

Interview with Dr. Sakakura, Director General of Japanese Standards Association



Dr. Shogo Sakakura

Dr. Shogo Sakakura was appointed Director General of JSA on July 1st 2000. He brings to JSA a wealth of knowledge and experience in the management of technology and strategic policy-making, the result of a distinguished career spanning across the governmental, academic and private sectors. Below is a summary of the interview that the editorial staff

conducted with Dr. Sakakura, to find out his views on standardization and on the role of JSA.

"You are currently a Lecturer on Management of Technology at Waseda University. Could you explain, from your point of view, the role that standardization plays in the management systems of Japanese companies?"

"First of all, MOT or Management of Technology is a management method to find out users' needs in the market area that the company belongs, and to search for what products and services are needed to fulfill these needs as well as to search for necessary technologies for these services and products in and out of that company, to utilize these technologies for the efficient production of these services and products, to do sales and after-services of these products and services, and so forth. These activities are not limited to Japan but are found all over the world. Standardization is very important for carrying out these activities whether it is de-fact, de-jule or consortium standards. The basis of international competitiveness relies on standardization."

"What, in your opinion, is the best way to encourage standardization activities and foster human expertise in this area?"

"The weakest point of Japanese industry is its ability to cooperate in standardization activities. In case of de-jule and con-

sortium standards, there is a need for industrial representatives to work at the various ISO/IEC TCs/SCs or various consortiums and to take part in the discussions on behalf of Japan. It is therefore necessary to send a lot of Japanese participants to these numerous meetings. The problem is that these people must not only be able to speak English fluently, but must also have enough knowledge of the related technology and know the movement of the world economy, the Japanese economy, and related partnerships of companies in these fields in the world. We do not have enough of these type of people. MOT programs can educate such people, but Japan is lagging behind Europe and America (and more recently other Asian countries as well) in terms of academic programs in universities and MOT activities. The problem is the process of setting up such programs takes time but we need to participate in standardization activities now."

"The ISO9000 series of standards is very popular in Japan, and ISO14000 series is not far behind. Why do you think they are so popular?"

"The popularity of ISO9000 I think started with companies who export their products to Europe. On the other hand, as for ISO14000, the background was the overall impression of the importance of environmental problems and the lack of tools to deal with them, and so these companies (and also local governments) took up ISO14000 as a means to deal with these problems. ISO9000 and 14000 series are not compulsory but the acquisition of ISO9000 or 14000 has become explicitly necessary conditions in many cases for business between companies and in government procurement. These may be the reasons why a lot of companies are interested in getting these standards."

"What do you think of the move towards sector-specific standards and how do you think they will be received?"

"The most important point of ISO9000 is the quality of the product or service *itself* but the present ISO9000 is weak in this regard. As a result sector-specific standards that are nearer to quality control have attracted attention in some fields. Therefore Japan should be more confident of its world-class TQM/TQC and propose that ISO9000 include the method or way of thinking of TQC/TQM, to include quality (of the product or service) itself. Japan should take the lead in sector-specific standards for steel, electronics, home appliances, office machines, etc. although it lags behind the US QS9000 for the automobile sector."

"Can you explain the relationship between JSA and the international standardization bodies ISO (International Organization for Standardization) and IEC (International Electrotechnical Commission)?"

"I think that we should actively cooperate with ISO and IEC and our policy or obligation to expand our activities should be

CONTENTS

- 1 - Interview with Dr. Sakakura, Director General of Japanese Standards Association
- 2 - Cooperation for Developing International Standards
- 3 - Outline of the International Standards Market Relevance Project
 - Japan-Sino Standardization Cooperation Continues
- 4 - Introducing the IEC Activities Promotion Committee
 - Project for Enhancement International Standardization Activities in Asia Pacific Region

to increase participation and to increase the number of chairs and secretaries of ISO/IEC TCs/SCs that we take on. As I said before however, we don't have enough qualified people for this type of activity. This is a problem."

"What role do you see JSA playing in the national proliferation and adoption of ISO management system standards?"

"We are in the top 5 of about 32 organizations that carry out ISO9000 certification and have been in the field for the last 5 years. We have a good reputation and have recruited good talents in this field. This is important as our income relies heavily on these activities and hence we must expand them and attract more customers."

"Why do you think the participation of the developing countries in international standardization activities is so important and what help or support do you see JSA being able to give?"

"JSA is supporting developing countries for two reasons: firstly, standardization is the economic basis of developing countries and it is indispensable for the development of their economy. Therefore standardization support is one of the most important means of Japanese technological cooperation which is the main pillar of Japanese economic cooperation for developing countries. The second reason is that these countries are also members of ISO and IEC and it is important for Japan to get their support in ISO and IEC

activities. We need to let them know about our technological situation in each field concerned to ensure such support and we need to build friendly relations between these countries."

"As Director General of JSA, what do you think the main roles and responsibilities of JSA should be? Which areas do you plan to focus your attention on?"

"The most important role of JSA is the preparation of JIS and their promotion at the national and international level. Also, a very important project we are involved in is the promotion of the use of information technology in JIS making and distribution. We will utilize this JIS IT system for the expansion of our JIS related services and we wish to use this system to secure our JIS related income. The increase in IT based sales is not likely to balance with the decrease in book sales and so we must try very hard to diversify our services using IT technology, not just selling JIS but also providing services relating to JIS information."

"Finally, if you had to summarize JSA's strategic policy into three key phrases, what phrases would you choose?"

"The first would be "standardization" of course! Then the second would be "utilization of IT" and the third might be "strengthen the competitiveness of Japanese industries through standardization"."

Cooperation for Developing International Standards

The project "Cooperation for Developing International Standards" was set up in fiscal year 1997 by JISC, the Japanese member body for ISO and IEC, as a national project on international standardization. The objective of the project is to actively develop international standards that can be adopted nationally by each member country and are applicable to the global market, as well as to encourage the submission of international standards proposals from Asia Pacific countries.

The project is currently in its 4th year. Initially, 4 fields (1-4 below) were adopted at the start of the project, but with the addition of 2 new fields (5-6 below), the project now promotes a total of 6 fields.

1. Multilingual Information Technology (CICC: Center of Cooperation for Computerization)
2. Laser Welding and Cutting (JWES: The Japan Welding Engineering Society)
3. Pressure Vessels (KHK: The High Pressure Gas Safety Institute of Japan)
4. Construction Materials (FCMI: Federation of Construction Materials Institutes, Japan)
5. Depth Profiling of the Next Generation Semi-conductor Devices (OSTEC: New Material Center, Osaka Science and Technology Center)
6. Concrete Machinery (JCMA: Japan Construction Mechanization Association)

International standard proposals relating to the themes covered by this project have been made in the last 3 years and these are currently being discussed at ISO and ISO/IEC/JTC1. This fiscal year the project is aiming towards the timely establishment of international standards and the promotion of discussions on international standards that have already been proposed in the concerned fields.

Efforts are also being made to develop international standard proposals for the two new fields. JISC has entrusted the coordination and promotion of this project to JSA and with the cooperation of national experts, JSA plans to support the activities of the organizations implementing the aforementioned themes by helping to smooth out any difficulties or problems that may occur in the standardization process. The project also aims to propose and establish international standards that give due consideration to the markets of the Asia-Pacific region. JSA is making efforts to form a network to enhance cooperation and build contacts in this region. In addition, JSA is also aiming to increase the level of international standardization activities in this area in order to bring it up to a similar level as that of other regions. This will be accomplished by analyzing and evaluating the process and results stemming from the promotion of this project, and by making the outcome available to all other international standardization related parties.

Outline of the International Standards Market Relevance Project

Based on the WTO (World Trade Organization) TBT (Technical Barriers to Trade) Agreement, which came into force in January 1995 and with the aim of promoting the reduction of trade barriers, Japan formulated the "Deregulation Action Program" on 31st March 1995. As part of this plan, a three-year plan was implemented from 1995 for the alignment of JIS with their respective international standards.

Through this process it became clear that there were problems with some of the international standards along the lines of:

- international standards that were only applicable to particular regions, and did not reflect the global marketplace
- international standards that were technologically out of date, and did not meet with the current technological standards
- international standards that posed issues in terms of safety and the environment
- international standards where the standards system was defective and the standards were difficult to use

For this reason, the Japanese Standards Association, in cooperation with the Japanese Industrial Standards Committee and related companies and organizations, is currently working on the implementation of an alignment project which actively implements international proposal activities for the alignment of such international standards mentioned above, based on the more appropriate JIS.

The implementation of the project was assigned to JSA by JISC and was then contracted out to 30 different private sector associations.

The associations have been involved in such activities as the preparation of revised international standards proposals, experiments to compare JIS and the related international standard and practical studies using international standards in each of the major countries. Further, the associations have been drumming up the cooperation of other countries in order to ensure the success of international proposals. They have also been taking part in international meetings in order to submit the international proposals based on JIS.

JSA is also implementing overseas research projects concerning the market relevance of international standards, research on know-how for international proposals and research into economic effectiveness concerning international standards alignment, in order to actively promote their market relevance project.

The table below gives examples of proposals on representative case studies out of the more than 200 themes covered by the market relevance project. The table includes the problem with the international standard and suggested procedures to be taken.

Problem with the international standard	Proposed response	Example
(A) Only used in a limited market or region	Co-habitation type	Laser welding field: Laser welding materials (ISO/TC44/SC3)
	Performance standard	Plastics field (ISO/TC138)
(B) Out-of-date	Submit proposals of technical data based on practical experiments	Cement field (ISO/TC74)
(C) Environmental or safety related issues	Environmental/safety related improvements	Nonferrous metals field (ISO/TC18)
(D) Inadequacies in the standards system	Improvement of the standards system	Rubber field (ISO/TC45/SC2)

Japan-Sino Standardization Cooperation Continues

2nd JISC-CSBTS Joint Meeting in July

The 2nd JISC-CSBTS Joint Meeting was opened on 25th July. The head of the Chinese delegation, Mr. Liu Xinmin (Deputy Director, Dept. of Int'l Cooperation, China State Bureau of Quality and Technical Supervision) and four other CSBTS staff, JISC (Standards Department of AIST, MITI), and members of JSA (as observers) engaged in discussions on the following themes:

1. Information exchange on current standardization policy of both countries
2. WTO/TBT Agreement
3. Conformity assessment issues

On July 26th, the delegation joined JISC and JSA members on a technical visit to the SUBARU Plant in Gunma

Prefecture. After being given a guided tour of the plant, the delegation took the opportunity to learn more about the company's standardization system at a Q&A session.

6th JSA-CAS Joint Workshop in October

5 delegates from the China Association for Standardization (CAS) will be coming to Japan in October to take part in the 6th JSA-CAS Joint Workshop on 15th to 25th October 2000. The Workshop will consist of meetings on the importance of international standardization in enterprises and efforts towards the 2000 revisions of the ISO9000 management system standards, as well as joint seminars and technical visits.

Introducing the IEC Activities Promotion Committee

The IEC Activities Promotion Committee (IEC-APC) was set up in July 1991 within the Japanese Standards Association as a organization that electric/electronic related companies, industrial associations, and academic institutes could participate in. The objective of the committee is to improve the level of Japanese contribution in IEC international standardization activities through supporting national IEC activities and participation in IEC activities, as well as to enhance the reflection of the views and opinions of the national industries at the IEC level.

The Committee is involved in the following activities:

a) Proposal activities

Keeping abreast of the strategic issues relating to IEC activities brought up at the IEC Council, Council Board, Committee of Action, etc., and summarizing the national views and opinions of industry concerning these issues so that the IEC-APC can submit proposals to the IEC Divisional Council of the Japanese Industrial Standards Committee and/or the respective Japanese committee members.

b) Support activities

Support the activities of the Japanese representative in the IEC Council and the activities of the Japanese members of the IEC. Support to enable participation in the IEC meetings, to hold international conferences

in Japan, and for secretariates and chairmen of TC/SCs.

c) Research Activities

Conduct research into wide, horizontal technology fields such as multimedia.

d) Information Provision

Publication of IEC-APC bulletins, translation of important IEC documents, sponsoring of seminars and lectures in order to publicize the activities of the IEC and the IEC-APC.

e) Information exchange/Coordination activities

Conduct exchange of information with IEC national committees to promote the smooth coordination of national IEC activities. Also, conduct information exchange with standardization organization including those based overseas.

f) Respond to advisory issues concerning IEC activities

Conduct committee activities to research into measures towards common issues in IEC activities such as improvement in awareness and evaluation of international standardization activities and the development of human resources.

For further information on IEC-APC and its activities, please contact IEC-APC on +81 3 5770 1593 (fax).

Project for Enhancement International Standardization Activities in Asia Pacific Region

As economic globalization advances, there are calls for greater promotion of free trade. One example of this is the move by national governments to agree to use international standards as a basis for technical regulations and voluntary standards as stipulated in the WTO/TBT Agreement. For this reason, the position of international standards such as ISO and IEC standards are becoming more and more important. Because member countries worldwide are, generally speaking, required to align their national standards with these international standards, it is of the utmost importance that the opinions of the countries in the Asia-Pacific region are fully reflected in the international standards development processes.

Given this background, JSA was entrusted by MITI to implement their 2000 fiscal year project to strengthen the cooperation between Japan and the other Asia-Pacific countries and to develop human resources in the field of international standardization through the implementation of the following four themes:

1. Training for local experts in the Asia-Pacific region

Implementation of training both in Japan and overseas to provide the necessary knowledge and know-how on TC/SC activities for those involved in standardization activities in the Asia-Pacific region.

2. Development of human resources for international standardization activities in Japan

Implementation of training to provide those working in standardization related organizations in Japan with the necessary knowledge and know-how on international standardization activities.

3. Development of a database on Japanese experts and the situation of standardization in the Asia-Pacific region

Creation of a database on standardization experts in Japan and to collect and organize information on standardization activities trends in each Asia-Pacific country.

4. Preparation of a standardization activities consulting network

Provision of a support service to assist national standardization experts with the use of CAD to prepare graphics/diagrams for standards drafts.

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