



Learning Curve

OCTOBER 4, 2009



# THE CREATIVE IMPULSE

H2-3

Pictures by MAKI INOUE FROM THE NISHINIPPON NEWSPAPER

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# Creative genius

Pictures by MAKI INOUE FROM THE NISHINIPPON NEWSPAPER

The labels "architect", "urban planner" and "inventor" do not even begin to describe Shunya Susuki, whose consuming interest in creating things from young is matched only by his breadth of projects and ideas, writes **FAEZH ISMAIL**

**W**HEN Japanese creativity teacher Shunya Susuki was about five years old, he fashioned a two-metre high object from boxes used to deliver fish.

It was several times taller than the boy and it caused quite a stir among the adults in the fishing community of Minato Machi. They were "astounded" that he could create something like that. When asked what it was, young Susuki proudly pronounced the item to be a robot.

He would make a similar announcement 50 years later: the completion of the Jang Geunm Robot which bows with a smile when it meets a person.

After months of hard work, the creator of the robot says he can now relax a little but "it is not perfect yet". "I have been adjusting it to make it bow deeply."

The Japanese bow to each other in greeting and departing. Bowing is also a cultural sign of respect — when expressing thanks and apology, among other functions.

Like the Japanese, Koreans also move their heads or the top half of their bodies forwards and downwards to say hello or goodbye.

The Jang Geunm Robot is the fulfilment of a boyhood ambition for Susuki, 55, who is also an architect and urban planner.

"I have been interested in robots such as *Astro Boy*, *Atom* and *Gigantor* ever



since I started reading *manga* in my childhood," says Susuki, who is director of the Earthquake-Resistance and Safety Section at Fukuoka City Hall, Fukuoka, Japan.

The Jang Geum Robot is the latest addition to his long list of achievements.

Its resemblance to Korean actress Lee Young Ae, who played historical figure Dae Jang Geum in the hugely popular 2003 television series produced by South Korean television channel Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation, is remarkable.

And it has caught the attention of NHK, Japan's national public broadcasting organisation.

Susuki's wide-ranging creations include solar electric cars, kites of unusual designs and sculpture of women.

The bust of the Mona Lisa ([http://www.geocities.jp/shunya\\_susuki/mona-lisa/Sculpture-Mona-Lisa-E.htm](http://www.geocities.jp/shunya_susuki/mona-lisa/Sculpture-Mona-Lisa-E.htm)) is especially noteworthy and his computer graphics animation reveals a highly-inventive mind.

The father of two describes his passion for innovation and invention as a hobby. Actually, it seems more like a calling than a hobby.

His creative pursuits clearly show a commitment of time, energy and resources which is very encouraging.

Experts would describe Susuki as a creative individual.

He displays the characteristics common to the ingenious such as sensitivity to others, his surroundings and the unusual, originality in thinking, curiosity, motivation, persistence and concentration. Visionary individuals are said to have diverse interests and that is also true of Susuki.

Apart from architecture, urban planning, computer graphics, painting, sculpting, kite making and searching for solutions to environmental problems, he is also enthralled by philosophy and different ways of thinking (in terms of nationalities, generations, blood types, man and woman and animals), among other subjects.

Eugene Raudsepp ([http://www.atarmagazines.com/creative/v9n8/170\\_Profile\\_of\\_the\\_creative\\_i.php](http://www.atarmagazines.com/creative/v9n8/170_Profile_of_the_creative_i.php)) writes that "the creative person is always in search of the new, always ready to see something unexpected, novel and fresh in his experience.

"He is receptive to unusual ideas whether they be his own or others. "In fact, it has been noted that the creative person's open-mindedness sometimes extends to the point of gullibility in accepting bizarre or even crackpot ideas, and that he frequently considers such notions quite seriously before relegating them to the dustbin.

"New perspectives, new ideas and venturesome concepts provide an endless source of exercise for his mind." Now consider the following.

"I have been thinking about making a weird and wonderful machine, a Time Machine," says Susuki.

It was a spur-of-the-moment decision after he chanced upon Paul Davies' book entitled *How to Build a Time Machine* (2002) ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul\\_Davies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Davies)).

"It is not a science fiction book but a serious one by the theoretical physicist," he says.

"I have been studying the basic level of both the general theory of relativity and the quantum theory since being inspired



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by the book.

"I may be able to apply the idea to make a Time Machine to convert seawater to fresh water (one of his future projects) in terms of marine geophysicists."

Interestingly, Susuki has maintained his boyhood curiosity ("only the truly creative individual manages to retain this early sense of curiosity," writes Raudsepp) as reflected in his ideas and ventures.

The Jang Geum Robot project is a case in point.

Nothing could weaken his resolve to make a robot, a childhood preoccupation which never left him.

He saw an opportunity in 2005 when Japanese researchers were developing a robot that would be displayed at Expo 2005 Aichi, Japan. He unsuccessfully offered them his ideas.

He was determined to make his own robot from that day on.

His family's fascination with the Jang Geum television series, which was aired in Japan at the time, piqued his curiosity and he found himself drawn to Dae Jang Geum, reportedly the only female Royal Physician in the history of Korea.

The historical fiction depicts traditional Korean culture in all its glory and gave viewers a rare opportunity to learn about Korean royal court cuisine and traditional medicine.

Jang Geum's medical knowledge, perseverance and dedication to her profession won the hearts of millions in Iran, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Australia, the United States, Romania, Canada and Israel.

The 54-episode television series was shown in Malaysia as *Jewel in the Palace* several years ago.

"I was strongly influenced by Jang Geum's spirit," says Susuki, admitting that

she was the inspiration for his robot. Work on the project began in April last year.

Susuki encountered numerous problems — ranging from difficulty in dealing with new materials for the robot's facial skin, skull and hands to finding a way to make it smile — during the project but he managed to overcome them and completed it on June 7, 2009.

"Yes, making the robot was challenging especially when it came to the smile mechanism," he says.

He discovered that only human beings have the capacity to smile and it is "the best way to show friendship to others without saying anything".

That is because "our skull is different from that of animals".

"For example, cats and dogs can't smile due to their jutting mouth bones."

He hopes the Jang Geum Robot will be displayed at Robosquare (<http://robosquare.city.fukuoka.lg.jp/english/index.html>) in Fukuoka City.

For a better appreciation of Susuki's breadth of projects and ideas, log on to [http://www.geocities.jp/shunya\\_susuki/susuki-E.html](http://www.geocities.jp/shunya_susuki/susuki-E.html)

Susuki speaks about his upcoming commitments with missionary zeal.

These include starting on a new type of machine for the elderly. A contraption to help the disabled or the elderly to walk already exists in Japan. But it is heavily computerised and expensive.

"I want to make a simple and cheap one to assist the elderly to walk."

The good feeling that Susuki derives from his leisure activity is not the only benefit.

It also serves as a diversion from the stresses and strains of being a public officer.

In other words, his pastime rather than

alcohol (Susuki is a teetotaler) acts as a medicine to get rid of stress.

And the recognition he gains from his exquisite handwork is a bonus.

The Japanese media seems curious about his inclination for introducing new things, ideas and ways of doing something and often highlights them.

As a youngster, Susuki was "very bored with daily life" and was always looking for interesting challenges.

He tried to fly a crane which was crafted from Japanese traditional paper, believing that it could fly if he "put some flies into it".

"I actually experimented with it, naturally, it failed to fly."

Those early failures would later lead to novelty paper planes and kites.

He was also captivated by various kinds of dolls such as the Japanese traditional ones made of wood or clay which is not surprising, given that his grandmother's father was a craftsman of the Hakata Doll, which is unique to Fukuoka.

In addition to his regular job and hobby, Susuki manages to find time to teach imagination and creativity to students of Shuyukan Senior High School, which is his alma mater.

His next class will be on Oct 24 and he will be teaching his students about creating their own websites.

He loves teaching and people often tell him that he has a gift for it.

Young people hold so much promise and Susuki believes that an individual is blessed with his or her own talent.

He would like to train students to develop their "imagination and creativity to help them discover their talents".

"The sky is the limit if people with different imagination and creativity cooperate with each other."

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