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Climate change issues and the COVID-19 pandemic share the same root

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Amid growing fear of the COVID-19 all over the world, we see various questionable conducts to procure surgical masks and rubbing alcohol. Under this chaotic situation, I cannot but admire the message of an Italian schoolmaster directed to his students. "Let us use the rational thought that allowed us to create said medicine so that we may preserve the most precious asset we possess, our social fabric, our humanity. "

The corona pandemic seems to be a warning that nature is sending toward humans over the excessively sophisticated modern ways of living. As you see, there are a few similarities between the COVID-19 catastrophe and the climate change issues.

Firstly, both were caused by globalization and land development as the result of excessive human desire. Globalization started in the 1990s enabled us to travel swiftly to every corner of the world, and at the same time, the trade started to expand rapidly. According to IATA, the world airline travelers in 2017 exceeded 4 billion which is a four-fold increase in 30 years.

As the CO₂ level in the atmosphere increased due to increased human activities, the climate change effects became a major issue for the international community especially after the Earth Summit in 1992.

As regards infectious diseases, new diseases appeared in the late 1970s when extensive land development started in tropical forests and other undeveloped areas of the world. Those new infectious diseases quickly spread worldwide because the speed and volume of transportation tremendously increased.

Thus, globally increased transportation consumes massive amounts of energy and emitted a large amount of CO₂. Moreover, excessive land development reduced the forest area, namely carbon sink, and at the same time, increased the possible expansion of unknown viruses inhabiting the undeveloped

areas. It is also expected that the methane, as well as viruses confined in the permafrost land, will be discharged as global warming increases.

Continued global population increase and endless human desire brought about the repeated climate disasters and the corona pandemic. These phenomena could be a sign that we have overstepped the limit of growth on this planet.

Secondly, the damages of both climate change and infectious diseases will become bigger and more serious especially for the poor. Climate disasters threaten the lives of people in poorer countries, and more than 3 billion populations do not have an access to clean water to wash off viruses.

The third point of similarity is that, in the face of climate risk or the corona pandemic, the current administration tends to put priority on the economy rather than our life. As we have pointed out, our government has taken short-term growth-oriented economic policies and neglected to cope seriously with climate risks.

The same attitude is observed in dealing with the corona pandemic. Priority should be put on establishing a sound system of virus prevention, testing, and care provision. However, they talk about immediate measures to boost the economy.

The current policy discussion seems to focus on how to expand consumption to stem stock price decline. For that purpose, they decided to distribute cash equally to all people, and are even discussing consumption tax cuts. Desirably, while discussing these immediate measures, the government should simultaneously deliberate a long-sighted policy to reform the current social systems and build up a really sustainable society.

The last point I would like to raise is that humans are potentially egoistic. We can empathetically consider issues of ourselves and our own family members and tend to put public issues second. It is in a sense quite natural to think ourselves first, but if we all forget about the simple fact that each of us is a component of the society, humans as a whole will not survive.

The Italian schoolmaster I mentioned earlier also said "One of the greatest risks in such events, ... , is the poisoning of social life and human relationships, along with the barbarism of civilian life. "

The repeated climate disasters (scorching summer heat, mega typhoons, torrential rainfalls) and the sudden eruption of infective illnesses. They will become more serious in the future if we endlessly expand our selfish desires. It is time we recognize the finite nature of the earth and make a big turn to build a safe and spiritually rich society. Building on the current experience of climate and pandemic issues, each of us should learn to develop a new value emphasizing sustainability and lives, casting off old values seeking after only economic development.