**Everyone should have the same right to get married**

Kasumi Ochi

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Do you know some people can’t get married although they wish to? Now Japanese laws don’t admit the same-sex marriage as you know. Someone may say, “It’s not my business.” I want you to know, however, this is not a problem happening somewhere far away but really close to you. According to a research by Dentsu Diversity LAB, 7.6% people recognize sexual minority themselves. Theoretically, out of forty people in a standard class, three such people exist. Out of three hundred ESS members, for instance, twenty two such people exist. Do you feel these figures are small? I don’t think so. From now I’m going to talk about the problems of same-sex marriage.

In Shibuya Ward on March 31st, a partnership ordinance was approved. They decided to issue same sex partnership certificates. You need to understand, however, that Shibuya Ward still doesn’t admit same sex marriage. Partnership is different from marriage in many points. Unlike marriage, partners aren’t given joint parental authority or insured as a family. For example, if one person passes away, his partner is unlikely to inherit a legacy because he is not officially a family member. They also suffer from many other disadvantages.

As I mentioned a while ago, same sex marriage is not legally recognized in Japan. People called “sexual minorities” also work and pay their taxes, and fulfill their duties. Nevertheless, they can’t be admitted the right to get married. Don’t you think it’s unreasonable for them not to be able to be married because of sex? Everyone should have the same right to get married to a person he likes and live happily together. It’s strange that laws restrict the right. Nobody would suffer disadvantages if same-sex marriage will be admitted in this country.

What should we do to solve it? At first, we have to change the laws so that same sex couples can get married. It may be difficult to change them immediately. Then, we first need to make local ordinances in other cities following Shibuya Ward. Another idea is to share the information about sexual problems via SNS. In fact, one of my old friends is a sexual minority. She told me she couldn’t disclose the fact the public. Some people may not think she is normal, but she isn’t different from us. We first need to throw away our prejudice and learn the correct information. It’s important to make the society where everyone can live happily.

In conclusion, I really feel for everyone, regardless of agreeing or disagreeing with the concept of same sex marriage, it is important to be interested in this problem and argue. Seven point 6 percent people alone can’t change the laws. How the other 92.4% people think and react is important.

**Not to forget terrible lessons of the earthquake**

　Ranku Fu

In our daily life, since the Great East Japan Earthquake, we have often heard the phrase “Let us not let the memories of the earthquake fade away”. To retain memories is believed a common way for Japanese to minimize the damage of earthquakes occurring in the future. I feel a contradiction in this idea. Today, I would like to touch on what is the real “fading of memories”.

“Fading” has generally been understood in a meaning that our memory fades with the lapse of time. In fact, to prevent the “fading”, many activities have been conducted. For example, people called storytellers tell their experiences of the earthquake at sightseeing spots or in lectures. Besides, the government and each city recorded pictures and documents of the earthquake. Are these activities really contributing to the increase of our awareness of the earthquake?

Please remember the society just after the Great East Japan Earthquake. Street lights went out. We couldn’t buy commodity goods or use enough electricity. At that time, almost all the people thought of the earthquake and took some actions. What is the recent situation, then? According to a survey this year, out of 700 people in their 20’s to 60’s, only 21 percent answered they prepared for an earthquake. Furthermore, thirty-three percent answered they had never taken any action for earthquakes outside their living areas. Now in our daily life, we hardly hear the words “saving electricity”. From these facts, I believe the thing fading away from us is not “memories” but “actions”.

To prevent “fading” of memories of the earthquake, preparation is very important. How should we then prepare for an earthquake? I suggest you promote voluntary actions and respects for the self-help efforts. About this idea, I clearly remember one story called “Miracle of Kamaishi” in the Great East Japan Earthquake. Just after the earthquake, Kamaishi city was in a very dangerous situation as Tsunami washed away and buildings were swept away. In spite of such a terrible condition, ninety-nine percent of elementary and junior high school students could survive.

When I heard this, I was very surprised. And I found one important idea in this story. Why do you think they could survive? It is because each child has consciousness called voluntary self-help that they want to ensure safety as a member of their family and their local community. And the reason children could have consciousness was that most children had familiarity with their city, and they also built strong relationship of mutual trust with their family and local people. Children therefore became able to have the idea to protect their own life connecting to protect their family and regional people’s life. As this story shows, by communicating deeply with our family and regional people in everyday life, we can notice that our existence in the society is big. This awareness brings us motivation to prepare for an earthquake.

In Japan, a lot of disasters have occurred. Everyone wants to live peacefully without encountering disasters. Human beings, however, have failed to control nature since the earth was born. We can’t but coexist with nature by our efforts. Not to repeat the past tragedy, in addition to keeping its memory, it is important to make actions with the mind of voluntary self-help. I strongly believe that if everyone has such idea, we can save as much life as possible in the future.

**Do you feel happy?**

Saori Fujita

One day, my soccer class teacher said to us, “People in developing countries are better at playing ball games than people like you. They don’t have much money. Why then, can they live a happy life?” We have more money and better environments than people in developing countries. Why are we not good at having a merry time? How can we make our life happier? Today, I’d like you to consider this through my speech.

First, let me refer to Vietnam. I went there on a school trip when I was a high school student. I visited homes of orphans. There were many children who are suffering from the aftereffects of the Vietnam War. We presented backup resources and played with children. Children looked like they’re having fun playing. I wondered why they can be so happy. Comparing with Japan, Vietnam is a developing country. In the standards of living, and environments, Vietnam is no better than Japan. I noticed, however, that Vietnamese children are used to enjoying their time.

Second, let me compare with other developed countries. In the world happiness index report 2015 announced by the UN, no.1 was Switzerland, no.2 was Iceland, no.3 was Denmark. Japan was 46th. High ranking countries were mostly European. Japan is a rich country. It is no wonder that Japan is higher ranked. Why is Japan 46th? Why are European countries ranked high? The reasons must be related to their national policies and the attitude of citizens. In the case of Denmark, medical, welfare, education and childcare expenses are all free of charge. The main revenue for those expenses is citizens’ tax. Moreover, Danish are much concerned with politics. Voter turnouts always stand at 80%. As you can see, people actually do something. People can have peace of mind and feel happy. Japanese people, however, seem unwilling to pay more tax. According to a professor of economy, it is only Japanese who refuse to pay more consumption tax to make our life much better. I consider this is different from European countries. Citizens of high ranked countries like Denmark are therefore qualified to live happily.

In conclusion, this is not a problem of developed counties, but a particular Japanese problem. Japanese environments make us being poor at living happier. In the case of Vietnam, they became familiar with the thought how to play happier because of their poor environments. Because it is now that is important for the people of developing countries and other developed counties, they always try to enjoy a great time. I believe we can do the same and consider “now” as an important period of life, and live happily.

Thank you very much for your attention.

**Fall in love with yourself**

Kazunori Sekine

“You need to focus on your strength. Though you have many good points, why are you blind to them?” This is what my mother always says to me when I consult her about my worries. Thanks to her advice, I could find I had to make efforts to be satisfied with myself. There are many Japanese who are not satisfied with themselves, and not being satisfied is one of the poor points of Japanese personality, in my opinion. According to a research of the Cabinet Office, only 45.8% Japanese are satisfied with themselves, and 62.6% of age 20 to 24 people are not satisfied with themselves. Besides, Manabu Musashi, a doctor of medicine in Hokkaido University, reported people not satisfied tend to be blind to their strengths. He also stated they have possibility to be involved in the bullying or committing suicide. He concludes this problem is caused by not having confidence and not accepting themselves. By being satisfied with yourself, your life must become much better. Today I would like to talk about two ways to satisfy yourself, i.e., be confident and accept yourself by comparing your current situations with your past and future situations. I hope this speech can be a trigger to loving and being satisfied with yourself.

Firstly, I’m going to talk about how to get confidence and accept yourself by comparing your current and past situations. Why can you realize them by comparing your current and past situations? Thinking of your weak points in the past and finding out whether they are still there as your weak points are useful. By doing this, you can easily know your strong points and how you made efforts to overcome your weak points. In the past, I didn’t have enough skills to be a leader. Now I believe I have them. Then, I can say having enough skills to be a leader is one of my strengths and I know I have made efforts and overcame many difficulties. I could get confidence and accept myself.

Secondly, I’m going to talk about how to get confidence and accept yourselves by comparing your current and future situations. Why can we recognize confidence by comparing our current and future situations? We can know the change of how small the gap becomes between our current and future situations. We have some clear or unclear ideal situations in the future. Most of us think our current situations are much different from our ideal ones in the future. We are not willing to recognize this situation as reality. It is all wrong in the first place to focus on whether there is a gap between them or not. We have to focus on the change of how small the gap becomes. It means we get closer to our ideal situation. When I was a high school student, I wanted to be good at Japanese and biochemistry. But, I was poor in fact when I started. Gradually, I could become better at both of them. This shows the gap became smaller. I got confidence and accepted myself because, by continuing to study, I could come closer to my ideal situation.

You can choose from two ways of life. One is the life with loving and being satisfied with yourself. The other is the life without loving and being satisfied. Some people envy others. It is just a waste of time. Please simply make efforts to get closer to your ideal situation.

**Japan’s Globalization and the Current Education System**

Miyuki Sugiura

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Today I’d like to talk about how the Japanese government's plan to reform the education system contradicts with their goal to improve Japan’s globalization. To begin with, let me ask you a question. Do you believe studying abroad is the best way to learn English? Surely, most of you might say yes, but I don’t agree with that opinion. Studying abroad isn’t the most effective way to learn English; it’s just an opportunity to learn it.

Many people believe studying abroad will be fun as they imagine that schools in foreign countries will be similar to exciting schools in the movies. However, the real- life experience isn’t fun at all. Why can I say this? - Because I experienced a real exchange. I studied hard to get As, attended the drama club and became a member of the FCCLA which stands for Family, Career and Community Leaders of America. That was the real exchange student life and it was quite a challenge that required patience.

Nowadays, the Japanese government puts so much effort into Japan’s globalization. They encourage foreign students to visit Japan on an exchange and also encourage Japanese students to study aboard by implementing scholarships as incentives. The Government believes that young people will broaden their perspectives by studying abroad.

In addition, the government is planning to change the current education system. They believe it’s better for students to study what they are good at or what they can enjoy; so they can develop stronger individual skills, rather than studying a broader range of subjects. This education plan, however, could destroy the patience of students as it allows them to avoid the subjects that they dislike or find difficult. If students study only what they enjoy, how do they develop a sense of patience? People may say we still face hardships while doing what we enjoy but while doing something enjoyable, it's easier to devote yourself. Studying outside your comfort zone is a true test of patience, and with it, we can develop our ability to overcome hardships more successfully.

The government is contradicting their values. They want Japan to be globalized and want students to study abroad, which requires patience. Meanwhile, they’re changing the education system in a way which will hinder the students’ ability to develop the patience required to study abroad.

Recently, the number of hard workers is decreasing and people are becoming less diligent, -I dare say that this is-, because people aren’t being properly challenged or pushed to develop patience and strength. We can simply avoid what we don’t want to do. We don’t have to talk to people we don’t like. SNS or LINE can do it for us. Students even avoid doing what they don’t like by making excuses. If we don’t challenge ourselves by doing what we don’t want to do, how can we become strong enough to study abroad?

I strongly believe that government should require students to study various subjects, including those that students may be reluctant to study. People need more opportunities to learn to overcome difficulties. This can help them strengthen their patience to learn English and in turn, I believe this will further allow Japan’s globalization. Thank you for listening.

**Love Yourself as You Love Your Neighbours**

Kotomi Fukada

“Do you love yourself?” My answer was absolutely no, because I thought I didn’t have any strong point at all.

According to the Cabinet Office, in 2013, only 45.8 per cent of young Japanese said they were satisfied with themselves, whereas people in foreign countries such as the United Kingdom, the US, and Korea, over 70 per cent were satisfied with themselves. Through these statistics, Japanese are said to be modest after all. This typical Japanese character sometimes causes a problem.

They generally underestimate themselves. They always compare with someone else. They hesitate to challenge themselves to new things. As a result, they fail to gain the fruits. What is worse, they fall into a vicious circle; to underestimate oneself, avoid trying to do anything, getting no seed of growth, and being disappointed with oneself. This cycle brings us extreme loss of confidence and leads us to dislike ourselves.

Today, I am here to tell you to love yourself. From now on, I define “love” as “respect as a man”.

What makes you underestimate yourself in the first place? According to a study by Toshiaki Horii, professor of Yokohama National University, university students who feel fear of personal relations increased in number between 1993 and 2008. When I was a junior high school student, I had a friend whose first name was Kotomi, same as mine. She was popular because of her intelligence and appearance. One day, I happened to hear a conversation among her friends by accident. “I like Kotomi but I dislike the other Kotomi, because she is ugly.” It was really shocking to me. I just felt I was denied. Since then, I have disliked and hated myself. I guess past negative experiences must have made some of you feel negative.

Nevertheless, I could escape from the circle fortunately. In March, I participated in the gathering of university students in Japan. We were divided into some groups by 10 people each. We talked about the members a lot with whom we didn’t know each other. Hobbies, favorite things, dreams, and characters; we could open our mind. I uncovered my unforgettable past. Strangely enough, I felt easy once I disclosed my story. I was given some comments objectively from people who listened to me. Finally, I felt I was released from a severe psychological trauma. To open up your mind with people not knowing each other so much, is a specific remedy to face yourself.

In addition, I suggest another remedy. That is “positive feedback.” It is to admire others. It’s important to advise specifically, and not just admire. Rochelle Kopp, a managing director of Japan Intercultural Consulting, explains how to evaluate others in three steps. 1) To mention what the person can do specifically. 2) What advantage the person can give? 3) What should the person do next?!

“Love your neighbors as you love yourself.” This phrase is written in the Bible. Today, my title is reversed back and forth. I strongly believe you cherish yourself first. Ladies and gentlemen, at the beginning, I said “I disliked myself.” Now, I feel confident to say “I love myself”.

**Why do we study?**

Yuri Furukawa

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Have you ever thought why you have to study? I’m sure most of you must have thought about that at least once. As students, this theme may be one of our common problems. Today, I’d like to think about this with you.

In the university, we major only in what we are interested in. That’s why we don’t have to study what we don’t want to. When we studied for entrance examinations to the university, we didn’t have to study the subjects not required for the tests. But is there anything that we don’t really have to learn when we step into the society? I don’t think so. To be honest, I wasn’t good at mathematics or science and accordingly I didn’t want to study them and I don’t want to study even now. However, these 2 subjects are somehow needed and useful in the society. For example, mathematics is important when we want to learn about economics. Science is helpful and also important when we use synthetic detergents in our daily life. This society is made out of almost everything. We must therefore learn as many things as possible.

Then why do we study only what we are interested in, particularly in the university? The answer for this question is very simple; specialists are also required in every field in the society. Lawyers are important in the trials. Without them, we are unable to solve the problems in our everyday life. Doctors are also important in medical diagnoses and operations for citizen’s health. Can you imagine the life without them? Experts in the commercial science and economics are important for the successful management of companies. This society can continue to exist and grow thanks to these specialists and experts. With no such specialists or experts, our life would stop making progress and the society would collapse.

In order to avoid such situation, we, university students, are expected to study hard what we major in and we have to learn them in order to help the society when we work for organizations such as companies or institutions after graduation. Some of you might still think that we should have comprehensive knowledge as I said earlier and we shouldn’t study only specific areas. But please remember, each of us is expected to play an important part as a different component of the society.

Now I’m studying law and majoring in politics. Sometimes I don’t feel like studying and want to play or enjoy my life, as many of you might agree. As one of the university students, however, I know I have to study and need to study much harder in order to become a good citizen. Let’s keep trying to study what we major in and learn as many things as possible for ourselves and for the society in the future. Thank you very much for your kind attention.

To solve the problem of refugees

Mayumi　Sato

What do you recall when you hear the number “0.2”?

This number is the percentage of people who were recognized as refugees in this country by the Japanese Government last year.　In 2005, there were only 384 people who wanted to be certified as refugees and wanted to immigrate to Japan. To our surprise, in 2014, there were over 5,000 people who wanted to move to Japan, but only 11 people were recognized as refugees by our government. In other words, our government refused remaining 99.8 percent.

The reasons for this are; a) Japanese government’s criteria for recognizing people as refugees are much stricter than other countries, b) the Japanese government spends two or three years to decide legal measures, and c) they need some hundreds of documents. Most of us may think this problem is an extraordinary issue. You may not think that we have any relationship between our life and refugees, because we hardly meet any refugees in our daily life behind the governmental policies. Then, let me introduce my experience.

I have had a chance to meet a man who was recognized as a refugee by our government and received protection. He runs his curry restaurant in Tokyo. He does not wear any dirty clothes, but he wears descent shoes. He has a proper job and he speaks fluent Japanese. He taught me that he had come to Japan in 2004 when the political change occurred in Myanmar, and he also said that he was really thankful for Japan to have given him his second life.

We should accept people from the country which is in dispute and we should protect them as refugees. There are three main reasons.

No. 1; Japan is the third major economic power in the world, and therefore it is natural for Japan to accept them. It encourages fundamental resolutions.

No.2; accepting refugees brings us some advantages. We can get plenty of plant workers and some intellectual or academic people. This acceptance of refugees would make our culture full of variety.

No.3; we can make use of our experience. Japanese government once accepted a large number of people when Indochina War occurred. They accepted over a hundred thousand people as refugees, but I don’t think a lot of people know this fact. That’s why we cannot fully use this experience for the ongoing problem. We could, however, operate more effective policy to protect refugees based on instructions we got thorough this experience.

Our government should give recognition of refugees to those who are forced to emigrate from their own countries, because we have big economic power and the experience. Japan is likely to play an important role in this problem all over the world. When we think of what we should do, the solution would be through exchanges with refugees or volunteer activities to help them, but most important of all, what each one including myself should do is "to know" the refugee issue and "to think" about it. It seems an abstract answer, but when each one of you pays attention to this problem seriously and considers a countermeasure against it, the behavior naturally follows. Many people don’t seem to know or think about this problem, and such attitude makes it more difficult to take actions for this problem.

Why don’t we change our attitude as a first step?

**Important things around you**

Akina Kowata

　 Do you have anything important or have you ever lost anything important in your life? Probably most people unconsciously have them. They disappear from us all of a sudden. I’m from Minami-soma City in Fukushima Prefecture. I suffered from The Great East Japan Earthquake and the accident of nuclear power plant four years ago. At that time, I was in a book store. A lot of books fell down from the shelf, and glass windows broke during the shaking of the earthquake. I was injured in the arm. I lost many things, too. Today I am going to talk about three things I learned through my earthquake experience and I want you to rethink about the things very close to you.

First, let me talk about the value of being as usual. After the earthquake, we had to move from our houses to the evacuation center to spend a few days there. People who escaped from the earthquake had to live together. The life there was very tough for us. We didn’t have enough commodities to live with such as water, food, electricity, fire and clothes. In addition, we didn’t have private spaces to relax. Complaints increased day by day. As a result, there were some troubles among them. I have come to realize that the items I always took for granted are very important, and that people can’t live without them.

Second, let me talk about the loss of places of our childhood memories. Minami-soma City faces the sea, and so, many buildings and houses were swept up by the tsunami. My important places were also included. I can’t visit those places again to see the same sceneries forever. I could keep my memories in my mind, but the amount of memories we can remember is limited and what is worse, we aren’t able to remember details. I won’t be able to show children those places or buildings in the future. In fact, I want to show them what I can leave as a memory of the earthquake.

Third, I’d like to refer to a death of my classmate. He was a very kind and funny person. I always talked with him about our school life, dreams, and entrance exams to high schools. We promised to meet at school on the very day of the earthquake. I didn’t even anticipate that he becomes the person who never returns. When I heard that he was killed in the earthquake, I could neither believe nor understand why he had to die. I regret not having talked more with him. I realize we can’t predict what will happen in the future, and people recognize how important lost things were when they actually lost them.

Through these experiences, I learned important things. First, we don’t know what will happen in the future. Second, what we take it for granted are not always there with us. Third, people will notice how important and special they are when daily routines are lost in front of us. I never want to experience an earthquake again, but at the same time, I could realize the value of things around me thanks to this earthquake. What I want you to learn most is that you should treasure your daily life more than before because you never know what will happen to your life any time.

Thank you very much.

**For our future**

Kohei Kuroda

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Have you thought about the ageing of population? It is a shift in the distribution of a country's population towards older ages. Today, we often see elderly people in many places. Even in my hometown, Sagamihara city where a lot of families move from local districts, there are more elders than before. Even though this issue has long been taken up by some of the media, most people, especially young, aren’t very much concerned about it. Today, I’d like to talk about population ageing in Japan and my solution to the problem.

At first, I’m referring in general to people who are over 65 years old. According to the data from the Cabinet Office, total population in Japan will be about 90 million by 2055, but the number of elderly people will increase to 36 million. The most serious problem is a decrease in total population while the number of elders is increasing. Because of that, other problems will also come up. For example, it will be hard to maintain our current living standards because people will no longer work as they get old and stay home. It will get difficult to develop and grow domestic industries, and the cash flow in Japan will stagnate.

What is common in all these issues resulting from population ageing is that it will burden young people. Then, how do we solve the problem of population ageing? As a solution, I’d like to make some suggestions for elderly people and for young people.

For elders, the only solution is to keep being healthy and enjoy their life. According to the Japanese Ministry of Finance, medical cost is the second biggest expenses among its social security costs. Elders should exercise their bodies and find their own raison d’etre for living. It is good that they go to the gym and culture centers. Thus, they can cut down medical costs and keep being more active. By doing so, they could also help the economy.

Next, for young people, they should get married earlier and give birth to more children. The greatest cause of the aging society is the decline in the birthrate. The birthrate of Japan in 2014 was 1.41. We can’t maintain our population unless our birthrate is around 2. Today, age of marriage has risen for economic reasons. Government and companies should support them economically and rather need to force them to take a childcare leave in order to bring up their children. And they should also allow people to return to work easily. The most important thing is to have a positive attitude towards getting married and having a child.

Population ageing is not merely a problem of Japan. It affects all of us, and our descendants as well. We have to face this problem, and we should lead the next generation for the future. I believe this is the best way to get over the problem of population ageing.