

No Borders in Fundamental Human Nature: We are All the Same Human Beings

Our presentation title is “No Borders!” Of course we aren’t talking about cup noodles, but talking about “There are no natural borders built into human nature”. Borders are only learned or imposed by society. We are all in the same boat and in essence we are all the same human beings.

Do you feel comfortable living in Japan? Yes, we do! Then, how about foreign people coming from other countries? Or people who are somehow different from us? Do they feel comfortable in Japan like we do?

We three had a great chance to go study English in Melbourne last year. It was only a three-week study tour, but we’ve learned a big lesson that we would never have been able to learn in a normal Japanese life. That is, fundamental nature is the same. So we are essentially the same whatever nationality we are, whatever color our skin is, whatever religion we follow. This is what we have strongly realized from living in Australia for three weeks, staying with local families and studying in the multicultural classes at Victoria University.

Walking in the downtown streets of Melbourne, we saw various people of different colors, languages, and appearances all blended in with the atmosphere. They looked as if they knew each other. For instance, when you went shopping to a local grocery store and paid for your purchase at a cash desk, you were probably greeted with the words like “Hello” or “Good day” or even “How are you?” Then the shopper replies like “Oh very well, thank you.” or “Great”. It’s like a conversation exchanged between friends. We were surprised to see this casual scene. This is unthinkable here in Japan. I’ll give you one more example that’s even more surprising. My host family took me dinner one night. Then all of a sudden my host brother broke into a conversation with the customers sitting at the next table. He invited me to join them. I joined them with puzzlement. I was completely mind-boggled. I could never think of starting an instant conversation with some one or some people just because they are sitting right next to me. Can you imagine that? However this is possible and normal in Australia. My fellow presenters had the same experience as mine during the stay in Australia.

When we came back from Australia, we began to recognize that there are invisible and unspoken borders around us, or we subconsciously differentiate people and things in our daily life back here in Japan.

Let me ask you a question. Do you never ever hesitate to offer help right away when you happen to see a stranger obviously lost in a street? Of course we don't if the person is someone that we know. But how many of you go up to the stranger unhesitatingly to help him or her? Here is where the glass wall exists.

I came across a similar situation myself in Melbourne. On the very first day I started to go to the ESL program by train I was very nervous and almost frightened because I was on my own in a place where I couldn't communicate well. However that worry of mine disappeared quickly thanks to a kind lady who invited me to take a seat next to her. She talked to me as if I was a friend of hers, and even helped me read the map to get to the school. She loudly asked the passengers around if anyone knew that school. Then more surprisingly, a man in the train came forward to say "I know that school. I could take you there." He actually took me to the school guiding me around the city on the way. I was more than happy, and couldn't express my appreciation enough. I may sound a little naïve, following a stranger without any worry of kidnapping or being taken advantage of in some way. However, this kindness comes subconsciously from the bottom from their nature. They don't think they did something special to help me like that. In Japan we would hesitate offer help or even avoid getting involved in such a situation. Why does this difference occur? We think that people in Australia think they are all in the same boat, and they are the same human beings. So there are no natural borders built into human natures.

Australia is a multi-national and multi-cultural country. They've got to listen to each other and understand each other to keep the country going. But before that, the people there already have a mental outlook that all the people in the world are the same, more directly speaking, they are aware of the essence of being human from the beginning.

Walking in the streets around the school in Melbourne, we got the feeling that we blended in with the atmosphere, and we were part of the scene. It was such a nice feeling, and we three all thought that we could live anywhere in the world if we are firmly aware of the importance of being honest, open-minded and attentive as a person. When we three came back to Japan, we realized that we can't carry on like in Australia. This is because there are invisible social controls imposed by the society. For instance, we are expected to keep a certain distance between us in Japan, so we don't talk to a neighbor on a bus or a train, let alone hold a conversation with him or her. We would like to say strongly, "Don't be shy." Go help and lend a helping hand when you see someone in trouble. Put your feet into others' shoes. If we are willing to listen to other people, keep our mind wide open and accept different points of view, we could get along with each other wherever we are in the world because we are the same human beings.

In summary, we understand our experience in Melbourne, Australia was limited because we went to only one country and stayed only three weeks. But Australia is a multi-national and multi-cultural country where many different nationals co-exist harmoniously, so we believe that our experience gave us a very valuable and positive lesson of the essence of being the same human beings. We should be able to feel and live as we did in Australia as long as we are open-minded and attentive, and remove the glass walls built into the Japanese society. As one movie or one song can move people in the world, it shows that we have the same sentiment and heart. It's like technology as well. If we are open-minded, let in new ideas and give them time to develop, they will be benefits for everyone.

We strongly hope, or rather, we mean to make the change. What we can do is limited as a single person, but we can still make the change. We will make efforts to make this change happen in Japan because "We are the same humans. We have no borders in fundamental human nature!"