



Belgium-Japan Association
Chamber of Commerce
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TRADE FLOWS & CULTURAL NEWS

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BELGIANS
IN JAPAN:
TYAS SŌSEN

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EDITORIAL

By HE Ambassador Kazutoshi Aikawa, Japanese Ambassador to the Mission of Japan to the EU

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude for the invitation to write the BJA Editorial. I also extend my heartfelt appreciation to be invited to the BJA New Year Cocktail Party in January this year, which was a precious opportunity for me to meet representatives of the various stakeholders shortly after my recent arrival in Brussels as Ambassador to the Mission of Japan to the European Union.

I have previously served in Iran, Washington DC, New York (UN) and Malaysia, but this is the first time I am to be posted in Europe. Brussels is said to be the capital of Europe with a high concentration of EU institutions, the NATO headquarters, and the headquarters of many European companies. I feel that Brussels is a place that symbolizes European values in the sense that it is a richly diverse society where not only EU citizens, but also people of various nationalities and races live together. I look forward to learning more about Europe's long history and traditions through various opportunities in the future.

This year marks a Jubilee in Japan-EU relations, as the Delegation of the European Union to Japan celebrates its 50th anniversary, and next year, when Osaka hosts the World Expo, will mark the Golden Jubilee of the Japan Mission to the European Union. The Japan-EU relationship is showing unprecedented depth in its half-century

history with the fruit of the collective efforts of our predecessors.

The Japan-EU EPA celebrated the fifth anniversary of its entry into force in February this year. It represents approximately 70% of trade between the two sides, and trade between Japan and the EU remains strong, recovering to its pre COVID-19 level by 2021. In addition, a Protocol amending the Agreement to include provisions on the free flow of data in the Japan-EU EPA has been signed and is expected to contribute to strengthening economic relations between Japan and the EU as a cornerstone of business facilitation in the giant digital market, which covers a total of 600 million people in Japan and the EU.

In addition, there are a number of Japan-EU policy fora, such as the Japan-EU Summit, which have been held 29 times, the Business Round Table, the Green Alliance, the Digital Partnership and various policy dialogues, etc. Furthermore, as Japan-EU relations are expected to build cooperation in new fields such as economic security and defense industry cooperation, public-private cooperation with the BJA will become more important in the future.

In 2024, we will face a variety of political schedules, including the European Parliament elections and the transition to the next European Commission, and being quick to recognize



HE Ambassador Kazutoshi Aikawa

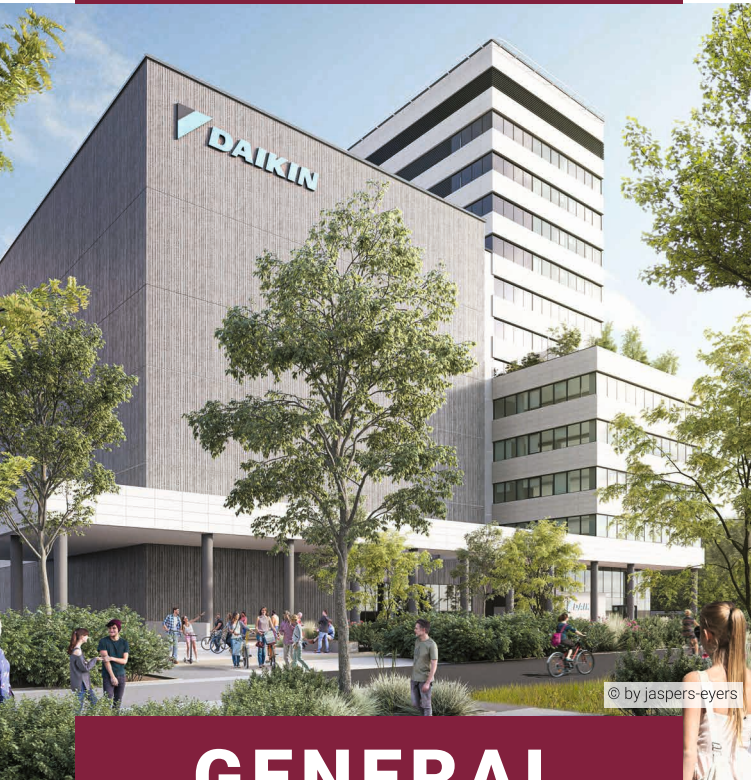
signs of change and respond to them in a timely manner will be key to the further development of Japan-EU relations, and we will be at the forefront of the efforts to achieve this.

Tragically, the international community has faced serious crises in recent years: the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which began in February 2022, shows no signs of abating. The situation in Israel and Palestine, which began with the terrorist attack by Hamas and others on 7 October 2023, has caused a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, risks of spillover effects in the whole region. This has cast a dark shadow over the entire world, including Europe.

Under these circumstances, close cooperation with the EU, a partner with which Japan shares fundamental values, is indispensable, and the Mission of Japan to the European Union is committed to working as one for the further development of EU-Japan relations. I am committed to working together with the public and private sectors to shape the future for the next half-century of EU-Japan relations.

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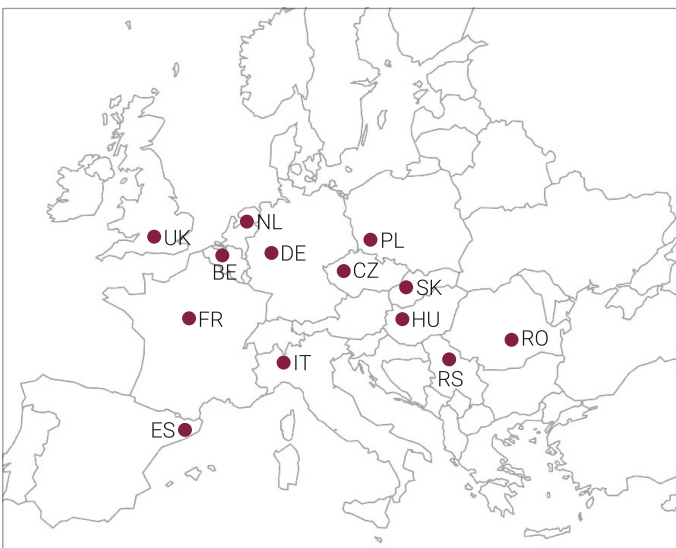


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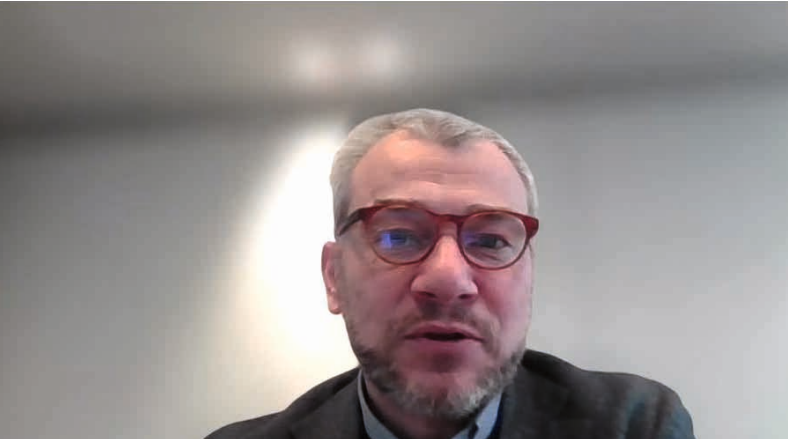
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for a Sustainable Future"*

TAKENAKA EUROPE IN NUMBERS

1973 Founding	13 Countries	630+ Employees	1.500+ Projects
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The EU in 2024 and Beyond: Changes, Challenges, Continuity

Thursday, 7 March 2024 – Digital platform



Dr Fabrice Stassin of Umicore and BJA EU Committee Chair (left) introducing the Speaker of the Day, Karel Lannoo, CEO of CEPS.

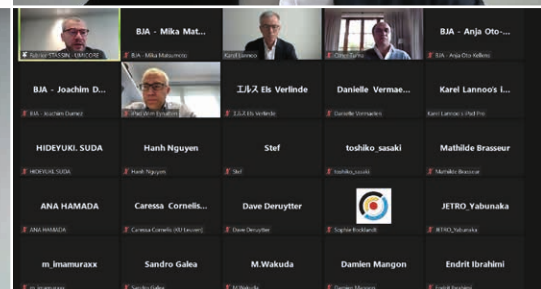
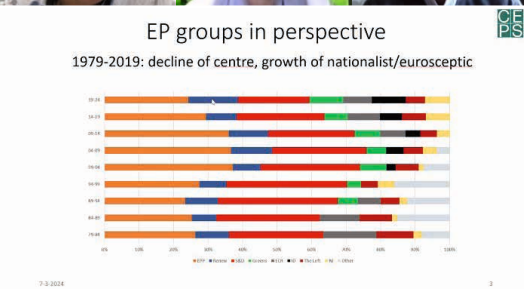
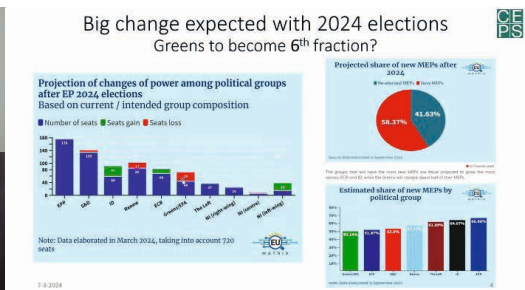
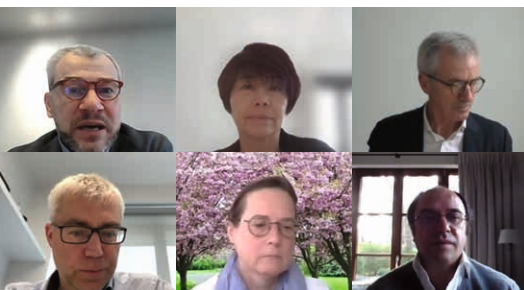
Thanks to the generous support by EY, the BJA EU Committee had the pleasure to invite Mr Karel Lannoo, CEO of Europe’s leading independent European think tank CEPS, as a guest speaker at its webinar on the future of Europe in 2024 and beyond.

Against the backdrop of a tense European and global policy arena, the EU will see lots of change in 2024. Up to 60% of the MEPs elected during the 2024 European Parliament elections will be new faces, and they will soon be followed by a new European Commission and a new President of the European Council, and Presidential elections in the US. After a huge rulemaking wave, it is expected the next EU Commission will again focus on the single market and competitive-

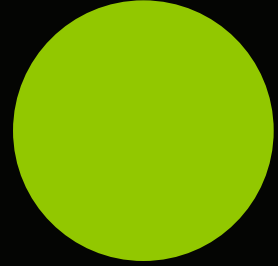
ness as well as start the preparation for an important new wave of enlargement.

After the welcome words and introduction by Dr Fabrice Stassin, Director Government Affairs Electromobility Projects & Coordinator for Asian Affairs at Umicore and BJA EU Committee Chair, Mr Lannoo gave a thorough and inspiring presentation to over 60 participants.

The event ended with a very dynamic Q&A session. As Mr Lannoo’s presentation deeply touched on many EU-related topics and addressed several concerns from participants on the future of the EU and EU-Japan relations, this digital event was highly appreciated by the attendees.



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His Majesty King Philippe of the Belgians and the BJA - Highlighting Japanese investors in Belgium

ベルギー王国のフィリップ国王陛下とBJA: 日本からベルギーへの投資の重要性

Tuesday, 7 May 2024 – Royal Palace Brussels and R&D Centre TME Zaventem



His Majesty King Philippe of the Belgians bestowed upon the Belgium-Japan Association & Chamber of Commerce (BJA) the honor to take part in the celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the BJA.

During these 60 years, the BJA has promoted closer ties between Belgium and Japan on a multitude of levels, ranging from economic and cultural to personal relations. Our two countries share a long common heritage, and the collaboration takes an ever-increasing range of forms and contents. The close bonds between the Japanese Imperial family and the Belgian Royal family further strengthen the relationship between Belgium and Japan. From its founding onwards and throughout the many decades, the BJA had the privilege to enjoy warm ties with the Royal Palace of Belgium.

To commemorate this, the BJA had the great honor and pleasure to welcome His Majesty King Philippe on 7 May 2024, highlighting the importance of the Japanese investments in Belgium and bringing our members closer.

His Majesty King Philippe commenced the day with a visit to the Toyota Technical Centre in Brussels, also known as the R&D Centre of Toyota Motor Europe (TME) during the morning. Highlighting innovation as its cornerstone, TME's significance has grown in recent years, marked by substantial investments to expand its European R&D and design activities. As the headquarters for TME's research & development, procurement, and production engineering tasks, including the European design and engineering functions, the Centre has the responsibility of enhancing the role of Toyota's European vehicle research and development processes.

The King's visit started with an explanation of Toyota's global multi-path strategy offering a wide range of zero and low emission technologies to help decarbonise mobility. The tour of the facility included visiting TME's Hydrogen Factory where hydrogen fuel cell modules are assembled and integrated into a diverse range of zero emission mobility applications ranging from cars to trucks and maritime products. His Majesty was





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His Majesty King Philippe honoring with his presence at the R&D Centre of Toyota Motor Europe, joined by HE Ambassador of Japan, Mayor of Zaventem, Toyota Executives, and the BJA Board of Directors

1st row (left to right): Ingrid Holemans, Mayor, City of Zaventem, Tanguy Van Overstraeten, Partner, Linklaters LLP and Vice-President of BJA, Yoshihiro Nakata, President & CEO, Toyota Motor Europe and Vice-President of BJA, His Majesty King Philippe of the Belgians, HE Ambassador Masahiro Mikami, Japanese Embassy to Belgium, Prof Gilbert Declerck, Member of Board of Directors of imec International and President of BJA, Matthew Harrison, COO, Toyota Motor Europe

2nd row (left to right): Aiko Yabunaka, Deputy Director General, JETRO, Wouter Bonte, Vice-President Sales Immersive Experience, Barco, Masatsugu Minaka, Member of the Board & Senior Executive Officer, Daikin Industries / Chairman of the Board, Daikin Europe, Edward De Beukelaer, President CEO, H. De Beukelaer & Co. and Vice-President of BJA, Shinichi Yasui, Executive Vice-President R&D, Toyota Motor Europe, Monica Perez Lobo, Vice-President Corporate Affairs & Sustainability, Toyota Motor Europe, Willy Vande Walle, Professor Emeritus KU Leuven

3rd row (left to right): Kanzo Kawaguchi, First Secretary Political and Economic Section, Japanese Embassy to Belgium, Gerald Killmann, Vice-President R&D, Purchasing, Toyota Motor Europe, Kaoru Umebara, Member of Board of Directors, President, Mitsui & Co. Benelux, Corine Vyncke, Director – Chief Legal Officer, Daikin Europe, Noboru Ogasa, President, Sumitomo Benelux, Thiebault Paquet, Vice-President R&D, Toyota Motor Europe

4th row (left to right): Wim Eynatten, Japanese Service Group Leader Partner, Deloitte, Koh Ichi Masaki, Head of European Affairs and Agency Convention Business Centre, Japan Management Association, Danielle Vermaelen, BJA Board Member, Fabrice Stassin, Director Government Affairs, Umicore

5th row (left to right): Joachim Durnez, Management Assistant, BJA, Mika Matsumoto, Project Manager, BJA, Anja Oto-Kellens, Executive Director, BJA

chauffeured across the premises to the Design Centre in Toyota's APM (Accessible People Mover), a wheelchair accessible battery electric vehicle designed at TME to transport athletes and others at the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris this summer. At TME's Design Centre, the King was shown how vehicles are designed and developed in Belgium for the European market and was invited to test his skills in the driving simulator.

Following the tour, His Majesty met with the BJA Board of Directors and, together with HE Ambassador Mikami and Toyota Executives, raised his glass for a 'kanpai' moment to celebrate Belgium-Japan relations.

This visit provided an opportunity for His Majesty to gain insights into the innovative endeavors of Japanese companies operating in Belgium. The BJA would like to profoundly thank





© Royal Palace, Belgium

Gathering with His Majesty King Philippe of the Belgians: A Royal Palace Moment

(Front left to right): Kurt Leuridan, CEO, Tokai Optecs and BJA Investment Committee Chair, Geoffrey Pot, General Manager, Takeda Belgium, Masatsugu Minaka, Member of the Board & Senior Executive Officer, Daikin Industries / Chairman of the Board, Daikin Europe, Prof Gilbert Declerck, Member of Board of Directors of imec International and President of BJA, His Majesty King Philippe of the Belgians, HE Ambassador Masahiro Mikami, Japanese Embassy to Belgium, Yoshihiro Nakata, President & CEO, Toyota Motor Europe and Vice-President of BJA, Jean-Marc Meunier, CEO, AGC Glass Group, Tanguy Van Overstraeten, Partner, Linklaters LLP and Vice-President of BJA

(Back left to right): Kanzo Kawaguchi, First Secretary Political and Economic Section, Japanese Embassy to Belgium, Takuya Hosogai, CEO, Terumo Europe, Marc De Baere, President, JSR Micro, Kan Okabe, President, Kaneka Belgium, Alexis Van Oostende, Executive Vice President – Corporate Services FUJIFILM Europe & Managing Director FUJIFILM Belgium, Simon Vljacic, President, NGK Ceramics Europe, Anja Oto-Kellens, Executive Director, BJA, Mika Matsumoto, Project Manager, BJA

Mr Nakata, CEO & President of Toyota Motor Europe and BJA Vice-President, and his entire team, for welcoming us all so warmly at the Toyota grounds.

Another highlight of the day was the Round Table discussion held in the afternoon at the Royal Palace of Brussels. A select group of prominent Japanese investors had the privilege to exchange thoughts and visions on the Japanese investment climate in Belgium with His Majesty King Philippe of the Belgians.

Distinguished executives, Mr Meunier, CEO of AGC Glass Europe; Mr Minaka, Chairman of the Board of Daikin Europe; Mr Van Oostende, Executive Vice President – Corporate Services Fujifilm Europe & Managing Director Fujifilm Belgium; Mr De Baere, President of JSR Micro; Mr Okabe, President of Kaneka Belgium; Mr Vljacic, President of NGK Ceramics Europe; Mr Pot, General Manager of Takeda Belgium; Mr Hosogai, CEO of Terumo Europe; Mr Leuridan, CEO of Tokai Optecs; Mr Nakata, CEO & President of Toyota Motor Europe and BJA Vice-President, together with HE Mr Mikami, the Japanese Ambassador to Belgium, Prof Declerck, Member of Board Directors of imec International and BJA President, Mr Van Overstraeten, Partner of Linklaters LLP and BJA Vice-President, Mrs Oto-Kellens, Executive Director BJA and Mrs Matsumoto, Project Manager BJA, gathered for this exclusive occasion.

His Majesty initiated and guided the discussion by inviting the Japanese investors to express their opinions and insights on the current business environment in Belgium. Key positive highlights included the location of Belgium in the center

of Europe as a hub for distribution purpose, the mastering of foreign languages and highly educated workforce enabling to develop strategic products and added value services. On the less positive side, the cost of labor as well as some expatriates related procedures were mentioned. The Round Table, adeptly moderated by Mr Van Overstraeten, fostered a valuable and constructive dialogue. It provided insights into the economic partnership between Belgium and Japan, underscoring the significance of Japanese investments in Belgium.

Towards the conclusion of the discussion, His Excellency Ambassador Mikami, whose attendance represented the strong diplomatic relations between the two nations, expressed his deep gratitude to His Majesty for hosting this prestigious and honorable event. He also underscored the strength of the bilateral ties, emphasizing the significance of the sustained collaboration, amity, and mutual esteem.

This exceptional event provided a platform to further enhance economic cooperation and partnership between Belgium and Japan. The BJA extends its gratitude to the investors for their time and valuable contributions to the dialogue.

The BJA expresses its heartfelt gratitude for the support granted by His Majesty King Philippe of the Belgians on 7 May - a landmark event for the organization and its members. It was an honor and privilege to be in the presence of His Majesty King Philippe and all the Royal Palace representatives.

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news from the members

NIPPON EXPORT AWARD 2024-2025

The BLCCJ is launching the 12th edition of its Nippon Export Award (NEA). The NEA is an initiative of the BLCCJ to reward those SMEs or large companies that have made significant achievements in exporting to Japan, importing into Japan, or distributing within Japan, Belgian-Luxembourg products or services.

The winning company will receive an award, will be allowed to mention “Winner of the Nippon Export Award 2024-2025” on their materials, and will

be granted use of the NEA logo.

The winner will also benefit from:

- › The possibility to invite guests/ business contacts to the award ceremony
- › Media attention: local media are invited to the award ceremony and encouraged to write articles on the NEA and its recipient
- › Special feature coverage on the BLCCJ website and social media

Previous winner in 2022 was software



company AppTweak Japan (HQ in Brussels).

The application deadline is Friday 30 August 2024. You can find more details on the website.

If you know other Belgian/Luxembourg or Japanese companies that are eligible for participation in the NEA competition, please do not hesitate to circulate the information to them. This competition is open to all.

TAKEDA UNVEILS NEW STATE-OF-THE-ART WAREHOUSE IN BELGIUM TO ENHANCE GLOBAL SUPPLY OPERATIONS

Takeda proudly unveiled its award-winning warehouse at its biotechnology manufacturing site in Lessines, Belgium, setting a standard for sustainable and digital supply chain solutions. The warehouse is strategically positioned as a one-stop logistical building within its plasma-derived therapies manufacturing site. By consolidating storage capacity on-site, this initiative bolsters the resilience of its supply chain, leading to reduced product cycle times and ensuring timely access to high-quality treatments for more than 250,000 patients across 80 countries and regions.

Designed and built to adhere to the highest environmental standards, the warehouse prioritizes primary energy consumption optimization and powered by 100 percent renewable energy sources. The storage centralization on site will reduce 330,000 km of truck trips annually, helping reduce the total carbon footprint of the site by up to 1,700 tons of CO₂ per year. This initiative aligns with the site’s broader goal to become a net-zero GHG emissions manufacturing site in its operations by 2030 supporting Takeda’s global net-zero goal.

Spanning 6,700 square meters and boasting a storage capacity of nearly 12,000 pallets, the facility is equipped with the latest technology and infrastructure to ensure efficient storage, handling, and distribution of its products. Located within a Factory of the Future, the warehouse integrates cutting-edge automation and digital technologies, leveraging its private 5G network for optimal connectivity. Utilizing autonomous drone inventory, autonomous mobile robots (AMR’s), and advanced radio-frequency identification (RFID) systems for enhanced tracking and monitoring, Takeda ensures swift and accurate handling of inventory, reducing human intervention while maximizing accuracy. Cutting-edge equipment outfitted with safety enhancements

like anti-collision detection allow for a safe work environment and enhanced well-being.

Geoffrey Pot, general manager operations at the Lessines site, explains: *“We are excited to advance our supply operations to better serve patients worldwide. This new state-of-the-art warehouse, recognized with the prestigious title of ‘Logistics Building of the Year’ in 2023, marks a significant milestone in our journey. Our commitment to environmental sustainability extends far beyond reducing our carbon footprint in transport and logistics. We are dedicated to minimizing our ecological impact across all activities on our production site. This includes initiatives such as water recycling and reuse, improved waste management, biodiversity promotion, renewable energy utilization, and fostering awareness of environmentally responsible practices. These efforts underscore our unwavering commitment to prioritizing sustainability in our strategy and day-to-day operations.”*

Operating a net-zero GHG emissions warehouse marks a pivotal moment in the evolution of global logistics, setting a new standard for environmental sustainability and efficiency. Takeda reaffirms its position as a leader in its industry in driving positive change for the planet and society.

Source: <https://www.takeda.com/en-be/newsroom/press-releases/takeda-unveils-new-state-of-the-art-warehouse-in-belgium-to-enhance-global-supply-operations>





DECODING THE LANDMARK EU AI ACT

By Tanguy Van Overstraeten, Partner, Linklaters LLP & BJA Vice-President,
and Laure Grandjean, Junior Associate, Linklaters LLP

The European Union (EU) institutions have now completed the adoption process of the first legislation governing artificial intelligence (AI) in the world, namely the EU Regulation laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence or ‘AI Act’.¹

At the time of writing this article, this detailed piece of legislation has been formally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council and should soon be published. It was initially tabled by the European Commission in April 2021 and underwent lengthy negotiations by the EU institutions, culminating in the political agreement reached in December 2023.

This groundbreaking legislation aims to shape the development and roll-out of AI systems within the EU, relying on a risk-based approach and with the overall objective to ensure that AI systems deployed in the EU are aligned with EU values, such as the respect of human rights.

More specifically, it seeks to create a safe and trustworthy space for AI innovation, while safeguarding public interests, including public safety, health, and environment. It is due to promote positive AI uses while preventing harmful practices, ultimately encouraging a human-centric and innovation-friendly

AI landscape.

The final text of the AI Act reflects compromises resulting from the extensive negotiations. For example, the AI Act will not apply in certain areas, such as scientific research and development as well as military and defence. Open-source AI systems are exempt too, except in high-risk scenarios. This is also particularly visible in the provisions governing general purpose AI systems, including large language models and generative AI. The related provisions were introduced during the negotiation process, further to the launch of ChatGPT in November 2022. They were heavily discussed following to the initial opposition of some Member States.

A multi-layered risk approach

The AI Act defines AI systems as smart systems that do not just follow a set of rules (like a traditional computer program) but also learn, adapt, and operate with some degree of autonomy.

It promotes a risk-based approach with four distinct categories. Each category is subject to specific obligations, tailored to the level of risk associated with the use of AI systems in that category and their potential impact on society.

The first category is a clear no-fly list, banning certain AI uses in the EU. These

include deceptive AI that can manipulate behaviour, systems that exploit vulnerabilities, social scoring, indiscriminate scraping of faces from CCTV footage, emotion mapping in the workplace and education, algorithms predicting criminal behaviour; discriminatory biometric profiling based on sensitive traits such as race or political leaning, and real-time facial recognition by police in public spaces with exceptions involving strict oversight and rights assessments.

The second category concerns high-risk AI systems and imposes burdensome pre-market and after-sales requirements such as thorough technical documentation, robust data protection safeguards, clear transparency, continuous compliance evaluations and strong human oversight.

The AI Act distinguishes two categories of high-risk AI systems. The first one covers AI systems governed by existing EU product safety regulations (listed in an annex to the AI Act), when the relevant product is subject to a third-party conformity assessment. The second category consists of an exhaustive list of use cases, considered as high risk due to the potential threats they pose to public health, safety, or fundamental rights. These use cases cover a broad spectrum of sectors, including education,

employment, essential public services, immigration, and justice. For instance, within the employment sector, high-risk use cases include using AI systems for recruitment, application filtering, candidate evaluation, decision-making on work conditions, promotions and terminations, or monitoring and evaluating performance of employees.

The third category concerns general-purpose AI (GPAI), which are AI systems trained on massive data sets to tackle diverse tasks. These include generative AI, which refers to artificial intelligence systems that can generate new content based on the large volume of data on which they have been trained. This can include text, image, and other forms of media. A well-known example of Generative AI is ChatGPT, which enables fluid natural language conversations with users and delivers responses that closely replicate human dialogue.

The AI Act imposes transparency for all GPAI models as well as compliance with the EU Copyright Directive's Text and Data Mining exception. The latter permits the electronic analysis of large amounts of copyrighted content for scientific research and other legal uses, with an opt-out available for rights holders in the latter case.

Further and stricter obligations, such as conducting model evaluations and adversarial testing, and executing risk mitigation strategies, apply to high-capacity GPAI models identified as posing a 'systemic risk'. These are GPAI models trained with vast computational resources or those designated as such by the EU Commission.

Codes of conduct for GPAI are due to be developed in compliance with the AI Act and will have to be in place within nine months from its entry into force. The fourth and last category encompasses

those AI systems that do not fall within any of the categories above. These systems are subject to a lighter regime. If such "low risk" AI systems interact with people or generate images, sounds, or videos, transparency rules apply. Users will have to be told when they are interacting with an AI system or when AI-generated content is presented to them. The latter should be watermarked to avoid confusion or deception.

Surveillance and enforcement measures

The AI Act introduces a comprehensive governance framework with two new bodies, in addition to national competent authorities: the AI Office (part of the EU Commission) and the European Artificial Intelligence Board. These entities will receive support from a consultative Advisory Forum and a scientific panel, comprised of independent experts from across the EU.

The AI Act is backed-up by high sanctions, including administrative fines. For the most serious violations, i.e. deploying banned AI applications, the fines could reach up to €35 million or up to 7% of the global annual turnover. Other infringements could lead to fines reaching €15 million or 3% of the global annual turnover, with a fine up to €7.5 million or 1.5% of the global annual turnover for providing incorrect, incomplete, or misleading information to authorities. The AI Act's sanctioning regime is cumulative with the General Data Protection Regulation and other potential sanction mechanisms, such as IP rights' violation. Some violations could therefore trigger penalties under several legislative frameworks, while also giving rise to possible claims for civil damages.

The AI Act will affect a number of players in the AI field. Providers, importers, and distributors are charged with a long checklist of duties but deployers also have their own set of must-dos, like

strictly adhering to the provider's playbook. The message is clear: in this new world of AI regulation, everyone from the developer to the deployer plays a part in keeping safe the users, and society at large.

Entry into force

The AI Act will enter into force 20 days after the publication in the Official Journal, which is expected in June. Most of its provisions will apply 24 months after such entry into force, with a number of derogations including the following:

- › enforcement of prohibited AI practices will begin as early as six months after the entry into force;
- › the above codes of conduct are due to apply nine months after the entry into force;
- › obligations regarding GPAI will apply 12 months after the entry into force; and
- › obligations for high-risk AI systems, which are either stand-alone or embedded in a product and are subject to a third-party conformity assessment, will apply after 36 months.

Conclusion

The AI Act stands as a pioneering regulatory framework seeking to balance the rapid technological advancements of AI with the fundamental values and human rights upheld within the European Union. It introduces a risk-based categorisation of AI applications, coupled with stringent requirements and a comprehensive governance structure.

The AI Act focuses on transparency and accountability. Users' protection reflects the EU commitment to foster an environment where AI can thrive responsibly. As the world watches, the implementation of this legislation could set a global benchmark for AI regulation, encouraging innovation while ensuring that technology serves the public good and respects individual rights.

[1] For the purpose of this article, the authors relied on the version of the draft AI Act dated 19 April 2024 ("Corrigendum") and accessible via the following link: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0138-FNL-COR01_EN.pdf.

BJA 2024 Annual General Assembly

Tuesday, 26 March 2024 – Liedekerke, Brussels



Alexandre Emond, Co-Managing Partner, Liedekerke, welcomed the audience.



The participants are listening attentively to the BJA activity reports.



HE Pieter De Crem, Belgian Commissioner General for Expo 2025 Osaka, toasting to the success of the Expo together with HE Masahiro Mikami, Japanese Ambassador to Belgium.

Thanks to the generous support of the law firm Liedekerke, the BJA had the pleasure in welcoming more than 70 members to its Annual General Assembly Meeting at their beautiful venue in the center of Brussels.

After welcome words by Alexandre Emond, Co-Managing Partner of Liedekerke, and Prof Gilbert Declerck, Board Member at imec International and BJA President, Tanguy Van Overstraeten, Partner at Linklaters LLP and BJA Vice-President, reported on the financial results of 2023, followed by Anja Oto-Kellens, BJA Executive Director, who presented the 2024 budget. Philippe Borremans, BJA Membership Committee Chair, presented the membership situation of 2023 and thanked wholeheartedly all the members for their support.

Tanguy Van Overstraeten continued to report on the activities

of the Executive Committee, representing all business committees, followed once more by Philippe Borremans, who gave a review of all the activities organized by the Cultural and Friendship Committees in 2023.

Before closing the meeting, Prof Gilbert Declerck announced the statutory nominations and opened the voting. Afterwards he gave the floor to HE Pieter De Crem, Belgian Commissioner General for Expo 2025 Osaka (BelExpo), for a presentation on the Belgian pavilion at the Expo. After presenting the overall thematic of the pavilion, HE De Crem gave an update on the tender process, the construction and the opportunities for Belgian companies investing in the pavilion during the Expo. After this insightful presentation, the members shared a pleasant moment together during the networking drink, kindly offered by Liedekerke.



A TREMOR OF NO MEAN MAGNITUDE

Studded on an earthquake-prone ring around the Pacific Ocean known as the “ring of fire,” the Japanese archipelago has a grim history of seismic upheavals and concomitant tsunamis, but, when the people of the Japanese peninsula of Noto were wishing each other a prosperous New Year on the morning of New Year’s Day 2024, they will have hardly imagined that Mother Nature would literally shatter all prospects of a prosperous new year from its very first day.

By W. F. Vande Walle, Professor Emeritus KU Leuven, and BJA Board Member



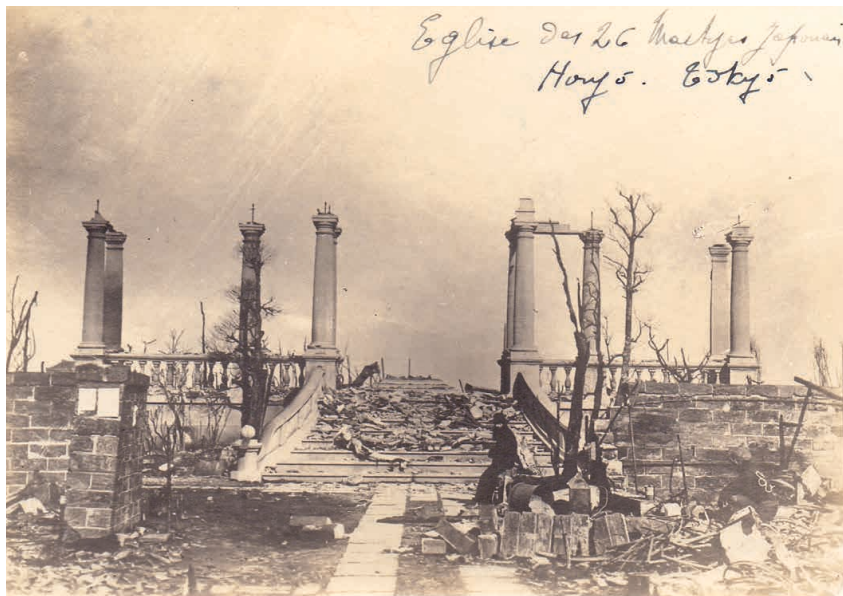
Ruins of the Saint Francis Xavier church in Kanda (built in 1874), destroyed by the earthquake on 1 September 1923. Courtesy Aartsbisschoppelijk Archief Mechelen.

Around 4pm the earth started to shake, and it was a tremor of no mean magnitude. With a magnitude of 7.6 the quake was the strongest to hit Japan since the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami of 2011. Nearly 100,000 buildings are reported to have been damaged or destroyed, and, as of late March, 244 persons are reported to have died. Admittedly, this is a low death toll in comparison to that of the 2011 disaster, which was aggravated by a nuclear accident, or, for that matter, to the one of the 1995 Great Hanshin earthquake, but nevertheless “full recovery” is projected to take years. There is of course no such thing as “full recovery.” Besides the irreparable loss of human

lives, reconstruction reshapes both the material environment and the social fabric for good. In that sense, no earthquake had more far-reaching effects than the Great Kantō earthquake. It not only took a record death toll, but it is also considered one of the single most defining events that shaped Japan’s contemporary history.¹

1 September 1923, 11:58 A.M.

Last year Japan commemorated the event, but, perhaps, because its memory has been somehow superseded by the memory of the more recent 2011 catastrophe, it has received less attention than one would have normally expected of a centenary commemoration. If



Ruins of the 26 Japanese Martyrs church in Honjō, Tokyo (built in 1879), September 1923. Courtesy Aartsbisschoppelijk Archief Mechelen.

that was the case in Japan, it was more so in Belgium, where the date passed virtually unnoticed. And yet, Belgium too had some reason to commemorate the date, as we shall presently see.

On 1 September 1923, at two minutes to twelve, a cataclysmic earthquake, believed to have a magnitude of 7.9, struck Japan. The epicentre was located between the northwestern part of Sagami Bay and the southern part of the Bōsō peninsula. The tremor caused the collapse of buildings, triggered fires, a tsunami and widespread landslides. By unfortunate coincidence it struck as people were cooking meals. Ruptured gas lines and overturned charcoal braziers fueled fires across large sections of Asakusa, Kanda, Nihonbashi, Kyōbashi, Honjo, Fukagawa, and the Ginza districts. In the end incinerating large swaths of the city of Tokyo and Yokohama. More than 370,000 buildings were damaged or destroyed, 105,000 people died or went missing. This is the count of Moroi and Takemura based on a reliable database. Their number of 105,385 dead and missing is lower than most figures usually given. An often quoted count is that of over 142,000, but is less reliable.² According to the Red Cross, there were 200,000 dead and 3.5 million casualties.³ According to Raoul Pontus, writing in 1923, there

were 300,000 dead, one million had lost their home and were nearly without clothing and the damage amounted to 30 billion francs.⁴ The *Comité National Belge de secours aux Sinistrés Japonais* has the following figures: 150,000 dead, 150,000 missing, 500,000 wounded, one million lost their home and are nearly without clothing, 380,000 dwellings destroyed by the quake or fire, and 15 billion francs (gold francs) of damage.⁵

As Tokyo's eastern part of the city, downtown Tokyo (shitamachi), was almost completely destroyed, people who had lost their home flooded all the large open spaces in the city. To take one example, at one point no less than about 500,000 people were said to have congregated in Ueno Park. In response, more than 200 barracks were built in the area of the park, and about 10,000 people found temporary shelter there. Existing buildings were also converted into relief facilities. For about a year and a half, Ueno Park and other parks served as shelters.

Tokyo University Library

The impact of the cataclysm was also severely felt in the realm of culture, as historical landmarks, temples, shrines, and their invaluable art treasures were not spared from harm. Many histori-

cal buildings, temples and shrines, and the art treasures they contained were damaged or destroyed. Needless to say, books were an easy prey to the flames. In contrast to the Imperial Library, which had sustained only minor damage and lost few books, the Tokyo Imperial University Library's holdings, amounting to some 700,000 volumes, were completely lost. Dr. Kozai Yoshinao 古在由直, then President of Tokyo University, turned to Dr. Elmer Ellsworth Brown, his counterpart at New York University, for assistance. His request did not fall on deaf ears. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., made a huge donation towards the rebuilding of the Tokyo University Library and the campus.

Red Cross Actions on Behalf of the Japanese Victims

Rockefeller's philanthropic gesture was only one instance of a broad-based American and international campaign to aid Japan. A mood of reconciliation and cooperation ran through the nations of the Western world who had been allies in the First World War. The aid to Japan was one of the Red Cross' first international co-ordinated relief actions after the war. The League of Red Cross Societies had been founded on 5 May 1919, in the margin of the Paris Peace Conference. The initiative came from Henry P. Davison, President of the American Red Cross. The war experience had brought home the awareness that national Red Cross societies needed to work more closely together across national boundaries in peacetime as well. The Red Cross Societies of the US, Britain, France, Italy, and Japan were the first members of the League, known today as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The League's first task had been to undertake relief work in countries where the population had suffered most during the war. Henceforth, the organisation would undertake extensive relief work in peacetime, when floods, droughts and other natural disasters had caused hunger, distress, and death. In view of the dimension



Cover of the Report by the Société d'Études Belgo-Japonaise about the Belgian aid to the Japanese victims of the 1923 Earthquake. KU Leuven Library, photograph by the author.

Cover of the December 1923 issue of the monthly magazine published by the Belgian Red Cross. KU Leuven Library, photograph by the author.

The newspaper *Gazet van Antwerpen* featured one such Red Cross article entitled: 'Hulp aan Japan – Oproep aan het publiek' (Aid to Japan - Appeal to the public). In it, the Red Cross reminded the readers that Japan had been a loyal ally during the First World War. At the time, the Japanese Red Cross had collected money for the benefit of the Belgian war victims to the tune of about 500,000 Belgian francs. The Belgian Red Cross appeal stated: '*The aid for Japan is for all Belgians a duty of international brotherhood and of national gratitude*'.¹⁰

Posters addressed 'To all Belgians!' pointed to the unbreakable ties established with Japan during the war. It even appealed to the nationalist civic spirit of the Belgian population, stating: '*It is by the charity of the people that the greatness of a nation is measured*'.¹¹

The fundraising was mainly implemented through subscription lists, made available throughout the country by the Red Cross. The donations were collected nationally in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Already on 5 September Foreign Minister Jaspar had commissioned Baron Constant Goffinet, President of the *Société d'Études Belgo-Japonaise*, to organize and direct a national committee to oversee and co-ordinate a large-scale relief effort for aid to the Japanese disaster victims. This *Comité National Belge de Secours aux Sinistrés Japonais* enjoyed the patronage of the King and Queen, the Duke of Brabant, and the Count of Flanders.

President Goffinet also appointed a committee of honour, an executive committee and a Secretariat, including the Belgian Red Cross, which was represented in the executive committee by its Chairman Dr Depage, while its director-general Mr Dronsart was one of the Secretaries-General.¹² The committee of honour included, among others, Cardinal Mercier, Japan's ambassador to Belgium Adachi Mine'ichirō, the

of the earthquake in Japan, it was the League's first campaign on such a grand scale, testing the staying power of the League five years after its founding.⁶ From Paris, where its headquarters were located between 1922 and 1939, the League directed the various national Red Cross societies to provide financial and material aid to Japan.

In the end, a total of more than 100 million dollars⁷ under the form of cash contributions and supplies was donated to the Red Cross of Japan by the national societies. Speaking at the General Council Meeting, the President of the Japanese Red Cross expressed his thanks in the name of his national society for the massive solidarity. Addressing the First Plenary Session of the General Council of the League, in Paris, on 28 April 1924, he declared:

*'It is the first time that Japan has suffered to such an extent, but it is also for the first time that she has felt in all its moving grandeur the reality of worldwide brotherhood. For many long centuries isolated from the world, we have never known the comfort of spontaneous foreign aid inspired by a noble spirit of solidarity. Now the Japanese nation has realized the reality of international brotherhood...'*⁸

Belgium Helps Disaster-stricken Japan

During the Great War, Japan ranking among the allies, had gained increased visibility in the West. The Japanese support during the First World War and its aftermath, had fostered a great deal of goodwill among the Belgian population. When Belgium responded to the appeal of the League of Red Cross Societies, in a remarkable twist of fate, it now became one of the countries extending their support to Japan, reciprocating the support Japan had given it during World War I.

The Red Cross of Belgium, at the time presided by Dr. Antoine Depage (presidency 1920-1925), was instructed from the Paris secretariat to devise concrete plans to unfold the campaign. Originally, a 'Red Cross Week' had been scheduled from 11 to 18 November 1923, the first time such week would be organised, but the relief campaign for Japan was considered more important and urgent, and therefore, the General Council of the Red Cross had decided to move the festive week to the following year, more specifically to the week from 6 to 13 April 1924.⁹

Through posters and articles in the press the Belgian Red Cross launched its appeals to the Belgian population.

Presidents of the Senate and the House of Representatives, members of the Cabinet, senior members of the judiciary, senior military officers and representatives of the financial community.¹³ Enlisting the help of a specialist from the National Bank, Goffinet did not lose time in setting up an accounting section within the Secretariat-General, while the Société Générale was chosen as handling bank. The Secretariat-General was given the use of a spacious office on the ground floor of the bank for nearly five months by the favour of the *Comité Central Industriel*. In addition, the Ministry of Railways, Post and Telegraphy graciously handled the mail of the *Comité National Belge de Secours aux Sinistrés Japonais* free of charge.

For the deployment of the campaign, provincial committees were set up in each province, who were given wide discretion in the choice of their *modus operandi*. The Executive Committee had a booklet *Appeal to the public* (*Appel au Public*) printed and put twenty thousand copies into circulation. It also relied upon the goodwill of the newspapers who regularly published the communiqués of the *Comité National*. Moreover, in answer to requests from the provincial committees, the *Comité National* issued a total of 1.5 million fundraising pins, in the form of a small silk-and-paper flag, to be sold at so-called “Japan Days.” It had also more

than six thousand posters printed, to be put up on visible spots, in order to further raise awareness of the fundraising campaign.

Cardinal Mercier and the college of Belgian Bishops called upon parish churches to invite contributions in the churches of their dioceses. More than 280 million francs were thus collected. Remembering the solicitude shown by the Japanese people towards the Belgian soldiers during the Great War, the *Comité* sent out a special appeal to Belgian veterans, urging them to take the initiative in raising funds for their Japanese comrades, part of which read (in English translation): “Our brave soldiers cannot have forgotten the memory of relief materials such as tobacco, tea, pencils and pharmaceutical products, sent to our soldiers by the Japanese and shipped to Le Havre by Nihon Yūsen Kaisha free of charge. Those presents came with moving greetings such as, “*We are very happy to present you this little pencil that bears the name “chū-yū-giretsu” (faithful, courageous, and honourable) in reference to the three virtues of loyalty, courage and honour demonstrated by the Belgian troops since the beginning of the World War.*”

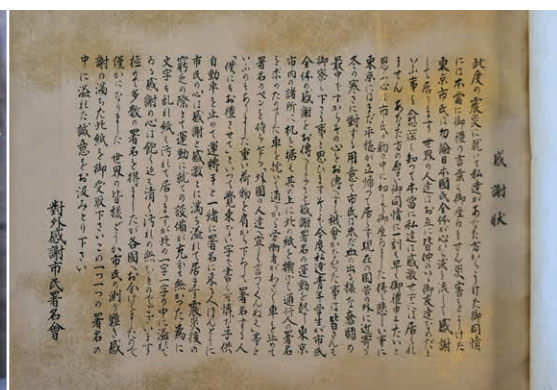
To further raise awareness among the general public, the *Comité* enlisted the help of speakers who had lived

in Japan, were knowledgeable about the country or at least had interesting documentation about it. It selected a group of sixteen speakers who could be called upon for a lecture anywhere in the country. On the list we find among others Théophile Gollier, Alexandre Halot, Raoul Pontus and Hans de Winiwarter. Théophile Gollier was a doctor of political and social sciences at the Université Catholique de Louvain. He was a one-time member of the Chamber of Representatives, former Vice-Consul of Belgium in Tokyo, and formerly also a Chargé de Cours à l’Université de Liège, where he at one point taught Japanese. He was the author of *Essai sur les institutions politiques du Japon* (Brussels, 1903) and a *Manuel de la Langue Japonaise I: Éléments de la Grammaire* (Bruxelles, 1907). Halot was Consul General of Japan in Brussels, and a former Senator. Raoul Pontus was Secretary-General of the *Société d’Études Belgo-Japonaise*, Hans de Winiwarter was a Professor of Medicine at the University of Liège and an avid collector of illustrated Japanese books from the Edo period. In all about one hundred lectures were delivered, allegedly yielding “magnificent financial results”.

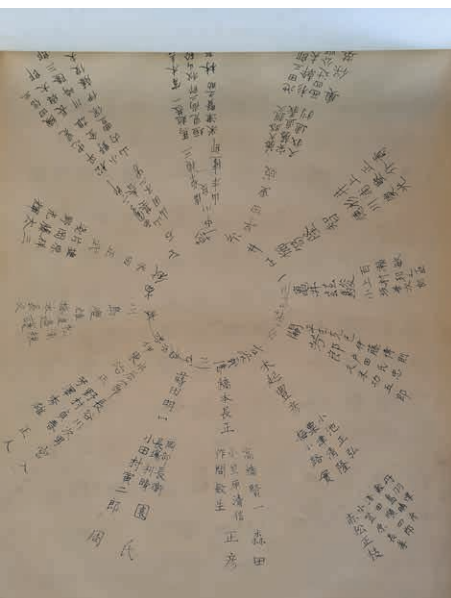
A problem arose about how to transfer the collected contributions to Japan: in kind or cash? Ambassador Adachi Mine’ichirō cabled his government to



Register containing signatures of Japanese pupils of Tokyo schools, thanking Belgium for its generous contributions in aid for the victims of the catastrophe. KBR, Manuscripts Department, Ms. II 5974, photograph by the author. Similar registers were sent to other countries who had joined in the relief aid.



Japanese letter of gratitude from the Citizens' Signatures of Gratitude to Foreign Countries Committee, preceding the list of 225 pages with signatures. KBR, Manuscripts Department, Ms. II 5974, photograph by the author.



Example page carrying signatures of pupils arranged in the outline of the Rising Sun flag design. KBR, Manuscripts Department, Ms. II 5974, photograph by the author.

ask for its preference and was instructed that cash was preferable. Therefore, on 12 September, only three days after the secretariat had started work, a money order with a first instalment of 100,000 francs was telegraphed to the Belgian ambassador in Tokyo Albert de Bassompierre. Equal amounts were regularly transferred subsequently. Although the *Comité* could just as well have transferred the money directly into the hands of the Japanese ambassador in Brussels, it preferred to send the money to the Belgian ambassador in Tokyo, because this *modus operandi* replicated the pattern the Japanese had followed during the First World War. In Le Havre, Ambassador Adachi had indeed personally handed over to the Belgian Foreign Affairs Department the sums collected in Japan for the Belgian wounded, disabled and war victims.

Belgian artists made a somewhat unusual contribution to the aid effort. Emile Baes (1889-1953), a Brussels-based artist put forward the proposal to donate works of art to the Japanese ambassador. They would be destined to be sold and the proceedings to be used for the benefit of the victims. In a few weeks' time a considerable number of paintings, drawings and other

works of art were delivered to the Japanese Embassy. Nor came the donations only from artists. The provincial committee of Liège distinguished itself by the donation of twenty-seven excellent paintings by the Countess du Monceau. These paintings, drawings and sculptures were first exhibited in Brussels from 14 May through 18 May 1924 (not unlike as happened with the books collected in Japan to be sent to the University of Louvain), and afterwards were shipped to Japan aboard a ship of the Nihon Yūsen Kaisha line.

In Japan, an organizing committee was immediately set up under the chairmanship of Ikeda Hiroshi 池田宏, Director General of the Social Works Administration in the Ministry of the Interior. The committee further included Baron Ōtera 大寺, President of the Belgium-Japan Association, Viscount Mushakōji 武者小路, former Councillor of the Japanese Embassy in Brussels, and Masaki Naohiko 正木直彦, the principal of Tokyo Art School (Tōkyō bijutsu gakkō 東京美術学校), as well as the professors Kume 久米 and Wada 和田 of the same school. A sales exhibition was held in November, in rooms lent by the Social Works Administration. The organizing committee had picture postcards and a catalogue printed. The Empress, Crown Prince Hirohito, and many peers, including Prince Kan'in, visited the exhibition and purchased works of art. The Empress purchased sixteen pieces, the Crown Prince fifteen. In the course of a week, besides those who were invited, no less than thirty-five thousand persons came to appreciate the exhibition. As a result, the 133 works of art were all sold, more than forty among them to members of the Imperial family, raising 22,635 yen, the equivalent of 186,000 francs. Admittedly, it remains debatable whether these works of art could literally be construed as Belgian aid to Japan, since the proceeds from the sale originated from Japanese buyers, but it certainly was a successful exercise in public relations since it helped to underscore the high degree of sympathy

of the Belgian public for Japan's plight and drew the attention of the metropolitan high society. Besides, Ambassador Adachi received 1600 volumes of books to help reconstitute the library of the University of Tokyo, which had lost all its holdings of 700,000 volumes in the blaze.

In the end the total sum of the Belgian donations (including the proceeds of the sales of the works of art) amounted to 2,641,910,55 Belgian francs. According to Isomi¹⁴ only the United States and the United Kingdom contributed more, while other sources put Belgium in seventh place,¹⁵ but either way, it was a contribution of no mean magnitude.

- [1] A penetrating study on its social, cultural and political significance is J. Charles Schencking. *The Great Kantō Earthquake and the Chimera of National Reconstruction in Japan*. New York: Columbia University, 2013.
- [2] See MOROI Takafumi 諸井孝文 and TAKEMURA Masayuki 武村雅之. Kantō jishin (1923 nen 9 gatsu tsuitachi) ni yoru higaiyōin-betsu shisha-sū no suitei 関東地震 (1923 年 9 月 1 日) による被害要因別死者数の推定 ("Mortality Estimation by Causes of Death Due to the 1923 Kanto Earthquake") in Nihon jishin kōgaku-kai ronbun-shū dai 4 kan, dai 4 gō 2004 日本地震工学会論文集 第 4 卷, 第 4 号, 2004, p. 25).
- [3] Roger Marcel Mayou red. *Musée Internationale de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge*. 1999, p. 99.
- [4] Raoul Pontus. *La Mission Industrielle Belge au Japon*. Liège: Société Belge d'Études et d'Expansion, 1923, p. 3.
- [5] Société d'Études Belgo-Japonaise ed. *Japon: Tremblement de terre du 1er septembre 1923: l'Oeuvre du Comité National Belge de Secours aux Sinistrés Japonais*, Bruxelles: l'Expansion Belge, s.d., p. 13.
- [6] Reid, Daphne A., and Patrick F. Gilbo. *Beyond Conflict: The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1919-1994*. Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1997, p. 76-77.
- [7] Hans Haug. *Humanity for all: The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*. Geneva: Henry Dunant Institute, and Bern/Stuttgart/Vienna: Paul Haupt Publishers, 1993, p. 353, has 277 million Swiss francs.
- [8] Reid, o.c., p. 76-77.
- [9] "Semaine de la Croix-Rouge", in *La Croix-Rouge de Belgique, revue mensuelle/Het Rode-Kruis van België, maandblad*. Bruxelles: La Croix-Rouge de Belgique, revue mensuelle/Het Rode-Kruis van België, maandblad, Nr. 10, octobre/oktober 1923, p. 761; Comité Exécutif du Croix-Rouge 1921 à 1926 (1923, 12 octobre). Semaine de la Croix-Rouge. Procès-verbaux, p.132
- [10] "Rood-Kruis van België: Hulp aan Japan" *Gazet van Antwerpen* (10-11 november 1923).
- [11] "Les Secours au Japon" in *La Croix-Rouge de Belgique, etc.*, Nr. 10, octobre/oktober 1923. pp. 804-805.
- [12] Ibid.
- [13] Société d'Études Belgo-Japonaise ed. *Japon: Tremblement de terre du 1er septembre 1923: l'Oeuvre du Comité National Belge de Secours aux Sinistrés Japonais*, Bruxelles: l'Expansion Belge, s.d., p. 10. What follows is largely based on this report.
- [14] Isomi Tatsunori 磯見辰典, Kurosawa Fumitaka 黒沢文貴, and Sakurai Ryōju 井良樹. *Nihon-Berugi kankei-shi* 日本・ベルギー関係史. Tokyo: Hakusuisha 白水社, 1989.
- [15] See e.g. a recent article in *Kyoto shinbun* (6 January 2021, evening edition), titled "Kokusai shien kansha no 50 manpitsu" 国際支援感謝の 50 万筆, featuring Prof. Jan Schmidt.

We agreed to meet at Nele's apartment, near the Harmoniepark in Antwerp. Her daughter Aili, from the eponymous electro-pop band, is briefly coming over from Brussels. As I take the elevator and step out, I see a pair of women's shoes and a pair of sneakers outside the door. I also take off my shoes first. It feels like coming home in Japan for a moment. Nele, a former embassy employee, opens the door with a broad smile. Aili, wearing a cap, joins us at the large table in the cozy apartment...

NELE SEGHERS & AILI MARUYAMA

FROM EMBASSY TO ELECTRO-POP

By Dirk De haene, Managing Partner, OSKAR D,
& BJA Editorial Committee Member

Q: Hello Nele and Aili, thank you for taking the time to be here together for this joint interview. Considering Aili's busy schedule after the release of the new album, it's quite an accomplishment!

A: Let's take a trip back in time, all the way to 1990! I had just moved to Japan and was working there when I met you, Nele, through a mutual friend, Ineke Van Put. I remember very well the time we visited your home. You were working at the Belgian embassy in Tokyo and lived in your own house within the compound, in that incredible location. What was it like living there?

Yes, it was a wonderful place to live. The location was very central and the neighborhood was very peaceful. We all had small private gardens, which was quite unusual for Tokyo. Our house was also rather modern by Japanese standards, with large windows, unlike traditional Japanese homes where you can barely see through the windows. Typically, Japanese homes had frosted glass windows wired for protection against earthquakes. But in our case, we had large windows that still provided enough privacy since we lived within a compound.

Another fantastic aspect was that during the time when Patrick Nothomb was the Ambassador, we were always allowed to use the swimming pool in the garden. Of course, not during office hours or when there were official visitors, but otherwise, it was never a problem. He didn't consider the embassy as his pri-

vate property but was happy to share it with his staff.

Apart from the fact that the building is no longer there, the whole neighborhood has changed a lot. We used to have a view of the famous Urasenke Tea House right across from our house, a beautiful, large complex. The upper class would often visit there for tea ceremonies, and when heads of state visited the embassy, their wives would also attend a tea ceremony there. Every weekend, luxury cars with chauffeurs would stop there. The car doors would open, and ladies in beautiful kimonos would step out and enter through a small door. It was like watching television, truly beautiful to see.

The neighborhood also had many old, beautiful houses belonging to samurai clans. Nibancho and Sanbancho were indeed the neighborhoods where the samurai lived, close to the Imperial Palace. But all of those have disappeared now. It's a pity because it also made the location of the embassy so unique at that time.

Q: When exactly did you arrive in Japan?

A: Oh, it must have been around the late eighties. Hirohito was still the Emperor (he passed away on January 7, 1989). I was previously working in Beijing, and it was after the Tiananmen Square protests. So it must have been around 1988. I spent almost four years in Taiwan studying Chinese before that. Then





An image of the former Belgian embassy building, on the cover of the Japan-Belgium Society Bulletin in 1994.



Visit of the late King Baudouin and Queen Fabiola at the embassy.



Images of the house of Nele on the grounds of the embassy, with their own private garden.

I moved to Beijing, working for the Belgian embassy, IBM, and the Dutch embassy, each on a one-year contract. After that, I briefly returned to Belgium and then went to Japan for thirteen years.

Q: And how was the work itself at the embassy?

A: The advantage was that you were working in Japan but not according to the Japanese rhythm or legislation. When there were visits, you had to put in some overtime, of course. But that was compensated with days off, all according to Belgian labor regulations. Another nice perk was that there was a change of diplomats every four years. So if things weren't going so well, you knew it would only last for four years, haha. It was also nice when sometimes they were Dutch-speaking, and other times French-speaking colleagues.

Q: I also remember during that time a visit from King Baudouin. Every Belgian living there was invited to the reception. I found that quite impressive as a 23-year-old.

A: Indeed, that was a great visit. I still keep some nice pictures of that visit. (Nele starts browsing a thick photo album full of photos and memorabilia)

Q: Another memory that sticks with me is a weekend with you and a bunch of friends at a villa owned by the Belgian embassy at Lake Chuzenji in Nikko. A beautiful, large old villa with a stunning view of the lake.

A: Yes, that was an imperial gift after the war. Several European countries were given country houses there, such as France, Italy, England... The villa still exists and was recently restored; it's still Belgian property. But again, it was typical of Nothomb; we were always welcome there. He didn't see it as his own but as property of the Belgian state. There was simply a list where everyone could note when they wanted to go there.

Q: You're married to a Japanese fashion designer?

A: Yes, I met Kyoji at the 'Unko' or 'Snottebel (snotty nose)' as the design by Philippe Starck of the Asahi Beer Building in Asakusa is colloquially called. Aili was also born in Japan, and we only returned to Belgium when she was seven.

Q: Was that for school reasons, or...?

A: Well, it was a bit of everything. When we were living in Japan, my father suddenly passed away. My mother was left alone, and I had been away for so many years. I didn't want to receive a phone call saying my mother had passed away while I was still living so far from home. And also for schooling reasons and because it was unlikely I could remain an expat there much longer.

Q: But your husband stayed?

A: Yes. It was during the period of the '7 of Antwerp'. We thought that might be an opportunity for him to find work here as a designer. In the beginning, he came here quite often, but he never made the

move to settle here. We also often went back, during the Easter and Christmas holidays.

Q: Now to Aili! At home and in the office, we always listen to Studio Brussel, and then in 2021, your single 'Dansu' suddenly came through via the 'De Nieuwe Lichting' contest. You made it to the finals. We saw you live in the OLT Rivierenhof in July that year. But that was, I think, between two COVID periods.

A: Yes, that's correct. But Radio 1 had already discovered us before that. We still get played there more often too. We actually wrote the songs before COVID. I had just returned from the US, and then we (Aili and Orson Wouters) went into the studio together and just did it very low-key. We actually worked on it quietly for two years because I still had another job back then, and so did Orson.

Q: Did you study music before?

A: No, I can't read music either, but I've always been very involved with music.

Q: And why do you sing in Japanese? Or rather, in a kind of Japanese gibberish?

A: Yes, I wouldn't say I speak Japanese fluently; it's often more like slang. But it's based on my communication with dad as a child. If I spend a week or two in Japan now, that language comes back quickly. But my language skills didn't really develop much further when I left Japan at the age of seven. When we started making music and I tried to put vocals on it, I started singing spontane-

ously in Japanese, and it felt right. We always make the music first and then the vocals afterward.

Q: To us, that sounds exotic, of course. But most Belgians can hardly understand it. It reminds me a bit of the opposite situation in Japan. There you often see people wearing T-shirts with English text that makes no sense at all.

A: Yes, our lyrics are difficult to sing along with here. I often see people in the audience attempting phonetic renditions, but you can't really call that singing along. With our music, it's mainly about the atmosphere, and it's also very danceable. Our first single was called 'Dansu' for a reason.

Q: You've also performed in Japan a few times recently. They obviously understand you there, but how are the reactions otherwise?

A: They find it very enjoyable and original, 'kawaii' too... Standard Japanese is often very rigid, with many rules and formalities. And I've completely disregarded that. Perhaps that makes it refreshing. I think in Dutch, but I often translate directly into Japanese and come up with certain expressions that they might un-

derstand but are never said in that way. I also don't get the impression that I offend people sometimes. They react more like, "Oh, that's funny the way you say that" and they play along. And my accent is okay too, so you can't tell that I'm European or anything.

Q: The title of your album, 'Nandakke' seems to fit with your approach to music. Starting with the music and then thinking, "Hmm, what should we come up with for the lyrics?"

A: Yes, indeed, that's how it sometimes goes in practice. And the title also captures the essence of the album. It's always a bit of a search. It's also about everything: family, Japan, food, etc.

Q: One track is called 'Fashion' a reference to your father?

A: Probably. I hadn't really thought about it like that. But often when I'm in the midst of a creative process, things fall into place in retrospect. I don't realize it at the time, but afterwards, those songs seem to fit together perfectly in terms of theme and rhythm, without us starting from a specific overall concept. We really don't work like that. Most things are very spontaneous, often born out of a joke. And that also works perfectly with Orson; we really do this together.

Q: On the track 'Futsu' I hear a Japanese male voice talking...

A: Yes, that's dad's voice! He also appears again in the track 'Takoyaki', when he's talking about his takoyaki recipe.

Q: I know the word 'Futsu' from 'Futsu-shu,' or table sake, 'ordinary' sake...

A: Yes, 'Futsu' means 'ordinary, plain.' When I ask dad how things are going, he always says 'futsu,' meaning 'a bit ordinary, just normal.'



Aili's first full album: 'Nandakke', including a full explanation on each song.

For performances, check the website regularly: aili.computer

Q: Your family name, Maruyama, literally means 'round mountain' or 'perfect mountain.' Ever thought about that?

A: Ha, no, not at all. Never played with that name, but it might be a reference in a song sometime. But 'Aili' remains a project of both of us. I already struggle a bit with my first name being the band name. So I don't want to focus too much on my name.

Q: The album cover for 'Nandakke' is also very striking and fresh.

A: Yes, we asked a contact of ours in Japan if he knew a graphic designer there. That was quite challenging in terms of the time difference and communication, but we managed in the end! He turned out to be more of an illustrator, a 3D designer, who creates really cool things. I wanted to do something with those Japanese playgrounds you find everywhere in small parks in a city like Tokyo. They have these globe-like round metal playground structures. And since our music style is often playful and impulsive, that seemed like a fitting symbol. But I'm not an illustrator or photographer, so we looked for someone who could translate that idea into something very dynamic, colorful, and beautiful. And that's how we ended up with Kanta (Mochida). Looking back now, everything fits perfectly, and I'm really happy with it.

And we're also happy with your album! We look forward to your next performance! And thanks a lot for this joint interview, Nele and Aili!



Aili signing her album 'Nandakke', and her EP 'Dansu'.

Celebrating Japanese Culture at Japan Fes BJA友好委員会 - Japan Fes訪問

Saturday, 13 April 2024 – Hasselt

The BJA Friendship Committee invited members and friends to enjoy together the Japan Fes at Kapermolenpark in Hasselt on Saturday 13 April 2024.

The first edition of Japan Fes showcased a rich tapestry of Japanese culture through a variety of mediums. Participants indulged in authentic Japanese cuisine – delicious ramen, dorayaki, takoyaki, sake, and much more...-, engaged in cultural workshops, and enjoyed a series of stage events that highlighted the beauty, tradition and modernity of Japan.

Together,
both young and old,
joined in celebrating the Friendship
between Japan and Belgium
at this vibrant festival.



BELGIANS IN JAPAN TYAS SŌSEN

For this interview, I had the honour to speak to Tyas Sōsen, a Belgian who has devoted his life to Japanese tea as his ikigai. Or perhaps we can say the Japanese tea selected him. Have a cup - it is a long interview, in line with a full course tea ceremony.

By Geert Benoit, Managing Director, Yamagata Europe, and BJA Editorial Committee Member

Q: What did Tyas - the Tea Master - do today?

A: This morning, I was instructing one of my online Tea Ceremony students on tea ceremony, and in the afternoon, I've been working on some orders that I still needed to pack and prepare for shipping.

Q: A nice mix of activities for a tea master. I'm surprised by the fact that you also provide online courses in this line of work.

A: Indeed, Corona had a huge impact on the way I was able to instruct people. All of a sudden, I had no visitors in Japan anymore. I had to start using online resources to stay in contact with my students and customers, so I decided to create an online video course for Tea Ceremony. There were some students who finished the elementary video course, and now require more supervision for their more advanced tea service (Otemae). I can also do that online, by observing their execution of the tea ceremony and guiding my students where they need to make some adjustments. If we're doing a new Otemae, I instead offer them instruction.

Q: Is this service (Otemae) similar to a template or a kata, like in martial arts?

A: You can indeed compare Otemae of a tea ceremony to a kata, but it's a very long kata. Some elementary Otemae, such as the preparation of thin matcha

tea, are about 20 minutes long, while the more advanced service will take about 40 minutes.

Q: How did you arrive at the position of Tea Master?

A: It was a long personal process. I first became interested in Japan when I practised Kendo in Belgium, which introduced me to Japanese culture. I then started Japanology in Leuven and, as part of the curriculum, I could study in Osaka, where I took my first class in tea ceremony at Kansai University. Initially, I thought it would not be for me, as I'm more of a man of action. But when I participated, I realized that everything I was looking for since I came to Japan could be found in that one room.

There is a scroll which is put up in the alcove that teaches you about calligraphy and old literature. The scroll I encountered on my first tea ceremony was a Waka poem, which introduced me to 7th century court culture. Learning about the alcove itself opened up traditional architecture to me. There are also flowers in the alcove, which led me to ikebana (flower arrangement). But most of all, we have all the ceramics, the lacquer, the metalwork, the clothing. I realized then that if I wanted to study Japanese culture, the tea ceremony was where I would learn it. It is essentially a microcosm of Japanese culture.





I started without any intention to become an instructor or attaining a certain rank. It was a very interesting process of self development. After about eight years of attending tea ceremony practices weekly, however, my instructor suddenly said: “It’s time now to get your instructorship”. I received the certification from a grandmaster in Tokyo, and afterwards I thought: I should start doing something with tea.

Q: Are you an exception as a non-Japanese instructor, is it a closed world?

A: No, but I am definitely one of the youngest foreigners to obtain an instructorship, so these eight years are considered a “fast” education track. In essence, the ceremony is a place where everyone is free from their background in the outside world, free from ethnicity, free from gender, free from age. The ideal in tea ceremony is that everyone in the tea chamber is treated as equal. On the other hand, in order to get into the ceremony, to get into that place, you do require some skills and of course understanding of Japanese culture and the Japanese language.

Q: Did you then take the name “Sosen”? And what does it mean?

A: Sosen is indeed the name that I received from the grandmaster when I received my instructorship, as an honorary title. Though, while you use the word master, that term is not used in Japan. Officially, I am a tea ceremony instructor.

Q: I saw on your website that you have a webshop for different brands of green tea. Are you in any way involved in the cultivation and production?

A: After I had received my instructorship, I wanted to do tea ceremony professionally, so I became employed with a tea vendor in Uji. I was able to host tea ceremony sessions for visitors, and act as a salesperson on the floor in the shop. There, I started studying tea production as a whole in more depth. Nowadays, I am involved in the production process by carefully studying what the producers that I work with do, how they grow and produce the tea. I even sometimes help in the fields or the factory. This is purely a personal interest however, it is not part of a tea instructor’s set of tasks.

Q: Are there families of tea, like the arabica and robusta coffees?

A: The plant is of the camellia family; camellia sinensis is the variation that is mostly used in China and Japan. There is also assamica, which is mostly used in places like India and Sri Lanka with a hotter climate for the production of black teas. Some cultivars that are developed in Japan have slightly different characteristics, some are more resistant to cold and disease, others have a larger and coarser leaf that lends itself to the production of other types of tea. And of course, there is a whole industry of tea nurseries, growers, producers and then the whole supply chain.

Q: I understand that you specifically work with organic tea. Can you explain what organic means in Japan?

A: As an organic tea producer, the “organic” certification requires you to use only substances that are approved by the Japan Agricultural Standards, so that you can be certified under the Japan Agricultural Standards Organic Label (JAS). Usually, the transition period to organic certification for a producer takes around three years. It is not a simple matter be-

cause the fields on the mountain hills are usually a mix of different owners, and if your neighbour uses certain chemicals, it will influence your crops as well.

Q Why did you go for organic tea? Was it a marketing decision?

A: No, my interest actually grew from my experiences working at the tea shop in Uji. It was during the time international tourism was picking up around 2013. The store was very popular with tourists from abroad, and because I was the only person in that store who spoke English, all of the foreign visitors turned to me with their questions. I was frequently asked: “Do you also have organic tea?”. When I turned to my supervisors, they just got mad at me and said “Don’t ever mention the word organic, it’s not delicious but bitter, it is impossible”.

At first I thought, well okay, they know better. Eventually though, I looked up organic producers and was introduced to someone who was making organic tea. When I visited the farm, I was astonished at how delicious, pure, natural and fresh the tea actually was. Through this experience, I became totally convinced that organic tea has much more potential and is actually of a much higher quality than mainstream tea, so I started blogging about it. This resulted in even more

questions from readers. Most of the organic tea I was writing about was from small producers without international experience, so I said to myself, I will get the tea and sell it. That is how The Tea Crane, my online tea business, started.

Q: So it started from impulses and questions from outside of Japan. Does that also mean you mainly sell outside Japan?

A: Indeed, my customers reside mainly in the US, and partly in Europe. Japan is a more difficult story. More tea producers are shifting to organic because they see that the international demand is growing. Domestically, however, the average consumer has limited to non-existent knowledge or interest when it comes to organic tea.

Q: Are there ecological motivations at the supply side to focus on organic tea, such as combating climate change or reducing pesticides?

A: The primary goal is to stop using any chemicals. They want to operate in the same natural way that people used to grow the tea 100 years ago.

Q: Let’s return to the tea ceremony. You explained that it is a microcosm of everything Japanese. What do you think is its essence, and do you feel that it is a shared or self-contained experience?

A: First of all, it should be clear, the ceremony is not about the taste. You may have been exposed to the term ‘tea sommelier’, but that is unrelated. This might be a surprise for the readers, but the tea is perhaps only a minor aspect of tea ceremony, and it is hardly ever discussed what the qualities of the tea are or where it was made, how it was blended, which cultivars were used, etcetera.

The tea is only a medium through which a gathering is organized, and the gathering is built around the tea. Ideally, a tea ceremony is hosted for three or five guests, but possibly also for one guest as an intimate 1on1 gathering. The traditional structure is a four to five hour gathering where people come together and where the host first prepares the coal for the fire, then starts boiling the water, then serves a traditional kaiseki meal. After the meal, the guests stretch their legs in the garden as the host reorganises the tea chamber. When everyone is called in again, the service of thick tea (koicha) follows. Koicha is the most profound and important type of tea because it’s the highest quality. You must use premium quality matcha to make a tea of thick consistency that looks more like soup than tea.

Q: I’m surprised that the ceremony takes four to five hours.





A: Indeed. You have the meal, the koicha (thick tea) service, and after that you have the usucha (thin tea) service where a lower grade macha is used, a bowl of tea is whipped up and everyone gets to have at least one serving.

In line with a lot of traditional arts in Japan, there is a build-up and a wind-down. The central part and climax is the koicha, that's what you build up to. The water is set on the charcoal, it starts to boil while you're having the meal, then gradually the warm water is ready to make koicha. It is an almost meditative environment. In order to come back down to a more everyday state of mind afterwards, there is a buffer, which is the usucha. That part of the ceremony is usually a bit more chaotic, a bit rougher. There's more conversation, someone might recite a song or perform a dance, and there is a bit more liveliness. Before that point, everything is very formal, very strict and usually done in a very small and dark space.

Overall, not much conversation takes place. The topics discussed during the meal and during the koicha service are restricted to questions about utensils that are used or the food. You would not talk about things that are related to the outside world.

Q: Do the guests usually know each other, or do they come in as strangers?

A: That depends on the group of people. The guests may know each other, but it is also fairly common for the host to not know their guest very well. During a formal tea ceremony, the host usually only invites one person and that person invites the two or four other participants. Of course, you can't host a formal four-to-five-hour tea gathering with people who have no background in tea ceremony. If you do it for tourists, it is a totally different setting with totally different timing, showcasing only one aspect of the tea ceremony, either the koicha or usucha service.

Only the "hardcore" tea ceremony practitioners still execute the original form of a 4 to 5 hour gathering, the full chaji (as it is called).

Q: Though tea ceremony is not about the taste, 'tea sommelier' is mentioned on your website.

A: Yes, that is the side aspect of tea that I became interested in. As a sommelier, I look at the tea flavours, the different ways tea is made, what makes a good and delicious tea. This is not discussed in the tea ceremony, but I do consider it to be part of my expertise. Perhaps the combination of traditional tea instructor and tea sommelier might make one a tea master. It is a term that people use to describe what I do, but I have never used it myself.

Maybe I have come to the point where I can provide an answer to your question, "what is the essence of tea".

Q: And the essence of the tea ceremony?

A: I often compare the function of tea in the tea ceremony to the daikoku-bashira

(the central wooden pillar) in a Japanese house. It is the central post that holds up the roof, and as such, the entire house. When someone enters a house, no one talks about the daikoku bashira, you talk about the decoration, the curtains, the carpets, the beautiful furniture. However, if you take out the central pillar, the house will collapse and the decoration will have no meaning anymore. That is the function of matcha in the tea ceremony. If you take it out, you just have all these utensils and it becomes a walk through a museum. The tea brings everything to live.

Q: Fascination for tea is growing in the West. Is there tea tourism in Japan?

A: It is gradually growing in Japan. In Shizuoka, there are certain places that cater tea to tourists and try to bring more visitors to the tea farms. You can visit tea growers and combine it with tea tasting and nice food. Some have lodgings and small hotels nearby so you can stay and interact with tea and tea growing. Wazuka is one of the villages here in the Kyoto area that is also moving in the same direction. You can stay in the village as well as visit cafes and have tea while you're looking at the tea gardens. Tea tourism or visiting tea gardens is something new that has not yet made its way into the mainstream itineraries, but real tea lovers are interested.

If you are interested as well, please come and enjoy all aspects of tea!

Irasshai!

More info:

- > The Tea Crane: www.the-tea-crane.com
- > Online tea ceremony course: academy.the-tea-crane.com/tea-ceremony
- > Tea ceremony activities in Kyoto: tea-ceremony-kyoto.com

BJA 2024 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – STATUTORY NOMINATIONS

The 2024 BJA Annual General Assembly Meeting took place on 26 March at the law firm Liedekerke.

For the Statutory Nominations, the below proposals of resignations, nominations, and renominations have been unanimously accepted and approved by the members.

Resignations

The following persons tendered their resignations:

- › Mr Matt Harrison, COO of Toyota Motor Europe;
- › Mr Stijn Henderickx, former Executive Vice President Meeting and Learning Experience of Barco;
- › Mr Genichiro Higaki, former President of Sumitomo Benelux;
- › Mr Yoshiyuki Morishita, former President of Mitsui & Co. Benelux.

We are very grateful for all they have done during their tenure as Board Member and wish them all the best.

Nominations

- › Mr Wouter Bonte, Vice President Sales Immersive

Experience of Barco;

- › Mr Yoshihiro Nakata, President & CEO of Toyota Motor Europe;
- › Mr Noboru Ogasa, President of Sumitomo Benelux;
- › Mr Kaoru Umehara, President of Mitsui & Co. Benelux

They all kindly succeeded their predecessors in the BJA Board of Directors. We are honored to have our new Directors among our Board Members. We look forward working together on several exciting projects in the future.

Renominations

- › Mr Wim Eynatten, Partner of Deloitte, and
- › Dr Fabrice Stassin, Director Government Affairs Electromobility Projects & Coordinator for Asian Affairs of Umicore, are renominated.

Their continued support is highly appreciated.

Find out more about our [BJA Board](#) and other inspiring [BJA Committees](#). Contact us if you would like to join one of the BJA Committees.

The BJA would like to extend a warm welcome to its newest members:

Corporate Member

DEINZE FOOTBALL CLUB

Established in 1926, KMSK Deinze is a renowned football club competing in the second division of the Belgian Pro League, also known as the Challenger Pro League. Situated in the East Flanders region, Deinze boasts a population of 45,000 and is recognized for its affluent residents.

In February 2022, ACA Football Partners (ACAFP), a Singapore-based company specializing in football business and a subsidiary of ACA Group, became owner of the club. Notably ACAFP is also the owner of Juventus Torremolinos CF, further amplifying their presence in the football arena.



Despite finishing 8th out of 12 clubs in the previous season, KMSK Deinze is currently positioned at the top of the league. The club's progress extends beyond the pitch, with plans underway to construct a new stadium, symbolizing its continuous evolution and growth.

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 - › Katsutoshi Fujimoto, Global Business Manager of KMSK Deinze/ACA Football Partners
 - › Stefan Berth, Sales Director of KMSK Deinze
 - › Celine Mawet, Chief Marketing/Communication Officer

Associate Members

BESIDE TAX SHELTER

Beside Group helps beneficiary companies in Belgium support the production of local cultural projects and benefit from the advantages of applying the tax law that falls under the European ‘cultural exception’.

25 of the 27 European member states developed a government-backed method of funding local cultural productions. With its 30Mio € annual in-house Tax Shelter fund, Beside Group finances and coproduces audio-visual works (film, tv-series, documentaries etc) and



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scenic art projects (opera, ballet, musical performance, etc), placing Belgium’s thriving production ecosystem of cast & crew, locations and facilities at its core.

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AMT has the capability to serve a multinational client base by providing expert, timely and cost-efficient advice. AMT has 10 overseas offices in addition to domestic offices in Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya with 681 lawyers (as of April 2024) whilst the majority of our lawyers are bi-lingual and experienced with communicating, drafting and negotiating across borders and around the globe. Our combined expertise enables us to deliver comprehensive advice on virtually all legal issues that may arise from corporate, M&A, finance, labor, intellectual property, IT and technologies, and litigation/arbitration.

Our Brussels office supports our clients on a wide range of legal areas, and also serves as the European contact point for inbound deals into Japan to quickly and efficiently provide high quality legal services across a wide range of fields.

アンダーソン・毛利・友常法律事務所は、1950年代初頭より、日本における本格的国際法律事務所の草分けとして、常に第一線で活躍してきた総合法律事務所です。

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ております。

ブリュッセルオフィスでは、欧州各国およびその周辺地域における依頼者のビジネスをサポートさせていただくとともに、M&Aやジョイント・ベンチャーなどの投資案件、競争法やデータ・プロテクションなどの規制法のほか、各種コンプライアンスや労務案件等の幅広い法律問題について、現地法律事務所と必要に応じて協力のうえで、質の高いリーガルサービスを迅速に提供いたします。



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