Diversity?　What's that?

TSUJIOKA Kento

Anan Kosen (NIT (KOSEN), Anan College)

"Diversity: the art of thinking independently together." This was the definition of diversity offered by Malcolm Forbes, an American entrepreneur and publisher of the Forbes magazine.

What do you think of when you hear the word "diversity"? Perhaps, the BLM or LGBTQ movement. Maybe biodiversity and evolution, if you're a biology student, who knows? Nonetheless, as our modern society become increasingly integrated due to globalization, apprehension toward the importance of diversity is gradually broadening. But do we truly comprehend what "diversity" is? Today, I'd like to share my thoughts on this topic.

First and foremost, let me introduce my background. I was born to a Japanese father and a Vietnamese mother in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. I went to The Japanese school in Ho Chi Minh City, yes, that's the name of it, or JSHCM for short. which consists mainly of Japanese students and other Vietnamese-Japanese students like myself from elementary to junior high school. My life in Vietnam continued for roughly 15 years with a dozen short homecoming trips back to Japan in summer vacations. At 16, I decided to return to my father's hometown on my own and enrolled in Anan Kosen to pursue my passion for chemistry.

The most recent occasion that brought diversity to the front of my thoughts was during my 2nd year at Anan Kosen. Frankly speaking, my first year at Kosen wasn't easy at all. I was a teenager alone without any friends or acquaintances, at a place I had no clue about amidst an ongoing pandemic. Notwithstanding that, I was able to adapt and make some friends eventually. One time, my friends and I were joking around and one of them said "GO BACK TO YOUR COUNTRY!". Although it was just a joke, I began to feel something like "Alienation" or "Inferiority."

Although I was born and lived in Vietnam for 15 years and I'm capable of speaking Vietnamese, I was raised and schooled as a Japanese person. So, it's difficult for me to identify myself as a Vietnamese or Japanese person. In retrospect, I've always tried to assimilate or at least act the same as my friends at the time to fit in, whether it's Japanese or Vietnamese. Therefore, after that incident, I realized that I was fundamentally different from my monoracial friends which led me to the conclusion that everyone is fundamentally different and there's no reason to act the same, which I believe is the core of diversity.

On the other hand, there was a time when I was on the other end of the spectrum. It was during my junior high school years in Ho Chi Minh. There was a classmate who identified as LGBTQ. At that time, I was too young and immature to comprehend the concept of diversity, let alone sexual minorities. Needless to say, I failed to respect her identity and consequently, sometimes discriminated against her by calling her a weirdo, alienate her, and totally deny her identity as an asexual person. However, she never denied me and accepted me as whoever I was even though I was an annoying, selfish kid with lots of pride, always daydreaming. She was the person who made me realize the importance of respecting others as who they are, without embracing your own beliefs to them.

To end this presentation, I'd like to highlight 2 points.

First and foremost, nobody is the same, nor is it necessary to be so. Differences are what make us who we are, which is the core of diversity. Last but not least, mutual understanding and respect play an important role in embracing diversity. Forcing your beliefs on others won't help anyone, but acknowledging and respecting them will benefit everyone.

In short, "Diversity is the aesthetic of embracing uniqueness through mutual understanding and respect". This was the definitions that I came up with for diversity, based on my own experience.

So, why don't you seek your own definition and zero in on the crux of diversity, thus participating in diversifying this society?

Thank you for your time and attention.