

Introduction

As Sony co-founder Masaru Ibuka remarked upon being awarded the Japanese Order of Culture, “Inventions are the fount of culture. They are essential to any culture’s development. There have been many significant inventions throughout the course of history - among them the ancient inventions of the water clock and paper-making, the invention of the printing press in the Middle Ages and, more recently, Edison’s phonograph and the steam engine, which powered the industrial revolution. All of these inventions have had a profound impact on the course of human civilization and sparked great cultural development.”

Sakichi Toyoda, widely acknowledged as one of Japan’s top ten inventors of all time for his invention of the world’s best automatic looms, was very offended by American policies to exclude Japanese in the early decades of the 20th century. Commenting on these anti-Japanese policies, he said ruefully, “What have the Japanese contributed to the building of modern civilization? The Chinese invented the compass, but the Japanese have invented nothing. That is why the Americans see Japan only as a copycat nation.” Believing that Japan had to produce outstanding inventions, to demonstrate to the United States that the Japanese also possessed very capable intellects, he donated large sums of money to the Japan Institute of Invention and Innovation to promote the invention of efficient storage batteries. Indeed, it was his belief that inventing useful technologies and obtaining good patents contributed to the advance of civilization – and that patents are thus the foundation of civilization.