

KAZE, August 2019

Let's make a drastic change in the future courses of our society and economy

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1. Uncertainty both in Japan and all over the world

In Japan, decreasing voter turnout is becoming an issue. Japan's national election last month recorded an all-time low voting rate of 48%. This means a half of the qualified voters did not participate in the national election. The reason for this low voter turnout requires careful analysis, of course, but I feel that those with unstable income could not motivate themselves to vote when they see the sad political situation these days. They are sick of hearing refrained campaign pledges of both ruling and opposition parties without successfully making a drastic change of the stagnant economy. In the case of those seniors with physical difficulties or dementia, some (or many) of them actually and physically could not go to the designated voting place or the advance voting station. The ratio of this voter group will be increasing in the future.

This national election seems to represent serious difficulties that Japanese society is facing now. Mr. Yoshimitsu Kobayashi, former Chairman of Keizai Doyukai (Japan Association of Corporate Executives), lamented the sharp decline of Japan's status in the global economy and warned that Japan will become a small-timer as it lacks a sense of crises in lukewarm water.

If we look at the global situation, again we can see various crises here and there: US-Sino trade conflict, unstable mid-East military situation, Trump cabinet making a bigger fuss, and UK confusion surrounding Brexit, all resulting in the increasingly volatile international situation.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, in the preface of the SDGs Report 2019, summarized the four years of SDGs implementation as in the followings:

"The report demonstrates that progress is being made in some critical areas, and that some favorable trends are evident. Extreme poverty has declined considerably, the under-5 mortality rate fell by 49 per cent between 2000 and 2017, immunizations have saved millions of lives, and the vast majority of the world's population now has access to electricity. Countries are taking concrete actions to protect our planet: marine protected areas have doubled since 2010; countries are working concertedly

to address illegal fishing; 186 parties have ratified the Paris Agreement on climate change, and almost all have communicated their first nationally determined contributions. About 150 countries have developed national policies to respond to the challenges of rapid urbanization, and 71 countries and the European Union now have more than 300 policies and instruments supporting sustainable consumption and production. And a wide range of other actors—international organizations, businesses, local authorities, the scientific community and civil society—have engaged with the SDGs in a manner that generates great hope for the coming decade. The United Nations, for its part, is working hard to reposition to the United Nations development system to be better equipped to meet the needs of governments to respond to this integrated and transformative agenda."

"Notwithstanding that progress, this report identifies many areas that need urgent collective attention. The natural environment is deteriorating at an alarming rate: sea levels are rising; ocean acidification is accelerating; the past four years have been the warmest on record; one million plant and animal species are at risk of extinction; and land degradation continues unchecked. We are also moving too slowly in our efforts to end human suffering and create opportunity for all: our goal to end extreme poverty by 2030 is being jeopardized as we struggle to respond to entrenched deprivation, violent conflicts and vulnerabilities to natural disasters. Global hunger is on the rise, and at least half of the world's population lacks essential health services. More than half of the world's children do not meet standards in reading and mathematics; only 28 per cent of persons with severe disabilities received cash benefits; and women in all parts of the world continue to face structural disadvantages and discrimination."

A mountain of problems listed up in Mr. Guterres's summary clearly shows the increased uncertainty about the future all over the world.

2. Let's change the course before the clock runs out

What caused the current critical situation of the world? What was the essence of the socio-economical concept that caused today's crisis? It may be an economic thought where, based on the global population increase, economic development is emphasized and technological innovation has pursued that purpose. Big enterprises are placed in the frontline of global economic warfare, clinging to the use of an easy energy source of fossil fuel to promote their globalization. In short, it is a political belief in the supremacy of an economy backed by technology development.

To overcome difficulties coming out of this belief, there is a supporting concept, a belief in science: problems brought about by science should be solved by science, and environmental problems brought about by contemporary technology could be solved only through continues economic development and technology innovation.

This belief may be summarized that the current difficulties could be solved only through the further pursuit of high-level technology innovation and maintenance of economic development to support the pursuit.

This belief in economic development has been followed for nearly two centuries, starting in Europe and gradually expanding to the US, Japan, and other Asian countries. As a result of the struggle of almost 8 billion people for economic development in the past years, however, cities are forested with skyscrapers and highways are covered with automobiles, and we found ourselves under the crises of ecosystems and the human society is facing catastrophe at this moment.

If human beings are allowed a little more time to muster enough courage to exercise wisdom, we have to quickly shift to a more safe and sustainable course of development. The new course should be summarized as a policy of placing environmental conservation first, not economic development. Technologies are selected depending on the level of environmental friendliness rather than efficiency. The decentralized local economy will be restored utilizing the civilian power of SMEs and NPOs. In this new course, renewable energy will be the only energy resource for production.

This new course may be named a "green course", which would be backed by the following concept.

"We finally realized, through extreme weather events and extinction of creatures, that leading a rich and convenient life using technologies thoughtlessly will cause economic and social instability and eventually threaten human life. Therefore, what is most important for human beings is to identify such fateful technologies as will impair sustainability and destroy the global environment, and consciously and systematically eliminate them while promoting safe technologies for the survival of human beings. To do so, we have to cultivate through school education, etc. a social ethic or wisdom that will help control our desire to pursue convenience."

Shifting to this new course of life is a big challenge and will face a lot of resistance from all sides, but time is running out unless we take an action right now.