

A Matter of "Mutual" "Understanding"?

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Ever since human beings formed "nations," there has almost always been an international conflict of some kind. An innumerable number of politicians, scholars, writers and students have tried to remove these conflicts with the magic words "mutual understanding." Many reports, essays, and even speeches at speech contests have stressed the importance of mutual understanding. But is this magic almighty? Today, I would like to talk about this matter based on a topic which many people are familiar with: the Japan-US trade friction.

Let me begin with explaining the basic structure of this economic conflict. Japan has a tremendous trade surplus which sums up to 37 billion dollars in 1984. The American delegates have been complaining that the Japanese have been making unreasonable profits by invading the widely open US market and by protecting themselves in the exclusive Japanese market. The Americans have demanded of us, the Japanese to open our market by removing tariffs and non-tariff barriers, while our delegates have been asking for understanding that we're doing our best to do so. But as the trade imbalance never seems to go away, they believe that the Japanese are cheating.

But believe it or not, the Japanese market is not as closed as people think. In the States, manufactured goods must pass different standards in different states, while here in Japan, they can be sold anywhere in the country as long as they pass the Japan Industrial Standard. While a lot of American computer firms complain about non-tariff barriers in Japan, IBM has sales of \$2 billion in this country. Furthermore, we Japanese are already buying quite a lot of American goods, including Big Macs, Coca Cola, Nike jogging shoes, Schick razor blades, Johnson & Johnson Band Aids, Nabisco Ritz crackers, Tupperware and too many others to mention. Although these products have a dominant share in Japan, they are never counted as imports from the USA because they are made in Japan by American firms. This means, that we are trying to make them understand that we are making efforts to have fair competition instead of telling them we already do.

What I've talked about is only a part of the problem, but I think you can see that we're not trying to mutually understand what really needs to be understood. And even so, a tremendous trade deficit in the United States remains. Unemployed workers still wander the streets of America with the emotion that the "Japs" have robbed them of their jobs. Looking at the pictures of these people on TV, a majority of the Americans will suddenly become ultra-nationalists wishing to sweep out Japanese products, although most of them are quite satisfied using them.

As many people have already argued, mutual understanding is important, and I do admit that. But now we are aware that international issues are not simply a matter of mutual

understanding. Then what can we add? I can think of two measures: one before mutual understanding, the other after.

Before it comes to a matter of "mutual" understanding, it is a matter of "self" understanding. In order to mutually understand what really needs to be, we must be sure of what we require the Americans to understand. Thus we will need to observe ourselves carefully: the industrial structure, commercial practices, culture and every other aspect that can influence these matters. It is necessary for us to know why we are in such a situation.

After we have achieved mutual "understanding," it becomes a matter of mutual "emotion control." Even if they understand what we want them to, there are cases where they won't be emotionally satisfied, and this often plays an important role in this issue. For example, as a majority of the Americans are satisfied with Japanese products, we can ask the consumers to appeal to the public. In this way, we can positively control their emotion by forming public opinion favoring us. After we have understood each other, we can know how to calm them down, and keep both sides "on the track."

My conclusion to this speech is never a conclusion to the problem, because I know that international conflicts are not that simple. I am aware that my proposal will still be no magic to solve any international issue. But I do believe that it will be necessary in order to get a step closer to a solution. Finally, let us not lose any hope to find a complete pack of solutions to every international problem, because I believe that problems exist only to be solved.

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