

## Youths and Seniors, be ambitious!

On March 18, the very next day following my 71th birthday, I referred to this topic in my blog page. On the same day two major events happened. Both of these events happened to be language (esp. English) related.

First, an article that I had contributed to the Asahi Shimbun was printed in the reader's page. Secondly, I took the TOEIC for the second time after my retirement.

Why did I want to write an article to the newspaper? That's because I was irritated by a report that appeared in the weekly TIME magazine in March. The report referred to the tendency of Japanese students. The contents of the report were as follows.

1. In these years, Japanese students who study abroad have been decreasing notably. In particular, students who went to the United States have drastically reduced in number.
2. Concurrently, the number of the students who went to the United States from China and Korea has been showing a remarkable increase. Japan is being outnumbered by these two countries.
3. Furthermore, the TOEFL score of Japanese students are among the worst in the 27 Asian countries.



The article in the magazine showed several concrete statistics. Those were very evident. It was a slight shock for me, as an adviser of study abroad, to encounter these facts. These tendencies also have been taken up several times by journalists in Japan. Because I have been concerned about this matter, I decided to write an article about the way of living of young people in Japan. The article was as follows.

### Youths, why don't you study abroad!?

*By Takeshi Shimizu English teacher 71 years old, Akishima city*

Several days ago, I read a report in the newspaper that an American, Donald Keene, acquired Japanese nationality. He is a scholar who has diligently studied literature of Japan and has profound knowledge and concern about Japanese culture. His sublime will and deed, I think, has brought a slight shock and some influence to the mind of Japanese people. His action was like a stone thrown in the pond spreading ripples across the water.

According to history, the American Navy gathered intelligent students from all

the universities in the U.S., just after the beginning of the Pacific War, and gave them special training to master Japanese language. On the other hand, the military government of Japan prohibited the study of English, saying “English is a hostile language.” It was quite natural that Japan was not able to fight over the U.S.

Many American graduated students including Dr. Keene had strong concern and held a friendly relationship with Japan.

It has become indispensable for not only the Japanese government but also for Japanese private companies to employ capable youths who can manage foreign language. This is so that Japan can keep up with the participation in the international world, and Japanese companies can develop in foreign countries.

Unfortunately, for now, however, the English ability among Japanese is the lowest among the Asian countries and the number of Japanese students who study abroad has been decreasing according to newspapers and magazines. I wonder if this comes from the tendency of Japanese young people to favor, “the interior than the exterior”.

*(More than half century ago, I was a high school student in a rural area in Nagano prefecture. At that time I had a keen longing for a “Fulbright study abroad plan”. I was unable to achieve my dream as a youth, but after my retirement I was fortunate to go to study abroad in Spain (though it was at my own expense). I am convinced through my experience that living in an overseas country will not only improve foreign language ability but it will widen one’s life in many areas.)*

So, I would like to make an appeal. “Youth, be ambitious!”



The italic letter portion above was extracted from the original text. At first, I wondered if the article might be too long or too personal. But when the article was printed in the newspaper, I received many emails and telephone calls, responding that my opinion is to the point regarding this actual situation in Japan. (Whereas, I don’t like to blow my own trumpet.)

By a strange coincidence, many newspapers reported a new movement of the Ministry of Education of Japan. The Ministry also had strong concerns about the tendency of Japanese youth and prepared a plan to support economically those universities that actively promote sending students overseas to study.

This tendency, I suppose, comes from the actual current severe situation that it is difficult to find job after graduating from universities in Japan. Now I hope strongly, that youths in Japan would have a more positive attitude toward their future life and to courageously challenge to pave their way ahead. I would again appeal to them strongly,

“Youth, be ambitious!”

At the same time, I would like to appeal for the same point also to elderly people. I’m also concerned about the ways of living of seniors. It seems that quite a high percentage of older people are only focusing on the amount of pension they will receive in the future and how they will be looked after by a nursing-care insurance program.

If most of the elderly Japanese people think like this, Japan’s future will be so dark and gloomy. So I would like to propose that those who are in good health even at their older age should keep working and pay their taxes and social insurance.

Of course, this is not obligated. They have a right to enjoy retired life doing what they want. But such kind of positive life, I think, should be taken into consideration at this time.

What do you think about this?

Finally, I would also like to appeal to elderly people.  
“Seniors, be ambitious!”

