**Some reflections on PP21 movement and its declarations – their relevance today as a base for further steps in the anthropocene situations**

Muto Ichiyo, June 2021

No doubt we are in an entirely new, challenging, and extremely hazardous era of human civilization, often characterized as anthropocene, which makes it urgent for global human society to design and bring about a global alternative human/nature formation and change ourselves for this purpose. Theories, thoughts, policies, programs, and actions are proposed, discussed, and partially implemented to meet this universal need.

In doing so, we are not beginning in a vacuum. We need to critically reexamine, and at once base ourselves on, what we achieved in the past as the base from where we jump into a world of unknown. In this context I think it is appropriate for us to go to the People’s Plan for the 21st Century (PP21).

PP21 from 1989 to 1996 was a large, comprehensive transborder process of people and their movements coming together and reacting to each other. As recapping the whole processes requires much work, it looks appropriate first to examine our three declarations from the point of view of whether, and how far, these declarations, Minamata, Rachadamnoen, and Sagarmatha, each and all of them, respond to the emerging burning global needs of the present times, and how we can develop currently needed alternatives on the basis of our past.

In response to our call, our PP21 partner, Hanasaki Kohei, in Hokkaido, the main organizer of the 1969 international indigenous people’s gathering has give us his overview of the three declarations and 10 points as his vision of the future on the basis of the reading of the three declarations, which has already been circulated.

Alliance hope – keynote address to Minamata synthesis meeting

I agree with all his points and want to build on his observation by focusing on the concept of transborder people’s alliance and transborder participatory democracy as we thrashed out in the two-year process (1988-89) of preparatory discussion we held on issue-, sectoral, gender, ecology, and other issue basis as well as our movement experiences.

In doing so, I refer specifically to the keynote address of the first PP21. The address was written drawing on the preceding discussions and presented to the Minamata synthesis gathering. Though my name is accredited as the presenter, it was in fact a collective work of drafters who worked to conceptualize the preceding extensive discussion processes as well as the mind and passion of activists working in Japan in the 80s.

Given space imitation, I will single out the idea of transborder participatory democracy we proposed to the first 1989 PP21 program.

I PP21 1989 keynote address – Alliance of hope

Our keen concern was about the global nature of the political, economic, and cultural rule of neo-liberal capitalism that cause destructive effects on environment and lives of the people, particularly in the name of development. Decisions affecting grassroots people’s lives were not necessarily taken by national ruling mechanisms but frequently by power centers outside to satisfy “Washington consensus” so-called.

So, democratizing national state, which of course stays of paramount, immediate task, alone would not enough. In the keynote, we stated as follows:

The situation calls for the declaration of a new right of the people: the right of the people to intervene in, to modify, to regulate, and ultimately to control any decisions that affect their lives, no matter where those decisions are made. …This should be established as a universal right which recognizes no borders. …Transborer participatory democracy is a new principle, by which not the state, but the people themselves can emerge as chief actor in determining the course of world politics and economics.

But who are the “people” exercising this right and how they can coalesce?

The key to transborder democracy is the people. But what is the people? …We can begin by defining the people ss we always do in this kind of discussion: they are the oppressed, the exploited, the manipulated masses. This is so, yet such “people” in general do not exist. The people are divided into a multitude of groups with their respective identities: gender, ethic, religious, cultural, class, nationality. …The struggle of the people begins on this terrain, in the divisive structure.

Yet “the struggle has a seed of general liberation,” the keynote assumes, and says that for the seeds to germinate, they must interact with other struggles and movements. If Japanese labor movement regards Asian migrant workers merely as a “threat” to press down Japanese workers’ wages, that movement is not worth being called people’s movement. Nationalist and other barriers can be overcome through mutually learning interaction with other people. The keynote stated.

All movements start on this compartmentalized terrain; the point is to fight our way beyond it, to destroy the whole divisive structure and replace it with a spontaneous alliance of the people’s own choice and making. In this process the movement can free itself from captivity. Experience shows that interaction with other movements transforms the movement, helping overcome its narrowness and oppressive practices inside, if there are such.

The keynote then goes to the process of dismantling the hierarchical formation of society. When the “logic of global majority” (Gorostiaga) = global south, asserts itself, the strata locating themselves above the lower strata should be brought to concede to the lower with dignity. “Our new ethic of the 21st century must include a way of seeing such renunciation as enacting a gain, and not a loss, of dignity.” And the keynote introduced a nation of “peopleness” as the cementing factor of the coalition and called the formation of global people thus created “alliance of hope.”

The keynote proposes a new concept of political right and political action, provisionally called transborder participatory democracy.

Transborder participatory democracy is the name both of a goal ad of a proess, As a goal, it means world-wide democracy practiced by the people of the world. It is a picture of a world order clearly distinct from the conventional idea of world government or world federation, which presupposes states as the constituent units. Yet as our goal it still remains a remote vision of the future.

As a political process, transborder participatory democracy has two aspects. First it is a practical method for criticizing, confronting, intervening in, and changing the power formation of globalized capital. In this sense, it is a form of action that corresponds to both the present socio-economic reality and the logic and necessity of the people’s movement. Second, in the process of transborder political action, the people’s groups and organizations gradually form themselves into transborder “people,” by which the division of the world into North and South can be overcome.

**Inter-people autonomy**

The keynote lastly characterized the alliance of hope also as “inter-people autonomy”:

When people’s groups thus begin to regulate their mutual relationships spontaneously and for themselves, destroying the system of forced mutual relationships, then we shall have inter-people autonomy cutting across the state barriers and replacing the inter-state system.

The inter-people autonomy thus is an affair of billions of people, and still is a vague picture of the 21st century. But one thing that is certain is that the alliance of hope of billions should be preceded by an alliance of hope of tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands, an arena and network where people’s movements from different countries and backgrounds meet and recognize each other’s peopleness, and enter into a dynamic interaction. This is what PP21 in 1989 in Japan is up to.

**Strength and limitation of Minamata keynote**

The first PP21 happened to take place at a crucial year of history, the year the short 20th century (Hobsbawm) was closing, with Tianmen in June and Berlin wall in November. The paradigm of social change looking verified by the Russian revolution was crumbling. PP21 did not mention socialism but challenged a new emerging task, or the old task, of seeking an alternative formula to replace the modern capitalist-colonial-imperial world with a “numberless international”, people’s alliance. In this context, it drew attention of progressive international communities and activist thinkers, such as European and Asian Christian communities, Latin American progressives, and Asian progressives and action groups. I believe the need to seek a general system change away from capitalism is now clear enough and so we made a proper start.

I think that the alliance of hope perspective was valid and that we need to In retrospect, the keynote-outlined perspective was, and increasing is, a valid approach to meet the 21st century challenges. But the notion of “people” in this keynote was narrow. “People” referred mostly to struggling people. Though some attention is paid at the end the address to the matter of billions (global people) and “tens or hundreds of thousands,” productive relationships between the two were not expounded.

**II Rachadamnoen Plege 1992 Thailand**

The Hanasaki note well describes the meaning of 1992 Thai PP21 and I have little to add. I think that the Thai program is featured by grassrootedness, particularly in its peasant program. As Bamrung Kayota often tells us, PP21 gave a stimulus to the creation of small peasants’s movement in Northeast, which later developed into the Assembly of Poor. Also, I recall the more than 10 tribal groups in Thailand met for the first time as part of PP21 and worked out their common demands to the government. I note that women participants in the workshop issued an independent statement asking that the community establish equality of women in decision making and incorporate it as part of the tribes’ tradition. The leadership accepted the resolution. I am interested to know whether the resolution has had lasting impact on the community life.

**III Sagarmatha declaration**

Hanasaki gives a good summary of Sagarmatha declaration and its underlying thought of alternatives and I have little to add. This declaration, celebrating diversity and celebrating life, brought us to the ground, that is, the people and people’s lives, as a step to overcome the narrowness of the 1989 PP21, namely the people as conceived as movement people. The power to change and to bring on alternatives is certainly there in the lives of the people, or in their life recreating endeavors.

This declaration, written 24 years ago, to me sounds as fresh as if it were written in 2021. (Its weakness is that it is too long) And I think it can well serve as a start line for renewed efforts to build alliance of hope. But we are still far from any kind of democracy we promote and stay under totally corrupt capitalism, empires, and defunct nation state.

So, we are hurled back to the realm of movement, strategies, political philosophy, life culture, and life philosophy on our way to transborder democracy as global people’s autonomy.

One thing I feel still lacking in the discussion of alternative civilization is about how the people nurturing alternative society will bring the forces adhering to their capitalist-based interests to negotiate with, concede to, and ultimately accept people’s terms and give in. This is the topic we need to seriously and urgently discuss at a time when Empires with their respective follower states are at loggerheads for their respective hegemony while taking about sustainability and when domination, exploitation, and violence by states and capital directed against multitude of people are rampant. (End)

**Corona pandemic points to the keen need of transborder people’s action**

(a memo to the SSF8)

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What need of global society has Corona pandemic brought to light?

A) To grapple with Corona virus, the state is being reemphasize as protective device to dike the flowing-in of the pandemic; ironically the state is called back in in a world where capital globalization has considerably decayed state boundaries. Anyhow, nation state is accountable primarily to its people and national governments have no power, nor primary interest, to directly handle global affairs except for their national interests.

B) On the other hand, given the nature of the pandemic, global solution is the only solution. It is particularly so at a time when systems are thoroughly globalized so that anything like country closure and national autarchy is unthinkable. There, keeping one country absolutely safe, ignoring others, does not hold. (Isolated country solution is possible only temporarily by thorough domestic programs, but fragile if other countries stay heavily affected).

Contradiction between A and B is insoluble unless there is viable global governance to function transborder to deal with the global situation. Can UN including WHO play that role? Meagre role, if any, primarily because these are clusters of nation states each concerned primarily with its national interest.

This setting calls for another agency to take on the necessary role. I think that agency should be the people themselves functioning as transborder alliance equipped with negotiating power. In the absence of such alliance in full, can’t alliance-oriented national actions working together on a global level be formed to act nationally and globally and push states to behave globally? Fair distribution of vaccine may be the most urgent matter to be taken up.

Such trans-border action networks are working in the area of climate change, for instance. Can’t similar initiative be taken on the pandemic issue by SS Forum, linking with movements and groups all over the world? Or are there already transborder networks operating for this purpose?

An Asia-Pacific based movement program with a global perspective should be called back into life in new ways. With the convening of the World Social Forum in 2001, PP21 closed its global assembly organizing mechanism in 2002, saying that anyone supportive of the people-centered direction of the spirit of PP21 as embodied in the three declarations from the three people’s convergences can initiate action as PP21 action.