

## IRIS : A BELGIAN-JAPANESE ADVENTURE! The IRIS Book and How to do business with Japanese

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Monday, 2 July 2018, late at night, I congratulate by e-mail, my Japanese friends for the fantastic game between the Samurai Blue and the Red Devils. I feel a bit sad for them and they wish me all the best up to the final.

I have a special relationship with Japan!

First of all, my first visit to Japan was a very long time ago, in 1985 more than 33 years ago. Since then, I have travelled regularly to Japan.

Secondly, even back then, the purpose of my visits was business and I got to know Japanese people both from the personal and the business perspectives.

In 1985, I was in the process of creating my own company, IRIS, to commercialize the results of my PhD. The invention was a revolutionary Omnifont OCR (Optical Character Recognition), superior to the solutions of the market leaders: two US companies and one Japanese (Tokyo Keiki/Totec). I had to travel to the US and Japan to see if we could convince professionals to adopt our new technology.

In my early days in Japan, with the help of the commercial attachés of the Belgian Embassy, I visited an impressive number of companies. At first, with mixed results, but, in the end, it worked! Over the years, I managed to sign licensing agreements on IRIS technologies, or develop new products, with Panasonic, Sharp, Fujitsu, Catena, Logovista, etc., a useful experience on how to do business with Japanese.

It certainly helped when, in 2008, I decided to approach Canon to develop a strategic partnership at international level. In only one year from the first contact, we signed an agreement, allowing Canon to distribute the IRIS solutions for Intelligent Document Recognition in Europe (IDR: forms, invoices and purchase orders processing, Automatic Document Classification, etc.) and Canon invested in IRIS.

Then, we managed to grow that joint business very fast and in 2012, I approached Canon to organize a friendly takeover on IRIS (listed on the Euronext stock ex-

change). The integration of IRIS inside Canon allowed me to develop new R&D projects with the Japanese teams of Canon. A positive and motivating experience with many meetings in Japan!

Then, end of 2015, after 33 years with IRIS, I decided to leave the company for new projects in the fields of Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Education. I departed from IRIS and Canon in excellent terms and a smooth transition was organized with the Canon Europe management team.

I immediately started new activities, and one of them was to write a book to share my IRIS experience with the new generation. It took me about a year to write the IRIS Book ([www.iris-book.com](http://www.iris-book.com)), which is designed as a “Guide to Entrepreneurship” (in English and available internationally from Amazon uk, fr and de).

Of course, given the history of IRIS, it will not surprise you that part of the IRIS Book covers the topic “How to do business with Japanese?” which by the way could also be read “How to do business with Belgians?” by our Japanese readers. In fact, this book is telling many stories (good and bad) that happened in the development of these Belgian-Japanese partnerships, in the very early days and in more recent times.

It has even more Japanese flavors. For instance, 3 Japanese characters (cartoons) appear throughout the book. They represent important facets of the entrepreneur. The Buddha is making weird or cool statements and reminds us that the entrepreneur has to stay Zen in difficult times. The Shogun makes more competitive statements and is stressing the fact that the entrepreneur sometimes needs to be a competitive leader. Finally, the little Geisha represents the importance of the work-life balance, essential for successful family life and long-term success in business.

If you like stories, if you are involved in your own Belgian-Japanese project, if you are Belgian, if you are Japanese, do not hesitate to read the IRIS Book! You will discover my experiences with Japan, a fascinating and beautiful country, with kind, smart and hard-working people. Enjoy!

