

AN ACTION AS PRECIOUS AS OUR LIVES

Koichiro Taniyama
Waseda Univ. ESA

Do you know how much your life is? The answer. Up to twenty million yen, if you have life insurance covering you and if you die of cancer. Up to forty million yen, if you are insured and if you are killed in an accident. But somewhere on this earth, a person's life is only seven hundred yen, or only about five dollars. Cheap isn't it? Today, I'd like to tell you how I spent three thousand yen out of my pocket to buy about four lives each priced at seven hundred yen.

It all happened last autumn, when I was reading and came across a strange term: "Schistosomiasis Japonicam." It was the name of a certain deadly disease. As you can guess from the name, the disease used to be found in Japan. I'm happy to be able to tell you that it is now gone from our country.

But, only several hours' flight from Japan will take you to a place where this disease is still rampant. The place I'm talking about is the Philippines.

The number of the Filipino patients of Schistosomiasis is close to five hundred thousand. This figure is two and a half times as large as that of cancer patients in Japan.

Schistosomiasis is an infectious disease caused by a small parasite called Miyairi snails. They enter the human body through the skin and damage the kidney and other organs. The disease will make the stomach swell to look like that of pregnant women. Eggs of the snail will stop up blood vessels in the brain. Patients will be paralyzed and seventy five percent of them will die within two and a half years, a death rate higher than that of cancer.

What's worse, schistosomiasis often takes the life of a young adult leaving his or her family with no source of income.

Fortunately, there is an effective medicine to cure the disease. It's called Plaziquantel.

In the Philippines, beginning in 1973, a Japanese organization by the name of Japanese international cooperating association; or JICA,

carried out a project to exterminate the disease on Leyte Island and achieved a great success. JICA cured a surprising eighty percent of the island's patients.

I wish I could give my story a happy ending. I wish I could say that we Japanese continued to help the people of the Philippines and, as a result, there is not a single Schistosomiasis patient in the Philippines now.

I'm afraid the truth is that the Japanese government no longer provides medication to the Philippines, simply because Japan has recently had so many other ODA projects that she can't concentrate on Schistosomiasis alone. The Philippine government doesn't have the money or expertise to take over for JICA. Thus still now, thousands of people die of this disease every year. Patients are dying at this very moment.

A small but steady project is under way at Kofu hospital in Japan to help the Filipino patients. Doctor Hayashi who was a member of the JICA project has been raising funds to buy the medicine Plaziquantel. However, there are still many areas in that country that doctor Hayashi 's service has not yet reached.

I mentioned seven hundred yen at the beginning of my speech. That is the price of Plaziquantel to cure one Schistosomiasis patient. Seven hundred yen is all the money you need to buy a life.

Recently, I have donated three thousand yen to doctor Hayashi's project which will buy Plaziquantel for four patients. I'm proud of my decision to do what I did.

There are many charities to which you can contribute money. You could help poor people become less poor; you could help schools to have more books. But I'm proud that I have saved four real people from dying.

Indeed, serious as the disease may be, I would not have been able to help the four individuals I helped if I had not had the good fortune to learn about it. That is, it is by sheer chance that I have enabled four individuals to breath this air just like us, see this world just like us, and to talk with friends just like us.

We university students often dream and speak of happiness for mankind. I'm growing tired of just speaking and dreaming. I want to

take action. That's why I donated three thousand yen. That's why I have decided to get up here today and share with you my little story about how I saved lives of four individuals who live only a few thousand miles from here.

Money makes the world go round. And, if we take action, it will even make those troubled parts of it go round.

Have you guessed the problem with this speech?

The answer is: Only one or two people a year die of the disease in the Philippines. In other words, the problem isn't really a problem or not as great a problem as the speaker would have us think.

このスピーチの問題点に気がつきましたか？

答えは： フィリピンで一年間にこの病気で死ぬ人は一人か二人なんです。ようするに、問題はさほど深刻ではないということです。