

A Japanese 3.0 Renaissance Man for Global Good

By Dr. Nancy Snow

Ko Fujii may not appreciate this label. He's much too humble. After our first meeting, I thought this *kikokushijo* (returnee) is a Japanese renaissance man: “Mr. 3.0”—a connector of intelligence, technology, and people. Fujii is founder and CEO of Makaira K.K., a public affairs and stakeholder engagement company focusing on technology, culture, and social innovation. And he is former head of Public Policy and Government Relations for Google Japan.

My own Google Inc. experience extends to web searching “Japanese Renaissance man.” Up popped a tribute to the life of publisher extraordinaire Shigeo Minowa, who kept the Japanese virtue of *isogashii* (staying busy) intact. Minowa co-founded the University of Tokyo Press, one of the first non-US-based presses to become a member of the Association of American University Presses, and earned his doctorate at age 76 from Sophia University. He headed the Academic Service of the United Nations University in Tokyo, where he helped to set up the United Nations University Press.

Both men intersect passion for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and Fujii waxes nostalgic for the now closed UNESCO Village in Saitama Prefecture. “The reason Japanese people love UNESCO so much is that it is the idea of ideals—to create world peace and unite the world through culture, science, and enlightening people with education,” says Fujii. Japan may be the country, other than France, where UNESCO is the most popular.

If you replace what publishing meant, in the 20th century, to Minowa's life with what the Internet means in the 21st to Fujii's life, then we have kindred spirits in enthusiasm and hard work to make Japan more global and socially responsible.

Fujii's professional experience leaves one breathless by its depth and breadth. Before Google, he worked at FleischmanHillard Japan where, in Tokyo, he represented some of the world's tech/non-tech companies as well as for-profit/nonprofit institutions. His areas of expertise and pursuits today include all things related to the Internet

and technological innovation in policy and practice, as well as place branding, public and digital diplomacy, civic technology, corporate social responsibility, and regional revitalization. Once I had met Fujii in summer 2014, I knew that Japan was on the right track with its talented visionaries.

Fujii is a Meguro ward-born Tokyoite who, at the impressionable age of 9, moved with his family to the Midwest region of the United States where he spent most of his elementary and junior high school years.

“I am a child of the 80s, a product of a specific era in the Japanese economy when Japan was on a trajectory to become one of the biggest global actors in the world. This was when everybody was going abroad to sell products, build factories, and do business; the first time that Japan really internationalized in the postwar era.”

Fujii won top-of-the-class awards in junior high, in subjects including cross-country, painting, poetry, and clarinet, and even won a science fair project award from the United States Air Force.

“It was really going well for me and so giving that up to return to Japan was a scary experience.” He adds that reverse culture shock was much tougher than the initial move to America. “Going to the United States was a matter of language. Once I learned English, I was basically fine.” Returning to Japan's education system and the rules and norms of Japanese society as a teenage *kikokushijo* was much more difficult.

From his parents' perspective, however, it made more sense for him to return to his home country in the mid-1980s for his high school and university years. This was the



Walking in the woods of Wisconsin, where Fujii camped as a child, and learned to navigate an international upbringing.

Vogelian “Japan as Number One” era (*Japan as Number One: Lessons for America*, by Ezra F. Vogel, 1979) in what was perceived to be limitless growth and prosperity. Now it was time for Fujii to sharpen up those Japanese language and communication skills.

His parents taught him to become a disciplined bilingual and bicultural individual. He was not allowed to speak English in the Japanese household, but his parents insisted that he speak proper English when interacting with his American friends. Because of his parent’s strict adherence to full linguistic and cultural immersion, Fujii was able to succeed in the Japanese school setting, just as he had in the American one.

“My parents demanded that, when I’m with my American friends, I act like a true American, and when I’m with my Japanese friends, I act like a true Japanese.”

I’ve joked before with Fujii that he seems more American [than Japanese], or even like a global citizen; now I know it’s because of his ability to adapt so well to the communicative style of his counterpart. He feels very committed to acting appropriately and responsibly to fit the setting, whether Japanese or global. It is his operating principle.

Japanese core discipline and commitment to excellence, strong parental guidance, with a global adaptability and openness to change help to explain Fujii’s goals to better the position of his native country’s place in the world. His parents raised him with the philosophy that “you never shy away from the most difficult problem.”

He seamlessly transferred his fast track success and achievements from America to Japan. A graduate of the

prestigious Kaisei Academy in Tokyo, he earned a Bachelor of Law degree from the University of Tokyo. His love for UNESCO ideas led to his joining the international department of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), where he spent nine years specializing in international science, international copyright law, and technology promotion.

While a MEXT official, he was granted two years’

professional leave to earn an MBA from Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management, with a focus on marketing, as well as public and nonprofit management. His Kellogg education led him to advocate the need

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for strategic PR and marketing in Japan’s government information campaign programs. This was unprecedented, in that to the Japanese bureaucracy, public relations and communications served as a dispensable sideshow to drafting laws and budgeting legislative projects.

“When I was in the government, that [communication] piece of science and technology was really missing. We never had enough programs to build public support for our undersea and space programs, or bioethics.”

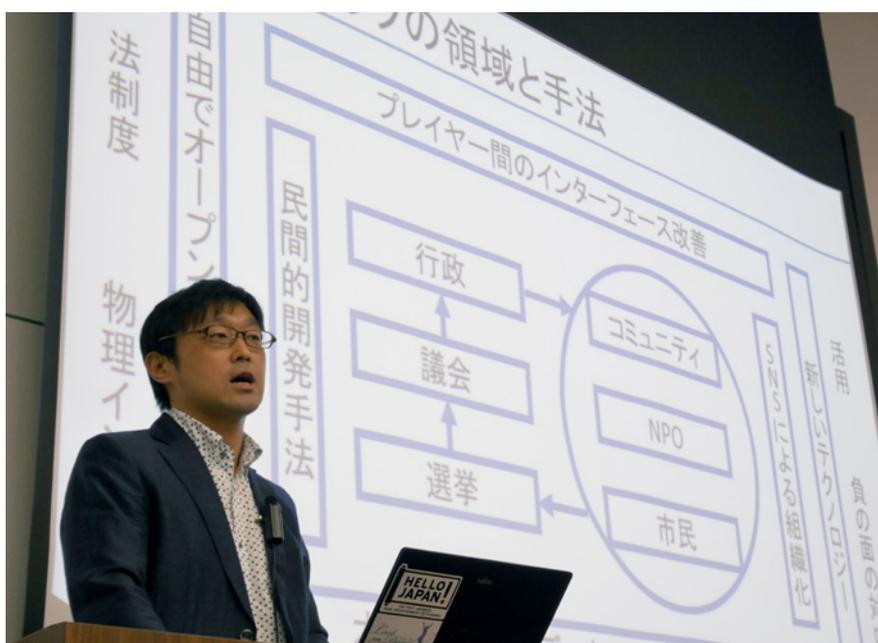
Early in his career he thought, “Why isn’t anyone working on communications?” Everyone thought that communications was for the ad agencies or academics, so no one was really doing communications back then at MEXT.

Fujii’s Kellogg years made him a key communications person. He understands the fundamental importance of integrating marketing communication into government

policy. Communication is “the circulation” for the idea; without it, nothing moves people to action.

Fujii remains true to two core missions: to improve Japan’s communications domestically and internationally; and to strengthen Japan’s abilities in international lobbying and negotiation, whether with a nonprofit or a corporate client.

But you can’t take the American boyhood out of the man: “Even now, when I land at San Francisco Airport, rent a car, turn the radio on, and drive up the 101 freeway, I feel I can do anything.” ■



Fujii speaks about the landscape of the civic tech community—where the power of technology is used to improve democracy and society.