

# Junichiro Katayama

An audience with an Icon

Interview by Stephen L. Doggett



**B**ack in 2016, my two great colleagues, Prof. Dini Miller (USA) and Prof. Chow-Yang Lee (then Malaysia) and I, decided to meet up in order to finalize the book, *Advances in the Biology and Management of Modern Bed Bugs*, which we had been working on together. Mr Junichiro Katayama kindly provided us with space in his office in Japan to undertake the work. Juni (as he likes to be known) proved to be an extraordinary and most generous host; he assisted us in our endeavours, acted as a tourist guide while in Kyoto, and indulged us in some of the most amazing culinary experiences I have ever had in my life. We simply cannot thank him enough!

Yet there is so much more to Juni who is, without a question, one of the most socially responsible



Junichiro finishing a 42km marathon run

industry leaders in the country, but more on this later. He is also a self-obsessed marathon runner. The Cambridge-educated Junichiro Katayama is the President of Semco Co. Ltd., which is the largest supplier of pest management products in Japan. He is also a former President of FAOPMA, serving the organization over 2007-2009. I am very honoured to interview Mr Junichiro Katayama as the Icon for this issue of the FAOPMA Magazine.

## HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN IN THE PEST CONTROL INDUSTRY?

Since 1995 when I came back from the UK to Japan and joined Semco, thus 26 years. How time flies!

## WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR MAIN POSITIONS DURING THIS TIME?

I became the President of Semco in 2000. I was a member of the Board of Directors of the Japan Pest Control Association, responsible for international affairs from 2004 to 2013.

I also was one of the Board Members of FAOPMA from 2001 – 2019 and the President of FAOPMA from 2007 – 2009 (I believe that I had served the Federation for the longest period among its board members' history.)

## PLEASE TELL THE READERS HOW YOU CAME INTO THE BUSINESS OF PEST CONTROL:

It was by chance. I inherited my family business from my mother, who managed the company for ten years after the sudden death of my father who founded Semco, which happened to be in the pest control industry. I had worked for a commercial bank for some years, followed by postgraduate studies in Cambridge UK, and so it was time for a change! Any sector would do, so I did not mind following in the family business, which at the time was a modest equipment manufacturer.

**PRIOR TO WORKING IN THE PEST CONTROL INDUSTRY, YOU WERE EMPLOYED BY THE INDUSTRIAL BANK OF JAPAN AND HOLD A LEGAL AND ECONOMIC DEGREE. HOW DID THE EXPERIENCE IN THE BANK AND YOUR DEGREES HELP IN YOUR CURRENT ROLE?**

The variety of career experiences gave me a balanced view of my life. I learned substantially how a company should be managed based on



NICCO, the charity that Junichiro supports, helps fund child care programs in Kenya.

figures/data when I was working in a bank as a corporate financial officer. It further broadened my mind when I was at Cambridge, where elite students from all over the world gathered to study more advanced economics. Both experiences



Junichiro speaking at Pest Summit 2016 in Singapore.



Tohoku in northern Japan was severely damaged in the 2011 earthquake/tsunami. Junichiro's company Semco led the program for fly control.

enable me to look at the pest management industry more objectively and sometimes with a more critical viewpoint.

**DO YOU THINK IT IS USEFUL FOR PEOPLE TO HAVE OUTSIDE EXPERIENCE BEFORE ENTERING THE PEST MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY?**

Absolutely! Life is full of joy when you have more experience. Diverse and rich backgrounds provide us a better understanding of our society.

**YOUR COMPANY, SEMCO IS RENOWNED FOR ITS LEAN WORKFORCE, YET BEING THE LARGEST SUPPLIER OF PEST MANAGEMENT PRODUCTS IN JAPAN. YOUR COMPANY ALSO PRODUCES PROPRIETARY AND UNIQUE PRODUCTS FOR THE JAPANESE PEST**

**MANAGEMENT MARKET. I AM SURE A LOT OF BUSINESS OWNERS WOULD LIKE TO LEARN THE SECRET OF YOUR SUCCESS. CAN YOU SHARE THIS WITH OUR READERS?**

Yes, this is our secret (but open to all my friends). There are several distinctive and unique characteristics of my company. One: There is no hierarchy (except myself as the President). We do not have managers or executives. We have only 50 staff, a very lean organization for the size of our sales and profits. Every staff has the same access to the company and customer information. We share reports via the company database every day or sometimes even every hour. My most important role is to read all the reports and provide feedback to my staff to enhance communication. Two: We do not have personnel appraisal and no incentives. This is

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important. Because we work as ONE team, we do not evaluate individual contribution. We only care for the results as a team and thus we are very outward-oriented. The annual salary is dependent on seniority. As long as the base salary is comparable to that of the labor market standard, all staff can expect a very stable life. Our staff tend to have many children (3 or 4) and buy a house with a long-term loan. Three: a no “work-life balance”. We value the “work and life” concept, but both are inseparable. We grow as a person through our work experience. We think about personal life issues when working, and we think about work even on the weekends. Both should not contradict each other. What we do as a good father or mother, or as a friend, we also do it at work. There is an equal treatment and no biases towards one or the other.

**WHAT WERE THE BIGGEST CHANGES IN THE INDUSTRY THAT YOU OBSERVED DURING THIS TIME?**

Pest management professionals have become more “professional.” In the past, they looked like “manual workers,” but now “consultants” are wearing suits and ties. There are more university graduates too in our industry.

**WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE SPECIAL CHALLENGES THAT THE JAPANESE PEST MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY HAS FACED?**

Low-profit margin, difficulty in recruiting new good employees, and low growth rate. All three are interconnected and cause a vicious circle.

**WHAT IS YOUR MOST PROUD ACHIEVEMENT**



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## **DURING YOUR TIME IN THE INDUSTRY?**

There are several proud achievements that I have had. First, my company has been growing consecutively for 20 years. I ran a full marathon 20 times with my staff during these ten years. Next, please see below.

**I ALLUDED TO YOUR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE INTRODUCTION. READERS MAY NOT KNOW THIS, BUT DURING THE GREAT JAPAN EAST EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI IN 2011 (WHICH WAS REGARDED AS THE MOST EXPENSIVE NATURAL DISASTER IN THE WORLD), YOU AND THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION, NICCO, THAT YOU REPRESENT, HAD LED A LARGE PROGRAM MANAGING FLIES ALONG A 400 KM COASTAL STRIP TO AVERT A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS IN THE DISASTER ZONE. CAN YOU PLEASE EXPAND ON THIS?**

When spring had come in 2011, the flies started to appear from the massive amount of trash caused by the tsunami. Tohoku (northeast) region of Japan is famous for its rich sources of fish, and lots of seafood warehouses were damaged and washed away by the tsunami. Our company staff carried out an extensive inspection along the affected areas, planned and established an area-wide fly management program. NICCO, which was the non-governmental organization I represented, was funded \$2.4 million USD from the government. The Japan Pest Control Association deployed as many as 6,000 technicians for six months. The whole affected area was approximately 400 km of sea line, so coordinating with each local municipality was crucial. The success of this historical project had prevented the residents from contracting communicable diseases, especially those related

to gastroenteritis, which the flies potentially could transmit. NICCO and JPCA were awarded by the Environmental Protection Ministry and the Health Ministry for their significant contribution.

### **WHAT OTHER PROJECTS ARE UNDER YOUR LEADERSHIP THAT NICCO HAS UNDERTAKEN?**

There were a number of them. The Post-Flood Mosquito control and sanitation project in Thailand in 2012, the Post-flood disinfection project in western Japan in 2018, and the Organic Olive oil project in Jordan since 2008. We also have projects in Kenya (Child Care program), in Jordan (Syria refugee aid), and India (organic farming project). Starting this year, there will be a natural pyrethrin project in Kenya. I spend 20% of my time on NICCO activity as a Vice President and 10% on the water polo activity where I am a local Club President.

### **NOW TO A MORE RECENT EVENT, HOW HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AFFECTED THE PEST MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY IN JAPAN?**

Actually, not too much. In major cities like Tokyo and Osaka, the decline of pest control demand might be observed, but in most local towns, they were not distinct. COVID-19 has not hit Japan too hard. We managed to control it below a certain threshold level, so our day-to-day activity is still business as usual.

### **AS NOTED ABOVE, YOU ARE A PAST PRESIDENT OF FAOPMA AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD VARIOUS EXECUTIVE ROLES WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION OVER THE YEARS. PLEASE TELL THE READERS ABOUT SOME OF THE SUCCESSES YOU HAD AT THE HELM OF FAOPMA.**

My most significant contribution to FAOPMA was to initiate the integration of FAOPMA and



Junichiro is the most gracious host and is here sharing a saké with Prof. Chow-Yang Lee in a traditional Japanese restaurant in 2016.



NICCO supporting programs in the Philippines.

Pest Summit. It was becoming increasingly challenging to hold two large conventions in Asia as they competed for the same resources regarding sponsorships and participants. I visited Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, and other places since 2007 to persuade and lobby the industry leaders on the need for integration. Many leaders became very cooperative in the end, and the two

organizations were finally integrated in 2017. It took nearly ten years to achieve, but it was well worth doing.

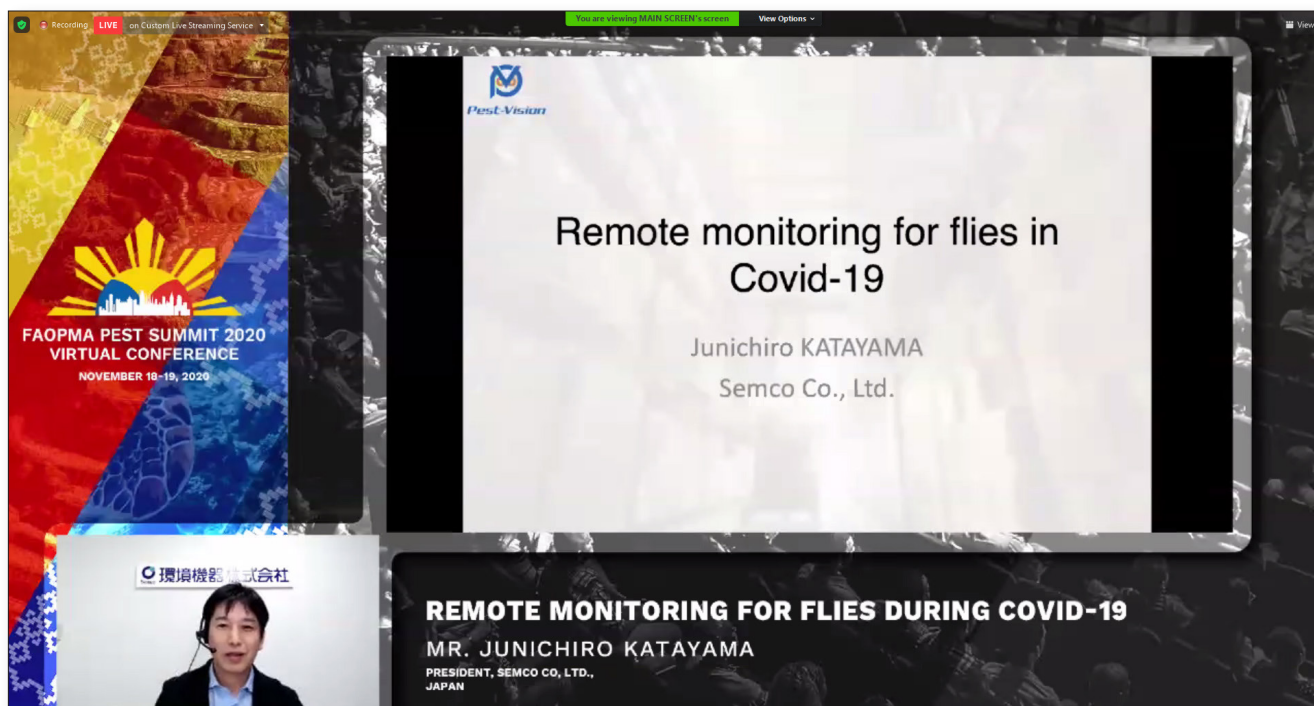
**DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR FUTURE FAOPMA PRESIDENTS?**

The most important thing is to realize that our industry is still immature and has vast room for improvement. Each Association should lobby their respective government on the need for a licensing program for pest management professionals in their country. This could eventually lead the pest management industry towards a respectable and high value-added industry. FAOPMA shall support all its member countries to do that, and most importantly, future FAOPMA Presidents shall represent our voice to the people and governments.

**WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES THE JAPANESE AND GLOBAL PEST CONTROL INDUSTRY WILL FACE IN THE FUTURE?**



Junichiro Katayama hosting colleagues at Semco headquarters, 2016. Included in the picture are two past FAOPMA Magazine ICONS; Dr Hirao on the far right and Prof. Lee back left.



Junichiro Katayama speaking at FAOPMA-Pest Summit 2020 Virtual Conference. Juni's topic was "Remote Monitoring for Flies"

Acquiring young talent will be increasingly challenging if we do not upgrade. Other industries such as IT or Finance can attract talented young people, but not our industry. Sad to say, but it is true. Our industry should be more profitable and should offer a better remuneration package to employees. Science should support our industry. More students should choose to specialize in entomology. AI technology and IoT should be introduced to improve productivity. Pest management professionals should be more respected in society.

**NOW THAT JAPAN IS IN THE PUBLIC EYE WITH THE UPCOMING OLYMPIC GAMES, WHAT PRESSURES HAS THERE BEEN ON THE PEST MANAGEMENT INDUSTRY WITH THE GAMES?**

The Tokyo Olympic Games should not accelerate COVID-19 cases in Japan. The Japan Olympic Committee makes very detailed operation manuals to host athletes from all over the world. Our industry plays a vital role in carrying out disinfection services and making sure Japan is a very clean and safe country.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK THAT JAPAN CAN TEACH THE REST OF THE WORLD ABOUT PEST CONTROL?**

Probably the importance of inspection and monitoring in pest management. In my opinion, the Japanese pest management industry likely collects and maintains the most extensive and robust monitoring data and utilizes them heavily in decision-making for pest treatment.

**WHERE DO YOU SEE THE PEST CONTROL INDUSTRY IN 30 YEARS?**

Remote monitoring will become standard practice, and a robot will primarily carry out the service itself. Our job is to design a pest management plan, monitor pest problems' status, and improve the plan. It will likely become a more data-driven automation process.

*Thank you Juni for your amazing insights on the pest management industry Juni. Also, I must congratulate you, NICCO, and your team, on all the extraordinary philanthropic work that you have undertaken over the years. The entire industry is very proud of your achievements. ■*