

THERE ARE NO FOREIGNERS

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When Japanese meet people for the first time, in forming new relationships, the word "Japanese" or "foreigner" outweighs any other factor including sex, occupation or social position. A social critic Shuichi Kato says, "Relationships with foreigners take place only in business deals." With such stilted classifications, how can we be INTERNATIONAL?

Japan has been trying very hard to achieve so-called "internationalization." An estimated half million Japanese are living in other countries. But do we really adjust to life in an international society? What I have observed is a Japanese "exclusiveness" which separates us from others.

Japanese in New York can live as they do in Japan. They can listen to Japanese radio programs, read the Yomiuri Newspaper, New York edition; watch Samurai dramas through cable T. V., and gather at the "Karaoke bar" filled with Japanese to sing their favorite Japanese songs. Many have chosen this way of living, but is that international?

Research shows that one-third of the Japanese in New York have never read an American publication, 40 percent have no American friends, and two-thirds do not take part in any local activities. They have formed a Japanese community in New York which seldom includes any Americans, and seldom are they included in any American activities.

In Japan, the situation does not change. Japanese rarely accept non-Japanese as mates, and in fact try to stay away from them. Have you heard of the mother who tells her son as he goes abroad, "I do not want you to bring home a blue-eyed bride." Of the Japanese people 64 percent are not willing to make friends with non-Japanese. 25 percent are willing to try, however only 4 percent actually make friends with people from overseas. Even the E.S.S. speech section members meet westerners only when they ask to have the speeches checked.

Since the late 1960's, internationalization has become the theme of our country. Foreign trade by Japanese enterprises has become more

active year by year, at the same time the anti-Japanese sentiments have become more intense in many countries. It even led to the boycott of Japanese products. Japanese businessmen ignore life circumstances and national sentiment of others and are intent only on selling goods to gain a profit. Our internationalization emphasis is not going the right way, and the mental gap between Japan and other nations continues to widen.

All too often we think of internationalization as an increase in trade, an overseas visit or living abroad. These are part of the total picture of internationalization. However, true internationalization comes about only when it is achieved by two aspects. One is material, and the other is mental. Materially, we are internationalized, however mentally we tend to be exclusive and shut out non-Japanese. We are not achieving "inter" nationalization instead the lack of communication which is the root of the criticism toward Japan continues.

Why can't we achieve internationalization in our minds? Why does the mental gap exist? Is it because we tend to label people as "Gaijin" or foreigners, and think they are not cooperative? As one example, it is very hard for westerners to be employed in Japan. Even the multinational corporations such as Mitsubishi or Mitsui who are seeking to hire English speaking persons, are hesitant to employ non-Japanese. The reason is not because they cannot speak Japanese, some are really good with the Japanese language, but the label "foreigner" makes it almost impossible to be hired. We think they do not understand us, and we do not try to understand them.

More than 15 years ago, when I was just a little kid living in the United States, I was never aware of such a thing as a "gap" between Americans and Japanese. In kids' minds, there is no word "foreigner," and no vocabulary concerning "foreigners." I never thought or felt as a boy from another country with a different nationality. I was just another kid living on the same block in the same land as my American friends. We were all pals!

I have come to realize there is a big gap between Japanese and non-Japanese. I have come to understand the strong impact on others the term "foreigner" makes. Can you understand why? The word "foreigner" sets people apart. Americans, British, Swiss, Africans, Japanese.... we are all world citizens. Use of the term "foreigner" helps to create the "gap" that separates us.

Not long ago, it was possible to see ourselves simply as citizens of one country. However, today, no country can stand alone, because international economic relationships have become so complex and interdependent. It is essential for us to develop the concept of world citizens, people who open their minds to the world, who learn about other cultures and accept other nationalities. The change in our attitudes fosters international communication which in turn diminishes the anti-Japanese sentiment. It is important to recognize that we are living in the SAME WORLD as people of every other nationality. To call this period "the age of internationalization," we must all be WORLD CITIZENS. There are NO FOREIGNERS!