

# The Path to Ambition

## Mr Tadayoshi Tazaki

### Looking Back at Japan from the UK

### An Ordinary Boy Who Sought an Extraordinary Path

Tadayoshi was bigger than the other boys around him but was never the type to have a strong desire to express himself. You might describe him as a taciturn, reflective person—a quiet boy who always had a smile on his face. His grandmother sometimes teased him, calling him “big oaf”. Few people would imagine that this easy-going boy—the kind of boy you see everywhere—would go on to lead such a remarkable life from his teens onwards, by leaving Japan, studying at the University of Cambridge in the UK, and starting up several companies in the country.

Tadayoshi Tazaki, the Founder, Executive Director, and Chief Advisor of JAC Group, was born in Mitsuzawa in Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture, on 16 July 1943. Having been evacuated to Manchuria during World War II, he apparently learned to speak Russian when young. However, as far back as he can recall, Tadayoshi remembers being a very ordinary boy. His academic scores and sports performance were nothing out of the ordinary, nor did he excel particularly in leadership. Why a boy like this would aspire to go overseas might seem a mystery. In reality, however, Tadayoshi faced a complicated situation at home. His father had debts of enormous size. Tadayoshi’s father had graduated from Imperial Japanese Army Nakano School, an institution attended by the military elite. Based on his powerful sense of mission, he wanted to restore diplomatic relations between Japan and the outside world following the end of World

War II and invested his own money in travelling around the world, incurring huge debts as a result. Learning later on about the truth of this situation, Tadayoshi was cast into despair about the size of the debt. He knew that if he simply grew up in the ordinary way, graduated from a university in Tokyo and became a government official or the like, he would never be able to pay the debt back in full; he would always be pursued by the debt his father had incurred and would be forced to live with constant money worries. Tadayoshi realised that there was no future for him if he stayed in Japan. He decided that he needed to set his goals higher, by studying at an overseas university and becoming a person with a truly exceptional record. If he could realise these ambitions, he could pay back all of his father’s debts and lead a fulfilling life of his own too.



Tadayoshi during his high school days (front row, third from right)

### The UK is Where I Will Take My Chances

Tadayoshi wondered which country he should study in. Having a talent for science, Tadayoshi was at first attracted by the “space race” which was underway among the major powers at the time. The Soviet Union was the leader in the space race, having succeeded in humankind’s first-ever artificial satellite launch and manned space flight. Thinking that the Soviet Union would be his best bet, Tadayoshi started making moves towards studying in Russia; however, when he inquired at the Soviet embassy, he was gently declined on the grounds that he was “too young”. Tadayoshi then thought about going to the United States, yet nothing really came to mind. At that time, there were already a number of people studying in the United States, and Tadayoshi decided that following the same pathway as other people was unlikely to turn him into an exceptional “human resource”. The next possibility that arose in his mind was the UK. He was interested in the UK as a global leading nation which had long been a great Western European power; moreover, he had the good fortune to encounter a young British teacher from the University of Cambridge who had taught at the University of Tokyo; Tadayoshi asked him for advice about studying abroad, and these discussions were the starting-point that ultimately led to Tadayoshi’s making concrete plans to go to the UK. The teacher told Tadayoshi that as he would not be able to go directly to a British university, he should start by attending a British “public school” (private boarding school), get excellent grades and aim at university from there. Tadayoshi’s goal was now settled.

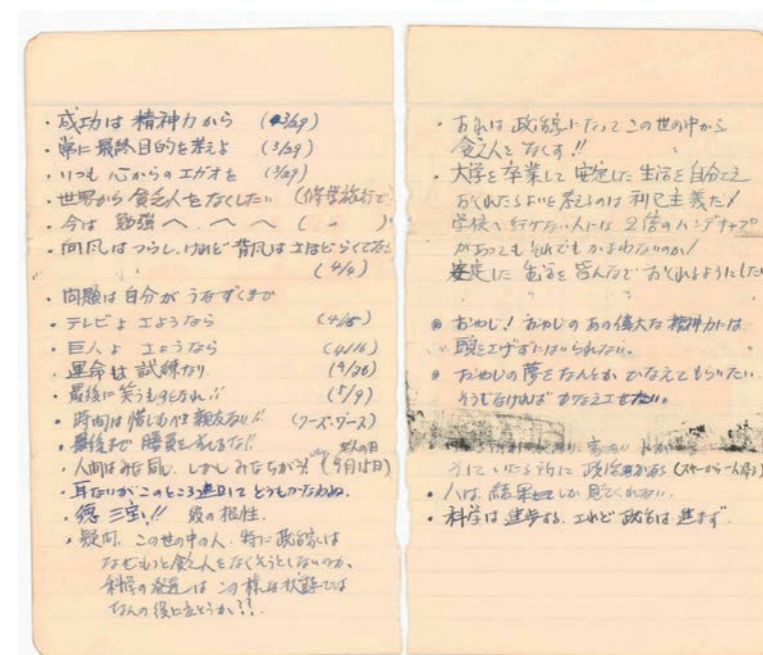
However, to study abroad in the UK, he would first need to prove his practical English abilities by passing the English exam of Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Tadayoshi, for whom English was not a special strong point, studied for all he was worth. At this time, his family was still not taking his resolve seriously. They thought he was unlikely to pass, no matter how hard he studied. Amazingly, however, Tadayoshi somehow managed to pass the exam. His mother was thrown into a panic by this result. She was adamantly opposed to this move, saying “It’s too soon for you to go overseas”, yet it was already too late: Tadayoshi’s resolve was fixed. Realising that she could not make

him go back on this decision, his mother gave in, and gave him her blessing to go, telling him in a letter she sent him that “You must not come back to Japan until you have found what you want to give back to Japan and made it reality”. And so, in 1962, in the autumn of the year, he graduated from Tokyo Metropolitan Nishi High School, and the 19-year-old Tadayoshi set off for the UK. He carried a one-way airline ticket with him. His mother and grandfather had somehow contrived to get hold of his travel costs and one year’s worth of school fees and accommodation expenses, having done all kinds of things to scrape the money together. But since only these basics could be covered, there was no knowing when he would be able to make his return trip to Japan.

### Stick to What You Believe in, and a Miracle is Sure to Show Up

Having arrived in the UK, Tadayoshi lacked the breathing space necessary to truly enjoy life in his new country. Although the normal practice was to spend two years studying at a public school before graduating, Tadayoshi needed to achieve a rather unrealistic-looking plan of getting into Cambridge after just one year of study, in order to keep his educational expenses as low as possible. English had never been his strongest point, and he just could not keep up with the lessons day by day. In addition to preparing and reviewing for lessons after classes were over, studying English also took up quite a lot of his time. What kept Tadayoshi going at such times was his strong determination to make it through, no matter how hopeless things seemed to be. A person who has truly made up their mind to do something can draw on reserves of strength that seem surprising to others. And so Tadayoshi continued his studies, literally spending every waking moment studying, determined to carve out a new future for himself.

At last, Tadayoshi approached the fateful day. The entrance exams for Cambridge would be held over three days, with an interview being a key part of the process as well as written exams. The decisions over which students to accept would be made based on their objectives in entering the university, what

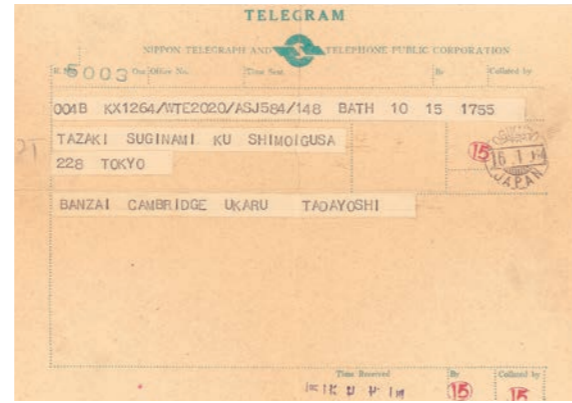


Notes written by Tadayoshi during his high school days. They reflect his unwavering determination and mindset at the time: “Success begins with the spirit”, “Always keep the ultimate goal in sight”, “Now is the time to study, study, study, study”, “Goodbye, television”, “Goodbye, Giants baseball team”.

they wanted to learn and what their goals for the future were. Tadayoshi strongly emphasised his ambition as a Japanese person to “study in the UK, and give something back to Japan”. In January 1964, Tadayoshi received his long-awaited reply from the University of Cambridge giving him the happy news that he had been accepted. Tadayoshi was overflowing with joy. Given that only around 2% of people in the UK went on to university at the time, it seemed unlikely to the point of miraculous that Tadayoshi, a Japanese, had gained acceptance to Cambridge, one of the world’s finest universities. By maintaining a passionate sense of belief in himself and continuing to work hard, he had demonstrated that he was able to make the breakthrough to an unbelievable life.

## The Values Tadayoshi Learned from the UK

After entering Cambridge, Tadayoshi began to realise the greatness of the UK as a country. During an interview with the university chancellor, he asked him “Why did you let me enter this university?” After talking about Tadayoshi’s excellent grades, the chancellor got round to the key point. “First of all, I thought that bringing a Japanese person’s way of thinking into Cambridge would be a great thing for Cambridge. And I felt that for you, studying here would help you become a bicultural person with the backbone that comes from both Japan and the UK, able to truly succeed on the world stage. I thought there was great value in supporting you in developing your track record in this way”. These words really opened Tadayoshi’s eyes. As a young man of 21 from Japan, he was first of all simply overjoyed to have someone from a prestigious British university expressing such high expectations of him. Furthermore, he was also deeply impressed by the significance of the chancellor’s encouraging him to be proud of his Japanese identity in the way he studied,



The telegram Tadayoshi sent to his mother, informing her that he had been accepted at Cambridge

rather than telling him to imitate British people. He was struck by the idea that this was what it meant to study at a university with a history of more than 800 years.

Tadayoshi noticed the best aspects of the UK in his interactions with friends. When he was invited to social gatherings, he often had to decline due to lack of money. Before long, he would find cans of beer placed outside the door of his room. These acts—silently giving him gifts after realising he was an independent student with no money to spend on having fun—inspired in Tadayoshi not only gratitude to such friends but also a deep respect for a country where such acts of thoughtfulness came naturally to people. Looking back, he notes that he never experienced a single act of discrimination from anyone in the UK, despite his being Japanese, his inability to speak English well and his lack of money. In an age when the term “diversity” did not really exist, the UK was a country that tolerated diversity and showed fairness to everyone. For Tadayoshi, being able to experience these values—values only to be found in such a mature country—as he studied, represented great value that could not be converted into money.



Tadayoshi after entering public school (fourth row, far left)

## Starting out on a Unique Life Course

After graduating from Cambridge, Tadayoshi attracted attention from a variety of European companies due to his highly unusual credentials as a Japanese person who had completed studies at a high-ranking British university and received several invitations to join these firms. A Swiss company arranged round-trip airfares for him to attend an interview with them; other companies offered the astonishing condition that they repay in full the cost of the scholarship he had received from the university on behalf of him. At last, it seemed that the future that Tadayoshi had mapped out was about to become reality. However, Tadayoshi turned down these appealing offers, and chose to start work at a Japanese company, Mitsubishi Corporation, where the salaries were not as high. What led him to this decision was a piece of advice from Shinroku Morohashi (later to become the president of Mitsubishi Corporation), who at the time was a board member of Mitsubishi Corporation in London. “Japanese companies are developing with breakneck speed right now. Looking to the future, learning from Japanese companies would be better for you than thinking only of your current situation and working for foreign companies”. Tadayoshi could see what was meant by such advice. Viewed from the perspective of where he would be most likely to succeed in the future, this would probably be Japanese companies. Tadayoshi therefore decided to enter Mitsubishi Corporation. He accompanied Japanese guests and dignitaries when they came to visit the UK and acted as interpreter. Though he did this work for only a year or so, it was an important period for him, giving him the opportunity to experience the vigorous growth of Japanese companies for himself, and to discover what they were coming to the UK for.

After a year with Mitsubishi Corporation, he next started work at an American company. He was involved in futures trading, becoming their first dealer in Asia. As he had always been strong at maths and was suited towards jobs that involved handling figures, he grasped the nature of speculation independently and built up a good track record, meaning that everyone wanted his

information. These experiences of success were another way that Tadayoshi learned the key points of business. However, he had no intention of doing this job forever. As his mother had written in that letter to Tadayoshi previously, he believed he had a duty to bring something back to Japan after studying in the UK. The fact that he had reached the level of being an exceptional “human resource” was all the more reason why he should aim to do things that other people could not. To realise this, setting up his own business would probably be the way to go. In the 1970s, with major changes afoot in the world, this young man who was equipped with both a Japanese and a British background was now starting to scope out the pathway along which he would travel.



Tadayoshi, while working at Mitsubishi Corporation

### ■ Profile: Tadayoshi Tazaki

Mr Tadayoshi Tazaki was born in Yokohama in 1943 and was evacuated to Manchuria when he was one year old. After World War II, he managed to return to Japan by ship aged five, barely escaping with his life. After graduating from Tokyo Metropolitan Nishi High School, he went to the UK aged 19. He studied at Kingswood School, an all-boarding private “public school”, in Bath, where he took A-levels in maths and physics and S-level in advanced mathematics, achieving the school’s top score. After leaving school, he was admitted to Downing College, Cambridge in 1964. In 1967, he graduated from Cambridge after obtaining a BA and MA in mathematics and economics. He was the first Japanese person to obtain a BA from Downing College, and later became a college fellow, a role in which he serves to this day.

After graduating from Cambridge, he entered the London branch of Mitsubishi Corporation in 1967. Following this, after working with Continental Ore Corp., the London branch of Sumitomo Shoji Kaisha, Ltd. and other organisations, he started working independently in 1974, starting up several businesses in London including “import/wholesale of Japanese foods”, “recruitment/translation and interpreting”, and “real estate

leasing”. He currently serves as Founder, Executive Director, and Chief Adviser of JAC Group.

In 2016, based on his own experiences, Tadayoshi established the Tazaki Foundation, whereby he has invested his own capital in cultivating truly global leaders who are equipped with world-class bilingual and bicultural knowledge. This Foundation sends seven to eight selected candidates to the UK from Japan each year, providing full scholarships which cover a five-year period from age 16 until graduation from university. As a long-term scholarship for study abroad, the Tazaki Foundation Scholarship is truly one of its kind in the history of Japan, and there are high hopes that the graduates produced by this Foundation will achieve success on the global stage in the future.

In 2022, he won the Japan-British Society Awards 2022 from the Japan-British Society in recognition of his substantial contributions as president of the Tazaki Foundation to the education of the human resources who will uphold relations between Japan and the UK going forwards. At the award ceremony, held on 22 November, he received a commemorative silver plate from Her Imperial Highness Princess Akiko of Mikasa, who is the Honorary Patron of the Society.