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We and “They”

A few weeks ago, a group of Vietnamese got arrested on suspicion of stealing more than 800 livestock. They were also suspected of overstaying in Japan.

Illegal overstaying.

Illegal immigrants.

What do you think when you hear those words? You might have negative pictures in your mind. However, are they actually bad? Why do they break the law? How do they affect our lives? Today, I want you to spend some time to consider those issues a little bit more seriously.

Illegal overstaying means the people who continue staying illegally in Japan even after their visas expired. Illegal immigrants mean the people who come to and live in Japan without legal documents. In this speech, I say “them” to indicate both illegal overstaying and immigrants.

In Japan, we had the largest number of them in 1993, which was about 300,000. Since then, it decreased to 59,061 in 2014, but from 2015, it's increasing, which is 82,892 so far. After 1993, the Japanese government made laws to restrict them. Accordingly, the number of illegals was decreasing to less than 20% by 2014. However, at the same time, the Japanese government also loosened the regulations of visas for business, sightseeing, and technical interns especially for Southeast Asian countries from the economic perspective. As a result, we have more and more them in Japan, and so its incidents.

Now, think about these. Are all illegal residents really bad because they break the law? Should the Japanese government deport every single one of them to their home countries immediately? My answer is no. Here are the reasons.

In terms of breaking the law, this is unforgivable. But, think about it from their perspectives. They come to Japan expecting to receive relatively high payment to support their family. Even though they can work in Japan as technical interns luckily, their visas are for only three years. Also, according to Saga Labor Bureau, 75% of workplaces for technical interns in Saga prefecture were violations of laws and regulations, such as low salary, without industrial insurance, dangerous and unsanitary places. However, to support their family financially, many chose to stay in Japan knowing it's illegal. And they had no choice but to be forced to work under such conditions no matter it is illegal or not. This is actually happening all over Japan right this moment. Since most of their workplaces are operating illegally, this issue doesn't appear publicly, neither the government nor any organization will help them. We can live our days healthy and safe because they get the dirty works under the surface and they sacrifice their lives under the surface. They come to Japan to live, just like us. But this is the fact around them.

I'm not suggesting we should let them stay in Japan forever without hesitation. Unfortunately, some of them do bad things as I mentioned in the beginning. But what I am trying to say; we must throw our negative prejudices towards them away, as next generation, we have to think deeply and try hard to solve this issue as generous as possible because this is the issue about people living their lives, just like us.