



INTERVIEW

IN CONVERSATION WITH  
**YURIKO KOIKE**

# The Mind, Skill and Body of the New Normal in Tokyo

Governor Yuriko Koike shares how the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is working to shape a “new normal” for the city that embraces diversity and inclusiveness and addresses the needs of the vulnerable amid the coronavirus pandemic.



| Image: Tokyo Metropolitan Government



**Mind, Skill and Body—I always consider this Japanese martial arts philosophy when making policies.**



**The COVID-19 pandemic has been an unexpected crisis for cities around the world as they try to manage the strain on public health infrastructure and maintain economic activity. How has Tokyo approached the crisis, and how has the city fared in tackling the crisis?**

The focus of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) is on containing and reducing the spread of infection while keeping the economy and social activities ticking, with the support of the people.

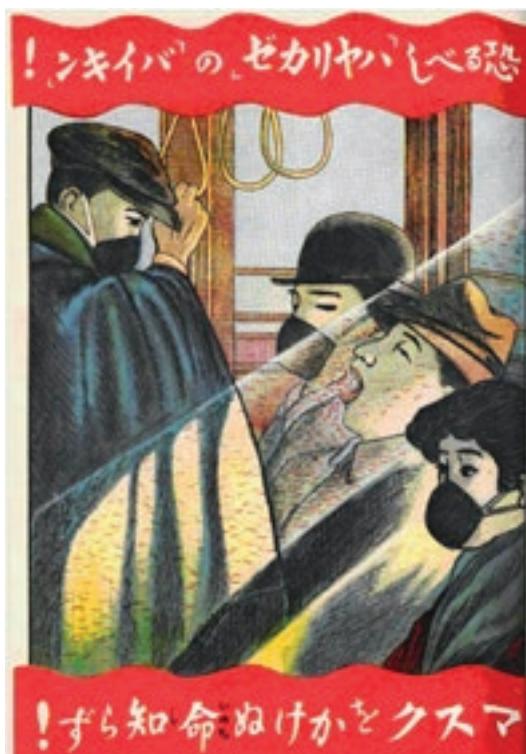
There is an expression derived from Japanese martial arts—“心 (Shin), 技 (Gi) and 体 (Tai)”, or “Mind, Skill and Body”. I always consider this philosophy when making policies.

“Shin” or “Mind” refers to the consciousness of people. The high social consciousness of Japanese people has received positive recognition overseas. I believe the high level of public health awareness has played a significant role in Tokyo’s success in containing the coronavirus crisis.

Of course, every culture has its own customs. In Japan, we take off our shoes at home, have special toilet seats with warm water to wash, and wear masks, among other norms. Indeed, mask-wearing goes all the way back to the 1918 flu pandemic. It has been jokingly said that only bank robbers and Japanese people put masks on. However, mask-wearing has now become an international necessity.

A poster from the time of the 1918 flu epidemic exhorts citizens to “be fearful of the flu and germs” and warns that not wearing a mask is “a reckless act.”

*Image: Written by the Central Sanitary Bureau of the Ministry of Home Affairs, from the collection of the Library of the National Institute of Public Health, Japan*



“Gi” or “Skill” refers to the ability to disseminate information using technology.

TMG launched a COVID-19 Information website at an early stage to deliver the latest information. This website has made its source code openly available and, as a result, more than 50 local governments across the country have launched their own websites using our source code. I have also been using YouTube to deliver live updates regularly in Japanese and English so that people can get accurate information in a timely manner. Since November, I have provided detailed information in simple Japanese, Nepali, Tagalog and other languages, to cater for foreign residents.

Governor Koike delivering the COVID-19 [Monitoring Report](#), with information available from TMG's COVID-19 Information website.  
Image: Tokyo Metropolitan Government



When a cluster of infections occurs, TMG notifies users of infection information based on visitation history via email and a communication app. We have also posted robot concierges in some subway stations to enable passengers to receive guidance without direct human contact.

In addition, in cooperation with universities and other organisations, TMG is promoting the establishment of a coronavirus analysis method using virus analysis of sewage in order to detect the signs of a potential increase in infections.

Finally, “Tai” or “Body” refers to policies that support both “Mind” and “Skill”.

TMG has asked a wide range of businesses including restaurants, bars, theatres, museums and sports gyms to display a rainbow-coloured COVID-19 safety sticker that shows they are taking steps to prevent the spread of infection. You can see more than a quarter of a million of these stickers all over Tokyo. Businesses must follow the guidelines for COVID-19 prevention in order to obtain the stickers and consumers are able to select among businesses by referring to the stickers. These safety stickers raise awareness among businesses and consumers and have contributed to a tangible reduction in the spread of infection.



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TMG also understands the need for compassion and the diverse needs and concerns of citizens during such a difficult period. In October, we opened a newly designated facility for recovery where people who have mild or no symptoms can stay with their beloved pets such as cats, dogs, hamsters and rabbits.

### **What will Tokyo's "new normal" look like?**

Tokyo's new normal in this coronavirus age includes washing our hands and wearing a mask, maintaining social distance, and avoiding the three Cs—Closed Spaces, Crowded Places and Close Conversation.

Even before the pandemic, TMG promoted telework to improve productivity and support flexible working styles. Now, we are further promoting this effort to reduce human contact. TMG has also strongly encouraged the introduction of telework among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by subsidising costs for the necessary supporting equipment.

Compared to pre-pandemic levels, the rate of companies introducing telework in Tokyo has increased significantly and daily commuter congestion has eased. TMG aims for these practices to increasingly take root in society without losing the momentum brought on by these extraordinary circumstances.

On public transportation, TMG is promoting the avoidance of peak commuting hours as well as measures such as the use of bicycles. Together with office development in the city centre, TMG is working toward creating bicycle parking facilities.

We are also promoting the spread of bicycle-sharing services, one of the key means of transportation in parts of Tokyo. Due to the coronavirus outbreak, the number of new registrants for bicycle-sharing services has increased dramatically, with a 40% increase between March to April alone. Based on TMG's initiatives, the number of buildings with open, spacious design and high-performance ventilation has also increased.

TMG was already promoting these initiatives before the pandemic. With the spread of the coronavirus, I firmly believe that these trends will continue to grow.

### **What are the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's initiatives for sectors, groups and communities affected by the COVID-19 crisis?**

I know that many have been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. I maintain the position that the key to supporting economic activity in Tokyo is to enhance assistance for SMEs.

SMEs, including sole proprietors, account for 99% of the companies in Tokyo. These SMEs are vital to the city's economic activity and industrial base. However, they have been severely affected by the pandemic. TMG has compiled 11 supplementary budgets so far this year to support these companies without delay.

## || A holistic approach to sustainable recovery is essential in maintaining Tokyo's vitality.



As the pandemic continues, expecting and nursing mothers are naturally concerned about their own health as well as the health of their unborn babies and newborns. TMG offers subsidies for coronavirus testing for pregnant women who wish to be tested before delivery; and counselling support for pregnant women and nursing mothers infected with COVID-19, in which a professional provides health and post-natal advice over the phone.

Given the sudden negative impact on the employment situation, TMG hired people as part-time employees who had to leave their jobs for various reasons related to COVID-19, as well as people whose job offers had been withdrawn because of the coronavirus economic convulsions. These measures have led to the creation of much-needed job opportunities.

We need to keep our sights set on the future as we work toward the recovery of the economy, society, and even our own mindsets as we endure this pandemic. Around the world we see a trend of working toward economic recovery while also coping with climate change, but I want to propose a "sustainable recovery" model for people as a new perspective on living sustainable lives, not only in regard to climate change, but in other areas as well. A holistic approach to sustainable recovery is essential in maintaining Tokyo's vitality.

We realise that digital transformation will be critical in restoring connections between people who have been separated by the pandemic. Going digital can help foster communication and create a society where people can maintain their way of life in the face of such crises.

Rather than try to return to a pre-pandemic society, TMG must realise a Tokyo for everyone, where diversity and inclusiveness are embraced through the establishment of a new normal and digital transformation. TMG aims to create a resilient and sustainable society that generates new values by responding flexibly to change; creating spaces where people can connect despite quarantine measures; creating environments where children can learn; and creating a system in which people can work and gain an income with peace of mind, and continue their artistic, cultural and sporting activities.

A robot concierge.

Image: Tokyo Metropolitan Government



## 感染防止徹底宣言



COVID-19 safety stickers displayed by businesses in Tokyo create public awareness and offer reassurance.  
Image: Tokyo Metropolitan Government

## II

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## II

**The Tokyo Metropolitan Government has plans for a new disease control centre as a response to the pandemic and to prepare for future shocks and disruptions. What role will this centre play in the future of Tokyo's public health governance and how will it help to build resilience for similar epidemics?**

The newly established Tokyo Center for Infectious Disease Control and Prevention or Tokyo iCDC is serving as a new permanent command post for conducting effective infectious disease countermeasures, including policy planning, crisis management, research and analysis, and information gathering and dissemination.

Under normal circumstances, Tokyo iCDC has been strengthening its fact-finding capabilities by training human resources in public health and establishing networks with local and international governments, research institutions and other organisations. And in times of crisis, Tokyo's know-how and strengthened capabilities can be leveraged as Tokyo iCDC shifts to emergency operation mode, responding swiftly and effectively to any situation.

**How will the Tokyo Olympics be planned and executed and how will public health safety concerns be addressed?**

The Tokyo 2020 Games, scheduled to be held in 2021, will be a symbolic and significant Games to prove that people, all together from across the world, have defeated the virus and strengthened our mutual bonds.

In order to have a successful Games, we must make thorough preparations to provide athletes, spectators and all involved with a safe and secure environment.

TMG, together with the national government, the Tokyo Organising Committee and other organisations concerned have been working closely to come up with a wide range of measures to manage the coronavirus. This includes border control and infection prevention measures, such as regularly conducting PCR tests on the athletes, and the way we run the Olympic and Paralympic Village, for example how meals are served. We are also working together to ensure the stability of the medical system.

Through these numerous efforts, we believe that the Tokyo 2020 Games can rise to the challenge of our post-pandemic world. And our model—the Tokyo model—will be passed on to future Olympic and Paralympic host cities. 🍷

*The information in this interview was correct as at 30 October 2020.*