

Meeting Dr. Yoshiro NakaMats – the "Thomas Edison of Japan"



With Dr. Natamats, February 2002 at the Gakushi Kaikan in Tokyo

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I first wrote this in February 2002 and posted it on my first website at kt70.com/~jamesjpn Because that website no longer exists, I am reposting it here.

On Feb. 13, 2002 while in Tokyo, I was invited by German Marina to attend with her a meeting called "21stCentury Seminar" and dinner held in honor of one of the greatest inventors of all time, Dr. Yoshiro Nakamatsu, also known as Dr. NakaMats. This is his preferred spelling of his name. According to the rules of writing Japanese in Roman letters, it would be Nakamastsu.

One of Dr. NakaMats' well-known inventions is the floppy disk! He is credited with over 3000 inventions – more than Thomas Edison – and 16 patents to IBM. He is reputed to be one of the 5 greatest inventors of all time! So you can imagine that I considered it an honor not only to meet him and talk to him personally but to be asked by him after the conference to give my impression of his talk while he videotaped me!



Together with Japanese Maggie (center) and German Marina before the Gakushi Kaikan building in Tokyo, Feb. 13, 2002

Forty-seven people were in attendance, two of whom were foreigners, Marina and myself. The rest were Japanese. I was the only American present. Only five of the guests were female. Attendees were primarily businessmen and inventors.

Dr. NakaMats' talk was of course in Japanese but I could follow it quite well including most of his jokes! I was excited at some of the things he had to say and responded with a good deal of obvious enthusiasm. This is probably why Dr. NakaMats wanted to video me after the meeting to record my comments. He often travels to America and so I could give him my response in English on video.

Here are some of the points that Dr. NakaMats spoke about:

- Love for others is the primary motivation of all his inventions – to help make things easier for others. He says that if mere profit were the only motivation, he would not have succeeded as he has. Because of his love for his mother, he invented a squeeze pump to make it easier for her to take soy sauce out of a deep jar. This invention came to become the hand pump that is used this very day to pump out kerosene from containers into portable heaters the Japanese use in their homes.
- The greatest long-term problem in Japan today is that of population decline! The average Japanese family only has 1.3 children. At this rate, in 50 years the population of Japanese will decrease to less than half or only 50 million people. This would further cripple the already ailing economy.
- The reason the Japanese people give for not having more children is the high cost of living and the ailing economy. Dr. NakaMats says this is a very poor excuse! I told him that a fellow missionary from Canada had 13 children! Yes, right in Japan! Dr. NakaMats was impressed.
- Japanese people are not working nearly as hard or as long as they used to. Americans have now surpassed them in work and diligence.
- Japanese pupils are not studying as hard as they used to. The quality of education has gone down.