

JAPIA's Activities

No.23 Intellectual Property Rights Subcommittee

Report: Intellectual Property Rights Subcommittee

Industry-wide Responses to Intellectual Property Challenges such as Counterfeit Products

Offering IP Education Programs and Cooperating in Counterfeit Enforcement Activities

To address counterfeit product issues overseas and to develop intellectual property (IP) professionals, JAPIA has established the Intellectual Property Rights Subcommittee under its International Committee. The Subcommittee engages in a wide range of activities, including anti-counterfeiting measures in cooperation with foreign customs authorities and the organization of IP-related training programs. This article introduces these initiatives.

Note: Titles and positions of members are current as of the time of interviews.

Building a Supportive Framework for IP Initiatives

The Intellectual Property Rights Subcommittee of JAPIA was established in 2002 with the aim of addressing counterfeit products and intellectual property infringements on an industry-wide basis, as these issues became more pronounced alongside the expansion of overseas markets. Its establishment was prompted by the rapid increase in counterfeit Japanese products, particularly in China and other parts of Asia since the 1990s. In recent years, as electrification and intelligent technologies have advanced, the importance of IP strategies that both protect technology and brands and enhance business competitiveness has grown significantly. Against this backdrop, the Subcommittee works to improve the industry's collective response capabilities through information sharing and issue identification among member companies.

The Subcommittee currently comprises 26 members from 19 companies, with activities led primarily by senior executives from member companies' IP departments. AISIN serves as Chair, with Astemo (President: Kohei Takeuchi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo) and Yazaki Corporation (President: Riku Yazaki, Minato-ku, Tokyo) serving as Vice Chairs.

The Subcommittee operates around four regular meetings per year and has established two working groups under its umbrella: the "Business Planning Working Group" (16 members from 13 companies), which focuses on IP human resource development and the planning of training programs, and the "Anti-Counterfeiting Activities Working Group" (17 members from 8 companies), which promotes countermeasures against counterfeit products through cooperation with overseas authorities.

Intellectual Property as a Driver of Corporate Competitiveness

The Intellectual Property Rights Subcommittee offers "IP Training Programs" with

the objective of improving IP literacy and developing human resources across the industry. These programs cover a wide range of topics, from the fundamentals of patents and trademarks to practical applications, negotiation skills, and IP landscaping. In addition to lectures, they emphasize opportunities for output-based learning through exercises and mock negotiations.

One distinctive feature is the diverse range of participants, including not only IP professionals but also engineers, sales personnel, and management. This diversity has contributed to the programs becoming an established cross-industry learning platform. The content is also designed to be accessible to companies without dedicated IP departments, enabling use by personnel who handle IP matters alongside other responsibilities. Expanding participation from small and medium-sized enterprises is another key priority, and initiatives are underway to broaden the base of participants.

Yoshiyuki Ishihara, Chair of the Subcommittee (AISIN), commented: “Intellectual property is an important management resource. Alongside learning by IP personnel, it is also essential to disseminate knowledge throughout the company, not just within the responsible department. Without IP rights, it becomes difficult to address counterfeit products, but by properly securing such rights, know-how, and data, companies can also facilitate business development. IP should be leveraged not only defensively, but also strategically as an offensive tool.”

Another distinguishing characteristic of the programs is their alignment with annual trends, including overseas IP issues and emerging management challenges. In fiscal year 2025, a total of 18 courses were held, attracting more than 1,300 participants, with satisfaction levels reaching approximately 90 percent. The programs are now firmly established as a cross-industry learning platform.

Anti-Counterfeiting Initiatives at Automechanika Shanghai

Another major pillar of the Subcommittee’s activities is the work of the Anti-Counterfeiting Activities Working Group. This group conducts anti-counterfeiting awareness activities at Automechanika Shanghai, one of Asia’s largest aftermarket automotive industry trade fairs.

At the JAPIA booth within the exhibition venue, panels explaining key points for distinguishing genuine products from counterfeits are displayed alongside comparative exhibits of authentic and counterfeit products. These presentations communicate the illegality of counterfeit goods and the risks associated with their unverified performance. The initiative is further characterized by international cooperation with organizations such as CLEPA (the European Association of Automotive Suppliers) and MEMA (the U.S. Motor & Equipment Manufacturers Association).

Many visitors to the booth are repair shops and parts distributors, and the venue has become a forum for sharing practical, business-relevant information, with visitors

asking detailed questions about identification methods and risks. In addition, JAPIA conducts surveys on awareness of counterfeit products among exhibition visitors and others. Recent surveys indicate that while the number of people with experience purchasing counterfeit products has declined, the proportion of purchases made via the internet has increased, highlighting the expansion of distribution through e-commerce sites as a new challenge.

Moreover, cases are increasing in which counterfeit products are chosen not only for lower prices, but also due to perceptions that “the quality is good” or that “they were said to be problem-free,” suggesting that quality gaps between genuine and counterfeit products may be narrowing.

At the same time, some users purchase counterfeit products fully aware of the risks, particularly for consumable items, reflecting a diminished sense of wrongdoing. In response, presentations by exhibiting companies are also conducted at the venue.

Survey Results

Automobile Components Purchased Despite Knowing They Were Counterfeit

■ Business Use (N = 332, multiple responses)

Rank	Item	Count
1	Light Bulbs	49
2	Spark Plugs	48
3	Ignition Coils	38
4	Oil Filters	37
5	A/C Components	35
6	Air Filters	33
7	Fuel Pumps	32
8	Bearings	32
9	Oil Seals	29
10	Oil Pumps	29
11	Clutch / Clutch Covers	28
12	Connectors	27
13	Brake Pads	27
14	Shock Absorbers	26
15	Water Pumps	25
16	Fuel Filters	24
17	Brake Shoes	22
18	Belt Tensioners	22
19	Stabilizers	21
20	Fuses	19
21	Fuel Nozzles	18
22	Others	2

■ Personal Use (N = 172, multiple responses)

Rank	Item	Count
1	Spark Plugs	21
2	Air Filters	21
3	Ignition Coils	18
4	Brake Pads	18
5	Light Bulbs	14
6	Shock Absorbers	14
7	Fuel Pumps	14
8	Oil Filters	13
9	Fuel Nozzles	13
10	Oil Pumps	13
11	Fuses	13
12	Bearings	12
13	Fuel Filters	12
14	Belt Tensioners	12
15	A/C Components	11
16	Water Pumps	11
17	Clutch / Clutch Covers	10
18	Connectors	9
19	Brake Shoes	9
20	Oil Seals	7
21	Stabilizers	7
22	Others	1

Cooperation with Chinese Customs and Authorities as an Industry Association

In addition to exhibition-based awareness activities, the Anti-Counterfeiting Activities Working Group also engages in enforcement support through cooperation with overseas public authorities. China, in particular, is a major production base for counterfeit Japanese automotive parts. Since 2008, JAPIA has been visiting Chinese customs and public security authorities to build sustained relationships. These efforts are positioned not as serving the interests of specific companies, but as initiatives to protect the brand value

and market order of the automotive parts industry as a whole, highlighting the unique role of an industry association.

The Working Group provides authorities responsible for seizure and administrative enforcement with concrete information, including explanations of product identification points and the risks posed by counterfeit goods, and engages in exchanges of views to improve judgment accuracy at enforcement sites. Meetings with public institutions, which are difficult for individual companies to arrange independently, are made possible through collective industry representation, contributing to the foundation of public–private cooperation in anti-counterfeiting measures.

In fiscal year 2024, the Working Group visited the General Administration of Customs of China, as well as the Beijing and Shanghai Customs offices, reaffirming the importance of continuous information sharing. In fiscal year 2025, customs visits were postponed due to the impact of Japan–China relations. However, a new video explaining key points for distinguishing genuine products was produced for customs practitioners. While past exchanges mainly involved administrative departments, demand was high for tools usable at the operational level, prompting this initiative as part of preparations for future improvements in relations.

As electrification and intelligence advance, intellectual property has become a critical factor influencing the competitiveness of automotive parts manufacturers. While the forms of counterfeit distribution continue to change, making countermeasures increasingly complex, JAPIA remains committed to strengthening IP strategies across the industry through human resource development, awareness-raising activities, and cooperation with overseas authorities.

Engagement with Overseas Authorities for Anti-Counterfeiting Enforcement

