

No. 18 Sense of Values in the Recycling-Based Society

Some days ago, consumers returned the beef to the Daiei Inc. because of its replacement of food labeling, which attracted much attention from the mass media. Not only the blunder of the Daiei Inc.'s refunding the price paid, but also there were demands of refund whose amount was 5 or 6 times as much as the sales volume. Many young people claimed through Internet even though they did not buy any goods.

This is indeed that "there is no fear to cross against a red light if all of us go together." Masaatsu Yasuoka had strictly remonstrated with leaders about their corruptions by describing "The corruption of the upper levels of society influence the corruption of public morals, which ultimately leads to the catastrophe of the society." Then, has Japan stepped into the period of catastrophe?

"Yanagida's Patient (Kakunoshin Yanagida)," told by a rakugo-ka (a comic storyteller) Shinsho, is a story that depicts the life and feelings of townsfolk. This is an interesting story because it expresses human feelings of the Edo Period.

"Kakunoshin Yanagida is a lordless samurai, who hates things contrary to reason. He frequently visited Genbei, a pawnshop owner, with whom Mr. Yanagida got to know through the game of go.

One day, 50 ryos (50 oval gold coins) was disappeared while Mr. Yanagida and Owner Genbei were playing go. Owner Genbei trusted Mr. Yanagida, but a head clerk Tokubei suspected him and insisted to report to the officer. When Mr. Yanagida heard about this, he decided to commit hara-kiri even though he was not guilty. For him, being arrested would disgrace Yanagida's family name.

However, his daughter Kinu thought that the lost money should be found because his father did not steal it. She suggested his father to esteem a Bushido, a code of samurai (personal honor is highly important and the incurred disgrace should be redeemed) with her self-sacrifice of selling herself to a (licensed) red-light district. Kakunoshin was worried about it but decided to do as Kinu told him anyway. He gave a head clerk Tokubei 50 ryos, ransom money of Kinu. At the same time, Kakunoshin also made a deal with him that the owner Genbei and a head clerk Tokubei would be beheaded if the lost money was found in the other place.

Six months later, lost 50 ryos was found on the back of a picture frame on the wall

during a general cleaning of the pawnshop. The owner Genbei had forgotten putting this money away. Owner Genbei had his all employees look for Mr. Yanagida, knowing that he would be beheaded, but no one could find him.

A New Year began. When a head clerk Tokubei was making a round of New Year's courtesy calls, he happened to meet with Mr. Yanagida. Mr. Yanagida heard from the head clerk that 50 ryos had found. So he went to the pawnshop to punish the owner and the head clerk as they had promised. However, Mr. Yanagida decided to forgive them when he saw the owner Genbei and the head clerk Tokubei protected each other.

They apologized to Mr. Yanagida and the owner bought Kinu back from a red-light district to adopt her. Kinu got married with the head clerk Tokubei and all lived happily ever after."

It may be tasteless to describe an outline of rakugo. With the master Shinsho's marvelous technique of storytelling, the story becomes full of human feelings of the Edo Period.

We can find the cassette tapes and CDs of this story in stores, so I encourage you readers to listen to this story.

It is interesting that, through this story, we can figure out a sense of values and a view of life of people in the Edo Period.

The first point is Kakunoshin was a proud man who believed being arrested was disgraced. Despite his innocence, he felt sorry for his ancestors of being questioned by the officer. To follow the Bushido, he ventured to pay his disgrace off by selling his daughter to a red-light district. People of the present age may think it ridiculous.

The second point is Kinu's determination to voluntarily selling herself to a red-light district, being convinced that the lost money would be found somewhere else.

The third point is the pawnshop owner Genbei's honest and manly attitudes. He had his all employees search Mr. Yanagida, knowing that he would be beheaded.

The forth point is generosities of the owner, who adopted Kinu who was sold to a red-light district, and the head clerk, who got married with her.

The fifth point is that (licensed) red-light districts existed as a part of the society. During their life, people sometimes need the money by all means. This social system made

those people possible to survive for somehow, by working in a red-light district (for women) or serving as an apprentice (for men), so that they did not need to commit suicide. The circumstances of those women should have been miserable, of course, except that courtesans were ranked high in the social esteem.

The first three points seem to be ridiculous for “modern – rational” people of the present age. However, the thing that those people have lost is the sense of value that human’s spirit and honor are more important than materials, isn’t it?

People of the present age may understand the last two points because the business affecting public morals (the red-light district industry) is still prevalent in the current society. However, motives for working in this industry seem to be greatly different from that of the Edo Period.

Now we are facing a crisis of the global environment. To avoid a crisis and to construct the future “mankind society,” it is not enough to develop only the recycling techniques. It is important, of course, to develop new recycling techniques, but this is not the only one to construct a sustainable recycling-based society.

The important issue is; we should imagine in some degree what pride and hope people constructing this society will have for their daily lives and what kind of “man with spirit (personality)” the young people are seeking for their future.

Otherwise, the recycling-based society will be approached from only the technology aspect, which will result in nothing but industrial structure changes.

Moreover, those changes alone do not make the environmental revolution sustainable. If a shift to the recycling-based society is corresponded to the industrial structure changes alone, this society will not be sustainable.

The future “mankind society” should be the society where people live a daily life while keeping full of energy and pride. If so, construction of the mankind society from the future global view is not only to develop the technology of material circulation, but also to reform of the viewpoint to people’s life, such as the reason for living, hope, pride, and peace of mind. People essentially “eat for living,” not live for eating.

If people’s main goal is to be rich in their material lives (be well-off), the environmental revolution will not be achieved.

From the ancient time, the revolution used to be a change of a sense of value, without

which reforms of the social structure cannot be started.

To lead the environmental revolution, we have to clarify the values appropriate to this revolution.

However, it is difficult for us to live while having this sense of value under the current nationalism and the business economy system.

Moreover, we have not established the value of the future “recycling-based society,” which makes us difficult to visualize in a clear picture.

To grasp this sense of value, we may need to re-examine values that mankind has built since the ancient time and its spiritual culture, from the aspect of a crisis of global environment.

From another angle, constructing the recycling-based society necessarily is making the “spiritual and honest culture” sustainable.

We need to have a higher spirit to consider the global environment of our subsequent generations.

Everyone plans to give a private property to his/her posterity, but few of us have ever considered the global environment of the subsequent generations including children and eco-system. We may need to have a broad outlook to consider the future with the spatially big (in the global level) and long-term (hundreds of years) aspect.

The mankind has never achieved this type of society. Accomplishment of this revolution is a challenge towards the wonderful future of the earth.

Many of the past revolutions were accomplished by expansion of people's view (change of a sense of view) and fermentation of a feeling of crisis to the society they belonged.

The global environment problems demand us to think with a global view and to have a feeling of crisis about subsequent generations' lives.

“The high civilization is not equal to the gorgeous house, beautiful clothes, or luxurious meals. The index to measure the level of civilization is how wide and profound the justice is prevailed to the society.” “Our family rules – Do not intend to make a special effort just to leave an inheritance to my descendants.” – Takamori Saigo

“To construct the materially rich society is to educate people to know manners.” – Yozan Uesugi

"We always have to think about the next seven generations. We have to keep asking to ourselves what kind of influence our acts will exert to our children of children of children." – Joseph Bulchack (from Abenagi Indians in the North America), Inter Press Service, translated by Tomohisa Shimizu)

Fu-shaku-shin-myo

A metaphor taken from Lotus Sutra, whose meaning is to "give anything, even one's life, for the teaching of the Buddha." This concept was inherited to the spirit of Bushido, in which justice and honor were more important than one's life. Because of the samurai's daily attitude on the basis of Bushido, a Christian missionary in the end of the Edo Period had mentioned that Japanese had two races.

This idea is almost the same as that of the Native Americans and warriors of th

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