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A Word in Need of Chang

I have a dream - it's a little unrealistic - but I have a dream of communicating with people from every corner of the Earth, not only in English, but in many different languages. So one day, I may live abroad and then, I will be called an immigrant.

This summer I went to Scotland to study English. There I made friends with a man who emigrated to Germany from India. When we talked, he mentioned how he feels as an immigrant in Germany. He said that the different backgrounds of cultures and customs can sometimes be suffocating. He loves living in Germany, but sometimes feels that it is only sort of like home. Since our talk, I have felt a little concerned about how I might be treated when I live abroad. According to the Nikkei Newspaper, about half of the Japanese disagree with accepting immigrants because we believe they are dangerous. Some people even equate immigrants with terrorists. Is it this bad to be an immigrant? I believe no and I'm here to remove negative stereotypes, and introduce a new perspective on immigrants.

Let's think about the benefits of immigration. As you know, Japan will soon have a serious worker shortage. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications states that, "By 2060, there will be half as many workers in Japan as there are today." Declining birth rates means that in the future Japan will need to depend on immigrants to fill in the vacant positions in the workforce. In fact, many immigrants are already working in a variety of fields in Japan. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development says that the percentage of college graduates among immigrants is higher than that among the natives of the receiving countries. Generally, the higher educated people are more active for the international movement. We tend to think of immigrants as manual laborers, but many of them are active in professional careers, too. "Immigrants are dangerous" is just the image, not the fact. Truth is what we see and feel.

So, I will propose two methods for increasing an awareness of immigration. To all school teachers, please provide us with as many chances as possible to communicate with foreigners. For example, there is a project called ASIA KAKEHASHI, which invites Asian high school students to schools in Japan. Our school joined this project, and now two international students are studying at our school. Both of them are from Muslim countries, so we are learning about Muslim culture from them, which is better than learning about Muslim stereotypes from social media. To all students, don't hesitate to interact with people who are different from us. Go abroad or say "hello" to a traveler walking through our town. Let's interact with foreigners and learn about them. Whether English or Japanese doesn't matter. The most important thing is not the support of language but the message you convey that our society welcomes immigrants. Tolerance of others is required for accepting them.

I hope when I decide to move to a foreign country, the word "immigrant" will have a positive meaning. The only way to make "immigrant" a positive word is to recognize the value and the great benefits that immigrants bring. They make us and our culture stronger. So I encourage you to think about your perspective on immigrants. I will treat immigrants here as I wish to be treated abroad.