

## ***“Welfare Engineering” Is Our Supporter!***

**Kohei Horiguchi**  
**Gunma College of Technology**

Everyone, do you know “Welfare Engineering”? It's a new field of engineering. Even if you've never heard of this word, you have seen wheelchairs, artificial legs and beds for nursing. All of them are products that are created based on welfare engineering. Welfare engineering has a close relationship to our bodies and lives. But how this relationship should be is very important. Today I'd like to express my opinion that we should pay much more attention to welfare engineering.

When you hear the word 'welfare,' you probably first think of elderly people. In aged society, the biggest problem is who takes care of many elderly people, because a decline in the number of births accompanies the aged society. So now many major companies are trying to make convenient electric wheelchairs and even humanoid robots to take care of the elderly. Even if they are in bed they can talk with someone on TV. There are even beds with videophone. Surely they are very useful. But are the elderly all bedridden? Who in the world would be so glad to always be taken care of by someone or some machine? I think recent engineers' attention is too much focused on 'taking care.'

Nothing can replace the joy of eating with your own hands.

Nothing can replace the joy of walking with your own legs.

Nothing can replace the joy of going to see your grandchildren with your own eyes.

Nothing can replace the joy of doing by yourself.

Therefore now I want to say, “Welfare engineering must be their supporter who helps the elderly do by themselves and must never be their ruler.” That is because welfare engineering cannot give the joy and can only support them to catch the joy by themselves even if they grow old. That is “Independence”, in other words, “standing upon one’s own legs.” “Being controlled by machines” doesn’t mean real “Independence”.

This idea is not only for the elderly. It's same for the disabled. And we should keep that in our mind too.

Recently the sense of supporting the disabled is getting established among us. So, however, don't we have the delusion that they cannot do anything without our help? In fact, when I was working at a convenience store, I met a man with a disabled leg and went out to open the door for him. Then he said strongly, “No thank you!! I can do it by myself!!” Then I found some delusion in me. He could do by himself even though he walked slowly and used his stick. Moreover, point blocks and wheelchairs were made for that purpose. After all, welfare engineering *IS* our supporter.

The disabled people are not only in Japan. There are so many disabled people in developing countries because of war, landmines, poverty and diseases. This is a very serious problem. They can't get a job, they can't go to hospital, they can't eat and they can't live. This situation should never be accepted.

Now the Japanese government is giving economic assistance to developing countries. But Japanese ODA is often called "Assistance without kindness." Is it only money that we can give to them? You know, Japanese technology of welfare engineering is the finest in the world. So I'd like to insist that we should assist them by using our welfare technology. This support is never only to send products. We can also teach how to make them, we can send welfare engineers to train local engineers. In this way, we will be able to become their real supporters.

I have a dream that one day all the elderly will be able to do anything by themselves and to live cheerfully. I have a dream that one day all the disabled all over the world will be able to do anything by themselves and to live without feeling inconvenience. I have a dream that one day as a welfare engineer I will become a supporter for the elderly and the disabled.