

Awake the Goodness of Human Nature

By KONDO Seiichi

The democratic peace theory is one of the major theories of international politics. This theory postulates that democratic countries do not wage wars. It says that since the people are the most vulnerable to the potential devastation of war and they participate in policymaking, international conflicts will be handled both rationally and peacefully and no war will occur. However, why are wars still continuing to be waged (under the name of defense and national self-determination) despite the fact that democracy has spread across the world? Needless to mention the Middle East and Eastern Europe, even Great Britain, recognized as a country of democracy by its own people and the rest of the world, resorted to force in its Falklands War with Argentina and the United States carried out armed intervention in Iraq. These wars gained an overwhelming support from general populations. Is democracy incapable of deterring wars?

The answer to this question is "No." These above-mentioned wars were waged not because the system of democracy is defective but because the system did not work as it should have. Even democracies could wage wars when political parties, important actors of democracy, prioritize their own party's interests with a focus on obtaining public popularity and the people heat up with narrow-minded nationalism or become indifferent to the whole society, pursuing only their own interests. You do not need to quote from *Adventures of a Bystander* by Peter Drucker and *Escape from Freedom* by Erich Fromm to reconfirm that the Nazis was a democratically elected political party. Not only war, but also a wide range of problems facing today's world, including a succession of financial crises, terrorism, global warming and poverty, are occurring because democracy and free market economy mechanisms do not work properly and political parties, companies, the media and individuals are all pursuing their own short-term self-interests.

Human nature has both good and evil aspects. The level of civilizations is determined by how you can highlight the goodness of human nature and how you can put the evilness of human nature under control. However, currently, under the systems of democracy and free market economy, everybody is showing their evilness of greedily prioritizing their own short-term self-interests. This trend is being fueled by intensifying global competition and society allows it. Amidst this situation, a sense of responsibility and public mindedness that should accompany freedom is forgotten. This has

caused human beings to fail to fully utilize a system that was painstakingly created through numerous occasions of bloodshed in the long history of trial and error on the part of humankind.

If I stress the importance of restoring the goodness of human nature and of betting back to “virtuous” politics and economic management, people may laugh it away as an immature and impractical argument. However, there is no other solution. This is also a significant point of discussion when you think about the future of China, which is ardently trying to restore honour from its humiliated history since the Opium War by rising to a global political, economic and military power. Ahead of China are the two options of pursuing global hegemony by twentieth-century Western-style military and economic powers and of becoming a “virtuous” great power, which ancient China used to aim to be, based on its criticism of the former. Recently, I have heard that a Japanese businessman argues about “virtue” rather than corporate management in his speech in China, which moved his Chinese audiences and led them to appreciate positively Japan. If this is a fact, I suspect that it makes much sense to preach on virtue. Let’s awake the goodness of human nature that is staying in everybody’s heart.

(This is an English translation of the article written by Mr. KONDO Seiichi, former Commissioner for Cultural Affairs, which originally appeared on the e-forum “Hyakka-Somei” of CEAC on August 1, 2014.)