

Speech at the breakout session of the CACCI Young Entrepreneurs Group - Asia Pacific on Nov 1, 2006
by Ted Suzuki

Prologue

First of all, I would like to congratulate our Chairperson, Ms. Perique, and her committee for the great success of this meeting today, which has so many participants from various Asian regions.

My name is Teisuke Suzuki, and I am a former Chairperson of the Young Entrepreneurs Group of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, called “Japan YEG” for short. On behalf of Japan YEG together with about twenty of my colleagues who are present at this meeting today, I would like to say that I truly appreciate this opportunity to make a presentation on our organization and some of our activities.

Address of the JYEG Chairperson

Before I move on to specifics, please allow me to read the address made by our chairperson for this year, Mr. Kunieda, so that I can better convey to you who we are, where we came from, and where we are going.

Introduction to the organization

Now let me start with a brief introduction to our organization.

Japan YEG, the Federation of Young Entrepreneurs Groups is, so to speak, a junior section of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Among the 520 local chambers of commerce and Industry throughout Japan, there are 400 that have junior sections, and we are a nationwide federation comprised of these 400 units.

In addition, there are 45 federations in each prefecture and 9 regional federations, where a “region” is defined as a larger area consisting of prefectures. These prefectural and regional federations are also members of our organization.

In total, there are approximately 26,000 individual member companies in these groups.

Most of our members are small (or rather, “micro-sized”) companies.

Our administration consists of about 60 board members, including 1 chairperson, 4 vice-chairpersons, 1 secretary, 6 committee chairpersons, and 60 directors representing prefectural and regional federations. They are each serving on a voluntary basis, and the term of each position is 1 year. We have 6 committees as working groups.

Basic agenda

Next, I will talk a bit about the basic agenda of Japan YEG. We think that the real tasks of our organization can be summarized under 5 basic classifications.

#1: Promotion and collaboration among our members

Meeting and getting to know others is the first step in any business, I believe. Our first priority is to provide our members with various opportunities to meet other members. Companies in the same business in the same location are, most of the time, competitors. But those in different areas can become friends and allies.

#2: YEG unit support

First and foremost, our role is to provide support to local YEG units, which make up our membership. This allows them to become more active in contributing to the vitality of their local communities, which are their main business arenas.

#3: Information and training

We provide our members with information and training that is useful for their business development and the improvement of their business skills. Our members are active businesspersons responsible not only for their own businesses, but also for the prosperity of their local communities.

#4: Networking opportunities

We try to provide our member companies with the chances to make the most of business opportunities by utilizing the benefits of our nationwide organization of 26,000 real active businesspersons working in every industry.

#5: Opinion-gathering and proposal-making activities

Working with JCCI, we gather opinions from young business leaders active in real business fields and make proposals to contribute to JCCI's activities.

Activities

I will next introduce some of our activities.

YEG Awards

The YEG Awards are intended to recognize and introduce outstanding projects implemented by local YEG units throughout Japan. We are building a database relating to such projects, so that members will always have access to necessary information concerning their counterparts in different areas of Japan.

Shosei School training programs

The *Shosei* School provides members with various training programs.

YEG business plan contest

The YEG Business Plan Contest promotes and encourages efforts for new business startups and business innovation among our members. This contest has resulted in the growth of many real enterprises from the business models that have been submitted.

YEG website and monthly e-mail magazine

We attempt to provide our members with real-time information that helps the activities of all of our member companies and local YEG units. Along with our homepage, we issue a monthly email magazine now being distributed to approximately 15,000 members.

YEG Business Site & business networking forums

We have developed an online business-to-business website called the “YEG Business Site,” which is now in operation. It enables us to receive information from member companies and to make direct contact with them. This used to be very difficult for small local companies such as most of our members. Also, we hold business forums in various areas across Japan, where our members can physically meet and discuss potential business collaboration. There is a possibility that we would expand our online B-to-B website into an international version, so that our counterparts in other Asian nations can have a platform for direct communication. This might open up gateways for small businesses, which are looking for opportunities with small companies at affordable costs over a broader area.

National Annual Conference

The National Annual Conference is our largest event in terms of size, with 4,000-5,000 members gathering every year. In talking about our National Conference, I must refer to the Aichi Declaration. As you may be aware, last year, our National Annual Conference was held in Toyota City on July 8th and 9th, in conjunction with the 2005 World Exposition, and Ms. Perique participated as a guest speaker. We had a talk session titled “Think Global, Act Local.” Following the keynote speech by Ms. Perique, Ms. Perique and our chairperson for the year 2005, Mr. Arahama, who is present at this meeting today (Mr. Arahama, Ken-chan, can you raise your hand?), discussed various issues and exchanged views and ideas as to how to promote entrepreneurship both locally and internationally.

Through a very fruitful discussion, the “Aichi Declaration” emerged. It is our hope that the “Aichi Declaration” will represent the beginning of a long-lasting relationship with young business entrepreneurs throughout Asia.

I would like to read the “Aichi Declaration” at this point.

Aichi Declaration

We, members of the Young Entrepreneurs Groups (YEG) of chambers of commerce and industry in Japan and the young entrepreneurs from the Asia-Pacific region, declare during the 25th National Annual Conference in Aichi, jointly held with the World Expo, that it shall be our role to contribute to our respective local communities by focusing on developing businesses through unleashing the capacity of entrepreneurship at the local level.

Furthermore, for the purpose of contributing to the economic development in respective local communities, the YEG shall advocate cooperation and collaboration with the entrepreneurship-focused organizations and movements in the Asia-Pacific region.

July 8, 2005 25th Annual Conference in Aichi

In closing

In closing, if I may, as one who sees great possibilities in organizations and movements such as YEGs, I would like to express my personal view on Japan’ possible role in Asia-Pacific region.

There are two very important issues Japan is facing right now that could have large impacts on the nation's economy and business milieu.

Japan now is becoming a society of a type that has never before been experienced. Specifically, this is a society composed of a large number of elderly persons and a much smaller number of newborns, resulting in a population that will decrease steadily and continuously. We will have to create new business models that can provide value, hope, and a sense of possibility, especially for next generation, even within a shrinking domestic market. This is a quite a challenge for our generation, but it is necessary to confront this situation, and it should prove interesting. If it is able to come up with a solution to this issue, Japan would be able to serve as a good textbook case for other countries that will be facing the same kind of situation in the near future.

Another subject Japan is grappling with is "sustainability," involving the environment and natural resources. Through our experiences, some of which we are not necessarily proud, we have found solutions in many areas. These include everything from countermeasures for air and water pollution to rubbish separation systems. Solutions and know-how for those problems, which Japan has learned about the hard way, should be very helpful to other countries Asia as they work to solve their own problems.

After serving as an officer of YEG for the last several years, I have become a firm believer in the possibilities of CCI and YEG, especially in a society with a mature economy such as Japan. There are many ways in which business can contribute to make this world a little bit better to live in.

As businesspersons, we should establish direct communication with one another, so that we can pool our wisdom. As members of micro- and small-sized companies, we may operate in local fields of activity, but we need to maintain a global viewpoint and to try to communicate with our counterparts in many nations, especially those in Asia. This may have been difficult in the past, but it will be increasingly possible through the utilization of platforms such as the YEG Asia Pacific Committee of CACCI.

When we get little bit older, maybe ten years from now, looking back, it would be nice if we could all say, "It was that meeting in Taipei on Nov 1, 2006, where everything first began."

Thank you very much for your attention today.