

‘Towards the 21st Century’ Revisited <Part 1>

Introduction

In the past, AAINews has run two serials titled ‘Coexistence of Nature and Humans -Towards the 21st Century’ (No.19-24) and ‘In Search of the Blue Bird; What is it that you long for?’ (No.31-36) which focused on the themes of global environmental issues, affluence and the way of life.

In the series ‘Coexistence of Nature and Humans’ published from 1998 to 1999, it was emphasized that ‘One of the most important tasks for the 21st century is addressing the environmental problems’. Then we introduced activities that pursue coexistence of nature and humans from Japan and overseas, not only by referring to existing reports but also by interviewing and conducting field research that enabled us to express our insights and thoughts. The series was concluded with the sentence “Keeping in mind the notion of ‘Co-existence of Nature and Humans’, we would like to continue contributing to various activities aiming at achieving such a co-existence in Japan, as well as contributing to sustainable development in developing countries”.

‘In Search of the Blue Bird’ was published from 2000 to 2001 with focuses on ‘affluence’ and ‘ways of life’. The following concerns were mentioned; ‘With limited resources and unlimited human greed, will globalization really work for the better? Wouldn’t it just lead to an increasing gap between the powerful and the weak and more environmental destruction?’ It also posed the question ‘If humans continue with their endless greed for material gains and with development beyond nature’s carrying capacity, the final consequence can be expected more or less. Probably it is high time we reconsidered more seriously the education system for the future generations as well as the desirable social system to be built up’ “The current ‘blocked-up’ feeling in Japanese society has something to do with the incapability of dreaming, and things like hope and a sense of fulfillment and achievement seem to be found at the opposite end of where Japan presently stands”.

Those themes were taken up at time when the Kyoto Protocol was adopted, and it was the time when globalization had already advanced and global warming

had become an issue. International cooperation activities we engage in, whether it is ODA projects or NGOs, have been influenced by the trend of globalization. The economic and cultural exchanges among nations have become more active, and the interdependence among nations has strengthened, based on the premise that globalization is progressing. As a responsibility of developed countries, various projects on financial and technical cooperation have been implemented in the developing countries.

With this regard, how should those of us engaged in international cooperation live, act and move forward in this globalizing world? This was the subject we discussed in the past series. 20 years has passed, and what have we done so far? What should we do from now on? The purpose of the new series is to pause and reflect on these questions.

It seems that not much progress has been made towards the solutions for global issues, and the problem appears to be even more serious compared to 20 years ago. On the other hand, it is also true that there have been some movements that did not exist back then, such as the emergence of ‘Glocal’ activities where people take action locally and disseminate results globally, re-evaluation of rural region and Satoyama (woodlands) with the trend of returning to rural life, as well as teaching about sustainable development at elementary schools.

In this series, we would like to think about how AAI can cope with the challenges associated with globalization and capitalism, and contribute to the community development, sustainable society and sustainable lifestyle, by incorporating the activities we engaged in.



Environmental education activities through mangrove planting (Oman, 2013)

*The series mentioned above can be found on the AAI website.
<https://www.koushu.co.jp/aainews/>