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Greening? or Decarbonizing?

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The IPCC Working Group 1 report issued this August warns that global warming is faster than expected. More importantly, it clearly states that "Observed increases in well-mixed greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations since around 1750 are unequivocally caused by human activities." Despite the severe facts reported by IPCC, our government has not clarified the ways to build a decarbonized society even during the LDP's presidential election and the Lower House general election campaign this month (October). It's high time for the government leaders to discuss which way they wish to lead this country.

Facing resource limitations on this planet, we, JAES, have discussed if capitalism without economic growth is possible, or if we should support capitalism when we have no alternatives, or if we should abandon economic development to build a decarbonized society. However, these discussions have not been widely recognized in this country. Even today, such issues are discussed only among scholars and those concerned and much less by politicians. What we need is a nationwide discussion about "green recovery" from the COVID-19 pandemic. However, our government uses this term as a catchy phrase for its short-term growth strategy and spends little time discussing the nature of "growth" itself.

Regarding the October general election campaign, Mr. Akira KUME, who worked long for the LDP Secretariat, wrote in the Asahi Shinbun newspaper (7 Sept.) that LDP is different from the political parties in Europe. According to Mr. Kume, CDU and SPD of Germany, for example, are based on a specific ideology/philosophy. Their Diet members are party comrades, while LDP, the governing party in Japan, does not have a clear party ideology. It is nothing but a group of people elected by the constituency for various other reasons. The lack of clear political philosophy probably explains why we have not seen any substantial discussion among LDP politicians and other parties. Without philosophy, they seem to be preoccupied with their desire to get a position in politics.

Due to its weak philosophy, Japanese politics avoids discussion about green growth and decarbonization, namely, the future direction of this country. As a result, Japan's environment policy lacks a solid conceptual base, failing to make concerted efforts to tackle global warming. The latest anti-warming plan adopted by the Cabinet this month envisions a society where technological innovation promotes economic growth. However, the technologies it depends on are still uncertain. Decarbonizing society by 2050 is quite

difficult, and some researchers speak for "green growth" even if they recognize the ultimate need for decarbonization. Those big businesses with vested interests mostly agree with the green growth concept. However, still, they seem to stick to the old idea that companies cannot exist without economic growth.

Global youth's climate actions initiated by Ms. Greta Thunberg have attracted the sympathy of young people in many countries, and Japan is not an exception. It seems that Greta and her followers deny the current capitalistic society and seek decarbonization. However, do those young people understand the pros and cons of capitalism? Do they discuss what decarbonization implies? If they avoid serious discussion now, they will lose the opportunity to deliberate fundamental challenges of their generation.

I believe, to overcome the climate crisis, we need a "paradigm shift" from the current society of overshooting planetary boundaries. Among others, we should change the unethical economy of destroying the mother environment and of making people unhappy by widening social gaps. Then, should we aim for green growth? Or do we have no other options than decarbonization? To seek an answer to this question, we, JAES, have been advocating an essential set of citizen's behaviors, namely, "learning, thinking, and taking actions based on what they learned." Humans control the economy and establish rules of society, so changing human behaviors would be a key to changing society. We do not alter our behavior just for a principle or an idea.

It may be too early to expect decarbonization in Japan. We have not yet agreed on how to phase out nuclear power generation. We have not achieved even a green economy. It takes a long time to change society. If citizens' attitudes change, politicians' mindsets will change, and so will the rules of society. Meanwhile, the climate crisis will become more and more severe to the point of no return. Beyond generations, philosophy, and creeds, we should make urgent efforts to find a common ground of discussion on the future direction of this country.