

Research Paper**Impact of Brand Creation in Disaster-Afflicted Areas on the “Sense of Restoration”: The Case of MIGAKI-ICHIGO****Satoshi Umeda^{1*}**¹*Faculty of Entrepreneurship, Musashino University, Japan**Corresponding author: s-umeda@musashino-u.ac.jp**Abstract**

After the Great East Japan Earthquake, private companies became important agents for performing reconstruction support activities. This study examines the impact of the reconstruction support activities undertaken by private companies following the 2011 earthquake. It presents a new framework for classifying such activities, focusing on business startups and reconstruction using the case of MIGAKI-ICHIGO, a luxury fruit brand representing Tohoku that has become prominent in the decade since the earthquake. A semi-structured interview with GRA, Inc.’s representative director, Hiroki Iwasa, was conducted to review the company’s intentions a decade after the earthquake. I prepared four questions in advance and asked other questions responding to the interviewee’s answers. The results indicate that the value of startups in reconstruction assistance arises when a company starts and during its corporate growth. This growth highlights the possibility that such companies become long-lasting reconstruction actors when compared with the reconstruction support activities undertaken by other private companies. These findings could serve as a reference for manufacturers and advertising companies who are considering reconstruction support activities and contribute to improving the quality of stakeholders’ reconstruction support activities. It also has multidisciplinary value by combining management science with earthquake reconstruction science.

Keywords: Brand creation, Disaster-afflicted areas, Great East Japan Earthquake, Reconstruction support activities, Sense of restoration.

Introduction

This study examines the impact of the reconstruction support activities undertaken primarily by private companies following the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. The study specifically aims to clarify and systematize the reconstruction support activities led by a wide range of private companies, and the quality of the reconstruction manifested in these support activities. Among these aspects, this paper focuses particularly on the practice of starting or establishing businesses as reconstruction agents.

The Great East Japan Earthquake occurred on March 11, 2011. The earthquake measured 9.0 on the moment magnitude scale (Mw), making it the largest earthquake ever recorded in and around Japan. In addition to the massive shaking throughout eastern Japan, tsunami, fires, and other damage resulted in about 15,000 dead and about 7,500 missing (Cabinet Office Japan, Disaster Management in Japan, 2022). The Great East Japan Earthquake had a major impact on Japan as a whole, and an atmosphere of self-restraint prevailed not only in the affected areas but also in the unaffected regions.

After the Great East Japan Earthquake, the presence of private companies was highlighted as fulfilling an important function as agents performing reconstruction support activities, particularly alongside the more traditional collaboration of the local residents, volunteers, the government, and nonprofit organizations (NPOs). According to the 2011 Survey on Social Contribution Activities (Keidanren, 2012), 427 companies belonging to Nippon Keidanren contributed 86 billion yen for that year alone (2011). In this manner, various private companies have been able to conduct reconstruction support activities in a variety of ways.

The media further reported on each company's efforts daily. This consistent reporting was met with praise; however, private companies' activities were wide-ranging. Thus, it was difficult to discuss the impact of their overall endeavors. Therefore, based on past studies, the impact and role of the private sector's reconstruction support activities were examined in this study by presenting a new framework for classifying such activities.

It should also be noted that, in 2011, the Japan Academic Society for Ventures and Entrepreneurs held a panel discussion titled, "Venture Companies are the Leaders of Reconstruction." This discussion raised the hopes of starting and establishing businesses as agents of reconstruction after the Great East Japan Earthquake. The Japan Venture Award, sponsored by the Organization for Small & Medium Companies and Regional Innovation, introduced the Great East Japan Earthquake Recovery Prize in 2012.

The decade since the Great East Japan Earthquake holds value when one examines the reconstruction support activities undertaken by private companies and their impact in this period. In particular, reconstruction is conducted over a long period and consists of a variety of efforts conducted daily. Kimura et al.'s (2004) reconstruction calendar organized the reality and awareness of the reconstruction after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake on a logarithmic time scale, showing that 50% of the victims of the total collapse still perceived themselves as "victims" even after a decade had passed. It may, therefore, be stated that a decade is also the period after which the majority of the effects of reconstruction support activities began to be visible, despite current activities being only partially complete.

The awareness of the problem presented in this study is based on the hypothesis that the presence of private companies could increase as the main agents of reconstruction support activities, as I experienced when I was employed in an advertising company. The changes and strengths of the environment surrounding private companies that led to this hypothesis are as follows.

- 1) The spread of the importance of fulfilling social roles (e.g., corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities and socially beneficial activities);
- 2) The decision-making speed (e.g., the budget, execution, and activity decisions); and
- 3) The high mobility and flexibility that leverage the accumulation of the core businesses (e.g., the logistics and service design).

The three points listed above are very different from those laid out by the government administration and the NPOs that had been reconstruction agents in the past. Even regarding the spread of COVID-19 infections encountered recently, private companies' activities are worthy of attention. For example, Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton was the first company to produce sterile gels in their perfume production lines and to provide such gel gratis to medical institutions.⁽¹⁾ Similarly, in response to a request from the government, Sharp Corporation established a mask manufacturing line.⁽²⁾ Regarding this trend, the importance of the support activities operationalized by private companies in emergencies is expected to increase in the future.

This study's findings could serve as a reference for manufacturers and advertising companies, who are considered to be at the forefront of reconstruction support activities. They could also contribute to improving the quality of the aforementioned stakeholders' reconstruction support activities. Furthermore, for academics, this study holds multidisciplinary value by combining management science with earthquake reconstruction science. This addresses corporate social contribution activities and is of current significance in Japan, since the country suffers from earthquakes regularly. Thus, this study contributes to the development of both sciences.

Literature Review

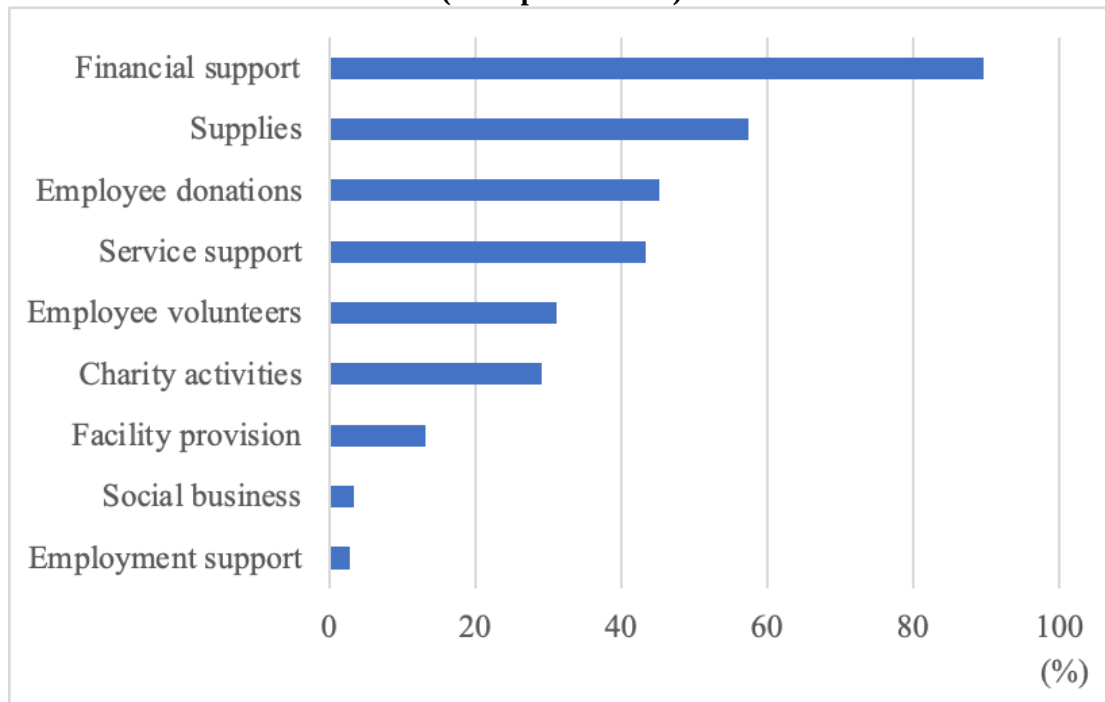
Initiatives of Private Companies in Reconstruction After the Earthquake and Study Subjects

In the past, studies have been conducted on the support activities provided by private companies in disaster-affected areas. For example, Takaura (2013) examined the disaster region's support activities offered by a non-disaster region company over about a year after the Great East Japan Earthquake. As of March 2012, when Takaura analyzed information on the social contribution activities of companies subject to the calculation of the NIKKEI average stock price, about 94.2% of the companies were found to have worked on some form of support in the affected areas. The forms of assistance are summarized in Figure 1.

In comparison, Yaguchi (2014) attempted to systematize the support content by classifying the reconstruction support agents into companies in a non-disaster afflicted area and those in a disaster afflicted area. Through this classification, Yaguchi's (2014)

study examined the support activities provided by companies in a disaster-affected area that ranged from “the inside to the inside,” and not just on the framework for “the outside to the inside.” The latter is how reconstruction support activities are frequently perceived.

Figure 1: Forms of Company Support Offered to Disaster-Afflicted Areas (Multiple Answers)



Source: Takaura (2013)

Such systematization has a certain degree of significance. However, realistic reconstruction support activities can also include activities in which private companies cooperate with one another, in addition to those conducted by companies alone. Startups specifically aimed at supporting reconstruction can also be perceived as performing reconstruction support activities undertaken by private companies. Based on this more generalized perspective, it becomes clear that the points raised by both Takaura (2013) and Yaguchi (2014) do not go beyond the systematization of the reconstruction support activities undertaken by a single company.

Therefore, in this study, in addition to activities such as giving donations and dispatching volunteers (which have been conducted for some time), the following frameworks were also presented: T1 the company-standalone type: activities focused on the company’s products and services; T2 the company-led collaborative type: implementation of the reconstruction events through the co-sponsorship of private companies; and T3 the company-startup type: startup and business creation aimed specifically at reconstruction. The elaboration of several cases using this framework is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Reconstruction Assistance Activity Classification

Type	Cases
T1 Company-standalone type	“Cheering for You” (P&G) “Photo Relief Project” (FUJIFILM) “Tohoku Bonds Made through Vessels Project” (Ajinomoto)
T2 Company-led collaborative type	“Tohoku Rokkon Festival” (Tohoku Rokkon Implementation Committee) which continued as the “Tohoku Kizuna Festival” “Tool de Tohoku” (Tool de Tohoku Executive Committee)
T3 Company-startup type	“MIGAKI-ICHIGO” (GRA, Inc.) Rapport Hair Group Disaster Recovery Leadership Development Project

Source: Created by author

Various case studies have been conducted on the activities undertaken by individual companies that fall under the “company standalone type.” Regarding the “company-led collaboration type,” I attempted to examine the case of the Tohoku Rokkon Festival as a representative initiative in which I was personally involved (Umeda, 2017). However, this study primarily examines the effects and impact of company startups that focus on reconstruction (i.e., the company-startup type) and their establishment by examining concrete examples.

Those individuals who have attempted to resolve social issues through their business activities are, at times, referred to as social entrepreneurs. In addition to private sector startups, a wide range of activities, including the establishment of NPOs and nongovernmental organizations, have also been conducted. ⁽³⁾

Although studies have been conducted on companies that were initiated in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake, many such studies have focused on the startup process. Additionally, these studies were conducted at the time of the startup without sufficiently examining the growth of startups over time or the effects of such businesses growing. It is also true that it is difficult to examine social impact unless a certain amount of time has elapsed since the startup began.

This study investigates an agricultural production corporation founded in the year immediately after the Great East Japan Earthquake, GRA Inc., which produces MIGAKI-ICHIGO. This company was chosen because, as of 2020, MIGAKI-ICHIGO had become a luxury fruit brand that represents Tohoku.

In this investigation, it is worth noting that the importance of copywriting in regional branding has been discussed in the creative theory of management studies. According to Umeda (2016), messages that serve as vectors for the region aim to have the role of creating a sense of unity that connects the internal and external worlds. Among other things, he suggests that the strength to convey everything from the outline to the

significance of the brand in the smallest element, the word naming, can be the key to brand creation and recognition.

Debate on the Quality of Reconstruction and the Sense of Reconstruction as a New Concept

This study focused on the discrepancy between “objective reconstruction” (e.g., the reconstruction of the social infrastructure) and “subjective reconstruction” (wherein people perceive that progress is being made “toward reconstruction”). The concept of subjective reconstruction, which can be regarded as a “restoration of the mind,” has also been noted in previous papers.

Outside Japan, for example, Hurricane Katrina, which caused tremendous damage throughout the United States in 2005, accelerated research into disaster reconstruction. In that case, sociologist Daniel Aldrich highlighted the following in his book: *Building Resilience: Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery*.

Aldrich (2015) indicates that despite the growing understanding of social capital, policymakers continue to downplay its role and focus resources on standard physical infrastructure such as rebuilding roads, bridges, and buildings. He also notes social capital’s importance in bringing residents back and attracting new people, and that policymakers need to think more seriously about social capital when developing reconstruction plans (Aldrich, 2015).

Regarding Japan, according to the website “Textbook on Reconstruction” (representative: Haruo Hayashi, professor at the Disaster Prevention Research Institute, Kyoto University), the concept of reconstruction was first used clearly within the history of disasters in the country after the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923. The term “reconstruction” in this context refers to the significance of urban reconstruction. This involves the reconstruction of the urban infrastructure that has been damaged in a disaster.

A major change in the implications of the reconstruction is thought to have been triggered by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995. What was proposed in the reconstruction process associated with this later earthquake was a way of conducting the reconstruction that attempted to acquire a new quality (Murosaki, 2009). In other words, this was something that did not exist in the area before the earthquake occurred. According to this idea, it is possible that although reconstruction is re-building, it is by no means a return to the original state (Murosaki, 2009).

The concept of creative reconstruction was proposed as a symbolic representation of this idea. Creative reconstruction encompasses not only the tangible aspect of urban reconstruction but also the intangible aspect of livelihood reconstruction (Miyahara, 2006). Additionally, the concept of human reconstruction originated during this time, because it was believed that the inherent vitality of cities would not be restored merely by restoring the social infrastructure (“Textbook on Reconstruction”).

As a result of the expansion of the concept of reconstruction over time, the study of disaster reconstruction in Japan has also changed to one that is more closely associated with human lives and minds. Prior to this period, research on reconstruction plans and

urban planning led by the administration had been the main focus of research studies. However, in addition to the role played by the media, descriptions of people-to-people connections and communities became more prominent in later years. The implications of the term “reconstruction” were thus expanded from the reconstruction of social infrastructure to include more human resources.

Miyamoto (2008) attempted to visualize the psychological feeling of reconstruction by using the “reconstruction curve” method when conducting interview research in the area affected by the Chūetsu Offshore Earthquake in 2007. Similarly, Hayashi (2001: 96–105) conducted a large-scale survey of disaster-affected areas of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. This was based on the assumption that life reconstruction issues could be divided into seven elements: 1) residence, 2) connections between people, 3) town, 4) mind and body, 5) preparations, 6) living arrangements, and 7) interaction with the government. The author outlined the sense of living reconstruction through an investigation of these seven elements.

Conversely, subjective reconstruction, the sense of reconstruction of everyday life or the sense of reconstruction, is limited to those endeavors aimed at substantial disaster victims and residents living in the specific disaster-afflicted areas.

In psychology, traumatic stress reactions that occur after working in disaster sites (e.g., after natural disasters, violent incidents, or accidents) or after witnessing such scenes are called disaster stresses. Research on this phenomenon is increasing. The effects of disaster stress are not restricted to direct victims or disaster survivors. According to Matsui (2012), victims can be divided into three categories: 1) direct victims and/or survivors (i.e., primary victims); 2) occupational victims who come into contact with disasters through relief activities and similar events (i.e., secondary victims); and 3) local residents who are not in the directly affected areas or accident scenes but who were affected by the news reports thereof (i.e., tertiary victims).

In the modern era, with media centered on social network services (SNS), people can be repeatedly exposed to terrible sights from areas stricken by a disaster. This occurs regardless of whether people are in the disaster-affected area itself. For example, during the Great East Japan Earthquake, the sight of the tsunami wave spread on SNS. This meant people developed a general attitude of self-restraint throughout Japan. To examine subjective reconstruction, it is necessary to discuss the issue as a whole. This would include the consideration of the tertiary victims. However, these concepts do not exist.

Therefore, in this study, the feeling of gathering momentum (i.e., the idea that things are moving toward reconstruction), not only in the disaster-afflicted areas but also in the non-disaster-afflicted areas, has been referred to as sense of reconstruction. Further, this study holds discussions regarding broad-based subjective reconstructions. By creating this new perspective, this study was better able to capture the reconstruction of the mind in the realms of academic discussion. This reconstruction of the mind could be perceived as a cohesive and wide area of the victim of the mind created via media.

Methodology

In this study, I interviewed Hiroki Iwasa, the Chief Executive Officer of GRA, Inc., a company that started immediately after the earthquake and created a new brand of strawberries in the Tohoku region, the MIGAKI-ICHIGO, 10 years after the disaster. GRA is located in Yamamoto-cho, Miyagi Prefecture, in the Tohoku region of Japan. MIGAKI-ICHIGO is one of Tohoku's leading luxury fruit brands. Being sold at 1000 yen per fruit, MIGAKI-ICHIGO strawberries available at department stores have been advertised across mass media. The origin of MIGAKI-ICHIGO lies in startups aimed at the reconstruction of areas after the Great East Japan Earthquake.

In the 10 years since the brand was born, the company has expanded beyond the sale of strawberries themselves to include the production and sale of sweets using strawberries, and the number of younger fans has also increased. In addition to opening its own stores, the company has also launched tie-up products with major convenience stores, and has grown into one of Japan's leading strawberry brands. The brand, which was created to help recover from the Great East Japan Earthquake, has reached the point where it is now recognized in isolation from the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Hiroki Iwasa, the representative director of GRA, Inc., started MIGAKI-ICHIGO. It hails from Yamamoto-cho in Miyagi Prefecture, which was hit by the earthquake. The town is a strawberry production center in Tohoku. However, 122 of its 129 strawberry farms were damaged (Iwasa, 2014). Having witnessed this scene of destruction, Iwasa is said to have participated in the restoration of Yamamoto-cho by producing strawberries in a completely different manner from before the earthquake.

At the time, Iwasa was the representative director of an information technology (IT) company. Thus, it is believed that he desired to create the world's number one protected horticultural center with the latest technology by introducing IT into the production of strawberries. This included using technology to monitor soil temperature, humidity, mist, air temperature, and analyzing the correlation between underground components and leaf conditions.⁽⁴⁾ Previously, such analyses were conducted based solely on human senses. To obtain the relevant knowledge in this regard, Iwasa visited strawberry plantations nationwide and conducted interviews and surveys. His idea ultimately materialized by combining his artisan skills with his IT skills.

As a result of these efforts, the strawberries planted yielded a significant harvest in the following year, and their quality has improved continuously. In January 2013, the company began selling MIGAKI-ICHIGO by presenting them as jewelry to eat (Figure 2). Currently, MIGAKI-ICHIGO has grown into a large-scale farm of approximately 35,000 square meters, and the company also exports overseas (Figure 3).

The company is now focusing not only on expanding the production of MIGAKI-ICHIGO but also on training new partners. Along with the lectures provided to applicants who gather in Yamamoto-cho, such training also incorporates practical exercises. This is where applicants are responsible for a single vinyl house and learn how to manage the data. They also learn about the importance of data management and everything that occurs up to and including the harvest.⁽⁵⁾ For next-generation producer candidates who show good results, support is provided by the company, allowing them to operate their own fields. In this way, a strawberry farming method that combines

artisan skills and IT is steadily becoming a production method that represents the new town of Yamamoto-cho.

Figure 2: MIGAKI-ICHIGO Logo and Package



Figure 3: MIGAKI-ICHIGO: Combining Artisan and IT Skills



For these reasons, GRA, Inc., which produces MIGAKI-ICHIGO, is becoming a synonym for Tohoku's luxury fruit brand. Thus, it made sense to include the company in this study's investigation, as it focuses on researching such an entrepreneurial entity conducting reconstruction support activities within a post-disaster area.

Moreover, it is difficult to understand the 10-year history of the brand simply by analyzing GRA's chronology and published "public" information. To get closer to the "private" information that only Mr. Iwasa, who is responsible for the growth of the brand, could know, I believe that understanding the narrative through interviews is the best method. Thus, the study was designed to gain deeper insight after reading the publicly available information in advance.

Research

To examine the effects of GRA, Inc. and MIGAKI-ICHIGO (both of which originated after the earthquake) on the sense of reconstruction, it was necessary to determine the initial intentions of these entities. It was also necessary to examine the kind of growth that has occurred within the company since its inception. It should be noted that GRA, Inc.'s activities have been reported by various media. Iwasa himself speaks about them in detail. However, most of this information is related to the time of the company's launch.

In this study, interviews were conducted to review the intentions of and events undertaken during both the startup and growth periods, as the company entered its 10th year after the earthquake. Semi-structured interviews were held, where interviewees' opinions could be investigated at a deeper level by asking follow-up questions according to the answers they provided. This was conducted while asking questions prepared in advance. The questions prepared in advance were as follows:

- Question 1) With regard to Iwasa, what kind of effect do you think the social impact has had, and on whom?
- Question 2) Where did Iwasa place his emphasis regarding branding?
- Question 3) After starting the business with the aim of local reconstruction, during the growth period, on what did Iwasa place the company's emphasis? Please choose between these two options: 1) on local reconstruction, or 2) the company's growth?
- Question 4) What kind of support existed behind Iwasa's decision to begin GRA, Inc.?

Regarding Question 1, in his interviews and books, Iwasa has often stated that he emphasized social impact. Question 1 sought details pertaining to this emphasis. By deciphering the details of what is encapsulated regarding society and impact, this question highlighted the kind(s) of reconstruction quality(ies) MIGAKI-ICHIGO attempts to contribute to local society.

Attention to detail is indicated in all aspects associated with the business, ranging from the naming of MIGAKI-ICHIGO (polished strawberries), sophisticated logo designs, and even packaging. Additionally, Iwasa has been quoted as saying, "*We are focusing on (the) branding.*" This statement suggests that branding activities hold concrete ways to promote social impact, as noted in Question 1. The branding relationship was further clarified through Question 2.

Question 3 related to the company's growth process. Even if one starts a social entrepreneurship endeavor, one's business cannot get on track with passion alone. The growth of a company and its local reconstruction are also linked. Therefore, by knowing what Iwasa desired regarding his company, this question aimed to examine the growth factors involved after he had started his social entrepreneurship endeavor (i.e., the source of the social impact).

Question 4 was concerned with investigating the community that supported and continues to support Iwasa's activities. The question intended to clarify the impact of the local associates, work associates, MBA associates at the Graduate School of Management and Globis University, and 800 pro-bono workers (i.e., volunteers who

use their professional experience and skills) on Iwasa's endeavors. By setting these questions, this study attempted to clarify the kind(s) of intent(s) that impacted the sense of reconstruction during the company's startup as well as growth periods.

The study was conducted according to the guidelines prescribed by the Ethics Committee of Musashino University.

Results

On July 27, 2020, I conducted an Internet-based remote interview with Iwasa. This section summarizes the research results pertaining to each question.

The company's social impact intention (i.e., Question 1) shifted from when the company originated to its full establishment. Iwasa responded as follows:

“At the time of its founding, I wanted to leave an impact as a visible figure. This was because the majority of the key performance indicators [KPIs] of the IT venture companies that I had been running since [the] beginning [of] work[ing] in the industry at the age of 22 [years], included numbers such as market capitalization and [the] number of employees.”

As a result of conducting reconstruction support activities with this perception of management, Iwasa began to feel impatient, believing that *“it takes time for NPO activities and volunteers to be effective. Looking at the local situation, the region will not be able to keep functioning if we are not able to create a momentum (strong direction) within a short period of time.”* Additionally, he said, *“I now feel that it is necessary to attract attention while offering more social stimulus, instead of just focusing on the numbers.”* He also stated that *“through interesting initiatives, my perspective changed regarding how to demonstrate an influence on society. From there, I decided to proceed with an individualized agricultural venture.”* Iwasa further stated that *“my perspective completely changed, and I started to think about how to influence not just Yamamoto-cho in Japan, but Yamamoto-cho and the rest of the world.”* This led him to engage actively in branding.

Regarding the question about why Iwasa opted to focus on branding, he noted that when his perspective of influencing society changed, he naturally began to think about branding:

“At that time, there were still not many agricultural products that had originality. That's why we could not create a social impact if we did not break out of producing a 'commodity,' create uniqueness, and convey it to our consumers.”

Once this understanding was established, the name MIGAKI-ICHIGO and the associated logo design that embodies the concept of jewelry to eat, were developed with the help of pro-bono workers.

Conversely, it should be noted that some employees had a negative reaction to this approach and said things like, *“I don't know what this sort of initiative means.”* Iwasa

went on to note that, *“although at that time, there was a dissociation between the place where the strawberries were made and the place where the strawberries were sold,”* when he visited the place where the strawberries were sold (i.e., at a major department store in Tokyo), he convinced the employees by saying, *“so this is what I had meant.”*

More recently, the branding concept has become familiar to the point where *“protecting the quality of the MIGAKI”* has become a common phrase within the company. This phrase *“has become a symbol of our pride.”* Iwasa further noted, *“Some fans of MIGAKI-ICHIGO are buying them from the perspective of supporting the reconstruction, and not just for their taste.”* This supports the effect of branding.

Regarding the psychological ratio of the local reconstruction and company growth during the growth period, related to Question 3, Iwasa provided the following interesting response:

“I consciously stopped using the term ‘reconstruction’ from a certain period onward. I thought that using the term would not allow me to go outside the framework of restoration and reconstruction. However, within me, morality [reconstruction] is [was] in my mind.”

Iwasa also noted that *“the shipment value of raw strawberries in Yamamoto-cho increased to more than before the disaster... regarding the numbers: from 1.3 billion yen to 1.7 billion yen. What I wanted to create is this sort of worldview.”*

Iwasa discussed his pride in the social entrepreneurship that occurred during the disaster reconstruction with regard to the venture company’s associates who worked around the same objective. He specifically noted that *“there are no longer any companies without the ‘big picture’ [broad] perspectives that take advantage of their individuality. Just stating [that] ‘reconstruction’ [is needed] will not make a company grow. It is important not to cater to the local community but to demonstrate one’s individuality to promote the company as something heterogeneous, and to manage it in an emotionally detached manner.”*

Regarding the existence of support for the startup (Question 4), Iwasa stated that *“there is always a desire to meet the expectations of those who have been involved up to now.”* A particularly large presence noted was that of *“colleagues who volunteered together immediately after the earthquake, and the co-founder Yohei Hashimoto, who was in Yamamoto-cho.”* Iwasa also stated:

“It was the pro-bono workers who supported the company from its foundation through to its growth period. There were those who contacted me after seeing my activities, while others were MBA [that I was attending at the time] associates. Some people became employees, and it is significant that we could share the original experience.”

In relation to Hashimoto, Iwasa stated:

“I met him when he was coordinating volunteer activities. When I saw him working positively, even though he was also affected by the disaster, I thought how happy I would be if I could work with this person.”

Additionally, Iwasa said, *“If it had not been for them [Hashimoto and other volunteers], I might not have been able to start a business. Even if I had started a business, I feel that it would not have continued this far.”* Iwasa then went on to mention his new colleagues by saying, *“There were about 250 new farming group applications in a year, and six groups were selected for the school. So far, 20 groups have graduated and 10 groups have been engaged in farming.”*

Research summary

What was consistent throughout the interview was not only the perspective of solving social problems, which is commonly seen among social entrepreneurs but also the perspective of a business manager on how to receive and attract social attention. This perspective was specifically applied as a unique agricultural venture by combining craftsmanship with IT through MIGAKI-ICHIGO. The phrase that illustrates this attitude the most is Iwasa’s statement, *“I consciously stopped using the term ‘reconstruction’ from a certain period onward.”* This remark symbolizes his intention to create a business as a creative reconstruction aimed at more than only restoration or reconstruction.

Additionally, the phrase *“not just Yamamoto-cho in Japan but Yamamoto-cho and the rest of the world”* accurately expresses the social impact that Iwasa intended. From this phrase, I can see his intention to realize creative reconstruction that goes beyond the reconstruction by drawing attention to the existence of Yamamoto-cho. This is not only due to the effects in the visible disaster-affected areas but also by making the people in non-disaster areas widely aware of MIGAKI-ICHIGO.

Alternatively, Iwasa never forgot his aspirations at the time of his startup. Through statements such as *“within me, morality [reconstruction] is in my mind”* and *“the desire to meet the expectations of those who have been involved up to now.”* I was able to gain a glimpse of Iwasa’s thinking about the region and people who have supported him in the past while also working toward growing his business and not only thinking about his business growth.

Discussion

Entrepreneurship as a Symbolic Reconstruction and its Potential as a Long-term Reconstruction Activity

From Iwasa’s interview, it is possible to observe a change in perspective from the startup period to the growth period. Among them, the most symbolic part was *“through interesting initiatives, my perspective changed to how to demonstrate influence in society.”* When he started the business, Iwasa aimed to impact society, particularly as a visible figure based on his experience as a business manager. From that point on, the implication of the term social impact began to change from a quantitative to a qualitative one.

Changes in this perspective can also be seen in the relationship between corporate growth and reconstruction. In answer to Question 3, Iwasa’s statement, *“I consciously stopped using the term ‘reconstruction’ from a certain period onward... However,*

within me, morality [reconstruction] is in my mind,” expresses the departure from entrepreneurship for the purpose of reconstruction.

According to his book, Iwasa believes that *“if restoring [Yamamoto-cho] to its former state is termed ‘restoration,’ the town will keep sinking when it is restored. That may not be meaningful.”* This shows that Iwasa aimed to move away from the framework of reconstruction and provide an active social impact.

The shipment value of raw strawberries in Yamamoto-cho (currently over 1.7 billion yen), exceeds the yield of the area before the disaster. Here, the noted series of words and actions also coincides with the realization of the concept of creative reconstruction, as highlighted by Miyahara (2006). Creative reconstruction includes not only the tangible aspect of urban reconstruction but the intangible aspect of livelihood reconstruction.

Furthermore, branding activities play a role in creating a social impact. For example, Iwasa responded to the business creation of MIGAKI-ICHIGO by saying that *“we focused on branding as well, to create a social impact. We thought that we had to create uniqueness and convey this to consumers.”* The concept of jewelry to eat and the name MIGAKI-ICHIGO, representing a brand where each strawberry costs 1,000 yen, were combined, leading to major media exposure for the company. As a result, MIGAKI-ICHIGO won the Good Design Award in 2013.

When reviewing that period, Noe Wakata, the Director of Art at Dentsu, who participated as a pro-bono professional and who was involved in branding (including the design of the MIGAKI-ICHIGO logo), stated in an interview online:

“It was necessary to establish the company not only in the context of helping the disaster-afflicted areas but as a single brand. Otherwise, I felt that it would not be possible to provide continuous support.”

Wakata further stated that the company aimed at *“giving people strawberries as if giving them a bouquet of flowers. There are people who come to buy them as gifts, and a shop clerk with white gloves offers it to them. I thought about what kind of design would be necessary to create such a worldview.”*

Additionally, the trust relationship between Iwasa and the various pro-bono workers is visible in the following quote by Wakata, *“I have never had a ‘no’ as a response from Iwasa. He trusted me in my professional work and left it completely to me. I was awed by that attitude and thought of trying harder.”*

Although there are various interpretations of branding, it is primarily perceived that a products’ value and services are converted into a value that customers can recall in their minds. The growth of MIGAKI-ICHIGO was born in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake as a symbol of reconstruction. It has not only revitalized the economies of the disaster-affected areas, but it is likely to continue to have a significant impact on their feelings toward reconstruction.

The method of generating momentum for reconstruction by establishing symbols is called symbolic reconstruction. It is said that this type of reconstruction *“is effective in creating projects symbolizing reconstruction, such as rites and festivals, in order to*

acquire a sense of reconstruction” (Yama, 2006: 161). Although the concept of symbolic reconstruction originates from rites and festivals, the creation and growth of brands from disaster-affected areas can also be considered a component of this concept.

This assertion is supported by Iwasa, who stated that “*Some fans of MIGAKI-ICHIGO are buying them from the point of view of supporting the reconstruction, and not just for their taste.*” It can be said that Iwasa achieved symbolic reconstruction through branding activities. This has had a positive impact on people’s sense of reconstruction through the company.

The impression is that the term entrepreneurship is impactful from the moment the business is started. However, if we look at activities like those undertaken by MIGAKI-ICHIGO, where people grow their businesses over a long period of time and establish their brands, we can consider these as the most long-lasting reconstruction support activities.⁽⁶⁾

Umeda (2017) noted that the flow of private companies starting reconstruction support activities is more rapid in decision-making and more flexible in budget execution than governments and NPOs. However, there is a danger that cash flow could stop due to changes in staff and/or worsening business performance. What I learned from this year is that while it is easy for private companies to start reconstruction support activities, it is difficult for them to maintain these activities. In the current climate, while some companies continue to make donations, we are currently hearing less about the continuation of reconstruction assistance activities.

Conversely, there is also a risk of business discontinuation in entrepreneurship. The probability that a venture will survive for a decade is said to be one in 10. However, in the case of GRA, Inc., despite advocating for reconstruction at the time of the startup, one can perceive a business as entailing that “*by expanding the business, reconstruction will occur later*” at the stage of business expansion. If GRA, Inc. can work to steadily expand that business, it may be possible to continue making an impact throughout long-term reconstruction. While calling it a success may be premature, it is already possible to see how social entrepreneurs are influencing society by achieving steady growth. Earthquake recovery is a steady, step-by-step process, accomplished through the activities of various reconstruction actors and their collaboration. The case used in this study is categorized as T3 company-startup type of reconstruction activities by private companies, as visible in Table 1. There is a need for more in-depth discussion on the relationship and roles played in the activities of T1 company-standalone type, T2 company-led collaborative type, and T3 company-startup type.

Existence of a Volunteer Guild Community that Supports Startups and Growth

The effectiveness of private companies’ entrepreneurial options as actors that support reconstruction became clear from this research. What is important here is the elucidation of the factors that encourage startups. The motive for starting a business is often centered on a sense of ownership. This strong sense of ownership is consistent with the reasons why I have seen managers decide to start a business in the field of venture support. Individual motives, such as “eliminating the anger that I feel” and “creating services by my own hands to overcome the handicap that I have,” are also often the driving forces behind large startups.

What I found from the interview with Iwasa was the presence of a community that supported his motivations, which helped him start his business. For Iwasa, the people he met when he returned to his hometown who worked as volunteers, the existence of pro-bono professionals, and the MBA course he completed at the Graduate School of Management, Globis University, were all major contributors to his success. The existence of a diverse group of experts who did not belong to the same organization but had the same aspirations (i.e., a volunteer guild community) was also a major contributor. This finding is exemplified by Iwasa's statement, *"If it had not been for them [Hashimoto and other volunteers], I might not have been able to start a business."*

Moreover, some of the company's employees played this role. This was not only at the time of startup but also at the stage of corporate growth. They did this by supporting Iwasa from both a mental and managerial standpoint.

It should be noted that it is not only in entrepreneurship that such organic volunteer guild communities create activities, but these guilds can also be applied within private companies as a whole. Although daily operations are conducted on a corporate and divisional basis, the cross-sectional links across the communities and divisions beyond the boundaries of the company that encompass various departments can be a major force that gets things done. For example, the basic concept of the Tohoku Rokkon Festival, an event aimed at supporting the Tohoku reconstruction (in which I was involved), originated from informal and organic connections that transcended the formal frameworks of such bodies as departments, parent companies, and subsidiaries. Indeed, intrinsic motivation formed the guild community and created the festival's activities.

Further investigations into how the activities that emerged from the Great East Japan Earthquake were generated within private companies could also be meaningful in the field of creating reconstruction support activities in the event of an emergency.

Conclusions

This study examined how private companies, as new reconstruction agents' activities, affect the reconstruction process. Among such companies, this study focused on business startups and reconstruction by presenting MIGAKI-ICHIGO as a case example. This company was chosen because MIGAKI-ICHIGO has become a prominent luxury fruit brand representing Tohoku in the decade since the Great East Japan Earthquake. As a result, the study asserted that the value of startups in reconstruction assistance is not only found when a company is initiated (as indicated by the word, startup), but that the company's further corporate growth is also of great value. Such growth highlights the possibility that these companies become long-lasting reconstruction actors when compared with the reconstruction support activities undertaken by other private companies. To gain insight into this perspective, an interview with GRA, Inc.'s representative director, Hiroki Iwasa, was conducted. I would like to express my gratitude once again for his invaluable assistance.

In the future, an investigation into consumers' perspectives is necessary in addition to the interview presented in this study, where the founder's perspective of MIGAKI-ICHIGO was the focus. Therefore, I plan to examine the impact of the company's activities on their purchases by text mining (a method of analyzing characters'

information) users' voices. Conducting this additional research may make it possible to examine both the internal and external aspects of the impact that startups may have on the reconstruction process.

Implications

This study found that the company-startup type reconstruction has the potential to have a significant impact at the time of startup as well as through corporate growth.

An implication of this study is that it elucidates the relationship between activities conducted by individual companies through T1 company-standalone types, activities involving multiple companies under T2 company-led collaborative types, and activities by startups and foundations for reconstruction through the T3 company-startup types. The potential for reconstruction arises when their strengths and weaknesses complement each other. Previous studies have reported that T1 company-standalone type reconstruction is quickly launched in the immediate aftermath of disasters due to the speed of decision-making and flexibility of funding. Additionally, some companies have carried out reconstruction activities in the immediate aftermath of earthquakes by using existing business infrastructure such as logistics and service provision networks. Conversely, as private companies' aim is to generate profit, they may not be able to allocate budget for reconstruction activities, depending on their performance. From this perspective, the continuity of reconstruction activities cannot be ensured from activities carried out by one company alone.

The T2 company-led collaborative type of reconstruction is a framework in which several companies execute reconstruction activities, which means that activities can continue even as companies change places. Therefore, it facilitates activities with a longer span than under the T1 company-standalone type reconstruction. In fact, in the case of the Tohoku Rokkonsai Festival, the activities have continued for over 10 years, albeit with different organizers, and have created new local traditions. However, deciding what kind of reconstruction activities should be carried out is complex and requires time to design a framework for smooth collaboration between companies to recruit supporting companies. Therefore, it is difficult to launch these activities immediately after an earthquake, requiring about half a year of preparation after an earthquake occurs.

If we add the findings of this study to these arrangements, it will be possible to present the relationships among T1, T2, and T3.

The T1 company-standalone type of reconstruction activities can be launched at an early stage, followed by large-scale and longer lasting activities under T2 company-led collaborative type reconstruction. Although it takes time for T3 company-startup type of activities to grow and create a social impact, they complement the sole-company type and company-led collaborative type of activities if they stagnate over time or in response to the recovery situation.

Therefore, it is possible to see how reconstruction actors change with the passage of time, as if the reconstruction actors form a linked chain. Understanding the relationship between the reconstruction activities of companies in terms of time axis and volume of

reconstruction activities will be useful for those generating actors of reconstruction in the event of future earthquakes or disasters.

Practical Implications for Asian Businesses

Asia has many earthquake-prone countries, such as Japan and the Philippines. Therefore, the possibility of facing damage caused by earthquakes or tsunamis is high. Consequently, I believe that the implications mentioned above will be useful for Asian business entities. Additionally, given the high potential for disasters in the Asian region in particular, it would be effective to expand the management support system corporate entrepreneurship type entities and startups to establish a legal framework for financial assistance.

Hiroki Iwasa, who created MIGAKI-ICHIGO, founded his own system development company before founding GRA, Inc., and was able to grow it significantly using his management skills. However, many people start an enterprise with reconstruction in mind with a single-minded determination. Therefore, despite the hope at the time of their founding, many of them are forced to go out of business without seizing opportunities for growth. Iwasa enrolled in the MBA course, a volunteer guild community that encouraged entrepreneurship and establishment of businesses.

The management of venture companies seems impressive; however, it is challenging in reality and requires difficult decision-making. Management cannot be done through sheer aspiration for reconstruction alone. Iwasa already had management skills and belonged to the volunteer guild community, which assisted the growth of his company significantly.

However, not everyone who is at the helm of a company or has founded a company possesses knowledge and experience of management like Iwasa, or colleagues that support them. Therefore, building a human resource pool of social entrepreneurs would be effective in expanding a mentor system to provide advice on long-term management. The importance of such an organization crosses national boundaries and can create a network in the Asian region. Managers like Hiroki Iwasa of GRA, Inc., who have started businesses with reconstruction support in mind and achieved growth, would be suitable choices as mentors. Developing such an organization will increase the possibility of producing companies that will create social impact through corporate growth, and assist in building an Asian region that can connect the “reconstruction activities by time difference” mentioned above. Further, starting a business with reconstruction in mind is not a model aimed at an IPO or an early-stage exit. This makes it difficult to raise funds through venture capital, the main source of funding for these companies. Therefore, expanding the legal framework for special measures such as financial support systems and tax incentives at the national level would be effective in enabling flexible fundraising in companies.

In Japan, the Cabinet has decided to focus on supporting entrepreneurs and start-ups in 2022, which has been declared the year of the startup (Prime Minister’s Office of Japan, 2022). Subsequently, a five-year plan for startup development was presented with the aim of accelerating economic growth and addressing social issues through the power of startups (Cabinet Secretariat, 2022). The plan outlined ways to embody the concept of

"new capitalism," and the FY2022 budget included a record-breaking 1 trillion yen allocation for measures related to startup support. Additionally, seven changes to the taxation system were proposed to strengthen the startup ecosystem. The plan also presented three specific measures: "building human resources and networks," "strengthening funding supply and diversifying exit strategies," and "promoting open innovation" (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2023).

However, there is currently no mention of support measures for entrepreneurship and startups focusing on reconstruction under this. In the future, I plan to conduct a survey on startup support for the purpose of reconstruction in the entire Asian region including Japan, and organize frameworks to develop proposals for each country. This will allow us to reconsider high seismicity of the region as an opportunity to generate new innovations and contribute to building a better society.

Notes

- (1) Cable News Network (2020) "French LVMH to produce hand sanitizer gel and distribute it to health officials free of charge," <https://www.cnn.co.jp/business/35150855.html> (visited: September 23, 2020).
- (2) "The government urgently requests Sharp for Mask Production, 150,000 masks per day in the next month," Nihon Keizai Shimbun, morning edition, dated February 29, 2020, p. 1.
- (3) According to Nishida (2014), social entrepreneurs refers to entrepreneurs who create "mechanisms" for solving social problems structurally.
- (4) From TV Tokyo affiliate's "Dawn of Gaia" series that aired on March 7, 2017, "The road to reconstruction, Chapter 20: The Young Leaders Standing Up, 'Increasing the number of strawberry farmers using the IT agricultural method!'"
- (5) GRA, Inc., support for new farming, <http://gra-inc.jp/shinki-shunou/>
- (6) Among the reconstruction support activities carried out by private enterprises systematized in this study, not many have continued their activities to this day.

References

- Aldrich, D. P., (2015), *Building resilience: Social capital in post-disaster recovery*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Cabinet Office Japan, Disaster Management in Japan, (2022), "Special Feature: The Great East Japan Earthquake", date accessed: December, 20, 2022, https://www.bousai.go.jp/kohou/kouhoubousai/h23/63/special_01.html.
- Cabinet Secretariat. (2022). Draft 5-year Plan for Startup Development. Retrieved April 19, 2023, from https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/atarashii_sihonsyugi/bunkakai/suikusei_dai3/siryoku1.pdf.
- Hayashi, H. eds., (2001) "Livelihood recovery from the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake 2001—panel survey results report", Research Center for Disaster Reduction Systems, Disaster Prevention Research Institute, Kyoto University.
- Iwasa, H., (2014), *1% Opportunity Lies in 99% of Despair*, Diamond-sha, Tokyo.
- Keidanren, N., (2012), "2011 survey of social contribution activities", date accessed: July, 29, 2022, <https://www.keidanren.or.jp/policy/2012/070.html>
- Kimura, R., Hayashi, H., Tachiki, S., and Tamura, K., (2004), "The life reconstruction process seen from the subjective time assessment viewpoint of disaster victims: building a reconstruction calendar", *Journal of Social Safety Science*, vol. 6, pp. 241–250.

- Matsui, Y., (2012), “Disaster psychology of earthquake and support”, *Fukumura Shuppan*, pp. 65–67.
- Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. (2023). Japanese government initiatives to foster startups. Retrieved April 19, 2023, from https://www.meti.go.jp/policy/newbusiness/medi_startup-policy.pdf.
- Miyahara, K., (2006), “What is reconstruction? Regeneration-type disaster recovery and mature society”, *Advanced Social Research*, vol. 5, pp. 5–40.
- Miyamoto, T., (2008), “Visualizing the sense of reconstruction”, *Reconstruction Design Research*, vol. 7, pp. 6–7.
- Murosaki, M., (2009), “Concerning the state of reconstruction after disaster”, *Studies in Disaster Recovery and Revitalization*, vol. 1, pp. 1–7.
- Nishida, R., (2014), “The emergence of social entrepreneurs in Japan and their entrepreneurial process—institutional basis, community function, and cooperation with policies”, Keio University Doctoral Thesis.
- Prime Minister’s Office of Japan, (2022), “①Growth Strategy (1) Science, Technology, and Innovation Startup Ecosystem”, date accessed: December, 20, 2022, https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/headline/seisaku_kishida/seichousenryaku.html
- Takaura, Y., (2013), “CSR of post-3.11 Japanese companies: Analysis of social contribution activities of 255 companies for the Great East Japan Earthquake”, *Journal of Japan Society for Business Ethics Study*, vol. 20, pp. 204–205.
- “Textbook on Reconstruction (Fukko no kyokasho)” <https://oss.sus.u-toyama.ac.jp/fukko/>
- Umeda, S., (2016), “A study on the importance of copywriting in local branding—focusing on three event cases”, *Bulletin of Nikkei Advertising Research Institute*, vol. 286, pp. 41–48.
- Umeda, S., (2017), “Social significance of entrepreneurial communications at the time of disaster recovery—focusing on the sense of reconstruction given by the Tohoku Rokkon Festival”, *Bulletin of Nikkei Advertising Research Institute*, vol. 296, pp. 22–29.
- Yaguchi, Y., (2014), “Social and CSR of the earthquake and corporations: Corporate activities and CSR in the Great East Japan Earthquake”, *Sosei-sha*.
- Yama, Y., (2006), “What is symbolic recovery”, *Advanced Social Research*, vol. 5, pp. 153–176, Kansai Gakuin University.



All papers are published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0). For more details, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.