

In Search of the Blue Bird; What is it that you long for?

Part 1: Prologue

"Why do you want the Blue Bird?" asked Tiltil.

"To become happy. If you find the Blue Bird, you can definitely become happy," said the Sorceress.

In this page of AAINews we ran a series of six articles titled "Coexistence of Nature and Humans - Towards the 21st Century." This series started in October 1998. We then ran another series titled "Partnerships between ODA and NGOs: For More Effective International Co-operation," starting last year. At first glance, these two series may seem irrelevant to each other, but in fact they share the same deeper theme or question, namely "What is the objective of our life?", or "What is sustainable development?" The new series starting today, titled "In Search of the Blue Bird" will be a journey for us to look for what we aim at and what we are longing for. This is what we are expecting in beginning this new series. This, plus the earlier two series of articles will form a kind of trilogy by sheer chance. Or, were they destined to do so?

In this new series of coming articles, affluence and dreams will be the keywords. In addition, the present and future of Japan and the Japanese, the future of our children and their education etc. will also be important themes. We AAI staff are working in the field of international co-operation and are given opportunities to get various experiences both in Japan and in developing countries. In this process, looking at today's Japan from inside and outside of the country prompts us to have various thoughts. For example, we often face these questions: By achieving economic or material affluence, do we necessarily lose (or have we lost) richness of the mind? Is this the real happiness that we have tried to achieve? And is that the same in developing countries? Why and for what purpose do we work to gain wealth? Have we worked hard so far, only to become unhappy? And other questions like these.

By the way, what constitutes affluence? And what is poverty? In order to indicate the scale or degree of poverty, development aid donors often use a so-called poverty index, which is measured by analyzing household income, calorie consumption, the number of hospitals and schools, the percentage of power supply or proper sanitation systems in rural areas, literacy rates, etc. However, we have come to doubt if poverty can really be indicated by material measures only. It is necessary for us all to have some dream to live a meaningful life. Nobody is without dreams or hopes for the future from the beginning. However, when people cannot have a dream any longer, or cannot find the way to realize their dreams, they are put into a desperate, literally hopeless situation. Thinking this way, poverty can be defined as a condition under which people are not able to have dreams and hopes for the future.

What is needed under such conditions is not a vague and abstract future planning which does not have any direct link or benefit to people's daily life, but a concrete, attainable objective, accompanied by the means of self-help and support to realize it. Isn't it the case that only when there is a concrete objective in life, when, aiming at the objective, it is practically possible to take some actions to make our own life better? And when there is appropriate support from others for those who are thus working hard, that we can say we have some hope in life? The support from others should not be permanent, but it should be given only to enable those supported to ultimately stand on their own feet.

Then, what can dreams and hopes be? In this series, we embark on a journey in search of the answer to this question.

"There is everything in this country, but hope." (Ryu Murakami in Exodus from the Land of Hope)



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