

Interview No.18

"WIPO-Green" effective for environmental technology transfer has started up (I)

Japanese companies cannot survive in this situation.

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The concept and structure advocated by the Japan Intellectual Property Association as a framework of environmental technology transfer has started up concretely as "WIPO-Green" run by WIPO which is one of the UN International Agencies. It is a structure to package technology, not only as patents but also as know-how so that developing countries can easily introduce and arrange the technology. They can also arrange for a company holding technology, and another company desiring to introduce it, to meet. Management of overseas large enterprises who quickly noticed great merits, in which the global and neutral organization WIPO is involved, are starting to have an interest in this structure and trying to use it positively. Meanwhile, the Japanese enterprises which are originators of this suggestion are behind in the starting dash due to insufficient explanation from their intellectual property division to management. Those involved in launching "WIPO-Green" discussed whether or not Japanese enterprises, taking advantage of environmental technology, can survive an international competition in this situation.

Attendees:

Mr. Takashi Sawai, Foundation Director, Foundation of Institute for Intellectual Property Strategy (Deputy President, Miyoshi & Miyoshi);

Mr. Yuichiro Kawamura, Managing Director, Japan Intellectual Property Association (Chief, Intellectual Property Division, Honda Motor Co., Ltd.);

Mr. Naoto Kuji, Advisor, Intellectual Property Division, Honda Motor Co., Ltd.

Chair:

Mr. Hiroshi Asakura, Editor-in-chief, Nikkei BP Chizai Awareness, TechnoAssociates, Inc.

What is "WIPO-Green"?

Mr. Asakura: In brief, what is "WIPO-Green"?

Mr. Kawamura: "WIPO-Green" is a website to arrange a meeting between a party which holds technology recorded on a database and a party which is going to introduce the technology, and the site is run by WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization), one of

the UN Agencies. Basically, it is free of cost, and once they are introduced, the rest is up to both parties. Only when a deal is established, the parties are to report to the WIPO bureau. Another feature is that needs information of the party introducing the technology is also put on the database. As for the needs information, we are working through such organizations as UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organization) on developing countries for cooperation.

Mr. Asakura: What else is in the database?

Mr. Kawamura: Contents which are too complicated are not read, so they are made as simple as possible like titles of technologies and patent numbers.

Framework of international technology transfer triggered by Japan

Mr. Kuji: A trigger was that, in 2007, when I was an instructor at a "Developing Countries Training Seminar" held in Vietnam by WIPO, I heard local people say, "We want environmental technology, but don't know where to go and what to do." In developing countries, people wish to use Japanese environmental technology, while Japanese companies are poor in overseas deployment power and lack a skill necessary to present the environmental technology, even though they have the technology. I thought something to satisfy both parties' needs would help the globalization of Japanese companies. I made a written proposal, summarizing the concept, and talked to a WIPO director I had worked with. He showed a great interest in my idea, which later led to the cooperation from WIPO.

Mr. Asakura: It's good that WIPO was interested in the proposal. How has it developed in Japan?

Mr. Kuji: Since WIPO is a UN agency, a backup from the industrial circle is requisite to work out this proposal. As this proposal was triggered by Japan, I looked for a parent organization to propel it in the Japanese industrial circle. As the technological transfer is composed as a business, centering on industrial property, I called to the Japan Intellectual Property Association, who have about 1000 Japanese companies as members. Specialists in the field of intellectual property were dominated by a conventional idea that they only need to file patent applications and rarely had an idea to sell technology globally. I had some expectation that, by promoting the present concept "to sell technology globally as a package including know-how, facilities, human services," our way of doing business in the field of intellectual

property would advance from a defensive stance of only applications to an aggressive stance of their utilization.

Mr. Asakura: What was the reaction of the Intellectual Property Association to the concept?

Mr. Kuji: Some agreed, but those in the intellectual property divisions of companies engaged only in patent applications looked confused. As judgment elements for business are required, we thought the management's understanding was important and so went to present this topic also to the Japan Economic Federation (Keidanren).

Mr. Kawamura: In Keidanren, we presented the concept, details of the contents, and international status of progress several times. Quite a number of companies who were for the scheme in general had rather a negative point of view on details. Particularly, there was a tendency for the audience to overreact to our presentation of the know-how. It is because some people entertain anxiety that availing themselves of the scheme may lead to opening their technology and know-how despite their company's intention.

Mr. Sawai: As this scheme premises both parties' business negotiations, there is nothing to fear about any spill of know-how. Pondering why such anxiety is caused, I feel it is because technology transfer involves many factors relating to a technical development division and a business division, and intellectual property division people are not accustomed to take the initiative to go further and build consensus throughout the company.

Mr. Kawamura: As for the protection of know-how, we can keep it secret or restrict technologies to be presented, in some cases. It can be freely determined by companies which provide those technologies. In that sense, a company loses nothing, and I would like people to view it as an increase in channel to broaden their own company's technology. In an actual technology transfer, in response to the needs of the introducing party, a specialist in the field needs to select a technology or customize it, and the situation is such that business does not advance only by patents. Rather, the technology would be more easily and effectively utilized by being packaged together with the associated know-how.

Three merits that overseas major companies jumped at

Mr. Asakura: Does it mean that Japanese companies have become conservative without realizing and lack positivity in globalizing?

Mr. Kawamura: In the reaction to the present concept, there is a striking difference between Japanese companies and foreign companies. Japanese companies take a defensive stance, while foreign companies show an aggressive stance in utilizing merits, if any.

Mr. Asakura: What merits does "WIPO-Green" have?

Mr. Sawai: Firstly it leads to an international image improvement of a company brand in the field of environment. As it is operated on the website of technology transfer for environmental technology and, moreover, by the WIPO which is a worldwide neutral agency, I suppose posting a technology and an achievement of the technology transfer will bring about a tremendous advertising effect.

Mr. Kawamura: As a second merit, it is effective in expanding a business channel in exporting infrastructure to developing countries. For example, in many cases, the strength of brands of world-famous companies hardly works in developing countries, and it seems to be difficult for the companies to get into an infrastructure-related big project associated with the local government. Why did an overseas big company jump at this project? It is because they thought it advantageous for their business, when getting into the developing-country's government, to participate in the structure which contributes to the global environment through WIPO, which is a worldwide neutral organization. Even in that overseas company, the person in charge of the intellectual property was of negative opinion at first, but from a certain point in time; he changed his attitude abruptly to a positive mode. I think it is because the decision of the management takes priority over the determination of the intellectual property person. In that sense, I feel there is a strong aggressive stance backed by a good viewpoint and a prompt decision to make use of the structure of the international technology transfer to the developing country's business operation.

Mr. Asakura: However, won't it become a drawback to show the know-how to developing countries?

Mr. Kawamura: For the technology utilized, it is worth presenting the know-how positively. As already mentioned, we only need to incorporate the know-how and keep it secret; it can be kept in a person's mind. There is not a lot of know-how that can be imitated with just a glance.

Mr. Kuji: From a different viewpoint, it costs about ¥10-million to maintain one patent for 20 years in Japan, the U. S., and Europe. So, we cannot afford to file a patent application in

developing countries, too. If we utilize the present platform, it becomes possible for us to provide a technology to developing countries where we have filed no patent and technology application, and receive the reward.

Mr. Sawai: There are various types of know-how, and it is important to draw a line to indicate the limit of presenting that know-how. It may be said that companies which can receive merit using this platform are excellent in know-how management.

Mr. Asakura: Are there any other merits than the two previously given?

Mr. Kawamura: I suppose there are a lot of environmental technologies which are owned by Japanese minor enterprises and universities but do not appear on the surface. If we transmit such information through the WIPO's worldwide network, we will have a greater possibility to newly raise funds or to use the framework for international financial support like government funds or development bank funds such as ODA (Official Development Assistance).

Mr. Sawai: Well, it can be said the third merit is to be able to expect utilization of international funds in the spread of the environmental technology.



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(To be continued to Interview No.19)