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New Crown: past, present and future

Thomas Hardy (Keio University)

New Crown's past has been remarkable for the depth of its thinking, the present is admired for the quality with which it brings these thoughts and ideals to life, and the future can hope to rise to challenges of the 21st century Japan by building on its strengths.

As I understand it, *New Crown* was reinvigorated some 30 years ago when a group of writers and editors, led by Professor Morizumi, and Mr Minemura of Sanseido recognized an unfilled niche in the market for junior high school English textbooks – books that would recognize that the students were young adults, with interests and activities appropriate to their age; that students needed books that provided intellectual challenges, as well as linguistic growth; that language could best be taught through lessons and activities that are communicative; that issues of social awareness and justice were critical to the intellectual and moral growth of students; and that students would rise to meet challenges to think and to learn to think for themselves.

I observed these principles in action at my very first *New Crown* engagement. I was called in to a meeting, asked to read a passage on a Japanese female mountain climber, and then told, “Some people on the writing team think this is sexist. We don’t think so. What do you think?” I thought it was.

I laid out the reasons. As the editorial staff and writers engaged in agitated discussion, I went to the whiteboard and started outlining ways to fix it. The writing team and editorial staff took my impertinent

rewriting in good humor and gradually I became a member of the *New Crown* writing team.

The up-coming edition of *New Crown* fully shares in the commitments I learned early on. There are lessons with a focus on the natural environment, be it animals or living and acting responsibility out-of-doors. Some lessons include components dealing with historical matters, those of Japan, other countries, and the interactions of Japan and other countries. Numerous lessons touch on aspects of major social issues, including the handicapped, the elderly, race and ethnicity in a multi-cultural and inter-cultural world, awareness of issues facing developing countries, and war and peace.

The point is not just that these lessons are in the textbooks. Rather, these issues are included to further the general goals of *New Crown*: to provide material that helps students learn English while at the same time increasing their knowledge of broader worlds, in Japan and beyond; developing their intellectual and critical thinking skills; and challenging them to study and think for themselves.

In future editions, just as in previous and current editions, the writers and editors of *New Crown* will have to adjust to prevailing educational, social, and political climates. It is, admittedly, a difficult time for textbooks working from a peace, justice, and critical thinking perspective. Nevertheless, the writers and publishers of *New Crown* will, I trust, continue their commitment to use the best teaching practices, social justice, and human values.