

Who We Are and Who They Are

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196. This is the number of countries we have now. We all belong to a nation such as Japan. Have you ever been conscious of what is special about your nation? Or what makes your nation a nation?

Last year, I went to Canada as an exchange student. I cannot forget a scene from the car window when I was on the way to my host family's house the first day. Maple leaf flags were attached to houses or cars, and even McDonald's had a maple leaf in the center of its logo. Their patriotism was also shown at school, and students stood up and heard their national anthem every morning. This way to express their pride as Canadians is very different from my nation, Japan. In other words, this is their identity: how different the nation is from other nations.

As long as we belong to a certain nation, a “feeling and recognition of ‘we’ and ‘they’” will occur, just as I used the words “they” or “their” toward Canadians. In the beginning of my time in Canada, I was sometimes perplexed or surprised because I only knew my common sense. I did not understand their identity very well. Then I realized that all people had conflicts around the world because we were chained to the common sense of our home country, and we only focus on our benefit. Through knowing ideas of what Canada was, I came to understand their perspective or thoughts as well, and they enabled me to approach problems differently. In my opinion, what all people should do first to solve international problems is to learn each other's identity.

My first host family in Canada was an immigrant family from the Philippines. For me, their lifestyle was very interesting because they lived as both Canadians and Filipinos. Since they had me, they spoke English to me, and they seemed to be the same as other Canadians. One day, I heard my host mother talking with somebody at the front door. The sound was strange because it was completely different from English. She spoke Filipino. Through spending time with them, I learned that they had a community of Filipinos.

They had a party at a park, and went to a church in the way they originally had gone in their homeland. In this way, they kept their original identity after understanding and respecting the identity of Canada. At the same time, other Canadians also accepted and took Filipino identity or lifestyle for granted. I knew that Canada had been dominated by Britain or France as colonies, and Canadians might be used to living together with people who have various backgrounds. Even considering it, I felt this relationship between Canadians and Filipinos was great.

A while ago, I read an article. It said that we did not need the definition of identity anymore to promote globalization. I do not think so. Identity is not a tool for clarifying where we are from or where we live. In my opinion, identity is important because it makes variety. The world is exciting because each nation has its own culture, tradition, language, and so on.

Today, we have wars, racial discrimination, and fights for expanding territories, on the other hand, exchanges beyond nations have become very active. It certainly happens in Japan as well. According to data from the Ministry of Justice, the number of people who moved to Japan from foreign countries is the largest ever now. Then what we can do to make Japan a better country for every single person is to both understand OUR identity and know THEIR identity. That is, to think about “who we are and who they are.” I hope this mutual understanding will be a big step for the future.