such as PayPal, businesses will be able on both sides of the planet to reach a broader market of would-be buyers for such distress sales.

This is an area where I plan to focus my energy. The main site for this new entity in Japan will be called [Sekaimon](#) or "Gateway to the world." The two other main players trailing Sekaimon in the marketplace are Rakuten Auctions and DeNA.

The Japanese are often suspicious and cautious folks, but a majority of natives I know have bought or sold on auction sites.

### **Cellular Phone Doodads Rake In Profits**

Kewpie (pron., cue-pee) dolls were first designed by Rose O'Neil, an American illustrator and writer, based on the mythical god of love, Cupid, in 1909. They were particularly loved at that time by porcelain doll makers in Germany of that era. The character then found coinage in Japan during the Taisho era (1912-1926). In 1922, a Japanese food manufacturer called Q.P. Corporation, registered Kewpie as its brand name.

To this day, these dolls are revered by young and old. Recently they have become a popular adornment for "cute" cellular phones for girls and women.

Cute dolls of a similar nature for cell phones could prove immensely popular. Study famous manga and anime characters and the make caricatures of them to avoid copyright infringement.

Perhaps you are already selling such a product in your native land or no someone who is. Make a sales trip to young fashion towns in Japan such as Harajuku and Odaiba. The market is open and bottomless.

### **English Catch Up**

There has been a spate of articles recently about the need for Japanese researchers to give presentations in English at international forums. The Japanese Cancer Association, for example, recently held its annual general conference in Yokohama and all presentations and Q&As were held entirely in English.

4800 researchers attended the conference, and 250 mini presentations were given entirely in English. Some of the presenters were inept in speaking or answering questions, but all did their best to adapt to the new ground rules.

With the hectic and irregular schedule which many researchers in Japan keep, it is difficult for them to keep regular lessons during work hours.

If you set up a niche-specific Japanese website introducing 24-hour a day online lessons for researchers, bankers, engineers, etc., I think a well-designed site will draw hundreds to thousands online.

This opportunity is not limited to the Japan Cancer Association. Many [professional associations](#) are encouraging members to brush up or vastly improve their English skills for international conferences. High professionals are desperate – though not always willing – to improve their English for conferences and workshops. The market is wide open and lucrative if you can prepare taut curriculums for such English-specific learners.

### ***Biz Ops In The Backwaters Of Japan***

Baby Boomers are retiring in droves. Unlike our grandparents, these new retirees are not satisfied with a rocking chair and a glass of lemonade while they wait for the Grim Reaper. They want to lead more active lives after retirement. The de-populated regions in Japan have a host of incentives to lure city folk back to the nature-bound countryside.

If you are here legally and have a visa which allows long-term or permanent residence, then there are a host of opportunities to live in the serene, pristine rural areas of Japan.

You could set up a pottery studio or glass-blowing studio for a fraction of the cost of doing so in big cities. Tottori Prefecture, for example, will pay a 100,000 yen stipend for one year for all newcomers who stay longer than one month. They will also pay 30,000/mo. for dependent children. To learn about incentive programs nation-wide, please [CLICK HERE](#).

### ***Off The Leash***

The pedigree dog is in vogue. Many shops brim over with dog accessories, dog clothing and yes, even dog wedding gowns and tuxedos.

Truly owners pamper their dogs and this means opportunity. With a Japanese collaborator, you could easily design a highly profitable website for Japan similar to [this one](#).

[Watch this video](#) for an example of an absurdly profitable niche idea in motion.

### ***Online English Teacher Training***

For many years, I have been an ESL trainer at major corporations in Japan. Many of these companies contract with rather unprofessional schools that hand a textbook and tape to a teacher and send them into a classroom.

One of the most insidious tasks in these corporate jobs is to write detailed reports about how the student is doing and what they need to do to improve. The message on each student may be just one general paragraph or a series of criteria requiring teacher comment. This is usually a public relations sham because the courses have no set goal.



If you are a highly-skilled ESL teacher/school specializing in on-site classes, then why not start by making a training tape of your or your staff's best effort in the classroom. The residual could be 50 percent for the producer and the remainder to be shared by contributors to the production.

For many schools that lack funding/manpower to do one-on-one training, this could be a step in the right direction in providing professionalism among temporary teachers.

### **Cell Phones Needn't Be Scrapped**

There's a gold mine waiting to be panned. It's called used cellular phones and they have many rare metals within them that can be extracted with the right equipment.

The extraction process is difficult. One such company, [Eco-system Recycling Co.](#) of Saitama, an affiliate of the non-ferrous metal company, Dow Holdings, has an operation which can extract the valuable metals. Workers extract gold by stripping or chemically soaking the circuit boards. The gold is then collected and melted down at 1100 degrees Celsius, and then poured into a mold. Each phone yields about 0.03 grams of gold. Thus, it takes approximately 10,000 cell phones to make a three-kilo ingot which is 99.9 percent pure and is worth approximately 10 million yen.

The problem is that in Japan the number of cell phones collected and recycled has drastically declined, from about 14 million in 2000 to about 6.6 million units last year.

If your country has such sophisticated equipment, the same business opportunity exists wherever you reside. One way to insure more availability of phones is to have an online backup system of addresses for cell phone users, so that they will more readily discard them.

By the way, there are a variety of other precious metals in very small quantities which could be identified and extracted with a concerted effort.

### **Manga Applications In Marketing**

No doubt manga and anime have a strong if not eternal foothold in many cultures outside of Japan these days. While the majority of American adults, for example, wouldn't be caught dead reading manga in public, their children's lives are a universe removed from theirs. Tokyo University Hospital is using this generation-binder (manga) to depict a young pediatrician who is eager to save children's lives.

No doubt, many cultures around the world dismiss this manga/anime genre as being filth, violence and sex. But there is equally no doubt that to reach the young generation any means at our disposal must be used.

Manga could be used to teach manners, finances, appropriate and inappropriate touching to name just a few applications. Moreover, it could be used to reach children for the promotion of products and services.

If you have dismissed the manga/anime genre as being unrelated to you or foul, you best reconsider. The future will see it used to promote and market every conceivable product or service. Jump on board now. Remember that time when, as a child, you asked your

Mom or Dad where babies came from? Watch [this video](#) for an example of how anime can be used to give a humorous twist on birth.

## **Initiatives To Recycle Textile Materials**

An American friend of mine recently reminded me of how much more efficient the Japanese government is in recycling than are the majority of non-affluent American communities.

A new effort by the Japanese government is encouraging textile makers to recycle used clothing. The companies participating in the project are trying a variety of methods to extract textile material from clothing and turn it into new clothing and bags. This idea was hatched after textile industry leaders in Japan observed the relatively successful campaign of U.S. outdoor goods maker, Patagonia Inc., which started collecting old underwear made by the manufacturer which was 95percent polyester.

In Japan, a similar program has spawned using an extractor system developed by Osaka-based [Teijin Fibers Ltd.](#) Teijin's system can recycle ten million items each year from each plant utilizing this technology.

Japan is absolutely the most advanced nation nowadays in recycling technology. If you have a machine or technology which can greatly benefit Mankind and save our planet, then this is the country where you could introduce your technology. A good starting point for finding interested parties is, as always, the [JETRO](#) site.

## **Snuffing Out Second-Hand Smoke**

No offense meant to the billions (?) of smokers worldwide - smoking sucks...literally.

According to a large-scale study by the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry, men who smoke at the age of 40 will live, on average 31/2 years less than their non-smoking counterparts. Those who smoked two packs a day or more saw their life expectancy cut by still another six months.

Contrary to the PR blitz of semi-privatized Japan Tobacco - the only tobacco corporation in Japan - the rate of 62 percent of males smoking in 1980 is about the same as the present rate. Life expectancy of children and spouses of heavy smoker are also suspected to be in decline, though data is somewhat inconclusive.

The Asian smoking plague is like a scar that festers forever. But I do believe more and more people, corporations and communities are starting to wake up to the dangers of unrestricted and unregulated smoking. Therein lays an opportunity to provide the preventive medicines, tobacco accessories and room/building designs for a smoke-free or smoke-preventive society. This market IS going to surge. To get an idea of what products and ideas are necessary in this niche, [CLICK HERE](#)

## **Fingernail Art Has Gone Mainstream**

Nails are in. Not the ones that go into wood, but the finger type.

In the last seven to eight months this trend has been going through the roof in Japan. Upon doing a little research about what I presumed to be a trend, the number two Google ranking for "Japanese nail salons" was a New Zealand outfit offering Japanese nail design!

Nail art treatment in Tokyo can range from 500 yen per nail to more than 2000 yen per cuticle. The estimated worth of this market is currently ¥100 billion (\$900 million) a year. An estimated 8000 salons are in operation which offer nail design and some 30,000 manicurists service the market.



Japanese women, and to an increasing extent, men, are very trend conscious. Like one ear earrings, janitor-style key chains and overalls with one strap hanging, nails are the new rage here. Though there is a lot of competition, there's a lot of market.

One market is for the older Japanese women - the Baby Boomers - who would love elegant rather than gaudy nail styles.

Secondly, a "men's only" nail salon may find headway.

Third, a "Nails of the World" concept, with designs peculiar to hundreds of nations available under one storefront.

Finally, Japanese-language training videos online could teach nail design enthusiasts how to set up a home business in this niche, with the A's to Z's of how to be a quality manicurist. Incorporated into this final idea could be an affiliate program selling the videos, the nail design products and tools, and even a franchise concept.

## **The Snowball Effect**

It was skiing twenty-five years ago that caught fire in Japan. It replaced the la-di-da past times of driving, watching TV or playing golf and tennis. [Skiing](#) represented the chic, country-club style of the affluent and wannabes. Nowadays, skiing has been in somewhat of a decline, while snowboarding has become trendier. Anyway, Japanese have increasingly taken to winter sports.

Hokkaido is the new investment paradise for foreigners. With increasing frequency, Japanese and foreigners are snatching up or, dilapidated inns and transforming them into upscale condominiums. The snow in the region is renown for its near perfect powder.

Most of the money influx into these resort areas is coming from Hong Kong and Australia, whose citizens would much rather make the short trek to Japan than to take an exhausting trip to North America or Europe.

The greatest revenue growth is in an area called Niseko Grand Hirafu, but other nearby areas are also experiencing exponential growth. The opportunity to bring foreign ski resort concepts to Japan has never been better in that region.

## **A New Wrinkle On Clothing**

Anything concerned with recycling strikes a chord with me. To take goods and concepts sitting on the scrap heap of time and resurrect them in a manner which is appealing to modern folks...has my seal of approval. A headline which grabbed my attention recently: "Old Styles Weave New Tradition," relates the story of two Japanese weavers who have taken frayed *Kameda-jima*, a traditional fabric, and are spinning them into indoor clothes such as men's dress shirts, skirts, and loungewear jackets. They are also making makeup bags - which are lighter than traditional, heavier leather -made purses.

The old fabric's appeal (whose origin dates back to the 17th Century) and comfortable feel are universal.

At present, these two men, Haruhida Tachikawa and Teruo Nakabayashi, are swimming in domestic orders but have not taken their plan globally. Most likely they don't speak English, but if you have entrepreneurial ambitions, then a trip to Kameda, Niigata Prefecture should be on your calendar.

## **Japan Is Bugged**

With the passing of time, company cyber networks are becoming more sophisticated, functional, and unfortunately subject to theft and sabotage. But an even more ominous threat lurks: companies are being infiltrated with bugs, the spying kind.

According to the staff of the NPO Japan Information Leak Control Management, last year 13 out of 303 tested firms were found to have bugging devices. While this rate is low, in the highly competitive Japanese business world this is an unprecedented change. It reflects, as well, as desire by some employees to get an inside scoop so that they can get that promotion they so desperately desire.

The anti-bugging instruments business is booming. Such devices sell for between 30,000 to 80,000 yen. They come in a variety of sizes and shapes. This price seems a bit extreme and I'm sure many overseas suppliers can easily undercut them online with [drop shipping](#) for much less.

Additionally, the government, afraid of terrorism strikes, is promoting the idea that each firm should have their own information control officer. The nature of detecting such devices and installing protection instruments does not require language skills as much as a detective's nose.

Got the bug?

## **Going Soft**

It has been customary in Japan for people to attempt the safest and easiest path through life. This is especially true in the investment field. With increasing business acumen, Japanese investors are looking for vehicles to make money other than the miniscule interest rates paid by Japanese banks. The nation's total household financial assets surpassed 1.5 yen quadrillion at the end of December 2005 for the first time, and hit an all-time record of 1.56 yen quadrillion at the end of June 2008.

The rules are changing and thus so are the more risky investment vehicles. Fully 50 percent of Japanese savings are being held as cash in hand or savings. In the last five years the share of stock and bond assets among households has risen from 6.2 percent to nearly 12 percent. What is the lowest risk business with the highest return in the world? Internet marketing software, applications and info-products. This field is in its infancy here, but surely anyone who is anyone will want to learn the skills for survival as the paradigm shifts from storefront buying to virtual everything. To learn more, [CLICK HERE](#).

### **You're Getting Warm**

Outside it's very cold. Inside it is very warm, but only if I am near the kotatsu (foot warming table) or next to one of our heaters. The windows and door frames have poor insulating qualities...and I am not alone with this problem.

According to the Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry, as much as 60 percent of heat from heaters used in winter is lost through window spaces. So when I read that the government is giving lip service (at least) to households going green and is requesting manufacturers and importers of home building materials to attach insulating performance rating seals to windows, I only smirked. The voluntary system is being aimed at making it less confusing to consumers wanting to choose products with high insulation efficiency.

Building a website/business around this theme and having weekend seminars at large home seminars in Japan on how to install and why to buy insulated windows and other materials can be held. For an excellent site outlining for this concept, [CLICK HERE](#).

### **A Broad Perspective**

To counteract the declining birthrate in conjunction with the shrinking labor pool as Baby Boomers retire, the Japanese Cabinet Office is progressively encouraging a work-life balance. Although the government cannot mandate firms to consider [child-raising support measures](#) and people's attitudes toward family life, corporations can see the writing on the wall: Make it easy for women to work after the birth of a child or watch Japan's labor force and economic might bleed to death.

At present, less than one in five children under five years of age are in childcare. The one's that are may not be there because the mother works; it may be due to the mother wanting time to herself.

While there are opportunities for licensed (60%) or unlicensed (40%) childcare centers, there is another related opportunity which will find acceptance in Japan quite soon. That area is in job sharing.

To be in front of the curve, you could set up a [job share portal site](#) in Japanese. This could include teleseminars, uploaded videos and ebook which outline the benefits of such a system to both employees and employers.

Many women, after childbirth, want to return to work but not without the consistent overtime and travel. Dividing the workload amongst people who have retired, could boost the prospects of a company remaining competitive despite a labor shortfall.

## **Virtual World Storefronts**

Second Life is a 3-D virtual world created by California based [Linden Labs](#). This world allows you to interact with other members in virtual spaces of your own creation.

Mitsukoshi Department Store became the first in its field in Japan to establish a virtual presence there. Basic membership is free and owning virtual real estate is very inexpensive. Mitsukoshi, using a virtual set up called Echigoya Gofukuten kimono shop - which is the original storefront of the first store in 1673 - as the storefront to welcome visitors. Mitsukoshi is hoping to draw 120,000 visitors in its first virtual year. They anticipate 40 billion yen in additional sales. Travel giant, H.I.S. and Toyota are a few of the other corporations turning to this new medium

I have absolutely no doubt that such web 2.0 sites are the wave of the future. The Second Life concept is about to make marketing and instructional sites more dynamic for those on shoestring budgets. In Japan, becoming an expert in this technology could bring in millions' of dollars.

## **Smoke and Mirrors**

In the movie **Joe Versus the Volcano**, Joe, played by John Travolta, is diagnosed by his psychologist as having a brain cloud. Now any fool would know that there is no such disease, but Joe believed he'd die from it.

Well now I have heard of a new disease called [metabolic syndrome](#) (which supposedly is real), and the Japanese government is about to insist that 57 million people between the ages of 40 and 74 be tested for it.

Mitsubishi UFJ Research and Consulting project that the market for anti-metabolic syndrome products will grow from two trillion yen in 2005 to 3.6 trillion yen in 2010. That means Japanese will spend more on these preventive drugs and therapies than they do on beer.

Just tag your health-related product with a coined logo which you could even patent saying something like "meta-syn" and start jacking prices.

## **Papaya and Mother's Milk**

Some 22 years ago my wife gave birth to our first daughter. From the start, she noticed that my daughter was fickle and irritable when breast feeding time occurred. It made my wife half crazy with regret and frustration that our daughter wasn't drinking well.

Our daughter survived this trauma, as did my second daughter. The second time around, my wife tried another shaman remedy, a tongue snip of our daughter to lengthen her tongue reach to get the milk. The result was months of neurotic behavior from my wife a fitfulness from my daughter.

Even back then - before my entrepreneurial mind had evolved - I knew that a problem existed and that if shaman doctors could create an assembly line of mothers with daughter's tongues to be clipped at 40,000 yen a shot, then there must be a solution to this problem which afflicts mothers and breast-feeding tots.

A few days ago I may have hit upon a solution: papayas. An experiment is under way in Ishigaki, Okinawa Prefecture, to try to verify the local assumption that papayas help breast milk production.

The island produces approximately 70 tons of papaya, and was thus chosen for a scientific study. This study could make Ishigaki the tourist destination of mothers and mothers-to-be and could also be the start of a papaya supplement mega-business.

Additionally, my wife's experience tells me that there is a booming market for solutions to low breast milk production. By the way, papaya is also linked with breast enhancement, which, of course, is a huge business worldwide.

### ***Listen To The Rhythm Of The Falling Rain***

The average roof sheds 160 gallons of rainwater per hour during a moderate rain fall. Rainwater is better for your garden than tap water: it is at ambient temperature rather than being cold and it is not chlorinated or treated with chemicals

An increasing number of local governments are improving water management by encouraging people to store rainwater runoff in tanks in what is known as rainwater harvesting. This harvesting is the collection and storage of rain from roofs and the ground for future use. This system can also help in flood control.

Ichikawa City now requires new buildings to install such systems, with a 200,000 yen subsidy as an incentive. Many other cities around the country are following suit. In total, 33 municipalities offer subsidies for infiltration systems and 50 for rainwater tanks.

The main manufacturer and distributor of harvesting devices is Okamura Kenko. Their systems sell for 140,000 yen and up. There seems to be a lot of room for overseas competitors in Japan.

Subsidies are expected to be offered in close to 100 cities nationwide in the next five years. There is a surging movement in Japan to make the recycling of water a second-nature habit.

### ***A Heavy Idea***

Call me crazy, blasphemous and tasteless if you must, but it seems that sumo wrestling in Japan is going the way of the dinosaurs. With scandals and growing disinterest in this most traditional of sports, sumo's days are numbered. Even the broadcasting channels

are finding it difficult to justify sponsoring it. Moreover, most young people lack the Spartan-like discipline necessary to rise up the ranks.

Just because sumo may be phased out of the Japanese psyche, doesn't mean that sumo wrestling is dead overseas. In fact, it has followers throughout the world. (For Sumo costume ideas, [Click Here](#).)

I believe sumo wrestler bookends, sumo wrestler planters, sumo wrestler salt and pepper shakers and sumo wrestler scrolls have a worldwide appeal which can transcend the decline in the sport. In fact, many Americans who are fat could easily enjoy the clothing and accessories - i.e., arse-wiping pole - because sumo wrestlers struggle with this inconvenience of obesity on a daily basis.

## **You Should Be On Chemicals**

One must keep in mind that the chemical industry and the nation of Japan as a whole are fully dependant on vast reserves of overseas petroleum and petroleum byproducts. But don't let that fact be mistaken for a soft underbelly for petroleum-dependent industries and refineries.

For many years into the future, according to one of my chemical industry sources, this industry will thrive because there is no affordable, viable substitute for oil. Whether prices double or triple for petroleum, there will continue to be demand for petroleum-based finished products.

The manufacturing industries in Japan will of course gradually pass on these increased costs to the consumers. Yet our huge appetite for products such as computers and iPods, produced with giant gulps of oil, will continue unabated.

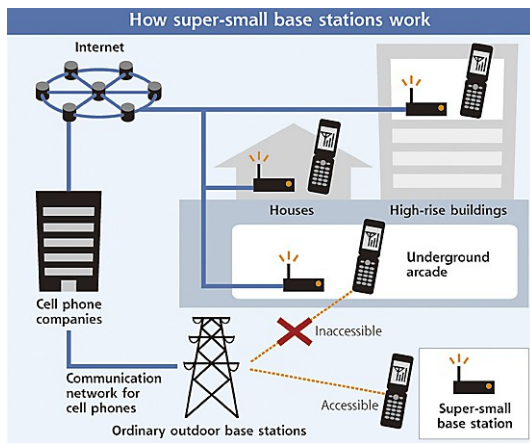
Notably, Japan's chemical industries are now developing several cutting-edge processes to reduce oil consumption dramatically in the process of producing semi-finished and finished products. Chemical companies will not become obsolete or overpriced in most of our lifetimes, although fluctuations in profitability may occur during periods of rapid rises or falls in oil prices.

Oil-saving breakthrough technologies and devices will bring huge profits to private/public researchers or research corporations in Japan. To learn more about the chemical industry vision, please click [HERE](#).

## **Bridging The Digital Divide**

There is a digital divide in Japan between urban and rural regions of Japan and the government is addressing it. A draft plan, outlining measures to make Broadband Internet and cell phones usable throughout the nation, has been outlined by the Internal Affairs and Communications Ministry. It will cost both the public and private sectors up to 1.2 trillion yen. A communications satellite will be used to make broadband Internet accessible to isolated regions and remote islands.





The good news is that although the ministry plans to set up antennas for receiving and then rebroadcast signals through fiber-optic cables, this will not be totally effective. To make for maximum effectiveness of this plan, the Ministry will revise laws and ordinances to allow citizens to set up, without a license, very small base stations capable of transmitting signals to basements and rooms without windows.

Two possibilities exist: to tap into the home-based stations' business and secondly to hook up with communications firms who will get two-thirds of the cost of setting up the stations subsidized by the government.

Away from the hectic life of Tokyo and Osaka sits a tropical resort area called Okinawa. The island had some of the most severe and tragic battles in the Second World War and, until recently, were dependent on the U.S. military and tourism to provide the bulk of jobs and opportunity. All of that has changed.

Okinawa is emerging as the IT capital of Japan, with more than 100 financial and information-related businesses having set up offices in the prefecture. Leading the way are Japan superpowers, NTT and Nomura Securities. Many overseas call centers which chose China or India for their default operations are packing their bags and finding their way to Okinawa Prefecture.

Okinawa has been coaxing companies to come to the island by offering them several incentives. For example, 30 percent of their young employees' salaries are subsidized by the Japanese government. The Okinawa government also covers 80 percent of companies' telecommunications expenses. These measures have helped increase the number of call centers on the island from three in March 1999 to 21 today, producing more than 3,500 jobs.



Downtown Nago is seeing rapid development, condominiums rising and businesses and shopping areas to accommodate the boom.

The allure of Okinawa began when the city of Nago in the prefecture was designated a special financial business zone. Moreover, the government has given Nago hundreds of millions of dollars in exchange for accepting the relocation of American military bases.

This means everything from ethnic restaurants to translation schools will be blossoming in the coming years. Okinawa Prefecture has the highest unemployment rate among youth in Japan at over 13 percent, so one of the incentives given by the Japanese government is a huge tax break to firms hiring twenty or more locals. A detailed article can be found by [CLICKING HERE](#)

## **Branding With Bookmarks**

One of the first images of Japan chiseled into my mind was that of scores of Japanese standing in bookstores and reading. It seemed that great deals of these customers were reading entire magazines or books without paying a red yen for them. Hmm? But to this day, bookstores that are profitable have not clamped down on these freeloaders. They have found - much like department store giant Marshall Fields - that customers who don't buy one time will eventually do so. Part of the bookstore culture is the gratis bookmarks that several of the stores offer when you make a book purchase.



Recently a library in Fukui Prefecture received an anonymous gift of 50 handmade bookmarks to be given away to readers on a first-come-first-serve basis.

Each of the bookmarks was beautifully laminated with a Japanese pictograph inscribed.

In all my years here I have received hundreds of such bookmarks, but have carelessly discarded most of them. When I went online to check if there was a market for such an item, much to my surprise there was. I am going to start to collect such bookmarks from any and all sources. They are a [great gift](#) and a means for branding your product or service.

## **Dressing Up Your Precious Pet Cellphone**

The ubiquitous cell phone (*keitai*) is on my mind. For those Japanese not addicted to cigarettes or pacifiers, a [keitai](#) are is the next best thing. People walk like zombies, J-pop music blaring through headphones, while they message on their cell phone toys. I have heard that some people go through withdrawal symptoms, if they happen to forget their keitai. Some high school kids in spoiled Japan rack up monthly phone bills from messaging and gaming of more than \$500. Parents often pay the bill without protest.



This niche - much to my chagrin - is loaded with opportunities. Ornate keitai decorations are being sold for 1,000 yen to 40,000 yen. Straps are a huge market ([Click](#)

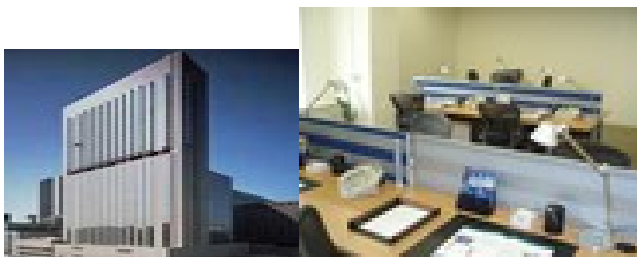


[Here](#)).

I have even seen keitai earrings. This culture is going to be around for a long time, so if you have unique concepts, this niche is your bread and butter in Japan.

### **A Virtual Panjumon Village in Metropolis**

When I was in Phoenix a few years ago it seemed like everyone was working out of an upscale coffee shop. While this idea has not caught on much in Tokyo, there is a growing (though still small) market of entrepreneurs who are on the move and can't or won't be tired down to an office. After all, being an entrepreneur means developing a mobile work life



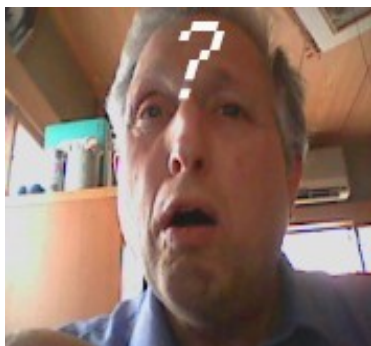
The virtual office offers you a complete corporate image without the huge costs of renting office space. This is quite important for startups. Some of the more established ones offer prestigious addresses, bilingual telephone answering services and a host of other services to make the on-the-go or business on a temporary stay fully able to carry on business.

The advantage of setting up such a business is that you can have hundreds (if not thousands) of people registering a prestigious address at the same residence. While those facilities are available on a reservation basis, the need is often of very short duration. If you are living in a prestigious area of Japan, you can deem your residence as a virtual office.

**Here is a caveat: There's no legal limit on how many companies can use one office. But the Business Organization Law requires companies to keep the articles of incorporation and the list of shareholders at the head office. Violators may be fined up to 1 million yen. Apparently, not many virtual offices follow the rule.**

### **Cell Phone Junkies Need A Fix**

One can't escape from the reality that mobile phones (*keitai* in jp.) are a fixture of modern life. Owning a cell phone in Japan, however, is a very complicated buying decision. The fine print of contracts for each phone company is so complex that not even many dealers can weigh the options and give you an informed opinion as to which phone, which plan, and which options match your budget and needs.



The Japanese Internal Affairs and Communication Ministry plans to put an end to this confusion by offering dealers and private individuals a chance to qualify as mobile phone sommeliers.

One of the main targets for such a license will be Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs). As a foreigner, this would be a golden opportunity to carve a niche among the foreign community in Japan.

If you are multilingual in Japanese, Chinese, Korean and English, then you will be a savior to the majority of foreigners here who haven't the foggiest notion about which phone and plan to purchase.

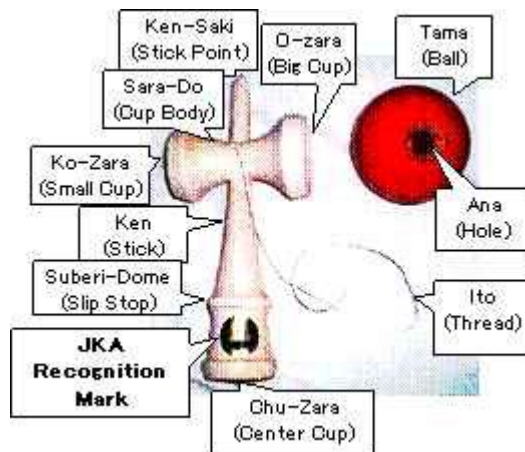
If you are bilingual in Japanese and one of the other languages above, then you could easily forge a win-win partnership with some other foreigner(s).

The keitai-based sommelier idea is spreading to all genres in Japan, making this licensing idea a winner in our connected world.

## Simplistic Challenge And Bliss

I'm a true believer in simplicity. Simple life, simple friendships, and even simple toys. The world of marketing since the Millennium has provided us ample chance to see that nostalgia and the toys of nostalgia never lose their allure.

Such is the case with the stunning comeback of the simple yet entertaining [Kendama](#). The basic technique is to catch the ball in the large cup. Children who have never tried the game are recommended to start playing *kendama kaiju*, or kendama monster fight.



Each part of the kendama has a name. The stick is called 'ken', and the ball is called 'tama'. Together, they are called 'kendama'.

There were more than 80 primary schools requesting licensed kendama instructors in the past year, an increase of over 50 from the previous year. Additionally, many schools are now considering adding this skilled game to their curriculum.

The [degree of difficulty between beginners and advanced players](#) is vast, thus requiring a license. The agility and hand-eye coordination makes it perfectly suited for all schools worldwide.

I believe all indigenous toys for agility have a potential in Japan and elsewhere. It's all in the marketing. For example, *koma* or Japanese top is a wonderfully simple toy that could have great appeal in our Nintendo world of GameBoys. [Take a peek at one in action...](#)

## Tour Biz On A Shoestring

Tourists associations in many parts of Japan used to leave the planning and implementation of tours to travel agencies. But the truth is that local associations know the nooks and crannies much better than a city-slicker agency scanning the Internet.



### **Nanatsugama**

The Nanatsugama Caves of Saga, designated as a national natural monument, are cliffs sharpened by the rough waves of the Genkai Sea. The frontage is 3 m and its depth is 110 m, and you can enter there by a boat at the time of a high tide.

The relaxation of the [travel law](#) last May opened the way for tourist associations to promote tour programs. Saga Prefecture's [Karatsu Tourist Association](#) has exploited the association friendly law by devising a six-tour program.

The reduction of the security deposit each travel agency is required to place with the government was reduced from 10 million yen to 3 million yen in July, making it easy for KTA and other associations to opt out from using travel agency for local promotion.

This lower barrier is also great news for foreign nationals wanting to own and operate agencies in unique, scenic areas of Japan.

## **Building Sophisticated Affiliate Portals For Japanese**

While there are several web sites on Japanese trends and innovation, few of them are well-known among Japanese or foreign consumer-surfers. And although the market for TV home shopping is on the increase, viewer rates in Japan measure only a few percent. Such big-hit products as Billy's Boot Camp have seen mainstream success, but such TV networks are generally dependent upon a small, loyal, hungry consumer group which buys gadget after gadget on a whim.

The top four media—catalog, direct mail, Internet and TV—make up 75% of sales, of which TV shopping and Internet sales have shown particularly outstanding growth.

Japan is a land of gadgets and gimmicks. Many of them have a shelf life of less than a year or two. Come, such as Hello Kitty or Apanman, have become cultural assets with high marketing value worldwide.

The trouble is that gimmicks and hype dig into our disposable income and we should know the unbiased and un-bought testimonials of those who use these products and services.

Until now, we have been pretty much forced to rely on staged testimonials and PR blurbs distributed by the manufacturer around the concept of Product of the Week, similar to TV shopping channels in exhibiting their stuff.

Why not build a site a product in a streamed video, but dissimilar in the respect that the film producer is totally objective. Each product will be judged according to a set of criteria such as price of competitive products, durability, practicality, etc. Each page of the site will have paying sponsors (which would be clearly recognizable) to make the post worthwhile.

Alternatively, you could set up a site which features unique products from Japan and offers a Pay Per Click (PPC) or affiliate commission structure such as [ClickBank](#), [Com-](#)

[mission Junction](#), or [PayDotCom](#). This may be a lot to chew off, but the rewards in this consumer paradise (Japan) could make it well worth the struggle.

## **A Steaming Idea**

There are more than 130 million people in Japan, but only a fraction of them have or will ever have an entrepreneurial mindset. This is good news for foreigners who are burning with passion. Lots of local merchants and associations with good ideas, products and even web presence tend to keep their talent local. They don't think nationally or globally.

The [Kusatsu Onsen Tourist Association](#) has launched a two-year pilot program which is partially subsidized by the central government to revive run-down, tourist-deficient hot spring areas. These areas were once booming in the '60s and '70s.

There are about 3,000 hot springs in Japan such as the one in Kusatsu, near Tokyo. The government and local tourist associations are looking toward revitalization and revival of these ancient wonderlands. Though Kusatsu seems to have their act together, many other areas are dragging their collective heels and wallowing in the throes of depressed economies. Take a look at the [Kusatsu](#) website. If you think you could clone or even improve upon such a website, you may be in business.

Since the government may pick up part of the tab, the time for action is NOW! Several years ago I lived in such an onsen area, Beppu, and although it has become somewhat rundown it still has great charm and appeal if framed right. Become the framer and have the government foot the majority of the tab.

## **Plastic Fantastic Lover**

This past week I was taken back by the variety of pet bottle designs in Japan. Being a long-term resident, you take such ingenuity in stride. But it is quickly branching out into everything from hangers to gardening watering cans to prescription drug containers. Attractiveness is truly the bait to try a new product on the shelf.

In Japan, 40-65% of pet bottles are recycled, according to the source you cite. Recently, a lot of recyclable PET bottles are being shipped to China, and several recycling plants are operating at less than 40% percent capacity. Many of the 60 or so plants are edging toward bankruptcy.

Like it or not, we are living in a finite world of natural resources. With epic documentaries such as former Vice President Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth," it has become increasingly difficult to live in a sound-proof cave with blinders on about the depletion of our earth's resources and the resultant warming of our planet.

It is my firm conviction that the somewhat apathetic Japanese will be at the forefront of making long-lasting, upscale, attractive recyclable bottles, containers, hangers, utensils and whatnots.

While our thirst for plastic bottles may continue unabated, nature will pull us back to reality. Japan is a great place to set up shop as a bottle designer, much in the mold of [Don Lindemann](#), founder of LAPI Company. His company took the sloppily attached PET

bottle with a flimsily-attached candy or toy and designed bottles which have a space shuttle feeling to them. The first bottle he conceived was a simple bottle design with a flat surface that allowed a snack bar to be placed against the bottle. The perforated label holds the bar in place and allows it to be removed easily. The candy/toy is seamlessly attached. This is a real business and design rather than language barriers will dictate the market.

### **Taking Vanity and Sin to the Limits**

Make no bones about it - Japanese young people are marrying later, if at all, and having fewer children, if any at all. Some might call that a crisis or a shame, while the entrepreneur would see it with eyes wide open.

The single life has gone mainstream, much to the chagrin of older generations. The Setagaya Literary Museum recently held an exhibition focusing around the life of a charismatic writer, [Kafu Nagai](#) (1879-1959), whose work is still popular. Married twice but single from his mid-30s until his death, Nagai was a typical chauvinist of his era. Despite his machismo, women have also been known to be moved by his writing and life.

The museum has compiled 10 rules, based on Kafu's writings, for leading an enjoyable solitary life. Among them are that if a restaurant takes your fancy, you should go there no matter where it is. He also recommended eating as many sweets as you want, keeping a journal, and hanging out with as many members of the opposite sex as possible. Hmm...Sounds a bit like modern life!

How about a Kafu Package: luscious chocolates, a gift certificate to a five-star restaurant, a gilt-edged journal with the person's name engraved on the front jacket in diamonds or gold, and a voucher for three uses of a top-of-the-line companion service

OR

We live in a world which dismisses the classic novels and henceforth the writers who wrote them. Many of them led solitary lives full of debauchery and decadence...by my standards. Yet I believe the Japanese would embrace the concept of novelist or entertainment cults with the same reckless abandon that gangsta rap and hip-hop have caught on fire here. Atmosphere bars or cafes with replica paraphernalia - pipes, eyeglasses, vests, makeup, clothing and accessories - of the bygone eras could become a new drug for the young. Some writers or entertainers of note who have he allure and stickiness in Japan include: Greta Garbo, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Clark Gable, Mae West, Howard Hughes, Kinuyo Tanaka, Albert Camus, and Ayn Rand.

### **Unashamed Youth With Fistfuls' Of Moolah**

The number of single households in Japan has surpassed for the first time the number of married couple households. More and more women are opting to remain single longer or forever.

What once was a man's domain, the "wise" investing of family earnings has now seen a larger number of women -presumably single - looking to financial markets where they can get a higher rate of return than the low-interest accounts of banks.



There is a growing demand for websites and seminars for individuals with little or no experience in investing. I personally know of one woman who has made more than 2 million yen in the last six months on gold and silver markets.

It is my firm belief that education about money shouldn't begin after you start working. It should start from the age when a child understands that the ice cream mommy bought cost money. Parents are the first line of defense against fiscal irresponsibility as adults. Jim Rohn, a renowned business coach and public speaker, says that the goal of every parent and educator should be to give a child the fiscal and moral training to allow the child by the tender age of eighteen to be independently wealthy.

Thus, the opportunity lies in teaching young Japanese children through manga step-by-step training booklets for elementary-age school children and online training for middle and senior high school students in the art of becoming financially independent. This could also build up a strong mailing list which will then buy your proprietary software for researching and investing worldwide once they graduate from high school.