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| Author | 池田, 亜希子(Ikeda, Akiko) |
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Accumulating various experiences and making steady observations foster the ability to scrutinize information

Dr. Kaneko talked about his surprising childhood, when he had longed for the world of spies. As such, he has sharp eyes for scrutinizing information. At present, he is making all-out efforts to address problems of information (content) distribution, saying that our world will become far richer and more exciting only if we can handle it properly.

A child who liked to make observations

I was a type of boy who would keep watching movements of an excavator at a construction site endlessly. To tell the truth, even now I still have this habit and like to watch people coming and going. Though I dare not talk to passers-by, I keep watching them while wondering, “What are they doing?” or “What are they doing it for?”

For example, suppose I noticed airline staff members, who had been at the check-in counter, were now found standing at the boarding gate, I would wonder, “At what timing did they move to the boarding gate and why at that particular timing?” What I actually see is only a portion of their entire movement, but I like to think about the meaning it has within the entire system. It is intriguing because I sometimes can have a glimpse into differences between airline companies.

Becoming a “007” – my dream

When I was a schoolboy, I once wanted to become a spy.

What brought you to Keio University?

Prof. Tomonori Aoyama, my advisor at the University of Tokyo, had been engaged in the development of 4K technologies at NTT. When I was in the second year of my doctoral program, he asked me about my future career. “I have no specific idea yet”, was my answer. Prof. Aoyama said, “Then let me think about it, OK?” Soon after that, at an international conference, Prof. Aoyama introduced me to a professor of Keio University, who encouraged me to come to Keio.

This is how I came to work for Keio’s Research Institute for Digital Media and Content in 2006. In April 2012, I additionally took up a post as Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Science and Technology.

I’m probably the only one in the world who is devoted to designing a hyper-scale information network that links digital data from the past to the present and from the East to the West, as well as thoroughly thinking about services evolving out of such network and IT technologies supporting it.

Reading a book entitled “Best 50 Detectives of the World” or something like that was a trigger. Of the 50 heroes featured in the book, the cool 007 was my favorite. As there were no such books as “how to become a spy”, I seriously thought I would have to master all the abilities required of competent spies on my own. Driven by this ambition, I read many books to acquire the needed knowledge, physical strength and emotion control powers, and tried them by myself. Since spy activity is basically supposed to take place in foreign countries, spies would need the ability to understand the given situation correctly using a limited amount of information. So I wondered how I could acquire the ability to judge correctly whether the information is true or not.

With respect to my attitude toward information authenticity, I feel I was somewhat influenced by my parents’ education. In my childhood, I was surrounded by illustrated reference books and encyclopedias at home. Naturally, I compared these books. Some pictorial books were written this way and others that way. I even found wrong information.

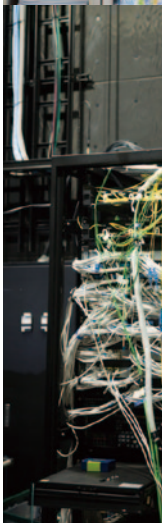
My experience overseas – undermined preconceptions and assumptions

As a third grader in elementary school, I accompanied my father, a biologist (morphological taxonomy), staying for one month in the United Kingdom and three months in the United States.

We visited the U.K. via Moscow, where I was shocked to find people speaking a “totally foreign” language. At the same time, I was also surprised to find my father capable of communicating with these people. We brought a radio with us from Japan. As I switched it on in the U.K., to my great surprise, the language on air was English! In Japan, the radio only spoke in Japanese, but now it spoke in the local language, which was truly amazing. Social systems, cultures, products...all were different from those of Japan. At the same time, I also began to feel a yearning for British gentlemen.

Limits of knowledge

The period of my overseas stay was only four months, so I did not attend a local school; I would study at home one day and go out the next day. For days of outing, my mother, my elder brother and I took turns to choose places to visit. One day when traveling on a bus together with my brother, who was a fifth grader in elementary school, we got lost. I consulted a Japanese-English dictionary at hand and found the words “here” (“koko” in Japanese) and “where” (“doko” in Japanese) but it didn’t show





how to use these words. Although I carried this dictionary with me throughout the trip, I found it useless after all. Nevertheless, we were truly grateful to the bus driver who was kind and patient enough to deal with the two small boys who kept speaking only “here” and “where” until he could somehow understand us.

When I returned to Japan, my classmates told me, “Your mind is out of focus due to the overseas stay.” But that overseas stay gave me a lot of rewarding experiences.

How to choose your expertise

To tell the truth, it was not my initial intention to focus on the network world. As a high school student, I was interested in aeronautical and space sciences. In my elementary and junior high school days, unlike today, rocket launching was still a rare event. Naturally I yearned for space travel.

Although I chose the University of Tokyo to study aeronautical a year after, I switched my course to information and communication engineering because I didn’t like physics. Moreover, I was attracted to radio communication and Internet. When I was in the first year of high school, I got a short-wave radio. Taking this opportunity, I made an FM antenna on my own using two curtain rails at home and enjoyed FM broadcasts from Osaka. When a special ionosphere known as the sporadic E layer was formed in the upper sky, I happened to receive broadcasts from Hokkaido, which was otherwise unavailable. Thanks to these events, I was captivated by mysteries of radio waves. In those days, I used to write a letter to the U.K to request BBC’s latest short-wave broadcast programs, which I would receive a few months later. But these programs soon became instantly available via the BBC website, which was an exciting development.

Recalling these events, I decided to major in information and communication technology, which dealt with information exchange via radio and the Internet. I chose “Mobile Internet” as the topic of my graduation thesis, “Mobility Support” for master’s thesis and “Network Architecture” for my doctoral thesis.

What is scrutiny of information?

First and foremost, you must get to the bottom of what is really true. You may believe something as being correct, saying, “This is what my teacher taught me”, “This is written in my textbook”, or “This is what I’ve already experienced.” But you shouldn’t take all of their authenticity for granted. It may be true in one facet of a certain phenomenon, but you should examine thoroughly whether you can find the same facet in the phenomenon that you are facing now or whether it is worth finding it in the first place. You should continue seeking the truth at all times while making the most of the knowledge you have gained in the past to seek for a relevant facet of the phenomenon. Never be content with looking at one facet of a thing. The more facets you have to explore, the closer you get to the truth. Of course, experiencing failure is inevitable if you are in an ongoing quest of truth. But if the failure allows you to discover a new facet of a thing, your quest will surely lead to a higher stage.

In order to acquire knowledge from past experiences, it is essential that you accumulate various experiences and make thorough observations and inquiries.

Some words from a student

Through my experience working part-time as a supporting staff of IT equipment repair, I wished to deepen my knowledge of network and chose to study at Dr. Kaneko’s lab. My generation takes Internet connection for granted, but I think it is important to understand each factor that allows the Internet to function properly. From Dr. Kaneko, I’ve learned to identify problems in the world and thinking about how to solve them. Meanwhile, Dr. Kaneko is a friendly teacher who always cares about us including our private lives.

(Reporter & text writer : Akiko Ikeda)

For the full text of this interview

<http://www.st.keio.ac.jp/kyurizukai>

What mechanisms or systems could facilitate scrutiny of information? . . .

Kunitake Kaneko

Born in Kagawa Prefecture, Dr. Kaneko specializes in application-oriented networking, focusing on networking of digital data that allows effective use of digital data. After graduating from the University of Tokyo in 2001, he completed the doctorate course at the Graduate School of Information Science and Technology of the same university in 2006; doctorate degree (Ph.D.). After serving as a Research Assistant at the Graduate School of Frontier Sciences, he joined Keio University in September 2006 as Assistant Professor for Research Institute for Digital Media and Content (DMC Institute). In April 2012, Dr. Kaneko assumed the current post while concurrently serving as a Researcher for DMC Institute.

