

日本の“中堅企業”は強く機敏で、技術的に熟練された中小企業であり、日本の産業の骨格をなしている。エンドユーザーから彼等の製品として認知されることが少ないため“隠れたチャンピオン”とされることがある。

しかしながら、彼等の特色あるテクノロジーは、トヨタ、日産、パナソニック、ソニーなどの大きな会社の大きな力となり、大きな会社のエンドユーザー向けの製品を作りあげていることになる。日本の80%の企業が中小企業である、ニッチマーケットの中でイノベーションに対して独自の歩みをしている。

大きな企業同様、“中堅企業”は物づくりの原則にしっかり則り、技術を伝承していこうという哲学と細部に拘るということで、優れた、そして他に類を見ない品質を保証する「日本製」というブランドを作り上げてきた。

「モノづくりという概念が、日本人がもつスキルや責任感や特性の中にまず存在すると思います。」と70年の長きにわたり中堅企業として誇りを持っている東尾メックの会長でおられる東尾光紹氏は語る。

「本質的に、日本人は自分の仕事にすべてを捧げ、達成しようという意欲(コミットメント)が大変高い。日本製を特別にしているのは、まさにこのコミットメントです。」

Japan's *Chukyo* are strong, agile and technology adept SME that form the backbone of Japanese industry. They are sometimes referred to as the 'hidden champions', as their products often go unnoticed by the end consumer.

However their specialized technology is essential for larger firms – including the household names we associate with Japan, from Toyota and Nissan to Panasonic and Sony – to make their final end-user products. In fact around 80 percent of Japanese corporations depend on these SMEs that work in niche markets and have developed unique capabilities in innovation.

And like these bigger firms, *Chuken Kigyos* adhere to the strict principles of *Monozukuri*, the Japanese philosophy of craftsmanship and attention to detail that defines the superior, unmatched quality of the 'Made in Japan' brand.

"We believe that the concept of *Monozukuri* first and foremost lies in the skills, the commitment and the character of the Japanese people," says Mitsuaki Higashio, President of Higashio Mech, a proud member of the *Chiyon* shops for seven decades. "By essence, the Japanese are very dedicated to their work and have a high level of

commitment. What makes the Japanese production special is precisely that commitment."

Another competitive edge of Japanese SMEs is their incredible ability to adapt to change, be it technological or market-oriented, which is particularly important in the era of globalization and the emergence of fourth industrial revolution technologies. Japan's shrinking domestic market has forced the nation's SMEs to expand their operations overseas in recent years, both by following bigger Japanese companies to new markets and by finding new customers in those markets.

Higashio Mech

Adaptation and innovation have been key to the success, as well as the future strategy, of Higashio Mech, which makes a series of pipe fittings divided into six subdivisions: galvanized steel pipe fitting, lining steel pipe fitting, copper pipe mechanical fitting for refrigerant, stainless steel pipe mechanical fitting, aluminum pipe mechanical fitting and plastic pipe mechanical fitting. "I have pride that our company is such a very seldom fitting manufacturer in the world that has so wide range of product lines," says company chairman and CEO, Mr. Mitsuaki Higashio.

our company's volume of sales grew significantly but the Hanshin Awaji Great Earthquake in 1995 was a major turning point. I have decided to develop the plastic mechanical fitting, a completely new concept for us, instead of the traditional cast iron fitting. Thanks to our continuous innovation, we managed to survive and grow. Our R&D department was key in maintaining our presence and success on the market; between 40 and 50 patents have been filed worldwide."

Having accumulated extensive know-how in the manufacture – most of machines in automatic assembly lines are self-designed – and application of malleable cast iron and plastic fittings, Higashio Mech now aims to bring more of its unique and high-quality products, which can be found such places as homes, apartments, hospitals, schools and office buildings, to a growing international customer base.

Promising to provide high-performing fittings with the concept of "no leakage, no pullout and no special tools required", the company is focusing its efforts in expanding in the U.S., Europe and South East Asia – where it aims to raise awareness of its products such as 'MECHFIt', the only push-fitting without tools that is more reliable than traditional push-fittings for multilayer and PEX pipes, and 'O'zzone Boy' which is for refrigerant and has the top market share.

"Our volume of sales is still little on the global market but we are working hard to increase our presence overseas. Europe is a very conservative market so it takes time for them to adopt new products even if we come with a better technological solution. We have to educate the market and push our products because we believe in them," explains Mr. Higashio.

積み重ねてきた多くの製造ノウハウ(自動組み立てラインの多くの機械が自家設計である)と、マレアル鋳物やプラスチック継手の用途開発を根に、今東尾メックはユニークで高品質の製品を、成長する国際的な顧客へ売り込みを図っている。

「漏れない、抜けない、特殊工具無し」というコンセプトでハイパフォーマンスの継手を供給することを約束し、米国、欧州、東南アジアでの販売拡大に力を注いでいる。道具無しの唯一のプッシュ式継手で、信頼性が高い“MECHfit”や、トップシェアを持つ冷媒用‘おっぞんくん’のような製品の認知度向上を行っている。

「国際的な市場では、まだまだ我々の売上は少ないが、海外で存在感を増すことに大変努めています。」

The market is changing and we try to adapt in the best possible way."

新製品を採用して頂くには、時間がかかります。市場を啓蒙し、我々の製品を売り込みます。なぜなら、我々は我々の製品を信じているからです。」と東尾氏は語る。

「世界のマーケットへ進出するには、パートナーを見つけることが必要と思います。欧州、中東/東南アジア、オーストラリア、アメリカでは信頼できるパートナーがいます。あるトップメーカーとは、共同開発して新製品を国際的に紹介しようと、グローバルパートナーシップについて協議しています。市場は常に変化しており我々は最善の方法で、適応していくことに努めて参ります。」 ※要約

以上

not be underestimated and some of the [companies] are listed in the first section of the Tokyo Stock Exchange."

lla and U.S.. We are currently discussing a global partnership with a certain top manufacturing company to introduce new joint-developing products internationally.

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重ねてきた多くの製造ノウハウ(自動組み立ての多くの機械が自国設計である)と、ア

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