

Shaping the Future's Visionary Innovators

World IP Day and Invention Day

Every year on April 26th, the day on which the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Convention came into force in 1970, WIPO celebrates the essential role intellectual property (IP) plays in fostering and encouraging innovation and creativity. Launched in 2001, WIPO member states established World IP Day to offer an exciting opportunity for people throughout the world to understand what IP really means and how it contributes to and drives the innovation that is constantly changing and shaping our world.

A similar event in April is also held in Japan – Invention Day (April 18th, the day on which the first Patent Act was promulgated in 1885), which was established in 1950 to raise awareness and disseminate information on the importance of Industrial Property. Invention Day supports Japan's innovators and highlights the role the IP system plays in economic growth.

Japan's Visionary Innovators

In 1985 Japan celebrated not only Invention Day, but also the 100-year anniversary of the establishment of its Industrial Property system. On this occasion the Japan Patent Office (JPO) highlighted ten of the country's most influential inventors. World IP Day 2012 celebrates visionary innovators, and perhaps one of the most visionary on the JPO list is Mr. Sakichi Toyoda, founder of Toyota Industries Co., Ltd., and who is often referred to as the father of the Japanese industrial revolution. Born in 1867, Mr. Toyoda learned of the newly enacted Patent Act in 1885 and decided to contribute to national development through becoming a successful inventor.



Sakichi Toyoda (Photo: National Diet Library)

Growing up in a traditional textile-manufacturing region of Japan, the young Toyoda saw his mother and others work tirelessly on primitive manual looms (devices to weave cloth) and decided that this would be a good place for him to start. In 1891 he invented and patented his own version of an improved human powered wooden loom, which brought a 50% increase in productivity. With continual refinement, by 1896 Toyoda's looms became extremely popular.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Toyoda put a great deal of effort into developing the world's first automatic loom that would stop if it became jammed (thus preventing poor quality products) and could be mass-produced. In late 1924 he intensified his efforts, which resulted in ten new patents and the introduction of the Type G Toyoda Automatic Loom. With this new invention Japan's textile industry grew rapidly, and accounted for 39% of world cotton exports by the late 1930s.

In 1927, Toyoda was awarded the Imperial Order of Merit, Japan's highest civilian honor, for his achievements. Backed by the success of Toyoda's inventions and IP portfolio, Toyoda's son Kiichiro founded Toyota Motor Corporation (Toyota) in 1937, and it rapidly grew into one of the world's leading automotive manufacturers.

Awards from the Imperial Family

Coinciding with Invention Day are many important events in Japan for both adults and children. Two of these, organized by the Japan Institute of Invention and Innovation (JIII), are competitions with awards from the Imperial Family – the Concour of Schoolchildren’s Inventions and the National Commendation for Invention – and are among the most esteemed cultural awards for inventions in Japan. In its 70th year, the [Concour of Schoolchildren’s Inventions](#) allows children to realize their potential as inventors and promote creativity for the future generation. For 2012, the prestigious [Imperial Prize](#) was awarded to a fifth grade elementary student who invented a robot that uses touch sensors to automatically climb steps. A [WIPO prize](#) is also awarded in the Concour, and this year went to a sixth grade elementary student who invented an electricity saving simulator. The National Commendation for Invention is an annual public competition designed to formally recognize particularly outstanding inventions and people who have an acute ability to exploit and promote inventions. The winner will be announced at the end of May 2012.



2012 Imperial Prize Winner
(Photo: JIII)



Imperial Award Ceremony
(Imperial Highness Prince Hitachi) (Photo: JIII)



METI/JPO Award Ceremony
(Photo: JPO)

To commemorate Invention Day, every year the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) and the JPO give out the IP Distinguished Service Award to individuals and corporate enterprises that have made significant contributions to the IP field in Japan. The purpose of the award scheme is to promote the development, effectiveness, and public awareness of the important contribution IP plays in our society. The Minister of METI and the Commissioner of the JPO formally convey the awards, and the [winners](#) for 2012 were announced on this year’s Invention Day.



Earthquake Vanquishing
Anchor Robot (Photo: JIII)

Another competition – The [Dreams of Science of the Future Painting Exhibition](#) – is now in its 34th year and provides the leaders of the next generation with an opportunity to freely express their ideas, creativity, and spirit of scientific curiosity through artistic expression. The 2012 Exhibition gave out 202 awards among 10,804 applications from children in kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school, and schools for foreign residents. The winning entries were exhibited at the National Science Museum in Ueno, Tokyo from April 10th to the 22nd, 2012.



Wave Eliminating Block
Robot (Photo: JIII)

Encouraging Creativity and Innovation

World IP Day 2012 celebrates visionary innovators – those who have broken molds and made a lasting impact on our world. The list is long, and the story of Sakichi Toyoda is just one. Imbued with Toyoda’s spirit, creativity, and ingenuity, events and competitions such as those that are held in Japan around Invention Day are examples of what we are celebrating this year through World IP Day. Through encouraging creativity and innovation, the IP system continues to foster the next generation of enduring visionary innovators.