The evolution of railway vehicles is outstanding. In the case of STRASYA which JARTS has standardized and ACT of JR East, various technical projects including making the vehicle more lightweight are being actively undertaken and the consumption of energy has been reduced to almost half the past level. It is said that significant improvement is being achieved in terms of LCA and waste materials. It is really impressive. I believe the daring objective set by the top executive of JR East to “halve the service life and halve the cost” has provided the momentum for technical development and has been materialized in the current situation. Needless to say, top executives would have been held accountable if development efforts had been unsuccessful, but I was filled with admiration and realized that future technical development should be based on this type of a business model.

I am writing this paper in Bangkok, Thailand. The fact is that I introduced Japanese superior commuter train system during business trips to Philippine and Thailand, where I related to the development and promotion of urban railways in the developing countries of Asia. Yesterday, I took a trip on a subway line in Bangkok that has just recently been opened for service and the day before that, I rode on the newest elevated railroad in Manila. Both these system were completed with significant cooperation and contribution from Japan in various aspects.

Let me make a few comments on my impressions concerning these systems. ATO has been incorporated into the railway vehicles and the rails are directly connected. From the technical perspective, the systems are well constructed. The facilities of the station are also not bad. In Manila, this is the third elevated railway system, and in Bangkok, the system is the second steel tracked mass transit system after the Sky Train. For this reason, both in terms of operation and management, there is little room for concern.

However, for some reason, there is something missing. What is it? I believe it is attractiveness as a “method of transportation”. While the vehicles and stations are peculiarly roomy and the form is clean being mechanical and linear with particular emphasis on function, these facilities remain bare and are somewhat devoid of beauty and human amenity. And to be honest, the external appearance of the vehicles cannot be called sophisticated.
In Manila, there is the famous method of para-transit system called "Jeepny". The flamboyant decoration combining the paint coating, lights and accessories are famous. In addition to the self-satisfaction of the owners, the reason money is spent to decorate these vehicles in this fashion apparently has to do with the fact that in the highly competitive Jeepny transportation industry, beautiful vehicles are able to attract more customers. As long as an urban railway system is being created in Manila that has such a tradition, consideration should have been given to the fact that the railway vehicles are yet another "method of transportation" and the vehicles should have been designed with the mentality of the people of Manila in mind. This would certainly have resulted in a more unique and interesting commuter train.

Regardless of how superior the performance may be, what is most important is whether the customers like the vehicles. With respect to design, I would have liked to have felt the strong impression I got when I first saw that famous LRT in Strasbourg. The Sky Train in Bangkok creates an interesting curved shape through the form of the frame of the hanging strap and the bench seats. In the subway in Stockholm, different artists were recruited for each station to design the walls in a unique and appealing manner. The subway in Moscow is even a target of tourism despite the intent being somewhat different. We would like to attempt to break away from being a computer train that "is used despite being something that is disliked" and to achieve a train that "is used because it is something that is liked."

Probably, having written in this context, there will be the protest that such an endeavor is not necessary for a commuter train and that since the trains are going to be packed anyway, the accommodations make no difference. It was almost 20 years ago that "trains without seats" were introduced in the rush hour on the Yamanote Line. This was just around the time that this author was involved in research of the evaluation of congestion cost and welcomed this measure as one that enhanced the comfort of all passengers during rush hour including those passengers who are unable to find a seat. But Mr. Hiroshi Kume of the TV program "News Station" commented, "This is a cattle-car train. They are making fools of their customers." Though I cannot believe that Mr. Kume rides the trains during rush hours, I understood that full consideration needs to be given to public acceptance (PA) of the customers in general including that of the media. Being appealing to the public must be the "first step" in any action that is taken.

I believe it is the same when we convey a message on the railway system in Japan abroad. Although the feeling to emphasize performance and system is understandable, what is important is that the interest of the decision maker is attracted through the intuitive appeal of the system as a "method of transportation". The design or accommodations need to have an appeal that is able to attract the interest of the general public in order for the decision makers to readily support such a system. In addition, it is imperative that vehicles that may confidently be termed "low cost" be produced. There are several manufacturers of railway vehicles in Japan and given this situation, the presence of individual Japanese manufacturers overseas will necessarily be diluted compared to, say Company S. Including reduction of cost through the economy of scale, a strategic approach will be expected.