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A Bridge that Connects Thailand to Japan

Hello everyone, my name is Morio Tetsuya. Like everybody speaking here today, English is not my first language. However, one thing that you may not be aware of is that my first language is not Japanese – it's actually Thai.

I was born here in Tottori but moved to Thailand when I was only three months old. My mother is Thai and my father is Japanese. I lived in Thailand for 13 years before coming back to Tottori just last year. Today, I would like to tell you how English has helped me to not only learn Japanese, but to become part of Japanese society.

You might be wondering “How did English help you learn Japanese? English and Japanese are very different languages, right?” That is very true, but English is taught in both Thailand and Japan, making it a bridge for me to cross from one language to the other.

When I first heard that I was going to move back to Japan, I was both excited and very nervous. I was happy to be returning to the place I was born, however I was very anxious about leaving my friends and some of my family to come to a place where I didn't know anybody. On top of that, I had virtually no Japanese language ability. I only knew basic words like “Konnichiwa” and “Arigato”, and when I arrived in Japan, I soon learned that my pronunciation was very poor because any time I tried to say things to a Japanese person, they would give me a funny look or laugh.

Also when I first came to Japan I noticed the differences from the place I grew up. In Thailand I was used to very spicy, complex and flavorful foods. In Japan, the foods are a lot more subtle with very mild spices. In some areas of Thailand people cook scorpions, spiders and insects with different spices and eat them like popcorn, but I could not imagine anyone in Japan even wanting to try to eat anything like this.

School in Japan is also very different from Thailand. I noticed right away that I would have a hard time because everyone only spoke Japanese. At first, the lessons were too fast and difficult for me. I couldn't understand anything. Making friends was difficult too because nobody could communicate with me, and I couldn't communicate with them. I had to resort to sign language and facial expressions.

Luckily, I was soon introduced to some tutors who were sent to teach me Japanese. I obviously didn't speak much Japanese, and they didn't speak Thai, so we had to rely on English to communicate.

I am grateful that my mother had the idea to send me to a school in Thailand with a good English program when I was in the 5th grade. If I didn't start studying English back then, it would have been almost impossible for me to learn Japanese now. I am also grateful for my tutors, who have been extremely patient with me and have helped me to learn a lot about Japanese culture. I am also grateful that they did not laugh at me when I mispronounced the Japanese words I was learning over and over again.

I am happy to say that today my life is much easier. My tutors still have to use English with me from time to time, but we mostly communicate in Japanese. I have also made many friends in school. I feel like I belong here and have been accepted by Japanese society. I joined this English contest last year because it was the only thing I could do well. Now, I am here for a different reason. I wanted to share my story, to tell you that I am proud of my Thai and Japanese backgrounds and how grateful I am that English has been the bridge to bring them together.

What has English done for you?

Thank you.