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# Cool Japan Fund chief says crafty marketing key to regional revivals

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Japan still has a wealth of products that can be sold to the world, and many are still waiting to be discovered, according to Nobuyuki Ota, CEO of the newly founded Cool Japan Fund Inc.

The fund, set up in November under a public-private Cool Japan initiative to promote home-grown products overseas, will closely network with regional governments, municipalities and banks to pursue projects that show promise, Ota said in a recent interview.

If the fund succeeds, some of the nation's battered regional economies may get an unexpected lift.

"I want to say, 'Let's energize local economies together.' If we can have one or two successful cases in your prefecture, others will follow suit," said Ota, a former executive at department store chain Matsuya Co.

"This may sound extreme, but if they don't push themselves, local economies will not find ways to get energized

again," he said.

The Cool Japan strategy is one of the government's key industrial and economic policies. The government provided ¥30 billion and 15 private firms chipped in a combined ¥7.5 billion for the fund. They include ANA Holdings Inc., Dentsu Inc., Namco Bandai Holdings Inc., Dai Nippon Printing Co. and Mizuho Bank.

The fund's main role is to source marketable products and help promote them overseas so Cool Japan can create opportunities for Japan's firms while promoting its goods and culture on a larger, global scale.

The Cool Japan Fund also plans to build Japanese shopping centers in major cities and get foreign TV stations to broadcast more Japan-related content.

As an example of a successful model, Ota mentioned Dassai, a sake brewed in Yamaguchi Prefecture. By actively marketing the tippie abroad, Asahishuzo Co. has turned Dassai into one of the most



Marketing us to the world: Cool Japan Fund Inc. CEO Nobuyuki Ota stands beside the fund's logo at his office in Tokyo's Roppongi district.

KAZUAKI NAGATA

popular brands sold today, in Japan or abroad.

"We hope to strategically copy such cases," Ota said.

When promoting products overseas, it is important they be presented in a package, he said.

For instance, when trying to sell rice, at the same time you can promote Japan's rice-eating culture by cooking it in the traditional way. This gives you a way to sell not only rice, but the earthen pots it is cooked in and Japanese culture.

Ota mentioned a number of short-term goals for the fund, such as trying to explain what Cool Japan means.

"People have different images of Cool Japan, so we have to provide our image of Cool Japan in a way that people can easily understand," Ota said.

Many Japanese will probably think of manga or anime — elements of so-called

otaku (geek) culture. But Cool Japan includes a whole range of things, like fashion, food and even culture or customs, said Ota, who was also a former president of fashion design company Issey Miyake Inc. and spent most of his career in fashion-related jobs.

Ota said many industries associated with Cool Japan have been given the cold shoulder by the government compared with automobiles and electronics.

The government admits that even though manga, anime, fashion and food might be popular overseas, they are not having much success making money, which is why the Cool Japan Fund is now trying to take a more strategic approach.

"The state has realized that these industries will play important roles in creating future growth opportunities for Japan," Ota said.

# Honda's moment arrives after long wait to join AC Milan

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Keisuke Honda has waited a long time to get his shot with one of Europe's biggest clubs, but his patience should stand him in good stead as he begins life with Italian giants AC Milan this week.

Honda was set to be unveiled by the seven-time European champions on Wednesday after signing a contract with the club until June 2017, with the Rossoneri handing him the No. 10 shirt made famous by the likes of Ruud Gullit, Dejan Savicevic and Rui Costa despite having never played in any of Europe's elite leagues.

At the age of 27, however, Honda has certainly served his apprenticeship. The attacking midfielder thrived in two years with modest Dutch club VVV-Venlo after leaving Nagoya Grampus in early 2008, and improved further after a move to CSKA Moscow in January 2010 brought a steady diet of Champions League appearances.

But a four-year contract with the wealthy Russians proved to be something of a set of golden handcuffs after Honda made a wider name for himself at

the 2010 World Cup just months into the deal, and the player's desire to move west repeatedly fell on deaf ears as CSKA refused to let the player leave on anything but their own terms.

Now that Honda has signed with Milan, none of that matters. Instead he can draw confidence from the fact that he is joining one of Europe's blue-chip clubs as he enters the peak years of his career, with enough experience, know-how and physical ability to make a lasting impression on the San Siro crowd.

"First of all, he is technically skilled," Milan manager Massimiliano Allegri told reporters on Sunday. "His game will broaden our offensive repertoire. Even with three men up front, he will be the trigger for our attack."

"We have been looking for a player who can fill that position. I've seen what he's done for CSKA Moscow at the European level."

Unfortunately for Honda, Milan is experiencing a turbulent 2013-14 season, with Allegri's side currently 11th in the Serie A table. Progress to the last 16 of the Champions League will come as scant consolation for Honda given that he is in-

eligible for the rest of the campaign having already appeared for CSKA, and Milan's domestic struggles look certain to preclude involvement in Europe next season, too.

But Honda did not make his move with simply the short-term in mind, and the Osaka native has everything it takes to make his time in Milan the defining period of his career.

The Rossoneri have enough quality in their squad — Mario Balotelli, Kaka, Stephan El Shaarawy — to render this season's struggles no more than a blip, and Honda is capable of making a significant contribution.

"I have a lot to give and to offer the team," Honda told Milan TV after landing in Italy last weekend. "I've been waiting for today for a long time and it's a dream come true. Milan are a legendary club and I supported them as a child."

The world has been waiting to find out if Honda is the real deal ever since he made his name at the World Cup in South Africa, and the intervening four years out of the spotlight in Russia means he has something to



Keisuke Honda of AC Milan celebrates scoring the third goal during the TIM Cup match between AC Milan and AC Spezia at San Siro Stadium on January 15, 2014 in Milan, Italy.

KYODO

prove after belatedly arriving at soccer's top table.

Now he is ready to show he belongs there.