

A Diplomatic Path Japan Should Pursue

By NAKAYAMA Taro

Succeeding Mr. AGAWA Hiroyuki, a writer, Professor Mr. FUJIWARA Masahiko's, a mathematician, column on the opening page of the "Bungeishunju" magazine September issue is very inspiring. The League of Nations' establishment was agreed based on the proposal of President Woodrow Wilson of the United States at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. It was a rare case for Japan to participate in such conference as one of the victors, and actively made major and minor proposals. One of them was to include a clause on abolishment of racial discrimination in the League's charter. Japan was represented by the best and brightest then: Prince SAIONJI Kinmochi (head of the delegation), Count MAKINO Nobuaki, who was known as a power figure in Japanese diplomacy (deputy head), Prince KONOE Fumimaro, who later became Prime Minister (secretary to Prince SAIONJI), and Mr. YOSHIDA Shigeru, who also became Prime Minister later (secretary to Count MAKINO). Mr. YOSHIDA's wife, Madam Setsuko was a daughter of Count MAKINO, who was fluent in foreign languages. She assisted Ambassador Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Grew of the US by providing them car and essential goods during their decade of an extraordinary stay Japan due to the war between Japan and the US. The proposal for abolishment of the racial discrimination clause met a strong opposition from the US which had African-American issues at home, and the United Kingdom which had colonies overseas, though it earned the support from 11 countries, and 5 opposition. President Wilson, the chairperson, then ruled that an important proposal shall be decided on unanimity, discarding Japan's proposal.

Xi Jinping, Chinese premier, has called his nationals to end admiring white people and Western civilization. This is to not support China's claim, but the cunningness of the West is unchanged since the Paris Conference. According to a Chinese intellectual friend of mine, what Xi said portrays that there is still a strong admiration to the West among Chinese elites. "The Western elites, however, have few knowledge of China. If someone visits UK for their job or study abroad, speaks little English and has not read Shakespeare or the Bible ever, but only interested in the City, s/he would be made fun of."

He continues "most of the people in US and UK, however, have no idea who Mencius, Du Fu or Li Bai was, nor have read the Analects or Tang poetry. They do not even try to learn Chinese characters as they seem too difficult for adults. On the other hand, Japan, which China has been bashing as much as they want incited by the West, reads Chinese characters, and understands the Analects and Mencius deeper than Chinese in some aspects. In Japan, even a child can recite Tang poetry, some are knowledgeable about ancient Chinese literatures like the 'Records of the Three Kingdoms.' I have spoken with a 10 year old elementary school student,

who is deeply interested in the names appear in the 'Records of the Three Kingdoms,' and showed me some 20 names in writing with no difficulties. I have also interviewed Trump supporters in the US, who kindly said 'I like Chinese people' to be friendly. The news that President Trump's granddaughter is learning Chinese had been around then. They were saying 'China's capital city is Tokyo ...No? Then Hong Kong is.'"

Another friend of mine who works in finance said this: In principle, one country has one vote at the international organization like the United Nations. And there are far more developing countries than developed ones. It is imaginable that China reaches to those developing countries via health/medical cooperation at the current coronavirus crisis. Japan should be careful to maintain its own credibility, stand in the middle amidst of US-China confrontation, because developing countries are counting on Japan. It is not desirable for them if it would be US or China. Japan may not be good at standing out at the international stage, though it should tenaciously advocate for the good of liberal democracy, with the other democracies untied, for establishing an international cooperation for the health enhancement of the world.

(This is an English translation of the article written by NAKAYAMA Taro, Adjunct Staff of a Nonprofit Organization, which originally appeared on the e-forum "Hyakka-Somei (Hundred Ducks in Full Voice)" of CEAC on August 8, 2020.)