

## community

## Leading businesswoman attempts to bridge gender gap

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Karryn Miller  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In 2003, when Mitsuru Claire Chino became one of The World Economic Forum "100 global leaders for tomorrow," she had to consider what impact she could make. "I wanted to help women advance in the world—especially within corporate Japan," she recalls thinking at the time. And so it was, Chino—living in a society that would still only rank 91 out of 128 four years later in the 2007 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report—began a quest to bridge Japan's sex divide.

The seed for Chino's vision was planted long before she walked on stage at the World Economic Forum (WEF). The ambitious 42-year-old's commitment to diversity is a culmination of an international upbringing teamed with having powerful women as role models.

Born in the Netherlands, Chino spent her formative years in London, Los Angeles and Tokyo, and was exposed to a number of different cultures from an early age. "I don't think I would have realized the situation Japan faces, or the situation Japanese corporations face had I stayed in Japan and not spent time outside of it," she explains. "I think I'm more self-aware and quite sensitive about my surroundings."

Chino's mother can also be partly credited for her daughter's determination to empower women. Her mother, Chino explains, "always had this ambition to follow what she was interested in regardless of factors that may stop others, like age or position." Chino's mother completed graduate school at the University of California, Irvine at the age of 55 in 1991, the same year the daughter graduated from New York's Cornell University.

Chino spent the early years of her career at the San Francisco-based law firm Graham & James, and became a partner in 1998 before returning to Japan in 2000. Her international move was prompted by a job offer at the Tokyo headquarters of Itochu, a major trading company.

"Itochu's business model really appealed to me. Sitting in the legal department you never really know what sort of legal questions you'll be facing on any given day as it could come from any of the seven business departments," says Chino, who works as corporate counsel.



xxxxx: Mitsuru Claire Chino poses at the Itochu headquarters in Tokyo in December. KARRYN MILLER

The firm's then-president and current chairman, Uichiro Niwa, also had an impact on her decision. "Chairman Niwa is a very charismatic leader and back in 1999/2000 he made some courageous decisions that acted as a turning point for Itochu. Even though I was living in San Francisco at the time, I had heard of his charisma and leadership. I wanted to be with a company with a good leader."

It was Niwa that helped Chino instigate a program to increase the number of women in the workforce at the Japanese company, following her WEF experience. The two set up a taskforce to research the

corporation's gender gap and the following year a "Diversity Initiative" was put in place.

"In 2003, women made up 2.2 percent of the business units (non-administrative positions). Our goal was 5 percent and we achieved that in 2008," explains Chino. "Although I didn't do it on my own, I'm proud of the fact I've made a dent in Itochu's diversity effort."

"Our focus was women initially, but we are also planning ways to increase the number of non-Japanese working for the company," adds Chino. Worldwide Itochu has about 40,000 employees, 4,000 of which

are based at the predominately Japanese Tokyo head office.

Chino's relentless drive has also led her to pursue other endeavors—ranging from semi-professional singing to fighting obesity and hunger simultaneously.

In June 2006, Chino took part in the WEF Young Global Leaders Summit in Vancouver. After brainstorming with Nagoya politician Motohisa Furukawa, Japan health policy expert James Kondo and chief strategy officer of Uniqlo Nobuo Domae at the four-day event, the group came up with an idea that would help reduce the calorie consumption many Japanese were concerned about, while helping to feed the world's poor. The same year the group launched Table for Two, an NPO that provides Japanese company employees healthy, well-balanced lunch sets, with ¥20 of the price used to support school meal programs in developing countries.

"I was attracted to the concept as I feel it's unique. It addresses two issues at once: providing options for people worried about their weight and balancing nutrition; and getting Japanese companies to get involved in corporate social responsibility."

Once again, Itochu provided the prime location for another of Chino's endeavors and, in spring 2007 Table for Two was piloted there. The project has since grown and is now part of the cafeteria offerings of 60 Japanese and multinational companies.

As Chino begins to explain her latest venture, I interrupt to ask just how such a calm, composed woman fits so much into her schedule. "My law firm experience helps. We had to fill out time sheets recording what we were doing for every six minutes of our time. It made me very time sensitive." As an afterthought Chino adds, "It also helps to have an interest outside of your job."

What comes next is not completely surprising. "I sing classical music semi-professionally in my spare time," says Chino. The multitasking woman's latest performance was at the Sumida Triphony Hall in November 2008.

That month Chino also took part in the Asia 21 Young Leaders Summit. Just as the WEF Young Global Leaders Summit led Chino to help start Table for Two, Asia 21 sparked a new project idea: The Hyper Textbook. Combining the resources of delegates from China, U.S., South Korea, the Philippines, along with other Japanese members besides Chino, the group will complete a comparative study

on how his torical events, such as World War II, experienced in multiple countries, are depicted in each country.

"I hope through the project we can create a better level of understanding between countries," Chino said. "It is dangerous for people to make generalizations about events without knowing all the facts," alluding to ongoing tensions between East Asian countries about Japan's military past.

The project is only in its first phase, with each member currently researching what has been written and approved in his or her own country. By November 2009 they plan to have completed gathering data and hope to host a conference to discuss and disseminate their findings.

Chino likes to stay involved at a global level through being a regular participant in summits addressing worldwide issues. In 2007, after her recognition as a WEF global leader, she was awarded a fellowship by Yale University, as a Yale

World Fellow. That year she joined 18 mid-career professionals from around the world (selected from a pool of 970 applicants) at the prestigious U.S. college-giving talks, and engaging in discussion with faculty members and students about topics like women in Japan and corporate social responsibility.

More recently, in 2008, she took part in two international academic conferences—The U.S.-Japan Foundation 9th Annual Summit in Seattle, and The WEF Harvard Kennedy School Executive Leadership Program in Cambridge, Mass.—each with the intent of sharing ideas and knowledge on global issues.

Listening to Chino explain both what she has already achieved and what she plans to achieve in the future, it's still hard to imagine how she finds the time to do all that she does. One thing is clear, however. Genuine passion fills her every pursuit.



Multitasking: Mitsuru Claire Chino is also a classically trained singer and performs semi-professionally. Here she poses by the grand piano at Yale University in 2007. PHOTO COURTESY OF MITSURU CLAIRE CHINO

## Go ahead, have a cow!



## JAPAN LITE

AMY CHAVEZ

This column is to give thanks to the cows who have contributed so much to our lives. To those cows who have put their lives at stake for us humans as well as to

those who have fodder to ruminate on and greener pastures to seek. Cows have made contributions to our society in many ways, but today I'd like to talk about their contributions to the English language.

Cows have given us many English phrases and vocabulary that we use in our everyday language. Although cows tend to moo in their own language, we have many borrowed words from cows. This is like *gairaigo* in Japanese, words imported from another language. Cows have contributed greatly to the English

language. Besides, cows have four legs, something I've always wanted. Their horns are kind of nice too.

● **To milk something for all it's worth**—When you milk a cow, you milk it till the udder is dry. So, to take advantage of a good thing is to milk it for all it's worth. Comedians do this with jokes as companies do it with marketing phenomenon or products.

● **Sacred cow**—Cows are sacred in India, and no one can touch them. And don't ask why. Thus, anything that has remained untouchable for so long, especially in government, politics, or institutions, that shouldn't be questioned

or criticized. For example, for foreigners, the To have a cow.

● **Bucolic**—Despite containing the word "colic," this Bucolic is a word originally used to describe shepherds and pastoral countryside, but now used to describe the ideal countryside life and almost always includes the image of cows dotting the lands cape.

● **Udder**—I was very disappointed to learn that there is no word udder in the Japanese language. In Japanese a cow's udder is simply an *oppai*, or breast. Yet the udder is a very distinguishing feature of a heifer. Then again, maybe the human breast was named after the udder. Which

came first, the breast or the udder?

● **How to count cows**—Cows are counted in heads. One hundred cows is 100 head. Not all on the same body, mind you. As a result, you'd say "A 100 head of cattle."

● **The herd mentality**—Cows, who gather in groups called herds, give us this term which means "to do as everyone else is doing." Cows tend to follow each other. The Japanese tend to resort to the herd mentality when it comes to fad diets.

● **Bovine**—She's so bovine! Like equine means horse.

● **The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.**—International

marriages often end up moving back and forth between the respective countries of each spouse as they try to find out which country is best for their family. The grass is *always* greener on the other side of the fence.

● **Till the cows come home**—Foreigners often drink until the wee hours of the night, partying until the cows come home.

● **Cow Karaoke**—Cows are all about us, but if you don't have your bovine antenna in place, you may not realize the wonderful moo life. Take, for example...

● **Mooooon River**—the song is definitely sung with a long moooooon. Not Moon River. It's Mooooon River.

## The English language is going to the dogs

## WHEN EAST MARRIES WEST

THOMAS DILLON

On Friday nights, I teach private English lessons to five people and three dogs. The dogs are good students: They are very quiet and never bark or interrupt. They always come to class well-groomed, wearing smart looking T-shirts and dresses. Absenteeism is rare, with just one absence due to a veterinary visit.

For the most part, the dogs sleep right through class, making it similar to teaching high-school students. The only difference is that they are blissfully sleeping in the arms of their owners. All the dogs are small and fit conveniently into the crooks of their owners' arms. But since this makes it difficult for the owners to write anything down, I wonder why they don't use baby slings.

My job is to teach the owners conversational English, including English they can use with their dogs.

At first, it was difficult to come up with a new dog lesson plan each week. I started with basic dog commands such as sit, beg, heel, etc. We studied canine vocabulary such as fire hydrant, top dog and doggie bag. We studied famous dogs such as Rin Tin Tin, Lassie and Benji. We sang the Doris Day version of "How much is that doggie in the window?"

As time went on, I had to get more innovative with dog commands, so I taught them circus-dog English ("Jump through the hoop, Fido!"), rescue-dog English (Dig for the victim, Rover!) and even police-dog English ("Sniff out the drugs, Spot!").

But after a while, I noticed that the

## One of my students climbed up on to the table and started walking around. "Sit!" I commanded, thinking this was a great chance for some review.

owners were not studying English with their dogs at home. They were not teaching their dogs the commands. As a matter of fact, they weren't teaching their dogs anything at all. The dogs knew no discipline whatsoever, not even the martial arts.

Most of the dogs slept in their owners' arms all through class, only occasionally waking up to yawn. Other times they'd open their eyes, watch for a while, then doze off again. With no reinforcement at home, how were these dogs ever going to pass the class?

Don't get me wrong—these dogs love English. They get so excited when their English teacher comes into the classroom. They playfully bark, wag their tails and lunge at me for a cuddle. They like to lick my toes too, which is why I am thankful I teach in those awful plastic slippers they gave me to wear—they proved to be great slobber guards.

When I talk to the dogs in English, they react as if they have just won the lottery.

One time I arrived at class early so I could eat my lunch before class started. I opened up my *obento* on the table and began to eat. Almost immediately, one of my students climbed up on to the table and started walking around. "Sit!" I commanded, thinking this was a great chance for some English review, but the dog just went on investigating my *obento*.

"Off the table!" I said, another grammar pattern we had practiced. My student, dressed in an ¥8,000 Alpaca sweater, looked at me and wagged his tail. "Off... the... table" I said, slowly enunciating each syllable to make sure the dog understood. It wagged his tail, then did a nosedive into my *obento*.

And the owner was sitting right next to me. "Is this normal?" I asked, practically choking from my student's appalling dog breath. "Yes," she said, not understanding what could possibly be wrong with her dog's behavior. After all, these are people who eat off the same fork as their dog. They probably French kiss their dogs too.

In this day of the pampered pooch, when there are more pets in Japan than children, it's no wonder people treat dogs to private English lessons. But just attending the lessons is not enough. They have to be exposed to English in their everyday lives. To learn a second language requires experiencing the language in meaningful, communicative ways. Furthermore, since English is a world language, learning at least the basics should be a requirement.

What was most obvious to me was that the dogs needed to study English harder. If not, how will they ever be able to talk to Irish setters or English sheepdogs?

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Maron: Photo courtesy of the author. Helen (now Maron) was one of the Dachshunds rescued by Brit Elizabeth Oliver. Here, she is now with her two new best friends (standing out from the crowd) who are taking wonderful care of her. Maron who spent most of her life in a shelter, is now discovering the wonders of walks, cuddles, and treats. She is a very happy girl. Come home, stay, and sit and has shown perfect toilet manners. We would like to say a big thank you to this kind family for showing a dog from a puppy mill the warmth of family love. self at home with his two new cat friends and is working out how to approach a relationship with the family dog. Tokyo ARK and The Japan Times would like to extend their heartfelt thanks to the Ishiis for giving Boss a long-awaited chancMaruyama-san sent a lovely letter to make me feel even worse. Her family is even fostering Mint, a brown Dax for us at the moment. They have two dogs Luke and Leia already and as you can see they are beautiful mixes. Her children's names are Ryuya and Airi (nice names!) Extremely nice and responsible family. Maron came from the awful, horrible breeder, so nice to see her so loved and having fun. e at domestic bliss. TOSHIYA ISHII

Many other cats and dogs are available for adoption. Please e-mail ARK at Tokyoark@arkbark.net or call 080-6146-3889 (English), 080-6517-8913 (Japanese) for more information. Tokyo ARK is a nonprofit organization founded by Brit Elizabeth Oliver. It is dedicated to rescuing and rehoming abandoned animals and others. All animals are vaccinated, neutered and microchipped.