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The sins we, adults, have committed and how to pay for them

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1. Who are the “Adults”?

By now, it is widely known that 15-year old Greta Thunberg of Sweden made a speech at the COP24 in December 2018, in front of representatives of various countries and business/NGO leaders from all over the world. She said, “You say you love your children above all else, and yet you are stealing their future in front of their very eyes.”, and “You only speak of green eternal economic growth because you are too scared of being unpopular. You only talk about moving forward with the same bad ideas that got us into this mess, even when the only sensible thing to do is pull the emergency brake.” I was really shocked to hear her speech.

The shock propagated rapidly among those sensible adults across the globe because what Greta said is really true in that we are stealing the future of our children.

In her speech, Greta did not accuse specific governments or regimes but she pointed out the responsibility of adults as a whole, their responsibility of having caused this terribly lamentable situations on this globe. It is true that most countries including Japan have been taking just a superficial measures to respond to the Paris Agreement and the IPCC 1.5 degree special report. As the result, the world total emissions have been ever more increasing, taking the global society to the opposite direction of a “decarbonized” society, as correctly expressed in Greta’s words of “only talk about moving forward with the same bad ideas that got us into this mess”.

After all, we, the adults, are unable to change politics and policy measures, moving forward with the same bad idea of the same production / consumption system. To all adults, Greta appeals with heart and soul; not only to leaders of governments and businesses, but also to other adults who are eventually supporting them.

2. What is our sins?

Inspired by Greta’s honest and straightforward remarks, I counted the “sins” that we adults are unconsciously committing against our will. Some people may say that “we have not conducted any sin, but we just did what was expected of us to do at that time.” It is quite understandable. At any rate, I would like to raise the following six points as the sins we have committed so far.

- i) Our ever increasing desire for economic expansion despite finiteness of the earth's resources, and despite various symptoms that clearly demonstrate the limits (abnormal climate, large-scale extinction of creatures, ocean plastic pollution, etc.)
- ii) Our continued neglect or depreciation of scientists' repeated warning about sustainability issues of human society such as environmental deterioration
- iii) Our negligence for seeking for real solutions but overly relied on technology development or innovation
- iv) Our failure to promote NPOs and political forces that are vital in developing a new economy adaptable to global environmental crises
- v) Our failure to cultivate a common sense of putting the environmental values (the foundation of all living creatures) above short-term economic benefit, and to educate the next generation to pass on the value.
- vi) Our negligence to make a cool evaluation the western culture (especially after the industrial revolution) which, although it created various attractive ideas and projects, is gradually showing its negative aspects under the current political, economic, social and environmental situation, and again negligence to step forward and try creating a new civilization based on wisdom of traditional Japan

3. How can we pay for our sins?

Many of us adults will not easily accept the idea of having conducted such "sins" as listed in the above. For many years, we have been working hard earnestly and honestly, believing that rich economy makes us happy and, if any problem takes place, politics and technology will solve them. However, our globe is now ailing as the result of all these human activities and it is now suffering from the crises of environment, politics and economy. Far from what we expected at the beginning. Given this perspective, it may be taken for granted that we should compensate for what we have done.

How to pay for our sins depends on each of us. What is most important would be that each of us reflect on what we have done and, embracing those sins, do what we could do. For example, supporting NPO activities, joining a protest march on the road, or conveying our opinions to politicians and government officials to promote changes. There are varieties of ways that we can do to pay for our sins.