



Role of Japanese Young Generation in New Century¹

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本稿は昨年（平成11年）10月13日に、土木学会東北支部主催・地盤工学会東北支部共催によって、仙台で行われた韓国土木学会会長（当時）鮮于仲皓（Jungho Sonu）教授による特別講演会でのスピーチの抜粋である。本稿の掲載を快諾して下さったSonu氏に厚くお礼を申し上げる次第である。

スピーチ要旨：近年の韓国やアジア諸国の通貨危機とその克服過程は、西欧文化に対するアジア的文化の存在を認識する機会を与えた。新しい世紀における日本の若い世代の役割として、まず日本人はアジア人から信頼される隣人としてふさわしい利他的行動規範をもって欲しい。そして、アジアの価値と文化が世界において正当な地位を確保できるように、アジアの指導者として積極的な役割を担って欲しい。このためには、グローバリゼーションにふさわしいコミュニケーション能力をつけ、己と他を識り、世界に能動的に働きかける日本人となることが不可欠である。新しい世紀の日本の若きリーダー達には、よりよい世界を建設し、それを次の世代に残す大きな責任がある。

As one family of Asian countries surrounding Japan, I would like to tell you on what other people in Asia feels the role of Japan as a leader of the world and Asia. I will talk on this subject for young Japanese generation helping in preparation of the new century. I would like to stress an important role of Japan in Asia based on my own observation, which I had in the latest two or three years.

As you fully aware that Korea has suffered a very difficult economic crisis in 1997. Korean people called this as IMF Economic crisis. As is seen in the terminology, the crisis seemed to be caused by IMF but the real reason was the excess foreign debt by individual companies and temporary shortage of foreign currency. IMF provided loan to Korean Government and after two years, our country could overcome this economic crisis. But the reason why we called this the IMF economic crisis is that the remedial reorganization scheme of our industry proposed by IMF was a shock to Korean people who never had it before. It was hardly acceptable according to the culture we had for a long time.

Korea does not have enough natural resources to develop her economy, which naturally induces the foreign loan to expand the industry. Several big companies like Kia motor

company and Hanbo steel company had difficulty in getting loans and finally the whole industry had a difficulty to continue borrowing money from foreign countries. I am not going to tell you about economy theory but I would like to say what to learn from this bitter experience.

On December 3, 1997 when Korean government decided to accept IMF loan with conditions of restructuring her economy as suggested by IMF, daily newspapers in Korea titled this day as “the day of national disgrace”. The macro operation of national economy needed to be under the strict control of IMF that would affect indirectly the sovereignty of every individual in Korea. Coming to know that we had to accept the IMF suggestion, Korea wondered about two aspects. First one is what caused this crisis, and the second is a fact that the very precise restructuring plan was prepared by IMF in a very short period. I do not want to discuss the first one because that is the job for economists. But for the second one, we have to think its background very seriously. This is not only the matter of Korea but also is the matter of all the nations in Asia. The restructuring program what IMF suggested included the reformation of big conglomerates as well as that of tax system to open our market more to the world. Even though IMF had same experiences with Thailand, Indonesia and other South American countries, the plan was well prepared and gave us a feeling that it was prepared far

¹ This article is part of the speech delivered by Dr. Jungho Sonu at the Tohoku University in October 1999.

before Korea faced the crisis. Otherwise, the plan could not have been ready in such a short period. It looked to me that they had been watching Korea's international business activities for a long time and felt that Korea needed to meet world business standard and practices based on the western culture. Even though Japan has the trade volume of world second or third, all the standard or practices were established based upon the western culture, which is very different from that of eastern civilization. That was part of conflict between two cultures.

Professor Samuel Huntington at Harvard University wrote in his famous book "Clash of Civilization" that the world would be reorganized based upon a confrontation of civilization. From his theory, the world could be divided into western and non-western countries, while the western countries are composed of nations of Christian spirit and non-western countries are not homogeneous of non-Christian religion. The countries that belong to Western civilization have relatively high living standards and stable social structures. These countries usually do not have conflicts between themselves and have a common goal to propagate their standard and value to non-western countries, while non-western countries except a few countries do not enjoy the blessings that western countries have. Professor Huntington further mentioned that the conflict would arise between countries of different religions or races.

I do neither agree with Professor Huntington's contention nor want to discuss his theory. There would be no major confrontation of ideologies like communism and democracy such as the one after the Second World War. But the point is that under whose value the world is being operated now. Apparently it is not based on the Asian value. When several Asian countries faced the economic crisis a few years ago, the prime minister Mahathir of Malaysia refused the economic restructuring plan proposed by IMF and executed his own plan by insisting that the plan should be based on the Asian value. Both Korea and Malaysia seemed to recover from the crisis this year but economic experts closely observe what result would come out from both countries.

The reason why I am telling this long story based on the experience of Korean economic crisis is that we can no longer be maintaining our life style which has been enjoyed for thousands years. It is necessary that we have to live together with other cultures. But it should not be neglected that Asian value be identified and honored in the world standard. I would like to stress that Japan should be in forefront to propagate and let the western world to hold a high respect for the Asian value.

This is the responsibility of Japan as a leader of Asian countries. Sixty years ago, Japan had tried to govern the great East Asia region by military force. But it was unsuccessful. At the edge of new millennium, Japan has to stand in forefront of all the Asian countries for the well-being and benefits of her neighbors. Because Japan is the only country from Asia in G7 nations, Japan as a representative of Asian countries has to put a great effort for Asian value to be a part of world value.

During last century, I understand that Japan had put a great effort to globalize the country even foreigners like us felt it. However, Japan does not have the position in the international society same as the country which leads the world. This may be due to the limitation of oriental countries which influenced by tradition of Confucianism but the more important reason is that Japan gives an impression to other Asian countries of pursuing her own benefit rather than sacrificing herself for the benefit of other Asian countries or the countries of rest of the world. It is true that Koreans very much prefer USA even though Japan, China and Russia surround Korea. Because USA showed that they could sacrifice even their lives on behalf of world justice. We were indebted to USA during the Korean War. I would like to stress this point to you who will be the future leader of the world in new millennium and how other people of the world wants Japan to be in the future.

Current technology development, especially in the field of telecommunications, contributes greatly in making the world to be one block. Furthermore information technology and information itself are too much concentrated to western countries. This is mainly due to the fact that the western country has a language that is common to the world. It was taught and practiced by the people of countries influenced by Confucianism that silence is a good conduct rather than expressing actively his own thought to other person. This is not anymore good in this globalizing era. Japanese young generation should learn how to communicate, persuade other people or express his own thought to other persons. Japan has a very beautiful language but the language is beautiful to Japanese but not to the people in other countries. Japanese culture is very respectable, but other country also has respectable culture. Break and jump over wall existing in your mind. You should become an evangelist to propagate Asian value to the world. One old proverb says that you will win every battle when you know others as well as yourself.

Dear leaders for a new millennium. You have the responsibility that you should construct a better world to pass to the next generation.