

# ADDING COLOUR TO THE KALEIDOSCOPE

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Look through the kaleidoscope of Singapore and you'll see a myriad of influences. Australian, British, Chinese, Eurasian, Filipino, French, Indian, Japanese, Malay, Peranakan, Thai and diverse cultures overlap, refracted and reflected through the country's way of life – its art, music, language, theatre, dance, sport, and film; its policies concerning basic needs such as housing and education.

For more than 25 years, the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) Singapore Foundation has been supporting organisations and individuals in Singapore, imparting a Japanese hue to the nation's cultural and sporting tradition.

JCCI was established in 1969 to be the collective "voice of Japanese businesses" in Singapore, and "to promote and expand trade and investments between Singapore and Japan for mutual benefit."

For more than 40 years, its activities have included exchanging views with the Singaporean government through bodies such as Singapore Business Federation (SBF) and National Wages Council (NWC), running seminars and

networking sessions, conducting wage surveys, visiting industrial parks and estates, developing handbooks on how to set up businesses in Singapore and consulting with Japanese companies on general business management in Singapore.

Apart from its business-orientated functions, JCCI established the JCCI Singapore Foundation 25 years ago, when Singapore celebrated its 25th anniversary of Independence. The first of its kind established by an overseas JCCI, the mandate of the Singapore Foundation was "to provide a channel through which the Japanese business community can put forth their support for Singapore's vision of a dynamic and culturally vibrant society."

Built with the annual donations of JCCI's membership (822 in 2015), the Foundation "supports the development of arts, culture, sports and education in Singapore."

Since its inception in 1990, it has given SGD6.79 million in financial support and awards to Singapore's cultural and sporting community,

funding events such as the Festival of Asian Performing Arts in 1994 and 1995, Special Olympics Singapore in 2005, 2007 and 2009, and bodies such as The Chinese Opera Institute, Singapore Kendo Club, The Esplanade and National University of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

Each year the Foundation disburses between SGD200,000 and SGD460,000 to an eclectic array of organisations and individuals working within the art and cultural domains.

Be Movement has been able to celebrate courageous individuals, organisations and companies in Singapore, Bali, Japan, India and Hong Kong, all through the Foundation's support.

The Foundation also supports JUGAS, an alumni organisation of Singaporean residents who have completed their tertiary education in Japan, and Luna Films, an organisation that brings independent films to Singapore and organises an annual Japanese Film Festival.

Consistent with JCCI's relationship with Singapore, the Foundation's support is a long term commitment that recipients have come to value and depend on. The Singapore Disability Sports Council, Singapore Arts Festival, The Philharmonic Winds, Singapore Film Society and Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO), have all received multiple grants and donations.

In 1995, to celebrate Singapore's 30th anniversary of Independence and its own 5th anniversary, the Foundation added a scholarship scheme for Singaporean students to study in Japan. Through the scheme, students are sent to universities including Waseda University and Musashino Art University in Tokyo, and Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) in the Oita Prefecture in Kyushu. The Foundation believes such exchanges are "necessary in fostering mutual understanding and trust between the two different cultures that is fundamental for business growth."

The Foundation's support of art and culture in Singapore has a deeper significance beyond business. For it is through the "soft" power of cultural support, exchange, understanding and assimilation – when parts of one's own culture merge with that of another – that lasting respect and friendship is forged. •

# INSIGHTS FROM FUMIO OTANI

PRESIDENT OF JAPANESE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY, SINGAPORE

*Written by JACINTA PLUCINSKI & RACHEL ONG*

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Assuming his new appointment in March this year, Fumio Otani is the new President of Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) in Singapore. His 1-year tenure spans across two historic milestones.

“This year is a very special year for Singapore and Japan,” Otani says. “It is SG50 and next year will be Japan and Singapore’s 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations [SJ50].”

He pauses, then adds humbly, “If I could contribute by further bridging the relationship between the Japanese and Singaporean communities, that is the part that I will do. To expand Japanese collaboration beyond the economy, to reach for greater impact in both cultures.”

Otani has lived in Singapore for three years and is also the Managing Director of Toshiba Asia Pacific. He shares with Be Movement JCCI’s own history in Singapore, what Japan and Singapore can learn from each other, and his personal hopes for the future.



*Fumio Otani, President of Japanese Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Singapore*

**WHAT ROLE HAS JCCI PLAYED IN SINGAPORE OVER THE PAST 50 YEARS?**

JCCI has been the communication bridge between the local Japanese business community and the Singapore government. Through JCCI, the voices of Japanese companies on the current business environment and problems faced can be heard by the Singapore government.

JCCI also strives to contribute to the growth of the local Japanese business community in a way that benefits Singapore's economy.

Of course global development over the last 50 years might be very tough but visibly, Singapore has developed very well. And I think the Japanese people have been cooperating closely to help develop Singapore.

**HOW HAS JCCI HELPED TO DEVELOP SINGAPORE'S ECONOMY AND CULTURE OVER THE PAST 50 YEARS?**

In the early days there were the electronics companies who came into Singapore to establish manufacturing facilities.

Nowadays most of the electronics companies have shifted from a manufacturing to regional headquarters role in Singapore.

In 1990, JCCI set up the Singapore Foundation, as a channel to give back to the society on behalf of the Japanese business community.

The Foundation also supports young Singaporeans to pursue higher education in Japanese universities, such as Waseda University and Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University.

JCCI believes that such contributions are necessary in fostering mutual understanding and trust between the two different cultures that is fundamental for business growth.

**HOW HAS SINGAPORE INFLUENCED THE GROWTH OF JCCI?**

The growth in the number of JCCI members explains it all [JCCI membership totals 822 in 2015].

Singapore's well developed infrastructure, highly educated labour force, strategic geographical position, transparent and flexible governing system and openness to foreigners, are just some of the attractive factors that draw Japanese companies to Singapore.

Many have strong faith in this country.

**WHEN IS A TIME THAT JCCI SHOWED COURAGE DURING ITS HISTORY IN SINGAPORE?**

JCCI showed courage and perseverance in bringing together existing Japanese companies, spending a great deal of time explaining to the Singapore government about the purpose of this organisation, negotiating with different agencies and finally getting the approval and recognition from the Singapore government to establish JCCI in July 1969.

Because of the efforts in the past, JCCI is what it is today.

JCCI is thankful for Singapore's listening ears.

**WHAT HAS JCCI LEARNT FROM SINGAPORE?**

Singapore's openness to on-going global changes and receptiveness towards different voices is something that we've learnt.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK JAPAN CAN LEARN FROM SINGAPORE ABOUT DEVELOPING AS A MODERN NATION?**

The Singapore government has designed the Smart Nation Programme – a project headed by Infocomm Development Authority [IDA]. That is

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the future, and a plan that is very well organised. Japan can also follow.

Moreover the Singapore government is transparent with the budget and it's very easy to understand what they want to do, what is going to be the direction, why we need to do this. So it's similar to company management – how to earn money, how to grow the company, how to develop the country in the world.

Japan has some very big political parties, which sometimes bring hurdles in driving things.

**WHERE DO YOU THINK SINGAPORE COULD IMPROVE AS A COUNTRY?**

Most of the time I am in the business scene ... since Singapore is quite young, there were not so many cultural activities that have taken root here in Singapore. So the culture part might be one area Singapore can grow a little more.

**WHAT SHOULD JAPAN AND SINGAPORE BE CONCERNED WITH IN THE FUTURE?**

Twenty years ago in Japan, people were only thinking about domestic issues. They wanted to provide money to the local people, and they did not emphasise foreign affairs so much.

Foreign affairs is very important for a country and this applies to both Japan and Singapore. And that's also what our, JCCI's, role can be. What is going to be the future? How we will organise ourselves? For Singapore, that is the most challenging point for the nation and for the coming generation.

**HOW DO YOU THINK JCCI CAN HELP SINGAPORE IN THE FUTURE?**

We are providing services to Japanese companies. However the market size is very small, so we also assist Japanese companies in developing collaborations with Singaporean companies to expand their business outside of Singapore. That also matches most of the Japanese companies' vision for their future growth.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITY FOR SINGAPORE IN THE NEAR FUTURE?**

The ASEAN countries are coming together to establish the ASEAN Economic Community [AEC] and that is a very big event. I believe Singapore will have a very big role in organising or leading the ASEAN countries. This is because it is the most economically successful country in the region and can be an example for other countries.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE SINGAPORE FACES IN THE NEXT 50 YEARS?**

Singapore may face a little bit of difficulty to continue the momentum of growth, because everyone thinks that it is already developed. If people think that they've reached a goal, then the growth will stop. Development is a pathway and the leader needs to continue showing that path to the people.

But I think Singapore will always be ahead of other countries because you have a very strong leadership thinking about the future.

**IS THERE ANYONE IN SINGAPORE WHO YOU ADMIRE?**

We admire and respect Mr Lee Kuan Yew because he had a very strong mind, and a very clear decision making process, and a very clear direction to go.

That is what I really like and I want to emulate that. •