

# Wanted Japanese Education with Foresight: A Revision of Futures Thinking

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This paper is based on a speech given to the Society of English Language and Literature's annual meeting at Beppu University, in Japan. The meeting was held on November 27, 1999. Freshmen, sophomores, juniors and senior students in the English Language and Literature department at Beppu University were requested to attend. Outside scholars, professors and teachers from the university as well as interested people in the community were also invited to attend the meeting.

This particular speech of mine was unusual in several ways. The first way that it was unusual was that I began the speech in the Japanese language. I had spoken in public on several occasions, but this was the first time that I had spoken Japanese in public. It was also the first time that my students had heard me speak Japanese. Since I have been teaching my students English conversation I have made it a habit not to practice my Japanese language in front of them.

The second way that this speech was extraordinary was that I addressed my student's future after college. I also addressed my deep concern over their future as individuals in Japanese society. Besides their personal future I addressed the future of Japanese education at the college level in a general sense and the future of English language training in particular.

It is no secret that a native English speaker can live and work and explore Japan without having to learn the Japanese language. I discovered that if one only knew the rudimentary essence of the Japanese language one could get by. Most phrases in English are easy for most Japanese to understand. Phrases like "where is the train station", or "where can I get a bite of food"

are well known. One genuinely needs to communicate for practical needs when one is living in another culture. The only way to communicate for practical purposes is to learn the language. I am thrilled when I think about all of the satisfaction of one to one communicating that I have experienced since I began to learn Japanese. I am sure it is the same type of satisfaction a Japanese student gets when they express their thinking and understanding to me in English.

I was in a deep and thoughtful mood after my lecture. However there was one thought that disturbed me. It was my students' lack of progress in English language skills that troubled me. I worried about my student's language skills. I do not think they understood the importance of good basic English language skills.

On a yearly basis Japanese visitors go to countries that do not speak Japanese. Because I live in Japan and have poor Japanese language skills I know how a nonnative speaker could be misunderstood. A misunderstanding of language could place many people in a difficult situation. It has happened to me in Japan and it could happen to my students in a foreign country. Problems in communicating could be difficult to resolve but culturally speaking it could also be dangerous. I thought about the Japanese student who was mistaken for an intruder in one of the southern states in the U.S. and was killed because he didn't know what freeze meant. So in my deep reflection I realized that there is more value to my job than teaching my students' to say hello and goodbye. I thought seriously about what it really means to speak English for a non-native speaker in an all English-speaking environment. It is difficult not only in today's world, but in the future global community.

## **I. Wanted English Study with Foresight**

How important is speaking the English language for Japanese students?

Some say very important others think it is a critical skill for the future. "On the estimates of David Crystal, a British expert, some 350m people speak English as their first language. Maybe 250m to 350m do or can use it as a second language in ex-colonial countries, notably, or in English-majority ones, like 30m recent immigrants to the United States, or Canada's 6m francophone Quebecers. And elsewhere? That is a heroic guess: 100m-; 1 billion is Mr. Crystal's, depending how you define "can". Let us be bold in all, 20-25% of earth's 6 billion people can use English; not the English of England, let alone of Dr. Johnson, but English" (Johnson 87).

That number is soaring as each year brings new pupils to school and carries off monolingual oldies-and now as the internet spreads. And the process is self-reinforcing. As business spreads across frontiers, the company that wants to move its executives around, and to promote the best of them, regardless of nationality, encourages the use of English. So the executive, who wants to be in the frame, or to move to another employer, learns to use it. English has long dominated learned journals: German, Russian or French (depending on the field) may be useful to their expert readers, but English is essential. So, if you want your own work published-and widely read by your peers-then English is the language of choice. (Johnson 87)

This lesson on the importance of English as a second language is not lost on the Japanese corporate structure. Innovative Japanese companies understand that national economics and success in the new technologies of the future is dependent on good language skills. "The birth of the computer and its American operating systems gave English a nudge ahead; that of the Internet has given it a huge push. Any web-linked household today has a library of information available at the click of a mouse. And, unlike the books on its own shelves or in the public library, maybe four-fifths is written in English. That proportion may lessen, as more non-English sites spring up. But English will surely dominate" (Johnson 87).

Johnson (87) states that "The growth of the cinema, and still more so of television, has spread the dominant language. Foreign movies or sitcoms may be dubbed into major languages, but for smaller audiences they are usually subtitled. Result a Dutch or Danish or even Arab family has an audio-visual learning aid in its living room, and usually the language spoken on-screen is English."

## **II. Wanted Future Thinking not Future Studies**

I mentioned that my lecture was unusual in two ways. The second unusual point was that I advised my students to think about their future as individuals. It has been my experience that many Japanese students do not think about their future. Perhaps it is because they feel that they have no influence over their future in Japan. I was given this unpleasant impression through conversations with my students. My students know what is expected of them by Japanese society. Consequentially if they want to get ahead in Japanese society they do what is expected. What ever it is. Thus, because I thought that it was important to my students I addressed the future of Japanese Education at the university level. Then I expanded on the concept of the future. I also explored the future of Japanese education in general terms and Japanese English language training in particular.

I used a book titled "New Thinking for a New Millennium" a futures research publication to explain how a "new field of social inquiry has been created whose purpose is the systematic study of the future" (Bell 3). I should be truthful here in that I do not in this paper advocate that Japanese educational institutions incorporate future studies as a indispensable curriculum, although that's not a bad idea. What I do advocate is that Japanese educators and educational institutions in some way learn and embrace futures thinking. In this paper I compare and contrast what has happened in other countries and systems that have introduced futures

thinking through futures studies to the present situation in Japan.

I used "New Thinking for a New Millennium" to explain what methods and tools are utilized in the futures discipline. This cutting edge discipline is "... sometimes called 'futures studies', 'the futures field', 'futures research', 'futuristics', 'prospective', or 'prognostics', and its practitioners are known as 'futurists'" (Bell 3). The book "New Thinking for a New Millennium" was helpful to me in summarizing what it is that futurists do to those Japanese educators that don't know. "Futurists aim to discover or invent, propose, examine and evaluate possible, probable, and preferable futures. They explore alternative futures in order to assist people in choosing and creating the most desirable future" (Bell 3).

To assist people in "choosing and creating the most desirable future" is a key phrase in future activities. In my speech I used future studies research by Jane Page that had been conducted in Australia to compare and contrast what I think is needed in Japanese education in terms of "choosing and creating the most desirable future". Although in her work Miss Page stresses secondary education I think her findings can be applied to the Japanese college level. Miss Page understood that "There can be no doubting the potential effectiveness of education as a forum in which to address these issues. In the case of Australia, for example, education is the largest national industry, servicing over three million pupils. It is, therefore, a fundamentally important means of transmitting social and cultural attitudes" (Page 127).

Jane Page (1996) reasons that the Australian "education system has not, to date, responded well to the challenge of applying futures issues in pre-school to secondary educational curricula" (Page 127). Despite a few exceptions in innovative colleges and secondary schools, I think the same can be said of Japanese education today.

Miss Page's explanation of why education had not responded well in Australia was "the lack of an awareness on the part of most educators of the methodologies and philosophical orientations of futures studies" (Page 127). Needless to say I agree with this assessment especially in regards to Japanese education. I feel that there is a definite lack of awareness in futures issues and methods by Japanese educators.

Page spots this lack of awareness of futures issues and methods in Australian education. "As a result of this gap in the educational knowledge base, the majority of educators do not possess the critical frameworks necessary to analyze their understandings of the future relevance of education and to convert futures concerns into practical learning experiences" (Page 127). I regret to say that this is a true situation in many universities in the world not just Australia and Japan.

Due to this poor educational environment in future studies understanding, I find myself in the same regretful position as other futurist researchers do whom in order to remedy this situation, "need to continue the long-term objective of disseminating information about the discipline of futures studies across educational settings" (Page 127). My contribution to this dissemination task is to continue writing papers on change and reform in Japanese educational journals in order to address this current gap in the educational knowledge base to Japanese educators.

I believe like Page did with her Australia experience that the Japanese educational system has not adequately addressed its mission to provide children with the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society today or in the future. "In Australia, the education system has been criticized for its lack of an adequate commitment to its future component. Gough has drawn attention to the manner in which educational researchers and policy makers frequently pay lip service to the importance of preparing students for the future without, however, seriously addressing this as an

objective in their curricula and in their methodologies" (Page 127).

Page cites futurist Gough who stated, "The education system is characterized by a largely superficial understanding of futures issues. When addressed, the future is generally considered according to three sets of assumptions: the first, where futures are addressed tacitly in educational statements but not discussed in direct terms; the second, where a token reference to futures issues is used solely for rhetorical purposes; and the third, where taken-for-granted futures apply a predetermined version of the future as a basis for decision making" (Page 128).

I think these three sets of assumptions have been and will continue to be a problem in the Japanese educational system especially in regards to the university system. I also agree with the conclusion that "educational discourse relies too heavily on past and present analysis of issues. This position has been strongly argued by "Richard Slaughter and Headley Beare, who have warned of the consequences of an education system which replicates educative frameworks which are rooted in a sense of the past. Slaughter cautions that 'If education stays stubbornly locked into outdated paradigms and past perceptions of problems it becomes a source of social rigidity, not a remedy for it" (Page 128).

We have reached the point in Japan where we need to place special emphasis on the importance of an understanding of the future for an individual students development. "Stinchcombe, for example, identifies an awareness of the future as the major factor distinguishing high school achievers from under-achievers. Benjamin Singer similarly emphasizes the importance of future role images for youths' social and educational development. Bell and Mau postulate that a futures-focused image forms the basis upon which to achieve social change" (Page 128-129).

What I would like to see happen in Japanese education is this. Japanese

educators have to create an awareness of the future for Japanese students. Educators need to show students the importance of future role images for student's social and educational development. They must do this in order to achieve social change. It is extraordinarily true in Japan that "... students who do not believe that the future will bring them anything will inevitably regard education as boring and irrelevant" (Page 129). I am afraid that at the present time Japanese students do not believe in their personal future and find their education as boring and irrelevant to them.

### **III. Wanted a Future and Change in Japan**

What is needed in Japanese education is change. Change in "The traditional educational discipline, which commonly claims possession of a single, unitary meaning by excluding divergent or opposing viewpoints and methodologies" (Page 130).

I believe that any change in traditional educational discipline in Japan has to be countered by a more open-ended set of teaching and learning strategies. If this means introducing future studies curriculum in Japan than so be it. This change can help Japanese students as long as Japanese educators understand the basic assumption of futures studies. "The emphasis in the futures-based curriculum is not so much on the learning of facts as on the process of learning how to learn, nor so much on the acquisition of absolute knowledge as on the development of varying skills and attitudes towards learning" (Page 130).

I believe that this change of philosophy is needed in Japanese education. I think so because I discovered through my teaching experience that a "... more open-ended curriculum well prepares students for adulthood since it reflects more accurately the dynamism which characterizes contemporary society and the lack of certainty which exists about the future. It is also more flexible and responsive to the continuing learning processes of



individuals" (Page 130).

Like Page I believe that "The futures-oriented curriculum would allow many points of entry for students' differing needs and interests and would adopt appropriately varied methods of instruction and options of instructional objectives" (Page 130).

Change and flexibility is needed in Japanese education because flexibility provides students with a heightened awareness of the importance of the future. Like Australia the task and future of education in Japan is in jeopardy. "This task is rendered difficult by the fact that the study of futures in education remains a developing and relatively under-researched area. As Slaughter has underlined, little synthesis and comparative evaluation of futures in education has taken place" (Page 129).

In Australia Paige found most futures educational initiatives have occurred "... outside primary, secondary and tertiary educational contexts, such as in the work of non-government organizations, conferences, symposia, special courses and futures workshops" (Page 129). This situation is unfortunately true in Japan as well.

Change is needed in Japanese education because of the emphasis, in futures education, on the development of a strong self-concept. This is very essential to Japan and Japanese university education. "An active, participatory approach to education places the individual's sense of self at the forefront of change. For Kauffman, the cultivation of a sense of self is particularly important for contemporary education. A strong self-concept can constitute an internal anchor for individuals seeking to function successfully in a dynamic and changing world. It also encourages the development of the students' sense of self-motivation, so that they can assume responsibility for propelling themselves through life" (Page 131).

Nowhere in Japanese education is there the emphasis on strong self-confidence in individual students. In fact I have found it to be quite the opposite. This is especially true in English language education where a sense of self-motivation can be said to be especially crucial. In Australia

This philosophical orientation is in accordance with the objective of futures studies to facilitate students' recognition of their connections with the outside world of culture, society and the environment. The holistic, global perspective results in an emphasis upon students developing qualities of tolerance and empathy, an appreciation of diversity and difference, and a strong sense of justice and equality. The stress upon students reaching out beyond their immediate concerns also commonly results in a link being established between futures education and environmental awareness, a connection which is evident, for example, in the publications on futures education sponsored by the World Wide Fund for nature. This emphasis enhances the students' awareness of the extent to which each individual forms part of a broader, interconnected network of relationships, an understanding which is generally absent from the previously cited youth attitudes to the future. (Page 131)

Critical thinking and development of such thinking skills as flexibility, curiosity, inventiveness and imagination are strong concepts in futures thinking.

The emphasis on critical thinking lies behind the frequent reference in futures educational studies to the development of such thinking skills as flexibility, curiosity, inventiveness and imagination and the ability to deal with surprise, conflict and irresolution. The re-assessment and redefinition of fundamental meanings and assumptions involved in critical thinking will further assist students to view themselves as creators of change, rather than passive recipients of the future, and to

contemplate a range of options for the future rather than a fixed, singular ideal. As Slaughter has noted, individuals who know that they stand at the center of their own history as agents rather than spectators are well placed to negotiate conceptions and images of futures worth living in. (Page 132)

For Japanese students to develop critical thinking and such thinking skills as flexibility, curiosity, inventiveness and imagination is essential to change in the Japanese educational system. However student change is only a small ingredient in the change and reform that I imagine is needed in the upper levels of the Japanese college system. Professors also need to develop a system to teach critical thinking and such thinking skills as flexibility, curiosity, inventiveness and imagination.

Like Slaughter articulated so well. "In education the past is evidently of much greater interest than the future. This 'temporal chauvinism' is a long-standing concern. H.G. Wells commented upon it in the 1930s in a paper called 'Wanted: Professors of Foresight' (Slaughter 137).

#### **IV. Wanted Professors with Foresight**

This lack of Professors with Foresight' was true in the past in Japan and will probably be true in the future as well. The Japanese educational system is riddled with professors from the old school of Japanese education. Professors who see to it that students are passed on to the next level regardless of their true understanding or ability. What is coveted in Japan more than just wanted are "Professors of Foresight."

Resistance to educational change by educators in Japan is legendary. Like Australia, Japan remains caught up in two kinds of lags. One is institutional the other characteristic. "The universities are full of rhetoric about strategic planning, being proactive and serving their communities.

Yet there is a cultural gulf between their outlook and one that takes the future as a substantive concern. Many have planning and administrative arrangements that fail to incorporate standard futures tools and methods" (Slaughter 138).

The future of futures thinking in Japan by educators is dismal. Even though I do not advocate a futures curriculum in Japanese education (It won't happen any way) I do advocate futures thinking by educators. However, like in Australia, decision makers in Japanese universities remain preoccupied with conservative forms of knowledge and enquiry. Because, decision makers have this mindset "admitting futures studies into the approved map of knowledge involves shifts of understanding and perception that many powerful decision-makers have yet to achieve" (Slaughter 138).

I think that it is crucial that futures thinking be accepted and embraced by Japanese decision makers. I think so because, critical futures study combines rational intelligence with intuitive and visionary abilities to provide a forward-looking context in which some of the 'big questions' can be posed and answered. Questions like; where are we going? How do we get there? What problems need to be solved? And why take this path rather than another?" "Such questions are too central to be overlooked. Yet they go well beyond those that tend to be asked in related fields such as critical theory and cultural studies" (Slaughter 142).

Much can be learned in Japan from futures research. However, much more can be accomplished with futures thinking. "There is an urgent need to move away from crisis management, short-termism and merely coping with change. Developing a more active and strategic stance must be much more than rhetoric. It requires practical competencies such as reading signals from the environment, interpreting their significance and developing appropriate responses. All educational processes require a forward-looking or prospective view and effective means of responding to change" (Slaughter

#### **IV. Wanted Universities with Foresight**

In regards to Japan's future 'big questions' have to be posed and answered. Where is Japanese education going? How does Japan get there? What educational problems do Japanese educators need to solve? And why take this path rather than another?' Surprisingly the answers to some of these questions are within grasp for example Keio University's Shonan Fujisawa campus;

Nestled in country within sight of Mt. Fuji Keio University's Shonan Fujisawa campus doesn't look like an institution on the cutting edge. Students say they can't use the tennis courts at night because the lights might keep cows in nearby pastures awake. Pungent barnyard smells sometimes waft past the campus' glass-and-concrete libraries and lecture halls. Yokohama; the biggest city nearby, is more than half an hour away. But far from being a backwater, Shonan Fujisawa is an unusual beacon of change in Japan's troubled university system. Instead of cookie cutter bureaucrats and blue suited corporate clones—the traditional crop of top Japanese schools, including Keio Shonan Fujisawa is trying to nurture something new entrepreneurs and independent thinkers. Says Hiroaki Wakashita, a communications technology student: Shonan Fujisawa is going with the Western ideal individuals that can work for themselves. (Macintyre 48-49)

Like the statement reads Keio Shonan Fujisawa is trying to nurture something new in Japan students who are entrepreneurs and independent thinkers. "Those are the creative types many Japanese say their country needs in order to revitalize itself. Most universities are still geared to mass-producing graduates who can cram facts, follow orders and work impossibly long hours. That's what Japan Inc wanted when manufacturing was king

and the country was booming. But times have changed. Fleeter, information based companies are taking over. Japans' top business lobby, the Keidanren, is clamoring for well-rounded grads who can handle an Internet IPO as smoothly as a night on the town with business partners in New York" (Macintyre 48-49).

The question in my mind is can Japanese education and industry cooperate to produce what is needed for Japan in the future. Macintyre, (1999) writes that "The Educational Ministry is listening. It has rolled out a reform blue print at boosting standards in undergraduate and graduate programs and loosening rules that make the universities so rigidly uniform. This year it is letting students enroll in the fall (instead of only in the spring) and making it easier to earn degree credits outside the university. Also in the works: allowing undergrads to finish in three years instead of four. By making universities more flexible, the ministry hopes to spark' more creativity on campus. It is also encouraging schools to leaven curriculum with more liberal arts classes. "The 21st century will be a time of tremendous change," says Hideaki Matsugi, a ministry official working on the reform program. -"We won't get through it without this" (Macintyre 48-49).

Who is at fault for this current unacceptable educational chaos in Japan? I do not know? But, the reality is that the Japanese educational system is not developing the students that new Japanese industries are howling for. The current attempts at reform may be too little too late. "Critics call these moves piecemeal. They say universities 'have not veered sufficiently from their traditional role of catering to big business instead of the individual. Such conservatism is hardly surprising. The ministry's bureaucrats have spent much of the post war period trying to roll back the liberal educational reforms brought in under the American occupation" (Macintyre 48-49).

As I mentioned before resistance to change is endemic to Japan. Any

change at any level is libel to criticism from a wide range of opponents. "Conservatives have felt the reforms put too much stress on individual freedoms and not enough on citizens' duties to the state. So there is skepticism about the ministry's top-down push to encourage Japanese students to 'pursue their own ends' as a ministry-commissioned report puts it. " What they are trying to do is a kind of planned spontaneity' says Ivan Hall, a U.S. expert on Japanese education who also taught in the country" (Macintyre 48-49).

Until recently, what happened on Japan's campuses didn't matter that much. Students got into university by passing a single make-or-break exam, after years of grueling study and after-school cramming. Admittance to select institutions like Keio or Tokyo universities guaranteed a slot at a prestigious ministry or name plate company. So once students made it in the door, they spent their time socializing and networking rather than studying. Companies didn't care-they preferred to mold new recruits once they were hired. But when Japan's economy hit a wall; many graduates of this system were ill-prepared for the new era of rapid change and open markets. Employers began to realize that, to succeed in places like the U.S., they needed people with better computer skills, smoother English and a broader, more cosmopolitan outlook. Companies can't simply plant their banners overseas; they need people who can get involved in local communities, says Satoshi Suzukibashi, who follows education issues for the Keidanren. "This is a response to globalization. (Macintyre 48-49)

If Japanese industry expects universities to change, then they have to consider what type of change that they are ready to accept in themselves. Reform is as big a challenge to industry as the one that the universities are expected to focus on. In fact "challenge goes to the heart of the problems of Japan's higher-education system. When it first set up universities in the late

19th century, Japan was racing to catch up with the West and avoid being colonized. Japanese leaders wanted technology and practical know-how, but not the West's liberal intellectual traditions. Keio's founder, Yukichi Fukuzawa, disagreed: in the 1870s, he argued that Japan also needed such liberal ideas to build a secure country. He tried to put his ideals into practice at Keio, but over the years the fire went out. At Shonan Fujisawa, many of the kids see themselves as trying to revive it. Says Yurina Tanaka, a second year student of environmental policy, computers and communications: "What we are doing here isn't just about getting a job. We can change society, bit by bit' (Macintyre 48-49).

## **V. Wanted Bureaucrats with Foresight**

Changing society is but one challenge facing Japan. Some members of Japan's bureaucracy realize the complexity of ad hoc change before them and are preparing to meet these challenges head on. Kazuyuki Motohashi is director of the Information and Public Affairs Office of the Ministry of international, Trade and Industry. He recently wrote on the issue of change at higher levels of Japanese education and the relevance of change at the upper level of education to Japan's future.

There is a panel in Japan called The National Strategy of Industrial Technology Competitiveness. The strategy of this panel "has been drafted by a high-level panel of business, academic and government officials to develop the technological prowess of Japanese industry" (Motohashi 17).

Motohashi San writes that this panel was "... created by the Industrial 'Competitiveness Council headed by Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi, it was established with the understanding that more technically competitive and innovative firms will be the key to generating robust economic growth in the 21st century" (Motohashi 17).



Motohashi spells out the strategy and "the roles to be played and the issues to be tackled by the industrial, and academic and bureaucratic circles, but most notably calls on Japan to reform its universities - a task that has made little progress. (Motohashi 17)

Motohashi considers a famous United States university to be a positive role model for Japan. "One only has to look at the major role Stanford University plays in promoting high tech industries in the Silicon Valley to understand how universities can, help improve the technological strength of Japanese industries. Universities must be encouraged to fortify their research activities and pass on the fruits of their labor to the business world" (Motohashi 17).

Motohashi is not happy with the current attempts to reform Japanese universities thus far. "I must say that Japanese universities have so far failed to meet such flowery expectations, with their poor information infrastructure and lack of incentive stifling both student and researcher alike" (Motohashi 17).

He goes on to point out that Japanese "Universities are constricted by a set of regulations, that control the establishment of new departments, or the appointment of professors, which prevents them from fulfilling their due role as a source of innovations" (Motohashi 17).

Do Japanese institutions lag seriously behind their overseas competitors? Motohashi seems to think so. "Japanese institutions lag seriously behind their overseas competitors in infrastructure, such as information networks and research facilities. A friend of mine who recently got a job as a professor at a state-run university had to wait as long as a month to receive an e-mail address. Many of buildings at public universities are so old that people used to state-of-the-art facilities at private-sector institutions would feel as if they had stepped back in time by more than a decade if they entered them"

(Motohashi 17).

Motohashi's bottom line is also a warning. He states that he and "the high level panel has cited the need for reform to make Japanese universities more internationally competitive. However, merely expanding on steps already taken will not be enough to instill change, and the proposed reforms must not be bound either by existing systems governing universities or budgetary constraints" (Motohashi 17).

## **V. Wanted Individuals with Foresight**

The prototype of the type of creative imaginative people that Japan needs is a very successful citizen named Mayayoshi Son. Mayayoshi Son is the "42-year-old founder of Softbank. He will end the millennium as "head of Japan's fifth largest firm- ahead of Honda, Mitsubishi and even Sony. He is the key player in what a recent Merrill Lynch study calls Japan's "Internet tsunami," a tidal wave of new Internet businesses. Led by Son, they are liberating a new generation of cyber savvy entrepreneurs who view Japan's economy as part of a global market. Japan Inc, still dominates; but in its shadows, the technogeeks are building the foundations of a more transparent competitive society. It is Son's courage and vision-and his ability to slay the staid establishment-that make him NEWSWEEK's Asian of the Year" (Wehrfritz 24-26).

More than any other business leader, Son is challenging Japan Inc. to change its ways. He has helped introduce e-commerce, sparked an explosion of venture capital and forced open stock exchanges. His businesses are empowering creative risk takers who might have been suffocated by the rigid rules, hierarchies and relationship-building of corporate Japan. With plans to launch a Nasdaq Japan exchange aimed at high-tech start-ups, Son is unleashing the stock market as a real source of finance; when the market starts trading by the end of

2000, young entrepreneurs no longer will need to cozy up to old-fashioned banks. If at first corporate Japan viewed him as an upstart, even a nuisance, Son is winning the day. Desperate for an escape from Japan's decade long recession, the government and corporations are turning to him for advice-and funding. "Son's now part of the establishment," admits Eisuke Sakakibara, Tokyo's influential former Finance Vice Minister. In short, the wandering samurai now rules. (Wehrfritz 26)

Mayayoshi Son made every effort to reach Japan's middle-class dream, a good education. "Masayoshi, tested into one of Japan's best high schools, in nearby Fukuoka. He quit in six months and, with his father's reluctant blessing, went to study in the United States" (Wehrfritz 26).

Mayayoshi Son thrived in the free learning environment of California. "After high school and a stint at Holy Names College in Oakland, Son earned an economics degree from the University of California, Berkeley. On the side, he imported Space Invader videogames from his father and invented a translation machine that he later sold to Japanese electronics maker Sharp for \$1 million. Recalls Berkeley physics professor emeritus Forrest Mozer: "I remember telling my wife, 'We should grab onto that guy because he's going to own all of Japan in 10 years'." (Wehrfritz 26).

Earlier I mentioned that development of thinking skills such as flexibility, curiosity, inventiveness and imagination are strong concepts in futures thinking. Well Mayayoshi Sons' father seemed to believe in this type of motivation. Mayayoshi's father demonstrated his way of instilling confidence in his children. "Taizo, the youngest of four boys, who owns an e-business consulting company called Indigo, recalls his father's way of instilling confidence in his children: "He would sit me on his knee, stroke my head and repeat, 'Taizo is a genius'." (Wehrfritz 26).

Mayayoshi Sons' career had its ups and downs. "Softbank went public in 1994, making Son a billionaire. A year later he stormed across the Pacific for a shopping spree in 'Silicon Valley' Son bought trade-show impresario Comdex and high-tech publisher Ziff-Davis, spending nearly \$3 billion for the prizes. In 1996, he teamed up with Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. to buy a major stake in Japanese broadcaster Asahi TV. Then, in late 1997, Softbank's share price collapsed on rumors of impending bankruptcy at its affiliated asset-management" (Wehrfritz 27).

Mayayoshi Son like many independent and creative thinkers is a bit of an outlaw the 42-year-old founder of Soft-bank, doesn't mind that the conservatives in corporate Japan view him as an upstart. It is a role he assumed at a young age, growing up in a society where nonconformists are often shunned. Son also grew up as a Korean resident in Japan, where even third-generation Koreans have difficulty gaining Japanese citizenship, as he did in 1991.

In his office overlooking downtown Tokyo, Son recently met with NEWSWEEK'S George Wehrfritz and Hideko Takayama and discussed his dreams and how the bigotry he faced helped him fight harder to succeed. I present a few examples closely related to the focus of this article.

NEWSWEEK: Excerpts

NEWSWEEK: Can you save the Japanese economy?

SON: I hope we will be able to contribute. All kinds of entrepreneurs and venture capitalists are taking a more active role.

NEWSWEEK: Is Japan ready for an Internet revolution?

SON: Until recently I was pessimistic. But now, many young entrepreneurs

say: "I'm gonna change the world." Our young generation of e-entrepreneurs are speaking Silicon Valley's language. I'm getting a lot more optimistic.

NEWSWEEK: What barriers remain?

SON: In the United States, rules regulate the dominant player and open opportunities to new ones. In Japan, the government regulates newcomers to protect the surviving giant.

NEWSWEEK: What Is your advice for Prime Minister kezo Obuchl's administration?

SON: That the Internet revolution should happen, even in Japan.

NEWSWEEK: How did you go to California for school?

SON: I told my parents I'd like to see the most advanced place in the world, where people of all races and nationalities go to pursue the American Dream. My mother cried. Uncles, aunts, friends and teachers all tried to stop me. When I went, there were all kinds of people with different-colored skin and different backgrounds living happily. Young guys with passion and a big vision could start up crazy companies. I said: "I want to be one of those crazy guys."

NEWSWEEK: What did you learn In California?

SON: Americans are much more creative. Younger guys have the same opportunity as older guys. Even people without capital: so long as they create a good business plan, there are always venture capitalists who will listen. It's not like this in Japan. That gave me encouragement.

NEWSWEEK: Who were your mentors?

SON: Mr. Honda and Mr. Matsushita were definitely heroes for entrepreneurs in Japan. After I started Softbank, Bill Gates and Steve Jobs.

I still believe that change is desperately needed in Japan's university system. Like Yurina Tanaka, a second year student of environmental policy, computers and communications says: "What we are doing here isn't just about getting a job. We can change society, bit by bit" (Macintyre 48-49).

## **VI. Wanted Leaders with Foresight**

On January, 18 an advisory panel to the prime minister of Japan issued a report "it suggests the country begin debating such major reforms as adopting English as an official second language, encouraging immigration and directly electing prime ministers" (Japan Times ST 2).

In its final report, titled "The Frontier Within: Individual Empowerment and Better Governance in the New Millennium," the 16-member panel underlined the need to reform education and encourage diversity in society as keys to Japan's future prosperity" (Japan Times ST 2).

Specifically, the panel urged the government to reinforce English language education, noting that all Japanese people should be able to use English as a tool to communicate in the international community. In the long term, it called for holding a national debate on whether to make English an official Second language. (Japan Times ST 2)

In lieu of his advisory councils advise it is not surprising what reforms Prime Minister Obuchis urged from the nation. "In his policy speech before the plenary sessions of both Diet chambers, Obuchi urged the nation to look forward to the new century and underlined education as one of the key task before his Cabinet (Japan Times 1).

The changes to such pivotal institutions as education and social security are based on the awareness by the panel that there is a need for a fundamental change of perception to facilitate a stronger relationship between the individual and the public domain.

I agree with the thoughts that "The nurturing of creative people should be a major goal of education, and Japan must not only review its conventional education system but also conduct more drastic reforms toward this goal (Japan Times 1).

In terms of education as one of the key task before his Cabinet, "Obuchi said he hopes to see all Japanese able to communicate in English, the common language of the international community, as well as have access to the Internet in the new century (Japan Times 1). Obuchi also stated "All people living in the 21st century should be able to communicate in English, while also acquiring the skill to use beautiful Japanese. They should also be able to enter the international community at will via the Internet" (Japan Times 1).

Obuchi's intentions to see all Japanese able to communicate in English, have access to the Internet, and have all people living in the 21st century able to communicate in English is admirable. I happen to think that it is too ambitious and impossible to do. Too ambitious because he might not take into his equation the competence of common Japanese people to learn the English language in a timely manner. This present unsettled situation will make the plan impractical to be of any help to Japan in the near future.

## **VII. Wanted Machine Translations**

There are many points of view in terms of Japans' attempts to conquer the language barrier. I found a unique description of this situation while I was

conducting this research. I found it in Wired magazine in a special report on the future of machine translation (MT). Alex Waibel is the associate director of the Language Technologies Institute at Carnegie Mellon University. Alex can be described as a machine translation dreamer of the highest category. While a student at MIT he went to one of his professors and told him that he wanted to develop a speech-to-speech translator. "He gave me a look that said, 'Yes. Now go back to your office and do your work.'" Waibel had to wait until 1987, when he went to work for the Advanced Telecommunications Research Institute in Osaka, before he finally felt the anti-MT chill lift. The local economy was booming, and as a trade-hungry chain of islands with a language that seems to have evolved independently from every other on Earth, Japan was eager to investigate even unlikely remedies for its linguistic isolation" (Silberman 232).

In his final state of the union address President Clinton reported that soon researchers will bring us devices that can translate foreign languages as fast as you can speak. Is this statement accurate? I think that it probably is however the reality behind the statement is premature. "Clinton isn't the first to be seduced by a vision of Star Trek's Universal Translator brought down to Earth. The dream of translation by computer is older than the high tech industry itself. Before email, before word processing, before command-line interfaces, machine translation - or MT -was one of the first two computer applications designed to act upon words instead of numbers (the other was code breaking)" (Behar and Silberman 220).

Reporters Behar and Silberman assert, "That really good MT is so hard to pull off that the task exhausted the top-end computing resources of every generation attempting it. Regardless, machine translation R&D is going stronger than ever, fired up by the globalization of the Net. Today, all over the world, software designers, programmers, hardware engineers, neural-network experts, AI specialists, linguists, and cognitive scientist are enlisted in the effort to teach computers how to port words and ideas from language



to language" (Behar and Silberman 220).

The authors also note "Many experts believe that instantaneous MT will arrive in less than 10 years, as humans coevolve with the technology and adapt to its inherent weaknesses. Others are convinced that only sweeping breakthroughs in computer architecture will turn our PCs and PDAs into Universal Translators (Behar and Silberman 220). I happen to believe; as do these others that a major I mean major break through in technology is needed to make MT a reality for all people.

Until this major breakthrough happens time and research continues to struggle ever so slowly forward. " In the meantime -thanks to innovations in speech recognition products like Dragon Systems' Naturally Speaking, even better MT technologies, and continuing R&D at places like AT&T and Carnegie Mellon - we are inching closer to the kind of seamless MT that was first envisioned nearly half a century ago" (Behar and Silberman 220).

So is what President Clinton and the many researchers and developers think about the reality of MT the future or only a dream. If so it seems that this is a very expensive dream for all involved. Or is the concept of MT an obsession? " This dream of accurate, automatic, real-time translation by computers - a practical version of the Universal Translator from Star Trek - has been a consuming obsession for some of the brightest minds in computing, linguistics, and AI research for more than five decades. It has marshaled heroic R&D efforts on academic and commercial fronts from IBM to MIT, burning through billions of dollars in pursuit of what is either the supreme embodiment of a borderless global society or the ultimate vaporware" (Silberman 226).

Ozzie Osborne leader of IBM MT division seems to be an optimist he says "What people really want is a Dick Tracy watch that will let them speak their natural languages with face-to-face translation. We're getting there.

Voice recognition has never been better. Voice synthesis doesn't have to sound mechanized anymore. If we become an overnight success with speech translation, it will be because we've been working on it for 30 years" (Silberman 288).

At the present time the human element is still a very important element in any language translation attempt. "For accurate and graceful translations of anything but dull technical prose, human translators won't be beaten by computers anytime soon, but in the emerging networked world, it's precisely in the arenas of unscripted exchange -such as chat rooms and telephone conversations where people will want MT most" (Silberman 290).

Other than the problems that are natural to the development of MT in terms of valid breakthroughs in research and development there are some other real time problems that I did not consider until now. With the help of Luisa Maffi, Silberman points out that

MT is still making people uneasy. When I spoke with Luisa Maffi, president of Terralingua, an organization that's sounding a global alarm about the extinction of indigenous languages, she expressed concern that MT could increase our laziness about learning other tongues. Encoded into every language are distinctive ways of adapting to experience. When we don't care enough to learn a language, or let a language die, she points out, we lose a set of cultural tools we may need in the uncertain future. A proliferation of MT, she added, might foster the illusion that getting scraps of literal meaning was the same as comprehending the culture of the person you're talking to. (Silberman 296)

So will having MT increase our laziness about learning other tongues? Given my experience in teaching conversation to Japanese students, I have to say yes MT will make Japanese students lazy. At the present time it is

my opinion that Japanese students don't care enough to learn a language successfully enough to communicate effectively. I certainly think that with MT Japan will lose a set of cultural tools that they will need in the information-based society of the future. I don't know that a proliferation of MT will foster the illusion that getting scraps of literal meaning is the same as comprehending the culture of the person you're talking to. I do know that Japanese students with poor English skills live in a world of illusion. They actually believe that they can comprehend other cultures well enough to communicate effectively without learning the skills needed to do so.

I thoroughly agree with the observations given by Silberman in terms of MT and the future. "Make peace with stubborn limitations, cut the hype, think in the scale of decades of gradual evolution, forget about breakthroughs" (Silberman 296). But some people never learn.

Huge amounts of money for research and development have been invested in machine translations. Not only Japan but, the United States, France, Belgium, Russia, and China is involved in research on Machine Translations. Several Japanese companies are heavily involved in developing this new technology. NEC Media Research Laboratories in Kawasaki Japan is trying to perfect a Japanese speech translator that can run on a ordinary PC. This system is limited to conversations about travel.

Universal Networking Language Center at United Nations University in Tokyo Japan is trying to decentralize machine translation with a universal networking language. In 1998 NTT in Kyoto Japan unleashed Altflash a system for translating between Japanese and English but it is limited to financial reports (Zimmer 235).

In December 1999 Spoken Language Processing Group Advanced Telecommunications Research tested a system in Kyoto Japan. "ATR, supported by industry and government funding, demonstrated its latest

prototype: two people met on a sidewalk, dialed up ATRs' computer on their cell phones, and conducted a conversation (limited to travel planning) simultaneously in Japanese and English. ATR is now working on commercial apps for real time TV translations" (Zimmer 235).

### **VIII. Wanted a Futures Plan with foresight**

So, how does one conduct "drastic reforms toward nurturing of creative people" To tell the truth I don't know. But a first step may be for Japan to make peace with their stubborn limitations, cut the hype and think in the scale of decades of gradual evolution, and to forget about breakthroughs. There is no technology fix for Japan at least not in the near future. The new technology is limiting and there is no substitute for good old-fashioned study.

No one I know of can produce a document or manual of reform to help Japan conduct changes for the future. But I have some new if not radical ideas on the subject based on the logic of my experience teaching English conversation in Japan. I have also conducted a random polling of Japanese English teachers concerning the question of English language reform. This very non scientific polling also gave me some creative ideas on reform in Japan.

What the teachers had to say was an eye opener for me. Their responses made me rethink my whole position on teaching in Japan. After reading Prime Minister Obuchis' article on the reform of Education the teachers that responded to my opinion poll said:

TEACHER # 1: "If Obuchi can speak English himself then I'm in agreement with him. If not then I do not agree. I do not think that English is necessary to communicate. It is possible to speak Italian, French, and Dutch. It's possible."

TEACHER # 2: "It is a good thing, but I am doubtful that it will succeed. The ability to speak English for common Japanese people is especially difficult. When you look at the conditions of English education now. After struggling for 6 years in junior high school and high school very few students can speak English well."

TEACHER # 3: "He (Obuchi) takes no account of Japanese culture and tradition. Of course I admit that there is some necessity of a basic knowledge of English, but he is too excessive in his demands that all Japanese learn English. English is of course important but the language which the people of the world uses is of a great variety."

TEACHER # 4: "It is impossible for all people to be able to communicate in English. If it was possible the goal should have been achieved long before, during the English teaching history in Japan."

These comments from some of my colleagues had given me much to think about. So having nothing to lose and everything to gain these are my thoughts on the debate on Educational reform. At present there is no plan or guidebook to introduce educational reform that I can put my hands on. So I will discuss the preparation and collection of information desired in such a manual.

My first thoughts on educational reform in Japan are that Obuchi and the Ministry of Education should not abandon their quest for reform of Japanese education. Obuchis' government should instead refine their thinking with a sense of reality of Japanese education. If you have never tried to teach English to a typical Japanese high school student or college student then try it. I am sure that the experience would open your eyes to the difficulty involved. Not only difficulty with teaching the students but difficulty with the Japanese educational system and the structure of teaching English in Japan.

Second thoughts on educational reform in Japan! In a continuing dialogue with one of my colleagues we discussed the following realities of Japanese English instruction.

- (1) Japanese English language students are lazy.
- (2) Japanese students see no reason to study English.
- (3) There is no need for Japanese to learn a foreign language in Japan.

There is little argument from me in what I see as the realities of Japanese education. There are students that seem to have an aptitude learning a foreign language and there are students that do not. The students that have an aptitude toward languages should be encouraged. Those that don't should only be expected to perform the basics. Emphasis on English language should be given as a lower priority towards entrance to a university.

The ideas' on English Language instruction that my friend and fellow teacher and I discussed were enlightening to me. Our discussion suggests to me that my friend had deep thoughts and really contemplated the issues deeply. I too have been in some deep moments of thought over the same issues and I have somewhat reluctantly agreed with him on the basics of instruction. I am reluctant to admit this because I thought with the proper amount of skill and determination I could accomplish the impossible and deliver the English language skills that I thought were needed in Japan. I cannot deliver these English language skills and neither can inappropriate patchwork by the Ministry of Education succeed.

The reality of the present situation suggests that the Ministry of education should take some drastic measures. One of these drastic measures might be of a greater benefit to Japanese if they in Obuchis' words "acquire the skill to use beautiful Japanese." Learning the Japanese Language properly is

important to Japan in terms of culture and tradition. I can not remember how many times I have been told by teachers how badly current Japanese students speak and write Japanese. Thus I believe more time and resources should be placed on this instruction. Japanese who do not speak or write Japanese well should be relieved of the burden of studying English, and concentrate on Japanese.

Consequentially those Japanese students that have a skill or natural ability toward learning foreign languages should be nurtured. The government (Japanese Ministry of Education) should bestow these students with maximum resources in order to develop their skills. Selection of these students should be at a early age. They should not be forced but identified, encouraged and developed in the same way that industry conducts research on machine translation. The same priority in terms of money and resources should be applied diligently to these gifted students. They can then form a corps of gifted English language teachers.

Teaching English should also be transformed. English Language should be divided into several classifications of educational structure. For example classify a class as English as a basic means of communication. This subject (English as a basic means of communication) may include greetings and making friends, conducting introductions or ordering in a restaurant. Giving and taking directions as well as shopping and currency transactions might also be taught.

Other areas for consideration would be to base a classes on English Language in a specialty area. For example English for Travel industry Management, English for conducting International Business, English as a basic means of communication. The structure and the contents of instruction should apply to the subject matter.

Current English Language teachers need to get out of rote memory and

automatic answers method of instruction. For example the phrase "How are you fine thank you and you." When I run into a student who uses rote memory and automatic answers method of instruction I cringe. This is not conversation. I challenge students who automatically respond this way with some strange answer to their inquiry fine thank you and you. I do this just to see how the person would react to a answer that I am not fine. Some times I say "My big toe hurts," or "my girl friend threw me out of our house and I have to find a place to live." I am not surprised when the person tilts their head and says Aaayyyh. They don't understand because they don't listen. Listening is as important as speaking in terms of having a real conversation. Students have to be trained to listen as well as speak.

Future English Language teachers should also get out of the lecture method of instruction more use should be made of role-playing and simulation. It is fun and more like a real life experience. For example role-play in a restaurant. Some students can be customers others waiters and waitresses. Dialogue should be given not to be memorize but to be used as a guide. People go to restaurants on a daily basis they already know how to act and what to do and how to order. Some specific instructions should be given to selected students. For example one student should object to the food in some way. Another should suggest the food is not prepared correctly, or the student should change their mind and reorder.

Entrance examinations for students that want to enter future English language departments should include a conversation component. English literature should be divorced from English language training. English is a skill it is not like the sciences or theory dependent areas or traditional college departments. English is like base ball or soccer one has to train in order to gain any level of proficiency.

English Language departments should hire more skilled Japanese teachers to teach English language basics. The important phrase here is



skilled Japanese teachers. In this time and age Japanese universities should be training competent teachers with graduate degrees. I have met many qualified Japanese who will never be hired at the university level because they are non-native speakers. It is such a waste of a natural resource in Japan

English Language departments should hire qualified graduate students from English speaking universities to teach specialty area subjects, even if they are not native to the countries that they are hired from. I have met hundreds of graduate students at the University of Hawaii that could speak and write English as well as or better than I. But they have no chance being hired to teach in Japan because they are not native speakers. Hiring English teachers should be based on ability not ethnic group.

In ending I have only these short comments. I addressed many issues in this paper all of which coincide with my present thinking and experience. Although I do not now advocate that Japanese educational institutions incorporate future studies as an indispensable part of the curriculum, I still think it's not a bad idea. I do however; encourage Japanese educators and educational institutions to embrace futures thinking. If I have at some point in this paper planted a seed and introduced futures thinking to scholars, professors and teachers from the Japanese university system I am satisfied with my job as a educational futurist. Which is to assist people in "choosing and creating the most desirable future."

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