

Making yourself capable of gathering information that is as good as from overseas

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In the old days Japan took U.S. as a country of racial segregation. But in reality, Americans welcomed and treated me very nicely when I visited there in 1970s. How about Japanese then? Looking from 'outside' you realize that Japanese discriminate foreigners, especially Asians, just as much. You become aware of the gap that exist between your vision in Japan and the vision of people in the world.

Seeing Japan from outside will make you see the problems and enable you to talk about them objectively. You will also be thinking from a higher perspective. This is very important for business leaders, too. For example, where is this age headed to? What are the implications of the events happening now? Or, looking back, what was the epoch making event of the time.....? In short, you will be capable of grasping a big picture of the history.

I personally see 1989 and 1995 as the symbolic year, turning point in history connecting to today's chaotic situation. In '89 when Japan was enjoying bubble of economy several historic events took place in the world; the fall of Berlin wall and Tiananmen Square protests. What these two incidents indicated was the effect of tremendous progress in IT that made it possible for people to see the events of the world through television etc. And in '95 five events occurred which were quite symbolic. Great Hanshin earthquake, Aum Shinrikyo incidents, ¥69 billion injection into Jusen (a Japanese non-bank home loan mortgage corporation), merger of Japanese major banks unheard of in the past, and Hideo Nomo transferring to the Major League. The iron triangle of congress, bureaucracy, and interest groups that has long supported the system of Japan at last started to crack and people with backbones or 'nails that stick out', were eventually moving out to the world. People who 'went outside' from Japanese companies or organization, people who then saw Japan objectively as 'individuals' (free from companies or organizations), became especially good at seeing things, as a matter of course, in a broader context.

If so, then is there any way to gain such kind of sensitivity without going abroad? My recommendation is again to try finding as much overseas information as possible. For example, think about multiple media available in the world. Watch and read not only

domestic television broadcasts, newspapers, or journals but those of overseas. And in doing this, try to see or read as broadly as possible.

Actually, even CNN of America and BBC of Britain are editing their information quite intentionally. You can see how this is done by just looking at other countries' media. For example watch or read Al Jazeera English (an English version of the Arabic-language news network). It brings you a totally different view of the world as compared to CNN or BBC.

On this planet only Islam is growing their population by two times. This indicates a large percentage of young people. Having a large number of young people in population will give the nation potential for high growth in economy but on the other hand its social infrastructure and job availability will inevitably stay behind in many cases. And 60% of Islam people are actually living in Asia. Japan has right by its side a market of Islam that possess high potential for economic growth. I wonder how many of Japanese people notice this or feel this.

Another thing is internet. Nowadays overseas information means internet. I must stress the importance of using internet in English. Don't even think that having more than enough of information already it is just too much to seek for information in English. In internet knowing exactly what information you are seeking is important.

Search what you want to know by keywords in English and you will be able to grasp quite a volume of information from all over the world. You can get diverse information you wanted from multiple angles from all over the world. Don't excuse yourself from this effort saying you are not good at English. The "standard language" of international society is "broken English". 'Broken' is OK. Just go on and get used to English by reading, writing, conversing. People don't mind whether your English is good or not.

Japanese people in their 40s by and large don't recall their having studied hard in their university years. In a system where everything is determined by the result of an entrance exam, a system of permanent employment, and seniority, what actually matters for promotion is how sensitive you could be of the expressions that appear on your boss's face. People of this generation tend to have a mindset of "Hirame ningen" (flat fish man; meaning that you see only upper side). They grew up being told that a good life is promised by a degree from a good university and I'm afraid that Japanese people in their 40s more or less still cling to this value. Also they are told that not making a mistake is better than making a challenge. On top of these, is the fact that it is still yet a society where men come first.

Watch out. Japan is facing a crisis no smaller than that of Meiji restoration or the second world-war. Just to mention domestic affairs, the end of Regime 55 was impressed by the unprecedented change in the leading political party. Japan could possibly be blown away by the violent trend of world affairs and new value of the new generation.

Just start by opening your eyes to the largeness of the world and its diversity. See how odd Japan looks from outside, incapable of changing. Then you will be thinking, learning, and acting by yourself. After all, Japanese were and are hard working, earnest people.

Photo above

Al Jazeera English website

On Sept.1st, an article on the election of house of representatives in Japan was posted, too.

Photo below

Chinese newspaper has its English version 'People's Daily'

Photo left

A magazine rack at Dr. Kurokawa's office. Along with Japanese magazines, many newspapers and magazines from overseas are stored.

Home work!

Read and see Al Jazeera English, CNN, BBC, People's Daily – all of them.