

“OUR WAYS”

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It is my great honor to be invited to talk about the history of AdAsia, and also to talk about my mentor, the late Mr. Hideo Yoshida who organized the first Asian Advertising Conference, the predecessor of today's AdAsia, 57 years ago.

When I talk about these subjects, I must begin with Japan at 12 o'clock, noon, August 15th, 1945. For the very first time in the legendary Japanese history of 2605 years, the Emperor addressed to his people, through public radio broadcasting, his decision to have his government accept the so-called Potsdam Declaration which demanded Japan's unconditional surrender to the Allies.

Although some people misunderstood the Emperor's classical Japanese as an order to “keep fighting”, most of the Japanese knew Japan was “not” winning the war, because many of them were starving in the debris of their burned down houses. They were depressed because of the defeat, but, at the same time, they were relieved from the tension and the pain of many years. However, it did not occur to them that millions of Asian people were living the same, or harder lives because of Imperial Japan's aggression of many years.

At that historic moment, the same thing was happening in the office of Dentsu, Tokyo, which survived the war destruction. Everyone felt lost. They did not know what would happen next, or, what they should do. Then, Hideo Yoshida reportedly said, “Cheer up, you guys. Our time has come.” He believed that advertising is a peace industry and it can prosper only in peacetime. (SLIDE “1” Mr. Yoshida)

Two years later, Yoshida was elected Dentsu president at age 43. Before the war,

he, together with his young colleagues, studied modern advertising business through American publications, but now he wanted to learn “directly” from the American practitioners, not only advertising but also marketing, which was an entirely new concept in Japan.

On the domestic side, he was “the” prime mover of the introduction of commercial broadcasting to Japan. He established, or helped to establish, some advertising-related associations, and also academic programs designed for students. There was no such phrase like “Corporate Social Responsibility” in those days, but I believe this is exactly what Yoshida already had in mind, and “practiced” ..

On the international side, in order to communicate with American advertising people, he wanted to establish a Chapter of the IAA (International Advertising Association), but the IAA did not issue its charter to any country other than the U.S.A., at that time. Therefore, Yoshida established JIAA, (Japan International Advertising Association) in 1957.

The IAA issued its charter to Japan in 1961. Yoshida was honored with the IAA Award for his “distinguished services in the field of international advertising and marketing” He went to New York to personally receive it.

In the meantime, Yoshida , not waiting for the IAA charter, organized the first Asian Advertising Conference in 1958, in Tokyo, with the JIAA as its secretariat. Naturally, the organizing committee was based in Dentsu, and some young staffers were temporarily assigned to assist it. I was one of them, although I had nothing to do with the international side of Dentsu business at that time. (SLIDE “2” 1st Conference)

This was my initiation to the international advertising world. I learned a lot. There were 8 overseas delegates, representing 5 countries, namely, Egypt (United Arab Republic), Hong Kong, India, Taiwan and Thailand, in the alphabetical order.

Two years later, in 1960, it was held again in Tokyo, in a larger scale with 38 overseas delegates. I was again assigned to assist it. The name of the gathering was now changed to the Asian Advertising “Congress” . Indeed, “congress” sounds bigger than “conference” .

Right after the second Asian Advertising Congress, I was transferred to Dentsu, New York, and Los Angeles later, and my association with the Asian Advertising Congress was put on hold until 1982 when I participated in the one held in New Delhi.

In the meantime, while I was in New York, the 3rd Congress was held in Manila in October, 1962. Mr. Yoshida was seriously ill and not able to personally attend it. Instead, he sent a message in which he said words to the effect that he could not help but feel excited when he envisioned that “some day in the future, Asia and Africa would become power houses in the world economy” .

“This” he said when Japan herself was still nearly a developing country, although she was fairly well recovered from her war damages, mostly at great cost to the victims of the 3-year war which devastated her neighboring country, just across a narrow strait.

Mr. Yoshida passed away three months after he sent his message to the Manila congress, at the young age of 59. It was a weekend, and my boss in New York called me at my apartment to convey to me the sad news.

Because of my absence for a while, I did not know that the late Mr. Antonio de Joya volunteered to set up AFAA, the Asian Federation of Advertising Associations, and its permanent secretariat in Manila, in 1978. (SLIDE “3” Mr. A, de Joya)

During the Seoul congress of 1984, I happened to know from a Hong Kong journalist that Japan was not a member of AFAA, and also that AFAA thought Dentsu was a Corporate Member, but Dentsu thought it otherwise. Upon my return to Tokyo, I had all the related documents in the Dentsu storage dug up, and found that there was a misunderstanding between AFAA and Dentsu, but, Dentsu’ s negligence was more to blame.

I explained my findings to the late Mr. Gohei Kogure, then Dentsu president, and recommended that the Japan Advertising Federation officially join AFAA as a “Country Member” . At the same time, Dentsu became a Corporate Member.

I previously had a “very difficult” problem over a denomination issue at another

international “non-governmental” organization, with regard to Taiwan’ s wish to come back to that organization, of which final solution took me a few years and a frequent commutation between Tokyo and Taipei. Therefore, when Taiwan wanted to come back to AFAA, I wanted this Federation to be free from the same sovereignty problem, and recommended that “Country Member” be re-worded to “Regular Member” . My success in solving those denomination issues is attributed to the patience and the wisdom of the leaders of the Taiwan advertising community.

The AFAA secretariat was re-located to Kuala Lumpur in 1990, under the auspices of the late Dato’ Jaffar Mhmd Ali. (SLIDE “4” Dato’ Jaffar)

Now, back to Hideo Yoshida, his interest, or his life work, was not only to make Dentsu a successful agency but also to raise the public recognition of an advertising agency as a legitimate and respectable business. Before his age, in other words, before World War II, advertising agencies in Japan were considered by the general public, more or less, as mere media space brokers. Thanks to Mr. Yoshida’ s energetic efforts, which obviously shortened his life, advertising agencies acquired a kind of regular citizenship in the Japanese business community by the time he hired me for Dentsu in 1955.

I have a funny memory. During the last oral test for my graduation from university, a professor suddenly asked me who wrote “She Stoops to Conquer” . I was a lazy student and not able to immediately recall the author’ s name. The professor, then, apprehensively asked me if I was job hunting. I said, “Dentsu has decided to hire me, sir.” He now happily said, “That’ s good.” and, I passed the examination, only by mentioning the name of Dentsu, instead of the name of Oliver Goldsmith. I was certainly not born for the ivory tower.

I owe my life to Hideo Yoshida. Thanks to him, I became an advertising man, and enjoyed my job for 47 years.

At one of the AdAsia congresses, held in the north-eastern part of Asia, several elder members were honored with a citation. As we were ushered onto the stage, I heard the melody of “My Way” . It had no lyrics, but I knew it starts with “And now, the end is near, and so I face the final curtain.” I wondered if the organizing committee was sending us up to heaven through an invisible, final curtain.

Paul Anka wrote, and Frank Sinatra, and many other artists sang this song. "Regrets, I've had a few, but then again, too few to mention" . Of course, when you are in business, you cannot help having a difficult time. I had it "very often" But, after all, I enjoyed my profession. I loved the chemistry of the advertising community.

However, I seem to have a new problem with myself. It is what is called "digitization" . It seems that life is becoming digitized in many ways. I am "100%" illiterate when it comes to "digitization" but, my poor understanding is that every direction is decided by either "this way" or "that way" , no in-between, again, if my understanding of the word " digitization" is correct.

To me, a life is not "yes or no." It is not "black or white," There must be a gradation in between. If I say this, you may call it a Japanese ambiguity, but I want to call it a universal wisdom.

On the other hand, I understand that the development of digital communications has made it easier to reach the individual person, rather than people as a block of mass, and I think this is meaningful. I understand that such marketing jargons like "target" or "strategy" originate from the military. What counts in the military is numbers, but not the quality of life of each individual human-being.

I imagine that many of you, ladies and gentlemen, are too young to know the American television serial, "The Naked City" . It is a series of police dramas, and each of them focuses on one ordinary citizen of New York. What fascinated me was its ending line saying, "There are 8 million stories in the Naked City. This has been one of them."

There are 7 billion people in this world. Each and every one of them has his, or her, own irreplaceable life to live, with Happiness, Sadness, Joy, Pain, everything. If the politicians of the world thought about it, they might not be able go to go to war so easily. Therefore, digitization of communications may contribute to world peace.

Ladies and gentlemen, if I gave you an impression that I came here to preach peace, I apologize. That was not my intention. But, I certainly share Hideo Yoshida' s thought that advertising is a peace industry.

Back to my subject of today, if some people think that participation in such a gathering like this AdAsia is not worth their time and money, and, if I am allowed to honestly say, they are wrong. Here, we can learn from each other, learn how similar we are, and how different we are. This is my way. What is your way? We can make new friends, and refresh our old friendships.

I sincerely hope that the younger generation of this business finds it as “meaningful” and “enjoyable” as I did, and mixes with their friends from other countries as much as possible. In the long run, it will certainly help not only their career development but also their business itself. I know this, because I learned it through experience.

Ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much. Have a nice day.

(Music: “MY WAY”)