Nationalism: The Road to Take?

Four killed, eight wounded. A young man of slightly lean figure, aged 25, carrying a dagger went on a ruthless rampage in broad daylight on June 8th, 2008. Some of you may still remember this brutal massacre in Akihabara (district in Tokyo known for the flourishing of Japan's subculture) that took place just around noon on that day. Not a day goes by when we don't hear about a "diligent and quiet" young man or woman who commits a crime—ranging from petty to merciless ones. Can we just brush it off by saying, "that was a vicious conduct committed by a heartless unknown?" How many crimes must be committed for us to realize that the cause may be systematic? What is really happening in the Japanese society? Prof. Shinji Miyadai (Tokyo Metropolitan University), together with the chair Prof. Takeshi Nakajima (Public Policy School, Hokkaido University) and discussant Prof. Akihiro Iwashita (SRC, Hokkaido Univ.) confronted this critical issue at the GCOE-SRC Special Seminar held on October 14th. While Prof. Miyadai received his PhD in mathematical sociology, he is an expert on wide spectrum of subjects including Japanese subculture to economic and political philosophy. He is a prominent opinion leader who has been active since the early 1990s and has continued to propose and at times criticize the economic and employment policies of the Japanese government. His recent book, *Challenges facing Japan (Nihon no Nanten)* focuses on the contemporary "quandaries" facing Japanese society.

Karl Marx's stated in his infamous work *Capital (Das Kapital)*, that when one sacrifices its society for economic interests and benefits, they are doomed to fail in their economic endeavour. Therefore, many bourgeois in a capitalist society recognized the importance of "taking care of society." However, the paramount reason for the recent expansion of economic inequality and the deterioration of business ethics in Japan in this globalized world is precisely because businesses could avoid the problem—whether it be through the implementation of foreign workers or building factories abroad. In other words, companies no longer have to "care." The inevitable consequence is an exhausted and impoverished society.

While it is impossible to avoid the ramifications of globalization, Prof. Miyadai pointed out the importance of building a society that will not be threatened by globalization through the reinforcement of social inclusion. The backdrop to the various crimes and social instability occurring in Japan is precisely because of the lack

of social inclusion. He also emphasized that it is crucial to reconstruct an inclusive society founded on mutual support and stressed that the absolute condition to make a breakthrough is to make a public commitment. Realistically speaking, however, making a commitment to humankind is far too vague and obscure; then to what can we make a commitment? A more practical framework that could work is religion or nationalism. Whatever the feasible framework may be, what is essential is the creation of a voluntary and independent "ties or in Japanese *yosuga* (よすが)[1]".

Few key issues were raised during the roundtable: one, regarding the ambiguity or danger of nationalism as a framework for commitment and two, the *problematique* of a possibly exclusive, overbearing and even sometimes repressive communitarian form of inclusion seen in rural areas or "murashakai (村社会) or literally 'village society'" seen in Japan. In other words, the answer is not the "old tale" of the manifestation of the top-down nationalism with an over emphasis on nation, but a transition toward a more "user-friendly" version of nationalism as a socially-based identity, while taking into consideration the interests and sentiments of everyday people. Moreover, we must always be sensitive to the intrinsic problem of exclusion in social inclusion—that is, there is always that someone who remains in the margin. Therefore, the challenges that we face today is to continue to create frameworks to include those who have been excluded previously, and to strive for discovering ways to encourage public commitment, whether it be to religion, "the new tale of nationalism," or some form of social ties or *yosuga*.

While mutual assistance and support is the key to reinforce social inclusion, it is perhaps also each and everyone's responsibility to find our own *yosuga* in an ever-changing world. As Iris Marion Young's stated in her book, *Inclusion and Democracy*, "the image of inclusive politics is that of a heterogeneous public engaged in transforming institutions to make them more effective in solving shared problems justly." Easier said than done, of course, but it is worth giving our best shot.

(Written by: Naomi Chi)

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[1] The Japanese word よすが (pronounced "yo-su-ga" represented in Chinese characters as 縁、因、便) has several meanings. One is "ties" or "relationship" represented by the character 縁. The other is "to depend on" or "basis" represented by the character 因. Lastly, it also stands for "ways" or "means" which is represented by the character 便. If we were to give some other *indirect translations* of this word in English, it means something to the like of "support," "refuge," or "haven."