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On Social Darwinism of Today

By KURANISHI Masako

2016 will become one of the memorable years in the history of humanity, because some epoch-making events occurred in succession: for instance, contrary to what most of the media had forecasted, the Brexit referendum resulted in "Leave" and the United States presidential election ended with the victory of Mr. Donald Trump. While there are critical voices about these phenomena as symptoms of political degradation by the raising of 'populism,' not a few people have supported them as democratic victories of common-sense of the people whom the power elite of today have ignored coldly for a long time.

Anyhow, most mass media tend to define 'populism' or 'anti-elitism' as nothing more than emotional antipathy or jealousy against the successful elite. But listening to opinions of those who voted for "Leave" or for "Trump," these phenomena suggest something not to be dismissed as an emotionally-charged argument; it seems that these results give us the good opportunity to consider the problem of today's elitism.

In the later period of the 19th century, it was the theory of evolution that brought about revolutionary change in our view of humankind. According to Charles Darwin, evolution of all organic beings is described as the ever-lasting process in which the fittest for the circumstances has obtained advantageous modifications naturally and can survive; Natural Selection is presumed to be a main engine for evolution of organic beings. This theory, on the one hand, shocked people considerably, because it could easily reach a logical conclusion that humans had also evolved from a common progenitor with apes. On the other hand, it has been applied to other fields as a scientific model of thinking until now.

One of them is so-called Social Darwinism; some Sociologists have attempted to apply the concept of Natural Selection, as one of laws of nature, to the human society at large. Especially, some of advocates tried to utilize it in order to justify the status of wealthy persons and the political or social elite in the name of science.

Social Darwinists, however, has been criticized that they conveniently have clipped some parts out of the original Darwin's logical structure and have twisted it partially. Guided by Darwin, the present fittest cannot be expected to be going to evolve further, since they have already fitted for the present circumstance by obtaining advantageous genetic traits in the past process of evolution. And present or future evolution is supposed to occur among the disadvantageous beings which are unfit for the present circumstance; evolution is the process of 'break through' of unfit beings struggling for existence. Hence if we apply Darwin's theory of biological evolution to the human society, the fittest must not be 'the final winners' authorized by some Social Darwinists, because they are to be confronted with emergence of the new fittest who has overcome their disadvantageous conditions. Moreover, real dynamism of evolution in the world of nature shows us obviously that modified advantageous genes have been diffusing among majorities to a certain degree as we can distinguish them as a single species.

Nonetheless, it is regrettable that we find that the elite of today closely resemble such Social Darwinists in their thought; they positively approve a world where powers and wealth are being concentrated in the hands of the chosen few in the expanding world-wide "laissez-faire economy" and try to fix their secure places just as a logical consequence of Natural Selection. From what has been said above, may we say that those who have been denounced as 'populist' are probably more equitable and humane than the elite, in such a sense that the former have observant eyes to see whole of societies in perspective and are worrying sincerely about ordinary people deserted by the latter?

Charles Darwin says in his work *On the Origin of Species*: "Although new and important modifications may not arise from reversion and analogous variation, such modifications will add to the beautiful and harmonious diversity of nature." Of course, there is much room for further consideration about not only the differences between Nature and human societies but also relevancy of variation or diversity to evolution. But living in the age when the outlook of future remains unclear, we may not go the way indicated by Social Darwinists of today, but may select another way towards the well harmonized society.

(This is the English translation of an article written by KURANISHI Masako, Political Scientist, which originally appeared on the e-Forum "Giron-Hyakushutsu (Hundred Views in Full Perspective)" of GFJ on January 10, 2017.)