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Moving forward for peace by transcending discrimination

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Have you ever heard about the phrase, “Yellow Peril”? It means yellow terror, which is a word to discriminate yellow-skinned races including Asian people. This word was used in European and American countries at the end of the 19th century. It was coined from a concept that Western countries should be on the alert against the emerging Asia and should suppress it. It began to be used when Japan was beginning to showcase its presence to the world after the Japanese-Sino War and the Japanese-Russo War. It is needless to say that behind the scene was a thought of white supremacy in European and American countries. Advocating this word, the Asian Exclusion movement spread more and more around the world. Kan'ichi Asakawa, who was then working at a university in America, objectively analyzed Japanese military action in Manchuria in the midst of this anti-Asia air and showed the data to the Japanese Government to alert them. His thought was expressed in a book titled “Indication of Japan’s Disaster”.

To Kan'ichi Asakawa who engaged in research and education of history at a university in America, the theory of yellow peril is not at all somebody else’s problem. It is easily anticipated that cold glances were given to Asakawa because he was Japanese as the outbreak of the war approached. Even in America where freedom and democracy were safeguarded, there was discrimination without a sense of composure.

There were two identities of Asakawa: one, who tried to act calmly and objectively as a researcher wishing world peace and friendship between America and Japan; and the other Asakawa who was looked at with discriminatory eyes from the civil society of America which was renowned as a country of freedom. There was the beautiful Japan which he loved and the America which welcomed and acknowledged him as a researcher. He must have felt pain deep in his mind as if his mind and body were torn apart. I can easily imagine his shoulders slumped in loneliness on his way back home as the sun set

after finishing lectures at the university.

We perceive Kan'ichi Asakawa as a man who was credited with bridging the gap between America and Japan as well as, as a hard worker who made a great achievement in the field of historical research. This year marked the 70th anniversary of his death, and an event was held in recognition of his achievement. Even so, I think now is the time to feel his sufferings as if they were ours.

About 80 years have passed since he suffered in America. I may say that "Yellow Peril" is now regarded as a vanished word. You see few Japanese and Asian people that are disrespected in the world. Globalization is going on in line with interaction and integration among people of diverse ethnic groups and nationalities crossing the national borders. However, when it comes to discrimination and prejudice, have they been eradicated from this world?

At 2:46 p.m., March, 11, 7 years ago, the largest disaster ever recorded in Japan mercilessly changed our daily lives. In the coastal area of Fukushima Prefecture, a devastating tsunami claimed many people's lives. Afterward, many people were forced to leave their hometowns and live in places for evacuation on account of the nuclear power accident. Furthermore, evacuated residents received much discrimination and prejudice as if they were contaminated by radiation only because they lived in Fukushima Prefecture. "Reputational damage" which arose from false rumors causing avoidance of agricultural produce from Fukushima has yet to be dispelled. Thoughtless words were said to local residents:

"I do not buy any Fukushima products."

"How long do you intend to live in this town?"

"You are compensated with a high amount of money."

Discrimination and prejudice were even levelled towards children. "Go back to Fukushima" and "I do not want to get infected by radiation." These words were said to evacuating students at schools to which they transferred. According to a survey concerning discrimination and bullying at places of evacuation conducted in 2017, 62% of respondents answered "I feel discriminated against or bullied."

Ambiguous anxiety not based on facts or scientific grounds, recognition of supremacy in oneself over affected people, egoism that tried to exclude affected people while staying in a safe place, ignorance and indifference, - these are similar to mentalities around a

time when a word, “Yellow Peril” was coined.

Occurrence of the disaster is an undeniable fact. Notwithstanding that, residents of Fukushima have been making efforts in order to overcome their misfortunes in the past and regain hope. There are people who are willing to support Fukushima. Why do we have to continue to make efforts for the revitalization in Fukushima? It is because we are willing to recover the beauty of our beloved hometown. Nothing could be more painful than experiencing discrimination or prejudice because we were born in beloved Fukushima.

All people are hoping to eradicate groundless discrimination and prejudice in the world. All people must be wishing for peace and safety. In spite of it, a chain of discrimination, prejudice, oppression and revenge is yet to be eliminated. Why? It is because we do not mirror our vague anxiety laid in deep in our mind, mental fluctuation criticizing others while placing oneself in a safe place, and indifference to people suffering from something.

During the summer of last year, I had an opportunity to participate in the Peace Memorial Ceremony in Hiroshima City. For me who has never experienced war, “War” was nothing but an abstract concept. However, when I saw the facts and tragic reality of devastated innocent people and exhibitions showcasing the devastation coupled with hearing atomic bomb survivors’ drastic experiences, I felt like each one of us was forced to face a challenge to abolish wars and nuclear weapons in the world. I learned, even after the war, the people of Hiroshima suffered from groundless prejudice. I was able to feel the same way as the people of Hiroshima feel in their hearts to aspire for a peaceful world.

Currently, I am working on debating in English. The world cannot get rid of discrimination, violence and dispute. Nuclear weapons are threatening us. How could it be possible to eradicate them? There is no other way to resolve these issues than steadily continuing to hear others’ points of argument correctly, and to respond to them with grounds to support our point of argument. I believe that globalization in a true sense is to debate constructive opinions among different races, ethnic groups and national borders. What is required of our generation is that we have to repeat rational discussions mutually rather than just building amicable relations.