

**F**uture “Discoveries”  
Are to be Found on the  
Frontlines.  
Plant Your Feet Firmly on  
the Ground,  
Keep Your Aspirations High,  
and Be a Pioneer.



**Initiatives for clearing new paths to the future originate in the frontlines of local communities, both in Asia and in Japan's outlying towns and cities.**

To my mind, there are two ways of living life. We can either be “pioneers” or “practitioners.” The first group includes those who go where none have trodden before to “open up new paths.” The second group consists of such people as lawyers and accountants who are “practitioners within well-developed systems.” This is not say that one is better than the other, but my advice to the students in my seminar has always been to live the life of a pioneer, to aim high, and to burn brightly.

Having completed its period of rapid growth, Japan today is troubled by a deep sense of stagnation. From our vantage point in Japan, it may be difficult to appreciate the tremendous energy that has been set in motion in Asia. At the forefront is China, where young people in their teens, their 20s and early 30s express a strong interest in their country and society, and are striving with all their might to spin their personal fabric of hope. A new phase of globalization originating in Asia is about to begin.

And when we turn our attention to outlying regions and local communities in Japan, we see that the same types of initiatives are being launched here and there. This is not “regional revitalization” as ordered and instructed from above. Rather, these initiatives for clearing new paths to the future originate in the frontlines of local communities. For example, take the town of Hikawa-cho located in northern Shimane Prefecture. At one time, the population of this rural town had decreased to 22,000, but has now recovered to 27,000. Over the past 20 years, the town has attracted 28 companies and created an environment where younger generations can work and realize their potential. Thanks to

this success, Hikawa-cho has come to be known as the “model for attracting corporate investment.” There are many other communities throughout Japan that are

alive and full of energy, such as the cities of Hanamaki and Kitakami in Iwate Prefecture and Okaya City in Nagano Prefecture. What is it that these communities have in common? The first common trait is that all the ideas and plans for revitalization were developed locally. Second, activities for implementing these ideas and plans were led by one or two young people. We live in a society that is said to have matured long ago. Yet there are many opportunities waiting to be exploited. The truth is that one person taking the initiative can change entire cities with populations of 50,000 people or so.

### **The age of learning from the West is over. The next decade will be a time for creating new frameworks.**

To clear new paths to the future, we need “discoveries” that will trigger and support the process of change. But these discoveries are not to be found in books. They exist only on the frontlines of the real world. That is why we must return to the frontlines again and again, to become soaked in sweat, and to crawl on the ground if we have to. Only then will the discoveries we seek reveal themselves to us. With this in mind, every year my seminar students conduct onsite studies and draw up reports containing concrete proposals and recommendations. For studies conducted in Japan, each student must produce a report of at least 10,000 characters in Japanese. For overseas studies, we meet and adjourn our missions overseas, and students are responsible for making their own arrangements for visiting the companies they are studying. Students are instructed to interview the CEO of the company and to come back with the CEO’s business card. On my part, I ask the CEOs to present their business cards to the students only if they feel the interview has been a success. Then I add, “As far as possible, please do not give your business card.” Notwithstanding this difficult requirement, many students have successfully returned with business cards.

Study missions can easily become mere formalities, and

the method that we have adopted at Hitotsubashi University may seem harsh in comparison. But that is what makes it worthwhile. Student reports based on firsthand information and thorough discussion frequently get higher marks than reports prepared by professional consulting firms. In addition to graduate and undergraduate students, participants in these missions include alumni who are well along in their corporate careers. Their motives for participation differ. Some want to “take a second look at the starting point,” while others see this as an opportunity to “refresh their minds.” But it seems everyone learns and everyone goes home with valuable insights for both life and for work.

Quite a few of the students have discovered their direction in life through this experience. For instance, one student took a year off from university to work at a company in Hong Kong and is running around on the frontlines of Asian marketing. Another student was so excited by the revitalization of Hikawa-cho that he decided to commit himself to revitalizing his own hometown. Yet another student — this one a co-ed destined to take over the family business in rural Japan — decided to move overseas to “spend ten years experiencing the world and to use that experience in operating the family factory.” We live in an age of inexorable globalization. For that reason, it is so important to take a close look at the global reality from the frontlines. And it is no less important to examine one’s own country from the inside.

Japan expended the past hundred years learning from the West and applying this knowledge to nation-building. But the curtain has been lowered on the age of imitation and it is now time for the Japanese people to envision and design their own future. The next ten years must be spent thinking seriously about the future and creating a new framework that will carry the nation forward. It is my earnest hope that Hitotsubashi University will be able to contribute to this process by educating and nurturing young people who will participate in this undertaking and work to create a new vision and new hope for society.

(Transcribed from interview)



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