

A portrait of Hideaki Ibuki, a man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and red tie. He is smiling and looking slightly to the right. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

INTERVIEW: HIDEAKI IBUKI

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What's the appeal of 'Cool Japan'?

The Japanese government is working to display the creativity of Japan and its people through implementation of its 'Cool Japan' policy. 'Cool Japan' encompasses all of the nation's internationally appealing products and services, from media content, such as Japanese animation and games, to Japanese cuisine and Japanese skills and technology. We spoke with Hideaki Ibuki, director of the Creative Industries Division at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), to find out how METI is working to allow Japan's creativity to shine all over the world.

What appealing aspects of Japan have gained international attention through the 'Cool Japan' initiative?

If we look at what's popular overseas, I feel the freedom and diversity of Japanese people's ideas and presentation are the most appreciated aspects of our products. To be innovative while at the same time keeping in touch with tradition - that, I think, is the main appeal when it comes to Japan.

The most popular aspects of Japanese culture in foreign markets are our food and media content. For example, in January, when we organized Paris Ramen Week Zuzutto, a ramen-centered event in Paris, France, not only did we receive widespread media coverage, but a long line of French locals formed as they waited to get a taste of our ramen. And media content, such as Japanese animation and manga, are so popular that various countries across Asia have created channels that air Japanese programs 24 hours a day.

What practical strategies has METI implemented to promote 'Cool Japan' abroad?

Looking at 'Cool Japan' as an industry, the key is to establish mechanisms or markets in foreign countries that enable various businesses and creators to make profits.

For media content such as Japanese animation and manga, we actively assist in selling Japanese merchandise overseas, establishing channels and websites for

distributing Japanese media content, getting Japanese films screened in foreign cinemas and enabling Japanese artists to organize live performances in foreign countries.

In the case of Japanese products, we assist Japan's manufacturers and businesses in holding direct dialogues with consumers overseas. We organize exhibitions to engage in test marketing activities that enable businesses to better understand local needs in foreign markets and boost market expansion.

For regional small-to-medium-size businesses that specialize in manufacturing high quality goods, we encourage business growth by forging connections with appreciative buyers and producers. Backup financial support for investments is provided through Cool Japan Fund Inc., which was set up in November last year. We aim to be the adhesive that holds local creators and foreign markets together.

What positive qualities of Japan do you think will gain renewed interest through the 'Cool Japan' initiative?

Japanese products and services certainly excel in uniqueness and creativity, but more importantly, we're known for consistent workmanship. I believe the ability to localize Japanese products to suit the demands and conditions of foreign markets, as well as the ability to develop products to international standards from the ground up, represent the strength and appeal of Japan. 