

Enhancing the Community to Create a Glorious Koriyama Where People Come Together

By Masato Shinagawa



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Nearly five years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake shook the very foundations of our peaceful civic life on 11 March 2011. In order to recover from this unprecedented disaster and ensure the future of our cherished homeland, the city of Koriyama, having overcome the chaos of the earthquake's aftermath due to the untiring efforts of its citizens and the generous assistance received from so many in Japan and overseas, is now stepping confidently forward as it moves from the "concentrated reconstruction period" of the first five years into the new "reconstruction and revitalization period".

A "Post Station for Knowledge" on the Old Oshu Kaido Road

Located in the center of Fukushima Prefecture, Koriyama will celebrate the 100th anniversary of its incorporation as a city in 2024, a year that will also mark the 200th anniversary of its promotion to post town status by the Edo shogunate. By the time Koriyama was promoted from a village to a town in 1824, it already served as a post station on the Oshu Kaido road, equipped with *toyaba* transport stations and lodgings for the daimyo processions that traveled under the system of *sankin kotai* (alternate-year residence in Edo), and bustling with the movement of goods and the comings and goings of daimyo and merchants alike (Photo 1).

Now, over 190 years later, Koriyama has grown into one of the core cities of the Tohoku region and a major hub in a high-speed transportation network that offers outstanding access to both the Tokyo metropolitan and Kansai regions. Part of an extensive network of rail lines and expressways that crisscross the region, the Tohoku

Shinkansen, with roughly 100 daily services, connects Koriyama to Tokyo in just 80 minutes, while Fukushima airport provides access to Osaka in just 70 minutes.

The year 2014 marked the opening of the Fukushima Renewable Energy Institute, AIST (FREI), where people from Japan and overseas come together to conduct world-leading research and development on renewable energy and to pursue its practical application and commercialization. In addition, the current fiscal year also brings the scheduled opening of the Fukushima Medical Device Development Support Center, a priority project for the reconstruction of Fukushima Prefecture that, as Japan's first facility to provide integrated support for the development of medical devices from device development through commercialization, will accelerate the formation of a medical industry cluster.

Leveraging both its geographical advantages and this nucleus of cutting-edge research institutions, Koriyama seeks to develop a cluster of job-creating industries by attracting corporations and related organizations from the outside, supporting the entry of local



Life on the street of a post station: Koriyama circa 1861

Photo 1: Anzai family, Otsuki machi, Koriyama City

Photo 2: Koriyama City



companies, and creating an attractive living environment for workers and their families, thereby generating new streams of people that turn Koriyama into a veritable “post station for knowledge”.

Meiji Period Projects: Asaka Land Development & Asaka Canal

It is impossible to talk about Koriyama without mentioning the national projects undertaken in the area during the Meiji period. In the midst of a revolutionary shift from the samurai days of the Edo period to the early Meiji period, samurai families around the country struggled with desperate poverty. Establishing industries that would provide them with relief and ensure the future of the nation was a policy imperative.

Around this time, the successful Asaka Land Development Project led by Yasukazu Yasuba, the governor of Fukushima, gave birth to the village of Kuwano. Due to the efforts of Masatsune Nakajo, then a manager with the Fukushima prefectural government, and Toshimichi Okubo, home lord of the Meiji government, this was followed by the Meiji government's decision to embark on its first national land reclamation project: the cultivation of farmland in Koriyama's Asaka wastelands and the construction of the Asaka Canal to convey water from Lake Inawashiro to this poorly irrigated area. The excavation of the Asaka Canal benefitted from the contributions of Japanese mathematicians and Dutch civil engineer Cornelis Johannes van Doorn.

Beginning in 1878, roughly 2,000 samurai relocated to the area from around the country. Construction of the Asaka Canal began in 1879. Directly supervised by the national government, the project entailed a total outlay of 407,000 yen (roughly 40 billion yen in today's currency), mobilized a cumulative total of 850,000 construction workers, and was completed in 1882 after just three years, bringing water to 3,000 hectares of farmland via a 52-kilometer main channel, 78 km of floodways, and 37 tunnels. Completion of the Asaka Canal — considered together with the Nasu Canal and the Lake Biwa Canal to be one of Japan's three great canals — brought water from Lake Inawashiro to the newly reclaimed farmland, transforming the Asaka wastelands into one of the country's most productive agricultural areas.

The Numagami Hydroelectric Power Plant, which took advantage

Photo 3: Takahiro Sato



Lake Inawashiro by Takahiro Sato, a winner of a photography contest

of a 40-meter vertical drop, also began operation in 1899. Enabling Japan's first long-distance, high-voltage power transmission, this major undertaking sparked the development of a thriving spinning and textile industry — another part of the “water revolution” that laid the foundations for modern Koriyama (*Photo 2*).

Tourism Centered on Lake Inawashiro

Lake Inawashiro, our “mother lake” and the source for the Asaka Canal, is a freshwater lake located within the Bandai-Asahi National Park, adjoining the town of Inawashiro and the cities of Koriyama and Aizuwakamatsu (*Photo 3*). Covering an area of 103.3 square km, it is the largest lake in the Tohoku region and the fourth largest in the nation after Lake Biwa (Shiga Prefecture), Lake Kasumigaura (Ibaraki Prefecture), and Lake Saroma (Hokkaido). With waters so clear the lake is sometime called the “mirror of heaven”, and so expansive that first-time visitors may mistake it for the sea. Lake Inawashiro offers unforgettably beautiful scenery that varies throughout the year with the winds and light of the changing seasons.

In summer the lake offers opportunities to enjoy swimming — unusual among Japanese lakes — camping, and water sports, while in the winter one may encounter some of the 2,000 migratory swans that arrive from Siberia or the natural artistry of “spray ice” sculpted on the shore by the wind and the waves. The lake draws many visitors year-round as a site of both relaxation and activity, while the surrounding area offers a rich variety of leisure options including art, cafés, hot springs, and a ranch.

We are now driving a number of initiatives centered around Lake Inawashiro to broadly

Photo 4: Koriyama City



promote what our local region has to offer and ensure that the precious history and culture of the Asaka land development and canal projects are passed on to the next generation.

“Cycle Aid Japan in Koriyama: Tour de Lake Inawashiro” is an annual event held since 2014 on the shores of Lake Inawashiro to benefit post-earthquake reconstruction. It draws many riders to the region for the opportunity to experience the area’s abundant nature, the sparkling surface of the lake, and the beauty of the changing autumn foliage.

Last December, we also launched a special website to promote the charms of Lake Inawashiro, providing information on tourist spots and events, a photo library, and videos of the area in every season (<http://inawashiroko.jp/web/index.html>). These days most tourists use the Internet to decide where to go as well as what to eat and where to stay after they get there: Internet “site seeing” leads to real-world sightseeing. It is critical, therefore, to make “site seeing” a priority through the use of 4K video and the like to draw tourists’ interest and make them want to come to Koriyama. We intend to continue enhancing the information we provide in order to further broaden our base of tourists and visitors.

Kaiseizan Park

Located in central Koriyama, Kaseizan Park was established to unite the pioneers who were taking on the challenge of settling the Asaka wastelands by creating a beautiful space that all could enjoy. Further developed as a symbol of the land development project, it now serves as a beloved oasis for the people of the city. The park and its surroundings offer something for people of all ages, with baseball and other sporting facilities, children’s facilities that families can enjoy together, and music facilities that citizens can use freely. In the spring, when the park’s roughly 1,300 cherry trees — many planted at the time of the land development — burst into bloom, the park dazzles its many visitors as one of the best cherry blossom-viewing spots in Fukushima Prefecture (*Photo 5*).

Standing in the park’s central plaza is a monument, The Pioneers, erected in 1992 to express gratitude for and pay tribute to the achievements of our forebears who carried out the Asaka Land Development Project (*Photo 6*). Sculpted by Koichiro Misaka, an honorary citizen of Koriyama, it incorporates bronze statues of key

people who were involved with the project, such as Nakajo, father of the Asaka Land Development Project, Okubo, whose efforts helped see the project through, and van Doorn.

Standing near the park, the three-story Kaiseikan Hall was built in a pseudo-Western style in 1874 at a time before Western construction techniques had spread to Japan’s outlying regions. When Emperor Meiji toured the Tohoku region in 1876, this cherished building was used as his temporary palace. Today, the building houses displays introducing the people involved in the Asaka Land Development Project and the excavation of the Asaka Canal as well as materials related to these projects. The grounds also incorporate a reconstruction, open to the public, of the sort of home in which the settlers lived.

Another local resource related to the Asaka Land Development Project is the Kaiseizan Daijingu Shrine, located adjacent to the park. Built in 1876 as a place of spiritual sanctuary for those involved in opening up the Asaka wastelands, the shrine enshrines a deity divided from that of the Grand Shrine at Ise. The shrine receives many visitors throughout the year but particularly on New Year’s Day and during its cherry blossom festival.

The area around Kaiseizan Park is literally Koriyama’s “Central Park”, something I am sure you will be able to sense when you visit. Please enjoy seasonal views while walking through the area and thinking back on the history of the Asaka Land Development Project.

Sixth-order Industrialization Project

Blessed with the waters of Lake Inawashiro, Koriyama was transformed into a bountiful land. The combination of clean water, fertile clayey soil, and a climate suitable for rice production turned the area into one of the nation’s most productive sources of high-quality agricultural produce.

Nevertheless, as the situation for domestic agriculture grows increasingly difficult due to the aging of full-time farmers, a manpower shortage, and concerns about the influence of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the question of how to achieve sustainable agriculture that enables farmers to feel a sense of security about their work is a major issue. To address this situation, Koriyama is working through public-private partnerships to promote what we call sixth-order industrialization efforts that leverage the balanced

Photo 5: Koriyama City



Photo 6: Koriyama City



Photo 7: Koriyama City



Photo 8: Koriyama City



characteristics of the city's agricultural, manufacturing, and service sectors. Sixth-order industrialization may sound odd. This means that agriculture farmers (engaged in primary industry) are also working on processing their agricultural food materials (secondary industry) and distribution of these processed goods (tertiary industry).

Last February, we entered into a partnership agreement with the Mitsubishi Corporation Disaster Relief Foundation, launching the Sixth-order Fruit-farming Project to integrate the production, processing, and sale of fruit produce. As part of this project, the Fukushima Winery that opened last October has begun producing wines and liqueurs. Looking to the future, this winery will be at the center of efforts to develop the area as a producer of wine grapes, encouraging people to take up farming anew and promoting employment in wine-related fields.

In addition, the "Carp-loving Koriyama Project", begun last year with support from the Kirin Group, is moving ahead with the sixth-order industrialization of carp, for which Koriyama is one of Japan's leading producers (550 tons annually). The project hopes to establish Koriyama carp nationally as a branded specialty product by working together with the local Carp Farmers Cooperative Association to develop new products.

Another important issue is dispelling the still-strong negative reputation that resulted from the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. In Koriyama today, as the result of government and producers working together to ensure the production, inspection, and distribution of safe produce, no radioactive materials are detected in agricultural products grown in Koriyama. Products such as the Koizukushi Set, which combines Koriyama-grown Asakamai rice with smoked carp (winner of the grand prize at the Fukushima Prefecture Specialty Products Contest), and Uneme beef, a richly marbled brand-name beef with a delicately elegant texture and feel, can be mail-ordered from the Koriyama Local Specialty Online Shop. I hope you will have an opportunity to try some of these safe, healthy, and delicious Koriyama products.

Hot Springs & Sports

One of Koriyama's major tourism resources, the Bandai-Atami hot springs, has developed a devoted following for its many atmospheric

hot springs inns along the Gohyaku River and its agreeable waters known for their beautifying properties (*Photos 7-9*). Located just 15 minutes along the Ban'etsu West Line from JR Koriyama Station, which is accessible by the Tohoku Shinkansen, the hot springs are practically in the Tokyo metropolitan area's backyard. They are also the perfect base for sightseeing excursions in Fukushima Prefecture, being close to the Ban'etsu Expressway interchange, just 20 minutes by car from Lake Inawashiro, and convenient for both Aizuwakamatsu and Urabandai.

With multi-purpose public facilities that combine hot springs, sports, and convention facilities — such as Koriyama Yracs Atami, a facility with hot springs, a pool, and a multi-purpose hall that seats as many as 3,000 people, and the Bandai-Atami Ice Area, home rink of the Tokyo Freeblade ice hockey team — the area is well suited not only for holiday travel but also for business events such as national meetings or corporate seminars.

Currently, in order to create even more bustle in the Banda-Atami hot springs area, we are moving ahead with a project to build an integrated facility near Bandai-Atami Station that will combine a public multi-purpose community space with a soccer center to be operated by the Japan Football Association. A football center just five minutes from the station at the heart of a hot springs area is sure to

Photo 9: Koriyama City



exert a powerful appeal nationwide.

With strong points like these, we hope to look into opportunities to host pre-Games camps for athlete delegations to the 2020 Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games or serve as a base camp for athlete training.

Host Town for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic & Paralympic Games

The Japanese government is moving forward with a host town program that seeks to promote the globalization and revitalization of local communities by encouraging mutual interpersonal, economic, and cultural exchanges between community residents and the athletes, families, and other parties from countries participating in the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games. Last January, as one of the first wave of organizations to be registered as a host town, Koriyama was accredited as one of the host towns for the Netherlands.

Since 1988, Koriyama has enjoyed a sister city relationship with Brummen, birthplace of van Doorn, the engineer who contributed to the Asaka land development and Asaka Canal projects. We hope that our selection as a host town will be an opportunity to build friendly relations that contribute to the development of both Japan and the Netherlands by deepening exchanges not only through sports but also in fields such as agriculture, manufacturing, and the economy.

Last June we established the City Council for Promotion of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, a body made up of local organizations and companies, in order to unify our community behind efforts to contribute to the Games through active exchanges not only with the Netherlands but also with other countries as well.

Koriyama Safe Community Initiative

Koriyama is moving forward with plans to make the city one of the best in Japan for children's health, building indoor and outdoor play spaces for children in local communities and providing environments in which they can play and be active to their hearts' content. One particularly popular spot is Pep Kids Koriyama, which opened in December 2012. Born of a public-private partnership — local corporations provided the land, building, and facilities at no cost and the play equipment was donated, while the city handles management and operations — the facility is filled with the happy voices of the many parents and children who visit every day.

The Tokyo Olympic Games held in 1964 showed the world that Japan had recovered from the war, but what was most impressive this time was the joyful excitement of the children when Tokyo was named host city for the 2020 Games. Through the upcoming Tokyo Olympics, and the exchange activities we pursue as a host town, we hope the children of Koriyama will become even happier and healthier. In looking forward to the Games, we believe it is extremely important to keep working to develop a living environment that is not only safe and secure for our children and the rest of our citizens but also offers peace of mind for visitors from Japan and overseas.

In November 2014, Koriyama declared its intention to engage in Safe Community activities advocated by the World Health Organization Collaborating Center on Community Safety Promotion.

With residents, government, and related organizations working together collaboratively and cooperatively to foster a safe and secure community in line with international standards, we seek to gain accreditation by fiscal 2017.

In order to be able to proudly welcome people from around the world who visit on the occasion of the Tokyo Olympics and assure them of a safe trip, all of our citizens are working together now to propel our Safe Community activities forward.

Koriyama — a Living Museum of Modern History

Today our country faces challenges unlike any it has ever faced before, from the rapidly declining birthrate and aging population to the contraction of local economies. Local governments need to fully understand these trends and respond thoughtfully in order to achieve independent and sustainable development. Solving such problems requires a backcasting approach: first defining future challenges and desired outcomes and then working backward to identify the steps to take today. All sorts of data forecasting are possible now, and it is critical to clearly identify, based on scientific data, what policies to adopt, keeping pace with the broader timeline of a changing society, to ensure a smooth landing when responding to the various challenges that the future will bring.

I also think we live in a time when it is important not only to build new things but also to burnish our precious local resources — the historical roots that form the foundation for our community. Since the Edo period, Koriyama has followed a history of constant evolution, nurturing new streams of people to meet the demands of each new age.

In these pages I have only been able to introduce just a small fraction of Koriyama's local resources. I hope you will take the opportunity to visit Koriyama, a veritable living museum of modern history, to experience for yourself, with all five senses, all that the city has to offer.

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Photo 10: Koriyama City



View from Koriyama city's public hall, which is registered as a cultural asset in Japan

Masato Shinagawa is mayor of Koriyama city, Fukushima Prefecture.