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We Cannot Afford to See PM 2.5 Pollution Indifferently

By SAKAI Nobuhiko

The media has been intentionally hiding the information about environmental problem caused by polluted airflow from China to Japan, but once it is revealed, appallingly, such news comes out one after another. One of such cases is a report by Hajime Kawagoe of the Sankei Shimbun on February 10. According to his article, "China enacted the Environmental Protection Act as an enforcement law in 1979. (...) This act was strengthened, and established formally in 1989. (...) There are many related regulations such as the Air Pollution Prevention Act, the Water Pollution Prevention Act, and so forth." In other words, China's Environmental Protection Act was enacted as an enforcement law 34 years ago, and established formally 24 years ago. 1989 is the year of the Tiananmen Square Protests. I hear that there are other related environmental regulations. Despite that, environmental problems in China developed worse and worse. Why? Kawagoe explains the reason, "Because China gave priority to economic growth in the name of economic reform, and set double standards regarding emission standards of polluted substances on national and local levels, which allowed the business to find loopholes. Most of these regulations have become actually ineffective."

Environmental standards in China are much looser than those in Japan, and further emasculation of them makes efforts to improve the environment utterly ineffective. Moreover, the way of Japanese involvement matters. According to Kawagoe's article, "Japan and China found the Sino-Japan Friendship Centre for Environmental Protection through grant aid of the Japanese government and public expenditure of the Chinese government," and this is 17 years ago. What has the Japanese government done since then? Though the government of Japan says repeatedly that it will provide advanced environmental technology for China, in view of recent turmoil of air pollution, the ultimate priority must be given to presenting an overview of Japanese involvement in environmental problems in China. Particularly, it is necessary to unravel thoroughly how Japanese development aid was used specifically. Otherwise, we will continue to make the same mistake, even if we cooperate with China to improve the environment.

Meanwhile, the Asahi Shimbun reports about PM 2.5 air pollution problems in Japan,

associated with the same problems in China. That is an article, entitled “Japan is Better: Regulation Starts since Tokyo Prefectural Act” by Harufumi Mori on February 10 that sheds light on domestic environmental problem in Japan, which is published along with Keiko Yoshioka’s report from Beijing. According to Mori’s article, pollution situations in Japan are much better than those in China, because Tokyo prefecture enacted an act to reduce pollution in 2000, and new environmental standard was established on the basis of the Environmental Basic Act in 2009, with regard to PM 2.5. However, Mori says, “Although pollution was curtailed, the achievement rate is still low, based on the environmental standard, and environmental measures are merely half done. Only 12 out of 46 observation sites all round Japan managed to clear the standard.” Mori mentions furthermore at the beginning of his column in the Environment Corner of this newspaper on February 20, “Certainly, there are some impacts of airflow from China, but Japan has not taken sufficient measures to domestic pollution,” and comments sarcastically, “However, thanks to media focus the impact of Chinese air pollution, PM 2.5 has drawn nationwide attention, and ironically as a result, we highlight the fact that our efforts do not meet the environmental standard.”

But this is too irrational. That is because pollution standards of China are far looser than those of Japan. In Japanese environmental standard, pollutant content of 35 microgram/m³ in the air is dangerous, and in the standard of US embassy in Beijing, it is 250 microgram/m³, but pollutant level in Beijing exceeded on more than half of the days this January. Moreover, though recent turmoil takes the effect of airflow from China seriously, Mori argues as if this were completely irrelevant to air pollution in Japan. Judging from these points, I believe that the media want to please the Chinese authority intentionally. What Mori wants to argue, that is, what Asahi wants to argue, is typically seen in the final part of the much malicious article on February 10. It says, “Our government will send officials of the Ministry of Environment and the ministry of Foreign Affairs to China after February 18. They exchange information and discuss environmental cooperation with the Chinese government and so forth, but if we urge the Chinese side to reduce emission in the name of ‘technological cooperation’, they will regard it as ‘interference in domestic affairs’, because we have not clarified how much of our PM 2.5 is emitted inside Japan and how much comes from China.” A commentary like this is appallingly servile to China. The Asahi Shimbun says that atmospheric pollution is just air pollution, and there is no way of discerning native pollutant and trans-boundary pollutant, and therefore, if we request the Chinese side to cut emission in return for technological cooperation, they will regard it as interference in domestic affairs! I can hardly believe that Asahi is a Japanese newspaper, as they take sides with an evil state wholeheartedly, and speak on behalf of such a regime.

They are utterly enemies to Japan!

(This is the English translation of an article written by SAKAI Nobuhiko, Director of Japan Institute of Nationalism Studies and former Professor of the University of Tokyo, which originally appeared on the BBS "Giron - Hyakushutsu" of GFJ on March 31, 2013.)