

Tackling Issues with No Answer

I used to try finding the answer to everything. In everyday issues, I always wanted to determine who is right and who is wrong. Was my mother the correct one in the fight, or was it my father? Naturally, I extended this tendency to larger issues such as poverty and conflict. Here, I faced a problem; there was no clear answer. It was impossible to find a universal solution. Because of this, I felt helpless and miserable. It was much later that I realized, having the answer is not always important. What is more important is having open and honest conversations about difficult topics for which we don't always have the answers. This change in mindset happened when I participated in the Sino-Japan Youth Conference as a Japanese delegate last summer. This conference was an opportunity for Chinese and Japanese students to interact to discuss their countries.

The first four days of the conference went by in a blur; we learned about each other's cultures, traditions, and national events. Finally, the last day came, and everyone was excited for the concluding event. Upon arrival, all participants were handed a sheet of paper with the instructions. My eyes skimmed the page and came to a sudden halt at a sentence written in bold, "We will be discussing historical conflicts that have occurred between our countries". Surprised, I scanned the paper and found that the discussion topics included both the Sino Japanese War and the Nanjing Massacre. I wondered, aren't these taboos that shouldn't be discussed? Especially not with people from China! These statements raced in my head and swirled like hurricanes. There was a larger question in my head too: what good is there to discuss a problem that has no clear answer and only causes discomfort? I looked up and sensed the same feeling from other participants too.

Their eyes were fixed to the floor and many were shifting uncomfortably in their seats.

As I glanced at the first person to speak, my eyes fell upon his name tag hanging

on his chest and next to his name, a bright red flag with yellow stars. His hands trembled beside him, and he reluctantly began, "I am going to talk about the Nanjing Memorial Museum, which is blocks away from my house." He described the brutal acts carried out on innocent citizens by Japanese soldiers, and the countless photos displayed in the museum. I looked around and all Japanese participants, including myself, were listening intently to his story, pained by the atrocious nature of it. Hearing his account, I thought back to when I visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum which was 10 minutes away from my grandmother's home. I remembered the shock and trauma I experienced when witnessing the horrific pictures and exhibits. Our experiences are so similar, I thought to myself.

From then on, all participants took turns voicing their opinions about our country's relationships. There were all kinds of remarks: harsh, constructive, emotional, and hopeful. But they all had one commonality; they gave further insight into things I had never thought about before. It also allowed me to make new discoveries and connections to my own experiences. At this point, the important realization had hit me. After all, we had no solution to the issue between Japan and China's long and devastating historical conflict; we hadn't even come close to one. However, the discussion we just had was undeniably valuable. It opened our minds to new ideas and motivated us to continue thinking about the issue. It allowed us to listen and be heard.

In our world, the majority of problems do not necessarily have an answer. These are often controversial, and difficult to discuss. Disparity, discrimination, historical conflict are only some of them. It is important; however, not to be silent, and talk openly about these issues, even if one can't reach an answer. It allows us to broaden our perspectives and deepen our understanding of each other. I hope for a world where no one gives up just because there is no answer; we should rather stay hopeful and continue tackling important issues through communicating with one another.

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