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From the Industry: Yasunori Matogawa, Ph.D., Professor of Space Communications at the Institute of Space and Astronautical Science

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Critical Perspectives: Yasunori Matogawa

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Dr. Yasunori Matogawa is Professor at the Institute of Space and Astronautical Science directly reporting to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, Sports and Technology. He is also in charge of supervising Kagoshima Space Center in Kyushu as Director General. Widely considered to be the man of space education in Japan, Dr. Matogawa is the President for the Japan Society for Aeronautical and Space Sciences. Internationally, he is well-known as the Chairman of the International Astronautical Federation. The interview was conducted at Sophia University, Japan with the assistance of Dr. Tsutomu Kanayama (Email: kanaya-t@hoffman.cc.sophia.ac.jp).

How did you develop your interest in space communication?

When I was in the first grade of my junior high school I found a newspaper article about rocket construction. The launch of Sputnik in 1959 occurred when I was in the first year of my high school. The flight of Gagarin happened when I was a freshmen at my University. So, my interest in space developed very naturally. I cannot say it was something in the curriculum in school or at the University that drew me to space technology or space science. It was the social atmosphere of the era. Those events were the most important motivators.

Important events in the history of Japanese space communication.

The most impressive event was the launch of the first Japanese satellite. It occurred when I was in the last year of my graduate course. It was a cooperative effort of about five thousand people in Japan. I felt the power that such cooperation can bring. And it was the most important event in my life. Since then, I have understood how much human cooperation means for the development of space science and technology.

How should space communication be taught in Japan?

Not curriculum in the classroom but experience in the field should be the priority. Young people should assist in launch operations and be allowed to track satellites. In other words, practical experience is the most important factor in obtaining self-confidence for young specialists.

How will the merger of the biggest space institutions influence industry and education?

At the moment, I cannot say that it's the best atmosphere here. There are not a lot of possibilities to do field work in space communication. We should fascinate students with the curriculum. Many youngsters are rushing into space industries, and almost half of the people who apply to work for space companies would like to literally work in space. Of course, only a few will get a chance to go there. So the curriculum and training courses should be prepared for them.

How do you see the future of space communication in Japan?

The development of space and satellite communications in Japan will depend entirely on investments from the Japanese government. And as far as the government is concerned, I don't have a lot of expectations; I don't have any illusions. But young, passionate people will overcome the obstacles and the barriers that politicians put in front of them. Satellite communications will continue to grow and take over other means of communications such as modern portable, telephone systems, many people on the earth will be connected via space communication, it will be a very big activity in the world, and Japan will play an important role in it, I think.

Professor Matogawa plans to open a school of space communication.

My private plan is to establish an educational facility that will teach space communications in Japan from primary school, maybe until they are high school students. Through these activities I'd like to pursue the possibility of teaching them the importance of life and responsibility.

What place should space communication have in the curriculum?

Of course, I think students who study space science and technology should study subjects that are socially oriented. For example, they should learn the importance of life, the importance of cooperation between people, and social responsibility. Without these factors, young people who study space communications and space technology will not make a valuable contribution to the development of the industry. Those people who are not engaged in space science should better

understand the importance of it. I respect the activity of Sophia University, and if possible, each college and university in Japan should have in its curriculum classes about space communication achievements, especially in the 20th century. This will have a very important result on the future development of space communications in Japan.