SONODA & KOBAYASHI
INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY LAW

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Contents

- News about Sonoda & Kobayashi -

1. Sonoda & Kobayashi Attends SusHi Tech Tokyo 2025

Members of our firm attended the 2025 SusHi Tech Tokyo expo at Tokyo Big Sight in early May. Standing for "*Sustainable High City Tech Tokyo*," SusHi Tech is an annual expo sponsored by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government showcasing innovations from around the world. With over 500 startups exhibiting and over 50,000 participants, SusHi Tech is the

largest startup conference in Asia. As such, members of Sonoda & Kobayashi helped share valuable insights into IP in Japan and China with startups from various fields.

- JPO and CNIPA News -

1. JPO releases 2025 report analyzing patent trends in 5 technological fields

In April 2025, the JPO released the results of its annual survey on patent application trends for specially selected fields.

The JPO made a report on 5 different technological fields for which it expects markets to newly develop or expand in the future. In the report, the JPO analyzes the strengths and challenges for Japan based on patent data. In this year's report, it examined the fields of perovskite solar cells, polarizer-related technologies, systems with flammable refrigerants, mRNA medicine, and speech and music processing for the metaverse era.

In summary, the JPO found that Japan takes a leading position internationally when it comes to perovskite solar cells and systems with flammable refrigerants and polarizer-related technologies. For speech and music processing, there are several Japanese applicants active in this field. Finally, for mRNA medicine, US companies had a strong presence.

Further information can be found here. (Japanese)

2. Joint publication by JPO, CNIPA and KIPO of correspondence table of similar group codes for trademark examination

The Japanese, Chinese and Korean patent offices (JPO, CNIPA and KIPO respectively) agreed to work together to create a list that shows the correspondence between various similar group codes that are used by all three offices in the examination of trademarks.

A similar group code is a code that groups together goods and services that are presumed to be similar to each other for the purposes of trademark examination. Using this correspondence table, applicants can compare what is acceptable in each of the three jurisdictions and thereby improve the predictability of examination.

Further information can be found here. (Japanese)

3. China: 2025 Patent and Utility Model Numbers for January to April Show Decrease Year-on-Year

According to data released from the CNIPA, there have been notable changes in the numbers for invention patents, utility models, and designs per month in 2025 when compared to the previous year.

Number of granted patents	Invention	Utility Model	Design	Total
Jan-April 2024	362,196	600,789	210,544	1,173,529
Jan-April 2025	267,945	530,961	218,859	1,017,765
Growth Volume	-94,251	-69,828	+8,315	-155,764
Growth Rate	-26.02%	-11.62%	+3.95%	-13.27%

Compared with January 2024, the number of invention patents granted in January 2025 decreased by 13.93% year-on-year, utility models decreased by 4.99% year-on-year, and design increased by 10.69% year-on-year.

Compared with January-February 2024, the number of invention patents granted from January to February 2025 decreased by 15.93% year-on-year, utility models decreased by 2.67% year-on-year, and design increased by 9.34%.

Compared with January-March 2024, the number of invention patents granted from January to March 2025 decreased by 20.99% year-on-year, utility models decreased by 2.73% year-on-year, and design increased by 10.07%.

So far, the number of invention patents and utility model authorizations has decreased year-on-year for four consecutive months, and the year-on-year decline rate of invention patent authorizations has reached the highest rate this year.

Further information can be found here. (Chinese)

- Latest IP News in Japan -

1. China Surpasses Japan in Hydrogen-Related Patent Competitiveness

Nikkei, May 2, 2025

China has overtaken Japan to become the global leader in hydrogen-related patent competitiveness for the first time, marking a significant shift in the decarbonized energy sector. In a study that analyzed around 180,000 patents from 2013 to 2022 across five hydrogen-related fields and considering factors such as patent feasibility and remaining term of rights, China ranked first in four of them—excluding only "use." This is a shift from a previous survey that analyzed the period 2011 to 2020, where Japan was ranked first followed by China.

China's rise in the field hydrogen related patent filings is largely on account of President Xi Jinping's 2020 announcement to peak carbon emissions by 2030. Since then, Chinese companies have doubled their annual hydrogen-related patent applications compared to Japan. In particular, Chinese filings have shown strength in the manufacturing sector, including in the production of electrolyzers, where it now makes up 60% of global manufacturing. Japan in comparison has a smaller market with filings coming from only a few companies, such as Asahi Kasei and Toshiba.

Japan and Europe have focused on the consumer applications of hydrogen cells, such as for fuel cell vehicles. In contrast, China has targeted industrial sectors such as steel and chemical production, which demand high volumes of hydrogen. While there are planned subsidies for hydrogen use in Japan, as well as continued cooperation with major partners, like the U.S. and South Korea, in the field, it appears that China's new position as number one in hydrogen-related patent competitiveness, coming from strong investment by various corporations, will not change any time soon.

Further information can be found here. (Japanese)

2. Food Tech and Its Increasing Importance in Global IP

Nikkei, May 20, 2025

As food insecurity grows due to climate change, geopolitical instability, and supply chain vulnerabilities, technological innovation is playing a central role in stabilizing global food production. Globally, "food tech" has become an emerging field seeking to provide solutions to these challenges. Food tech entails the synthesis of biotechnology and the incorporation of digital technology such as AI, sensors, or data and statistic driven systems.

Amid the growth of this field, intellectual property protection has become a critical concern. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, global food tech

investment has increased by ten times over the past ten years. As food production technologies become more sophisticated and more widespread, the risk of technological theft and misuse by foreign entities grows, highlighting the need for robust patent protections. Strong IP strategies in food tech are essential for safeguarding economic security.

In Japan, companies such as NTT Communications have developed land-based aquaculture that uses AI to control water temperature and fish growth, while ventures such as Plantex are developing plant cultivation systems that regulate environmental conditions to ensure consistent crop yields.

Despite the various innovations contributed by Japanese firms, the country remains behind in both investment and patent activity compared to global leaders. In 2022, Japan's food tech investment reached only $67.8 million, significantly less than the U.S., India, or China. Patent filings at the JPO reflect a similar gap, with Japan contributing just 15.2% of smart agriculture and 4% of aquaculture patent applications globally between 2010 and 2018. Without further development in IP measures, Japan risks falling further behind in the rapidly evolving food tech sector.

Further information can be found here. (Japanese)

- Latest IP News in China -

1. Patent License Agreement Announced between Mitsubishi Chemical and CATL

Tencent, May 16, 2025

On May 15, 2025, Japan's Mitsubishi Chemical announced that its subsidiary, MU Ionic Solutions Corporation (MUIS), signed a patent license agreement with Chinese battery giant Contemporary Amperex Technology Co. Ltd. (CATL) for lithium-ion battery MP1-related technologies.

MUIS has developed a cathodic interface control technology using difluorophosphate and holds numerous patents in this area. While the background of the licensing agreement is unclear, Mitsubishi Chemical recently had two unrelated Chinese patents invalidated, possibly signaling a broader effort to monetize its patent portfolio.

This marks the first publicly known licensing deal between CATL and a Japanese or Korean company. Given China's rapidly growing lithium battery industry and a shrinking market share for Japanese and Korean manufacturers, such licensing deals are becoming more common. Mitsubishi Chemical's move may pave the way for similar agreements with other Chinese firms.

Other companies are also pursuing this strategy. Tulip Innovation Kft., a patent pool backed by LG and Panasonic, is advancing its own licensing program, reportedly engaging with Chinese battery manufacturers.

As patent licensing in lithium battery technology is still developing, this agreement between CATL and Mitsubishi Chemical could become a benchmark for future deals. Previously, only lithium iron phosphate and ternary lithium battery licenses had international precedent. The terms of this latest agreement may influence the structure and pricing of similar arrangements in the future.

Further information can be found here. (Chinese)

2. Baidu's global public AI patent applications have exceeded 27,000

SINA, April 24, 2025

In recent years, with the development of large-scale artificial intelligence models, Baidu's patent applications and authorizations in the field of AI have also continued to rise. By the end of 2024, Baidu has published more than 27,000 AI patent applications in 29 countries and regions around the world, of which 22,000 Chinese patent applications have been filed

and 12,000 have been authorized, ranking Baidu first in China for seven consecutive years.

Among them, Baidu's generative artificial intelligence, using large models, has 2,950 patent applications and 1,371 authorizations, leading domestic innovation among Chinese companies.

Baidu will have hundreds of millions of yuan in patent licensing revenue in 2024, and the use of this patented technology will serve to benefit enterprises in various sectors.

In terms of Chinese market trends and industry impact, generative AI is gradually becoming a key mode of change in various industries. The application of deep learning and large models, such as Baidu's, has provided a strong impetus for the transformation of the finance sector, manufacturing sector, and other fields. It can be expected that the number of AI-related patent applications will increase both in China and abroad well into the future.

Further information can be found here. (Chinese)

- IP Law Updates in Japan: Insights from Sonoda & Kobayashi -

1. Advice for Prosecution of Patents in China: Fees and Accelerated Prosecution

Xudong Ma, Chinese Patent Attorney

In my work as a Chinese patent attorney, I have heard from many applicants who file in multiple jurisdictions that their fees in China were the most expensive, despite the official fees in China being very cheap.

The application fee for a patent at the CNIPA is only 200 USD, which is much more affordable when compared to filing in Europe. So, why are Chinese applications seen as more expensive?

One reason for this may be that most foreign applicants are not familiar with China's procedures, resulting in additional actions and unnecessary expenses. As a former examiner at the CNIPA, I would like to introduce some tips that may help avoid these issues.

Fees

Regarding the fees, if an application is filed in China, the filing fee should be paid as an official fee. In addition, filing fees are based on the number of claims in the PCT applications, so even if claims are deleted or added during national phase entry into China, the filing fee will not be changed.

The chart below summarizes the official fees for filing and examination.

	Application fee (RMB)	Examination fee (RMB)	Surcharge (RMB)
Invention Patent	900	2,500	Surcharge for claims in excess of 10 (per claim) 150 Surcharge for specification in excess of 30 pages (per page) 50 Surcharge for specification in excess of 300 pages (per page) 100

It should be noted that the filing fee in China is fixed if the number of claims is below 10. Our suggestion is to limit the number of claims to 10 at the PCT stage and then add others via a voluntary amendment without any additional claim fees. Applicants can also file "multi-multi" claims in the PCT application stage. As such, one can pay the official fee based on the number of claims, and afterwards, amend the claims, as multi-multi claims are not permitted at the CNIPA.

Accelerated Prosecution

In addition to the cost saving measures mentioned above, there are various methods to accelerate the patent prosecution procedure at the CNIPA.

The most common method to speed up prosecution is the Patent Prosecution Highway, a.k.a. PPH. In order to be eligible to file a PPH request, applicants should first file a PCT application and receive either a positive examination report or a grant in another country. In both cases, a PPH request for the corresponding Chinese application can be filed. Furthermore, both Paris-PPH and PCT-PPH applications are eligible for Chinese patent applications.

The conditions for a PPH request in China are:

- The request is made after examination was requested, but before an OA has been issued.
- The application has been published.
- An OA or a Decision by an examination authority, such as WO/ISA, WO/IPEA or IPER, indicates that at least one claim of the PCT application corresponding to the application is patentable.

If the request for PPH is granted, you may receive the first office action within 2 months, which is several months earlier than for ordinary applications.

The alternative path for accelerated prosecution is the pre-examination system. Unfortunately, however, the conditions are strict for applicants outside of China. Here is some brief information about the system:

- There are strict rules regarding where the company is registered. As a result, it is mainly applicable to Chinese companies.
- The system is not available for PCT applications entering China.
- It takes only 3 months for a decision of grant from the date of submission.

For foreign applicants or for some specific technologies, the pre-examination system may be used, but the conditions are strict, and the chance of success is unclear. Only PPH is the common and guaranteed path for directly speeding up prosecution.

Practical advice for an efficient prosecution

First, applicants should request publication as well as substantive examination earlier. In general, patent applications can be published 18 months after the filing date/priority date. However, if a request for early publication is filed, patent applications will normally be published within 4-6 months following this request under examination practices at the CNIPA.

If the applicant has applied for substantive examination by the time the application is published, the application will enter the substantive examination phase immediately after publication. As a result, submitting an early publication request can shorten the time between passing the formal examination and publication and speed up the transition to the substantive examination stage. In this situation, the application will enter the substantive examination phase immediately after publication, thereby shortening the examination period (4-6 months).

About

SONODA & KOBAYASHI is a law firm offering dependable legal services for intellectual property. Our multinational team of about 120 experts in technology, law, languages and international communication has served companies worldwide and gained a reputation for thoroughness and reliability.

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