Information, Culture and Social Studies
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"Safety-security study" and "oral history" with their significance expanding through the cultivation of human resources

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—— First, could you tell us about how this laboratory was established?

It was in December 2002 that I came here to serve as a concurrent professor. Subsequently, our proposed project was selected as one of the government-sponsored projects eligible to the Special Coordination Funds for Promoting Science and Technology and thus, in October 2003, this laboratory was officially opened. Our research activities have two major pillars. One is this newly launched project concerning safety-security and human resource development in the area of science and technology. Another is a project on oral history, on which I have been working for about 10 years.

—— Could you tell us more about the "Is Japan Safe Enough?" project, the one concerning safety-security and human resources development in the area of science and technology, sponsored by the government' s Special Coordination Funds for Promoting Science Technology? What is the objective of this project?

By now, the level of safety as the objective norm of science and technology has been generally improved. At the same time, however, when we look at the situation in the mass consumption society, we have the reality that not many consumers feel a sense of safety with goods and foods produced by using science and technology. Against this backdrop, I thought I would take up and ponder on the issue of safety engineering and the psychological mechanism of human thinking as one theme. Because my academic background is in political science, a humanities field, this theme may be a bit beyond my capacity. But I thought that we could be of some help when it comes to educating people for that purpose and that we would be able to achieve something if we could widen the scope of viewpoints through collaboration with those specialized in science-related fields.

"Collaboration" or "mutual consideration" between humanities and science fields rather than "fusion" between the two

—— At RCAST, various attempts have been made to fuse humanities and science fields together. Actually, it may be more suitable to call it "collaboration between humanities and science fields" in which those specialized in the two fields collaborate with each other. In this project, you have been working together with those specialized in science fields. What impression do you have so far?

"Collaboration between humanities and science fields" would be the right way to put it indeed. Now, after a year of working with them, what comes to my mind is the notion of "mutual consideration between humanities and science fields." Those of us specialized in the humanities fields give consideration to those specialized in the science fields, while at the same time those in the science fields give consideration to us. It would be difficult to go beyond that point. I am past 50 years old now and I have been in the humanities fields for more than 30 years. Having come to this point, even a very brief conversation would be enough for me and my colleagues in the humanities fields to communicate with each other and instantly understand what the others are up to. But this would not be the case when working with those in the science fields. Therefore, even if we approach those specialized in science and try to understand what they are doing, we may end up

misunderstanding what they say. But even if we do end up misunderstanding each other, I think it is still worthwhile. By working together with them, there emerges a certain domain of mutual comprehension, from which something new will be born. Then, we will probably be able to have unexpected spillover effects.

In the final end, it would be difficult to work together. But we can still say, "Let' s keep our eyes on where we can work together" and I think that is how things are supposed to be. Trying to fuse the humanities and science fields is like trying to mix water and oil. That is, they would go back to the original state in due time.

What I find interesting at RCAST is that collaboration is not limited to between humanities and science. Various sorts of "science-science fusions" and "science-engineering fusions" are taking place between and among professors specialized in different fields of science, for instance, between the Faculty of Engineering and the School of Science, or even on the level of department or major, whereby various thoughts and ideas hitherto submerged in each field surface and interact with each other. Through such fusions, or mutual consideration, people come to take interest in other domains outside their own specialty and the same thing is happening between those specialized in the science fields and those of us in the humanities fields. This is because RCAST has the kind of environment that facilitates such interactions. It is filled with lots of factors that help us enrich our thoughts and ideas. The question is how I will take on my challenge in this given environment. In this sense, working at RCAST is a very stimulating and precious experience.

—— Indeed, many of researchers at RCAST are very willing to mingle with and absorb various kinds of knowledge from researchers specialized in other fields and this enthusiasm has generated various collaborations.

Exactly, that is the very source of energy for RCAST and how to bridge various seeds is our major challenge. In any case, it would be a shame if each researcher works on his or her own research project while being in this environment at RCAST. We need to link with each other and expand the domain of our study. It is important to have and pursue to realize such an image.

"The project on safety-security and human resources development in science and technology" has generated various spillover effects through organizing seminars

—— Let me ask about the framework of human resources development courses. There are three courses, namely, the common course, the advanced course and the journalist course. What are the characteristics of each of these courses and how do they relate with each other?

The common course is meant to be an open school. As we have lecturers from various fields, those attending the course will be very much enriched in knowledge. The attendants are working members of society. At the same time, however, most of them are, in one way or another, a specialist of safety and security, holding a post in which they have to think about the safety and security in their respective field of work. Thus, there are lots of information exchanges and those who have completed the course often organize or participate in alumni activities. Specifically, an old boy school is being organized once every month, which is being done without any help from our side and solely under their own management. This is one of major achievements of our project.

On the part of teaching side, it is often the case that lecturers do not know what other lectures are teaching. In a bid to provide linkages among lecturers, we have set up a committee of those engaged. As we proceed with the seminar program, we try to ensure that each lecturer has a clear idea as to the positioning of his or her lecture within the overall program by holding committee meetings and giving separate briefings to those unable to attend. Probably thanks to this effort, many of the lecturers seem to feel identified with the whole program as they actively participate in closing ceremonies, parties and so forth. This, I think, is another major achievement.

We chose Ark Hills, not Komaba (where RCAST is located), as the location of the school partly because we had held an intellectual property seminar there before. But more importantly, we thought that Ark Hills, located in the center of Tokyo, would be far more accessible – both physically and psychologically – for participants because most of them are active members of society, who are in a busy fulltime post and have to struggle to attend the class starting from 6 or 6:30 p.m. Making it psychologically easy is quite important. It is indeed necessary to provide such motivation.

We have provided the common course for two years and I believe we have produced certain results. From now on, it is quite possible that those who have completed the course will become an epicenter for various new activities. Among those who have completed the course are bureaucrats and corporate employees. Along with journalists, they can probably create a certain unit of community. And then, our challenge will be how to support this community.

In the advanced course, we will incorporate simulations, games and role plays along with lectures so that those hoping to learn practical know-how on safety and security can practice how they should cope with risks in various situations. This is going to be a very interesting experiment. We will start with a class of about 10 people but I believe this will be another major achievement of our project.

Journalist education is another mission of our project. For this particular course, we have asked RCAST professor Toru Takeda, who is also a renowned journalist, to join us and left it to him to determine most of the course design. The basic line remains science technology and safety-security issues. But when it comes to educating journalists, there will not be substantial differences between educating general journalists and those specialized in science and technology. So, our approach is to focus on the characteristics of individual journalists. That is, we provide journalist programs just as we would do in educating

general journalists but at the same time we are trying to make each of them develop special knowledge in a certain field of his or her interest. This course has just begun and we are not sure how much we can achieve in one year. But what we can say at this moment, half a year into this program, is that we are beginning to have those who are capable of handling long-term research and news gathering. Also, some people have had a chance to see the forefront of news reporting, working as an intern at a major newspaper company. When these people develop their practical ability, that is, when those people – who are generally younger than those in the common course with some of them still being students – are fostered or nurtured into full-fledged specialized journalists, one layer of them this year followed by another layer the next year with more to follow, I do expect that we will be able to change something.

—— As a project sponsored by the government's Special Coordination Funds for Promoting Science Technology, there remain another three years. How do you proceed with the project in the remaining years?

I used to think that the cultivation of human resources would be a tiresome task. But what came to my mind while proceeding with the safety-security project is that thinking about the cultivation of human resources has been a very nourishing or enlightening experience for us. Without this opportunity, we would not probably have thought about rethinking of history. The project has been quite meaningful for us in that it has widened the scope of our viewpoints. That is my honest impression now.

Lately, we have been in frequent contact with University of Tokyo Press. Finally, "Anzen-Anshin-gaku (Safety-Security Study)," a book based on the content of the common course and edited by three of us, Professor Yoichiro Murakami, Professor Hideyuki Horii and myself, will be published in May 2005.

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Links

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