

## Greetings from the President's Office

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### "Abacus Nori"

It could be said that most children start learning or taking lessons of activities because their parents believe it will be beneficial for their kids. And of course, some children start on activity from their own will too. Whatever motivation, some activities require it to be started at an early age for developing one's potential fully, such as ballet, go, Japanese chess, and other activities that need highly sophisticated skills. I guess the relation of Nakajima-sensei, the former president, and his violin is a good example.

In my case, it was the abacus. I started it when I was in the third year of elementary school. The teacher of the abacus school was one of my relatives, and that was the reason my mother had me start learning it, but I was reluctantly engaged. However, I found it very fascinating to see myself improve with the abacus. I went to the abacus school every day like a routine and I passed the first grade at the age of 12. If I recall correctly, the examination included addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, written-down problems (mental calculations), and sales slip count. I was good at doing calculations in my head and was able to make accurate calculations with five- or six digit numbers. A vivid image of an abacus and its beads come to mind and I could use it in my head. Once I became a junior high school student, I got busier and had to cease the abacus school. I would assume that my skill for mental calculations peaked at around the age of 10 to 15. Now more than 50 years have passed since that period, and still there is a vivid image of abacus beads in my head. I would guess my current skill of mental calculations abides to two- or three-digit numbers, as I feel some limitation in my brain's ability.

The abacus reminds me of when I was in the US as a student in the mid-70s during a time when small calculators became widely prevalent. By and large, the people living there were not very good at calculations and small calculators, which size were about 20 cm by 15 cm, amazed people with its convenience. Some students in the US were even proud of owning one. One day, a friend brought his calculator with him and showed us how to use it in front of everyone. He was the focus of everyone's attention. When he added up 10 four-digit numbers, I also calculated them in my head at the same time and came to the same answer. I said "You are right!" and people turned around asking me why I could make such a statement. When I told them that an abacus was embedded in my brain, no one believed me and challenged me to a match against the calculator. I confidently said that I would beat it with any digit of numbers.

There is a knack to calculating in your head. For example, the last three- or four-digits should be calculated first, and then the following three- or four-, and so on. This enables you to calculate any digit of numbers in your head; however, calculators do have a limit to 10- or 11- digits. In addition, my friend's finger was too big to push the keys and seemed sluggish. There was no reason for him to beat my brain abacus even with his calculator.

Later, people crowded including my advising professor and other staff members too, about 10 or so in total. I do not remember what happened afterwards, however, I do remember that people called me "Abacus Nori" thereafter.



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