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COVID-19 and My New Book

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A new book of mine entitled "Hopes beyond the Crises" will be published very soon. The book has originally intended a memoir or commentaries based on more than 50 years of my experience of environmental policies both as a government official and an NGO organizer. I wanted to write that the rapid and extensive environmental degradation will ruin human society in due course, and that, to escape from the demolition, we need to quickly establish an environmentally sound civilization. To be specific, I aimed to illustrate such civilization from political, economic, technological, and educational points of view.

1. How people responded to the COVID-19 crisis

Then, the COVID-19 pandemic occurred in February. All meetings and events were canceled, and, like many of you, I stayed home most of the day. This stay-home period provided me with enough time to deeply think about the book theme. Encouraged by my colleague, Ms. Fujimura, and the book editor, Mr. Inamoto, I started to reorganize the book chapters taking into consideration of the pandemic impacts. It was a kind of surprise that people accepted the government requests of curbing economic activities and staying home once they recognize the risk of the pandemic as a crisis.

2. Pandemic crisis and the environmental crisis

We have long been appealing the serious environmental crisis. We have been telling people that a drastic change in our lifestyle and our economic activities is necessary. However, our voice did not reach policymakers, nor even the general public. We have been frustrated at not being able to persuade people of the huge risk that our planet is facing.

Now, I learned the difference between the corona pandemic crisis and the environmental crisis. People can immediately see the serious effects of the pandemic. They recognize that it is a real crisis closely related to their daily life, so the scared people willingly follow the government instructions.

On the other hand, the environmental crisis is less than convincing because it is about "possibilities" of environmental degradation "toward the end of this century", not about "today" or "tomorrow". People cannot sense the urgent need for change. In other words, people CAN change the ways of their life once they fully understand the serious impacts of the environmental crisis.

3. The environmental policy requires diversity

During the Abe regime, it was more than disappointing to see politicians and government officials reading between lines and became defensive.

Consequently, the policy processes became dull and stay stagnant without making any effort of steering varieties of rich experiences and knowledge existing in this country into the government. (The typical example was the decision-making process of the nuclear power generation project.) However, the environmental issues are linked to a broad range of fields, and therefore the policy-making process should become dynamic involving people as widely as possible. Thanks to Greta, young people in Japan are becoming more active. As regards the environmental field, women have been performing the central role leading NGOs and NPOs of this country.

For these reasons, I decided on the new structure of my book focusing on the possibilities that people can change their ways of life before it is too late. I also decided to emphasize the potentials of young people and women in the future society.

4. Image of Japan in the future

The Japanese society remains stagnant for a long, not only environment but also in politics, economy, science, and education, etc. How can we revitalize ourselves and in which field can we contribute to the global society? In other words, which field of business can we prosper in the next few decades. I believe it is “the Environment”, becoming an environmentally sound nation. It is not about promoting business related to environmental technologies. What I want to see is a recovery of Japan as an ethical country based on our rich cultural sensibility and traditional knowledge/wisdom. There are a lot of issues that require nation-wide movements; amendment of Constitution, greening economy and technologies, educational reform, institutionalizing civil participation in policy-making processes, etc. I wrote my thoughts on these issues in my new book, and cannot wait for receiving your response.