



# AXXZIA: Japanese cosmetics player looks to expand international presence

Having built a very successful business in China, AXXZIA has set its sights on Southeast Asia and beyond.



"We are aiming to expand to Asia, through which we can become a global brand."

**Taku Dan,**  
President, AXXZIA Inc.

Japan's cosmetics companies are renowned for high quality across Asia. Tokyo-based cosmetics firm AXXZIA Inc. has managed to leverage that reputation to build an incredibly successful business in China, where today there is intense competition between local and international players in the beauty industry.

In just 21 years since its establishment, AXXZIA has grown from one humble beauty salon, to a Tokyo Stock Exchange-listed cosmetics firm with a thriving Chinese business – small compared to the industry's biggest players, yet agile, innovative and with plans to grow across Southeast Asia and beyond.

As success grew in China, AXXZIA was on the verge of an IPO when the pandemic hit. And the Covid lockdown proved to be a gamechanger for the company as it saw the potential for growing its e-commerce business. E-commerce sales grew to 50% of total sales when the pandemic hit, compared to 20-30% prior to it.

Among the Japanese cosmetics firms in China, AXXZIA was ahead of others in entering the e-commerce market, says company president Taku Dan, giving it the edge over its compatriot rivals. "However, we not only need to compete with Japanese cosmetics companies in China, but also companies from other countries in the Chinese market," says Mr. Dan.



Headquarters in Tokyo, Japan

"One important factor of our success in that market is that we were fast to localize. We tried to follow what a Chinese cosmetics company did in the Chinese market, which helped us localize our business."

This localisation drive involved partnering with Chinese e-commerce giants Tmall and Douyin, growing its sales network and using its 35-strong Chinese staff members at its Tokyo headquarters to facilitate communications with Chinese partners. Moreover, Mr. Dan himself is Chinese with many years of experience running a company in Japan, giving him an advantageous perspective to leverage the respective strengths of both of the two biggest marketplaces in Asia.

One such product that translated well from the Japanese to the Chinese market is AG Drink Series, with high-volume sales of the beauty drink helping to further boost recognition of AXXZIA's name in China. "One of the key things about this product is the pro-aging ingredients, which



Essence Sheet (Eye Sheet)

is specifically for anti-glycation," explains Mr. Dan. "The word or concept of 'anti-glycation' was known in Japan, but none of the available products in China had anti-glycation properties. We used that concept in our product development in China, which was well received by our Chinese customers and improved recognition of our company."

As China makes up 90% of AXXZIA's total sales, the company aims to grow its presence in other overseas markets, mainly in fast-growing Southeast Asia, as well as expand sales at home in Japan. "I am trying to spread our products to Asia. To that end, we would like to be an international brand," adds Mr. Dan.

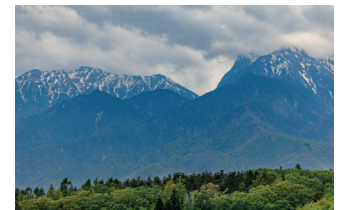


AG Drink series (Beauty Drink)

"I think a good balance for our sales would be 60% in China, 30% in Japan and 10% in Southeast Asia."

Meanwhile, product innovation remains an important focus, particularly due to the highly competitive and demanding Japanese market, which is why AXXZIA is investing

more in R&D. "We used to have two OEM production sites. Since we acquired Huit Laboratories in April 2022, we now have our factory. We built an R&D organization in November, and the role of our R&D team will continue to become bigger," the company president reveals. "To differentiate our products, we need to develop and build our know-how, expertise, and technologies. Our plan is to increase our R&D personnel and focus more effort on this aspect. Eventually, we would like to develop and produce every new product in-house."



Location of the Factory in Japan

Indeed, such plans require investment and the company's milestone Tokyo Stock Exchange (TSE) listing will be an advantage in this regard. "Being listed on the TSE Prime market allows us to increase funds and boost our name recognition, which helps us to form partnerships horizontally," Mr. Dan explains. "However, we are shooting for higher targets, like achieving JPY 100 billion in revenue in 10 or 15 years and becoming a global brand from Asia. Now, we are aiming to expand to Asia, through which we can become a global brand, going beyond Asia, to markets such as the Middle East."

## AXXZIA

AXXZIA Inc.

<https://axxzia.co.jp/en>

# Craftsmanship for the perfect optical frames

Partnering with renowned designers, Masunaga Optical produces only the highest-quality glass frames.



Home to Japan's eyewear manufacturing industry, Japan's Fukui region produces 97% of all optical frames in the country. This rich history began with Masunaga Optical, which pioneered eyewear production in Fukui in 1905 and still leads the industry to this day as it approaches its 120th anniversary in 2025.

Founder of the company, Gozaemon Masunaga, did not find it easy at the beginning, as retail clients were reluctant to buy Fukui-made eyewear. But as the products improved, they began to sell gradually in cities throughout Japan. Having brought in skilled craftsmen from Tokyo and Osaka, Gozaemon established a guild-like system, and later full-fledged craftsmen went on to create their own workshops. Thanks to this system, the number of eyewear workshops increased,

and the optical frame industry spread all over Fukui.

"Masunaga Optical was the cradle of the optical frames industry," states current president and Gozaemon's great grandson, Soutaro Masunaga, before highlighting the *monozukuri* (manufacturing craftsmanship) philosophy that has guided the company over the last 118 years. "In terms of our *monozukuri* philosophy, our mission statement has remained since the company's establishment. It says: 'We manufacture excellent eyeglasses. We want to make a profit if we can, but we do not hesitate to take a loss. It is always in our thoughts to manufacture excellent glasses.' These words are still the basis of the code of conduct for our employees."



Back in the 1970s, while many eyewear manufacturers acted purely as OEM compa-

nies, Masunaga started trying to understand more about the retailer's point of view, which then led to an understanding of what end users wanted from their glasses. Gradually it start-



ed transforming the business from an OEM to a more market-in approach. "We produce and sell our own brand, and we are building our own retail channels. We can balance the needs of both opticians and end users. I think this is what differentiates our company from other eyewear manufacturers," adds Mr. Masunaga. This approach has enabled the company to build its global success over the past five decades, with international markets today making up 80% of the company's total sales revenue.

As glasses are seen as both a medical device and fashion item, production can be a challenge as companies try to balance between the two. "Balancing different aspects is important and I think that eyewear is becoming more and more fashionable these days, but still, we must think of ourselves as an eyewear company, not a fashion company," says Mr. Masunaga. "This is inevitable in our business because eyewear still has a medical aspect to it and needs to function as a medical device. We try to balance three major aspects: technological know-how and function, user-friendliness, and then in the end add a fashion aspect. We must combine these aspects to create better products, which leads to better customer satisfaction." This manufacturing outlook has led to the creation of products such as the award-winning Anti Tension Frame, which disperses the weight of the frame perfectly to offer unbeatable comfort and durability.



"We try to implement our best R&D capabilities to create the best products for customers."

Soutaro Masunaga,  
President, Masunaga  
Optical Mfg. Co., Ltd.

As the company continues to grow its success and global operations, it hopes to work with more top eyewear designers both at home and abroad. However, staying true to its roots and supporting the Fukui area will remain at the top of its priorities. "The founding fathers



thought long and hard about what could be introduced to the area to help local people and make contributions to the local area," says Mr. Masunaga. "They wanted to make the area flourish and provide jobs for locals. Still, this philosophy continues, and it has not changed over 118 years. Of course, our company has evolved with the times, but the founding principle continues to push us to make significant local contributions."



MASUNAGA  
www.masunaga-opt.co.jp



"We aim to be an eyewear brand that is more flexible and adaptable to the social conditions of our age."

Hiroshi Ueno,  
President, Intermestic Inc.

The company behind the renowned Zoff brand, Intermestic is a leading Japanese eyewear manufacturer which aims to make its 'Made in Japan' quality products accessible to everyone from young to old.

Key to this strategy requires keeping costs down while maintaining and improving manufacturing standards, as explained by company president Hiroshi Ueno. "Rather than seeking to raise the prices of products, we are looking to see what we can ensure and how we can maintain recognition within society," he says. "We want to keep providing products at a reasonable price that the masses can afford."

That includes the older segment of society in Japan, the country which has a rapidly-declining and fastest aging population in the world. While this demographic trend presents particular market challenges for many companies, this demographic trend represents a unique opportunity for eyewear manufacturers like Intermestic. "As people age, more and more people require glasses. The second-generation baby boomers represent about 8% of the entire population, and they are reaching the point of needing glasses," says Mr. Ueno. "Previously, 70% of our business catered to those in their 20s and 30s, but now each age group, from teens to 50s, accounts for just under 20%, balancing the business expansion. We can cater to all different age ranges and generations in Japan."

With 80% of teenagers in Southeast Asia estimated to suffer from myopia, catering to this segment has become an increasingly

# Making Japanese-quality eyewear accessible to all

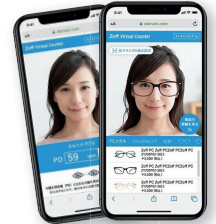
Intermestic president Hiroshi Ueno has a clear vision on the company's future and how it can respond to changing social and environmental conditions through its high-quality, affordable eyewear.



Zoff Harajuku store view



Zoff NEW STANDARD



Zoff Virtual Counter

important priority for Intermestic. "We are definitely looking to see how we can strengthen our support to the teenage population and how we can provide a supportive environment for families with children who have growing eyewear needs," adds Mr. Ueno.

One of Intermestic's initiatives aimed at youngsters is UI8, through which the company provides free services such as lens changing for children who frequently need to increase and change their prescriptions due to their worsening eyesight. "We are making access to glasses more affordable for families. We are looking to contribute to that kind of environment in Japan. In the field of public relations and advertising, we create printed materials such as pamphlets and brochures to introduce support and services available for myopia, which are distributed to ophthalmologists and elementary schools nationwide."

Aside from treatment of myopia, the company is also conducting classes for elementary school students while promoting prevention and healthy lifestyle habits for good eye health, which of course includes less time on digital screens, one of the main causes of increasing myopia rates among children. As a father of young children himself, the topic of prevention is a personally important one for Intermestic's top executive.

"Even when my children are outside, they are always looking at their phones and screens, which makes it difficult for them to engage in the world differently," he says. "Moving forward, I think chil-

dren in Japan and everywhere else need to find ways to expand their horizons and take responsibility. We have to promote possible methods for them to do so, help them make discoveries in the outside world and show them how to lead lives that are more open-minded."

Indeed, the company's management strategy involves addressing a wide range of modern social and environmental conditions, such as climate change, increasing digitalization, and epidemics or pandemics like COVID-19. "We are preparing to reflect our R&D strategy and innovations in changing social conditions," adds Mr. Ueno. One clear example is the fog-free lenses developed by Intermestic during the pandemic to make users more comfortable when wearing face masks.

Other examples of the company's product innovations include Night & Day, which offer regular glasses and sunglasses in one piece so users do not have to switch or carry two pairs, and STROBE XX, one of the company's most iconic products designed by Mr. Ueno himself.

"STROBE XX, which I am wearing now, has a frame that is a little bit thicker," he says. "There are so many variations for glasses and eyewear. It is endless how you can customize them, depending on your needs and aesthetic preferences. There are many things that a particular person wants, and it may even be just a millimeter difference in thickness. We have clients who are very particular with their eyewear. I noticed that the edges or contours of a person's face change as a person ages, re-

quiring thicker framed glasses for a more balanced and sharper look."

With Japan's declining population and birth rate, many domestic companies have moved to strengthen their international presence and Intermestic is no different. "The ASEAN region presents great growth potential because of its younger demographic and much younger average age," adds Mr. Ueno, who is determined to oversee the company's successful international expansion as well as leaving a lasting legacy beyond his tenure.

"I live by the saying of one Japanese politician named Gotō Shinpei. He said a low-caliber person leaves behind money, a mid-caliber person leaves behind a company or an enterprise, and a high-level individual leaves behind capable people," he comments. "I believe an ordinary individual leaves behind money and an ordinary company or enterprise, a high-level individual leaves behind people of great caliber, and to have left behind a legacy of culture is someone of supreme caliber."

"I wish to create and leave behind a new culture through Zoff. I am now 50 years old, and I do not know how many more productive years I still have ahead of me. Leaving behind a new culture through what Zoff can create would be the greatest source of honor and what drives our purpose."

**Zoff**  
www.zoff.com/en

# The sock enthusiasts taking one foot forward in global markets

Tabio Corporation has been supplying ultimate-comfort and long-lasting socks to the Japanese market for decades and is now looking to expand.



Tabio Store at GINZA SIX in Tokyo

A specialized manufacturer of socks and legwear first established in 1968, Tabio Corporation now boasts some 241 stores in Japan alone as well as another 32 worldwide.

Company president Katsuhiro Ochi is adamant that the key to the firm's success lies in its commitment to its products: "Our competitors pursue the growth



"By maintaining a high level of quality, we have been able to grow our reputation for high-quality socks and legwear."

**Katsuhiro Ochi,**  
President, Tabio Corporation

of revenue through mass production; we have always pursued quality over everything else."

The firm's much-loved football socks are a good example here, enjoying widespread popularity despite being made by a sock maker, rather than a sports specialty brand.

Looking to the future, e-commerce will have a crucial role to

play as the company continues to grow. Mr. Ochi again: "We have made a decision that future expansion will come through online shopping. When we find a particular country that has good sales

- 1 3-D Knitting**  
All 3-D Knitting from Ankle to Toes:  
Functionally Fitting on your Toe, Arch,  
Heel and Ankle
- 2 Arch-Support Compression**  
Less Fatigue on your foot
- 3 Dry & Durable**  
Tabio Original Double Layered Structure for All-Weather
- 4 Non-slip grip**  
Silicon Rubber on the Sole

Tabio Sports® Soccer/  
Football Socks



Socks with the Thinnest Lamé in the World

through e-commerce, we will expand in that country by opening a few physical shop locations."

With existing stores in the UK, France and China, the company's latest target is the U.S. market, a move that could see its sales figures increase by more than the 13% already recorded in 2022. The company's main goal is to ensure comfortable feet throughout the world, stresses Mr. Ochi.

"Having comfortable feet is an important factor in leading a happy life. We would like to 'Step Beyond' to make people's feet comfortable around the world with our 'Sock Enthusiastic' temperament as a driving force."



# 'Dream plastic' experts offering fast and flexible service

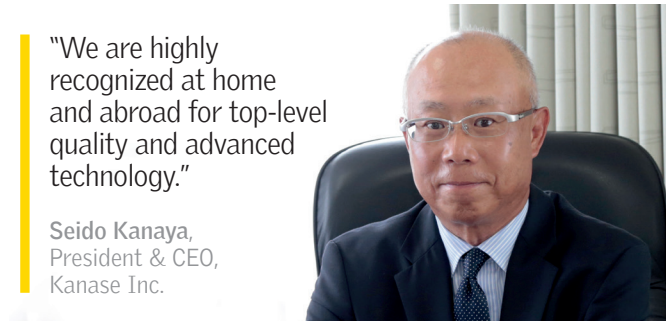
Since being founded as a specialist button maker in 1919, Kanase has also established itself as a go-to manufacturer of acrylic sheets.



Kanase HQ, Wakayama

Specializing in acrylic sheets and polyester buttons, century-old Japanese company, Kanase, boasts a fully integrated manufacturing process to craft its world-class products from resin materials created in-house.

Kanase's acrylic sheets, known as 'dream plastic', have a range of applications. "They're used for products such as aquariums, displays, sign boards and furniture," says the company's president and CEO, Seido Kanaya. "Different customers have different ways of using



"We are highly recognized at home and abroad for top-level quality and advanced technology."

**Seido Kanaya,**  
President & CEO,  
Kanase Inc.

them. We tailor our products according to their needs."

While Kanase is in competition with giants such as Mitsubishi Chemical, Kuraray and Sumitomo Chemical in the acrylic sheets market, the firm's smaller size actually gives it certain advantages over such companies, Mr. Kanaya says. For example, it can offer a more personalized, more flexible, speedier service. Acrylic sheets



"For instance, if a customer needs 10 acrylic sheets urgently, I can call the head of the factory to change production immediately and finish the order in one night, before shipping the next day," he explains. "Customers can receive their orders in two days. If they call bigger companies, they may be able to get the same products - but they will receive them a month later. There is a big difference in delivery time." Kanase's button business, the company's founding activity, is



PEARL LITE buttons

currently the less profitable of the manufacturer's two main areas of expertise. However, a commitment to giving back to society fuels Kanase's determination to preserve its long-standing tradition of making high-quality buttons.

"Our most important social responsibility is to keep our employees' jobs," Mr. Kanaya says. "This is the reason why I have been very patient."



# 'Socks for Everyone': NAIGAI's mission as a 'Leg Solutions Company'

NAIGAI develops high-quality socks that help solve issues which concern the elderly, pregnant women, and people with disabilities.



"We want to resolve the issues and concerns people have with their legs and feet worldwide."

Kenji Imaizumi,  
President, NAIGAI Co., Ltd.

Founded in 1920, NAIGAI has a rich history in sock making, providing high-quality products that are notably more comfortable, durable, and higher performing than those manufactured by its competitors.

Speaking to NAIGAI president Kenji Imaizumi, it is easy to sense his passion for his company's products and how they can make a true difference in the world.

Through innovation and R&D, carried out at the state-of-the-art NAIGAI Lab, the company is developing products aimed at making users' lives better, including products specifically designed for women, the elderly, and people with disabilities.



NAIGAI Lab

"Our company's primary policy has always been to prioritize quality. This policy has been upheld for the entire 100 years of our establishment," says Mr. Imaizumi. "Our goal is to provide value that exceeds customer expectations."

Turning to the technical aspects that ensure the superior quality of NAIGAI's socks: "We have focused on the comfort of the rubber inserted into the sock and achieved this comfort by combining natural and synthetic rubber. Natural rub-



Socks for Everyone (みんなのくつした)

ber is soft but lacks durability, while synthetic rubber offers durability, but is not as soft and leaves marks on the skin," says the president.

"It took considerable time to develop the technique to successfully blend the two materials, and we eventually achieved it. Other apparel normally uses spandex, which can cause discomfort and leave marks on your skin. In comparison, NAIGAI products are soft and durable."



NDX products

He adds: "Our founder's goal was to develop an ideal rubber yarn that combines the best qualities of both materials, leading to the creation of our NDX product."

One of NAIGAI's latest product innovations, 'SUASiC' has been billed as "as the sock you don't wear", providing odor resistance, slip resistance and incredible comfort for those requiring the sockless



Socks that you don't wear (SUASiC)

look. 'SUASiC' was designed to address the concerns of women who wear pumps and sandals in the summer, explains the president.

"When they wear pumps or sandals barefoot, their feet would become sticky, slip, or could possibly even get hurt. It could also damage their shoes. 'SUASiC' doesn't slide around in the shoe, providing a solution to issues such as friction and blisters. The gripping capability of the fabric on the foot prevents any sliding and eliminates the discomfort that many people complain of. We are currently developing it for men also."

The development of products such as SUASiC serves as testament to NAIGAI's commitment to solving customer issues. And that includes more complex issues encountered by particular customer groups with special needs, such as the elderly, people with disabilities and pregnant women.

With Japan's population aging rapidly, NAIGAI has placed particular focus on the elderly, who often encounter problems such as foot pain, joint pain, hip pain, or swelling feet. In response, NAIGAI is focusing on developing socks and services to address these specific issues.

As people with disabilities have similar concerns as the elderly, the company has also focused on products for this customer segment also, such as its "Socks for Everyone" (みんなのくつした) brand.

When it comes to Femtech, NAIGAI has developed innovative products such as "TOTONO" to address issues faced by women at different stages of life, with a focus on improving blood flow. For example, one of its products utilizes a terahertz artificial ore called TERAX, which is known for its trillion times-per-second far infrared molecular vibrations.



TOTONO with TERAX printing

"We grind this mineral rock and print it onto the sock. This promotes blood circulation and blood flow throughout the body and increases body temperature at the extremities," explains Mr. Imaizumi. "Utilizing this artificial mineral enables the creation of vibrations that positively impact blood flow and other water substances in the body. By promoting blood circulation, this helps protect the body from becoming cold and fatigued."

With such innovative products, Mr. Imaizumi sees NAIGAI as much more than a sock manufacturer, but a "Leg Solutions Company". His aim now is to bring these solutions to millions more customers worldwide.

"We want to resolve the issues and concerns people have with their legs and feet worldwide. It's part of our rebranding effort. We are already supplying Asia, America and Europe, including socks under several brands."



Socks for Everyone (みんなのくつした)

素足以上に  
足どり軽く  
NAIGAI  
www.naigai.co.jp/en