

My Impression of China

By TAHARA Soichiro

From April 12 to 14, I visited Shanghai. Many things surprised me. The population of Shanghai exceeds 20 million, which is about twice as many as Tokyo. There are about 2 to 3 million migrant workers in Shanghai to top it off. Shanghai is now the world largest city. The number of Japanese living in Shanghai is about 80 thousand; that is also the world's number one, exceeding cities like New York or Los Angeles. Hosting World Expo, Shanghai is infused with energy.

With Tokyo sense of time and distance, I thought it would only take 20 to 30 minutes to visit place to place; however, it took over an hour to go anywhere, making me fully realize the vastness of the land. Former minister Zhao Qizheng came all the way from Beijing to Shanghai, knowing that I would be there. I had a discussion with the Communist Party's officials in Shanghai, which went on over two hours. 15 to 16 university professors in Shanghai also gathered to have a talk with me. I also met the consul general of Japan and the U.S.

Up to today, Japan sought after the American model. However, at the point of history when Chinese GDP exceeds Japan, I was struck by the idea that the Chinese model must be sought as well. China's one-party system entails various problems, but is quick to make decisions at any rate. China is making outstanding impressions in the regions such as ASEAN or Africa. On the contrary, Japan takes too much time in making decisions, in so missing opportunities. While America and Europe were suffering from recession, China keeps its rapid growth improving over 10% each year. During the discussion with academics, I asked, "Last year, Liberal Democratic Party that ruled Japan for so long lost the election, and Democratic Party of Japan took over the office. Changes of the administration occurred due to the result of votes. For the former West countries such as America, Britain, France, or Germany, such changes in administration due to election has become commonplace. On the contrary, China does not have an election. There is leeway in economy, but no competition in the political arena. Is it health or unhealthy?"

After a moment of silence, one of the academics said, "Surely Japan's ruling party changed from LDP to DPJ, but the change is insignificant." And continued, "Because of elections, LDP or DPJ accommodate public opinions. To cut a long story short, neither LDP nor DPJ can raise consumer tax although there are debts amounting 870 trillion. Consumer tax of every Western country is about 15 to 20%, and Sweden 25%. Contrary to that, Japan's consumer tax is only 5%. Too low. It is nothing but pleasing public opinions. Isn't it because of this tendency that DPJ cannot even resolve the issue of relocation of Futenma air base?" These opinions have their points.

But I said daringly. "Is it good to have elections or not?" After a long pause, they answered, "Democracy is what is necessary to China now. Democratization of Chinese Communist Party is required. China cannot stand if the current condition continues. A change will come in the near future, or say, we shall make these changes." At that moment I felt we were having a straightforward, heart-to-heart conversation. By any measure, Shanghai's energy is amazing.

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