

I have been in Lithuania for one year and two months, and during this time I have had the opportunity to feel the history every week and month.

In Lithuania, there are many historical state events which are led by the leaders of the State, such as the President, the Speaker of the Parliament and the Prime Minister. For example, solemn state events are held on the anniversaries, such as the Day of the Statehood on July 6, 1252, the Day of Re-establishment of the State on February 16, 1918, and the Day of Re-establishment of Independence on March 11, 1990, which are important annual efforts to reconfirm the milestones of the country's attainment of freedom and independence.

There are also many memorials for those who sacrificed their lives for freedom and independence, such as memorial for the victims of the tragic sacrifice in January 1991, caused by Soviet military invasion of Vilnius a year after the Declaration of Independence, memorial for the victims of the massacre by Soviet soldiers at the border, memorial for the victims of the Soviet deportation to Siberia, and memorial for the victims of the Holocaust in Nazis Germany-occupied Lithuania, and so on. Lithuania remembers them every year on Remembrance Day and renews its determination never to forget their precious sacrifices.

Of course, since the violent outbreak of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the victims of the Ukrainian war are also commemorated during these national events, and Ukraine's Independence Day was solemnly marked on August 24 with participation of the Ukrainian citizens who have taken refuge in Lithuania.

Also in Lithuania, September 1 is the start of the new school year and this day is celebrated as the important "Science & Knowledge Day" with ceremonies in schools all over the country. This year, I was invited to Mykolas Romeris University to attend the ceremony, and I was very impressed by the speeches of the University Rector and honored guests, who repeatedly stressed that the purpose of education and learning is freedom and peace.

This is truly a scene from a state-led event in a country that knows the significance of freedom and peace, and the immeasurable cost of losing freedom.

Now, Lithuania, which cherishes such history, had passed a resolution in its Parliament, Seimas, to designate the year 2020 as the "Chiune Sugihara Year", as it was the 120th anniversary of Chiune Sugihara's birth and the 80th anniversary of "Visas for life".

Chiune Sugihara came to Lithuania in 1939, just before the invasion of Poland by the German Nazis and it was only two years before Japan's all-out war against the US and UK by the attack on Pearl Harbor, and stayed for just one year as Deputy Consul in Kaunas, the capital at the time. It was here that Chiune Sugihara demonstrated his courage to do justice as a human being. He was not influenced by the national stance of Japan at the time or its decisions and actions, and kept demonstrating his courage influenced only by a human

wish to act in a righteous way. As a result, thousands of Jews did not lose their freedom and their lives, which is a piece of history that the Japanese should be proud of.

On the other hand, however, it is also true that the first half of the 20th century was a period of human injustice for Japan as a state, as a result of its expansion into other countries facing the Western powers. And we should re-acknowledge such facts and pass them on from generation to generation, which I have come to feel keenly in Lithuania, a country that values its history.

Since the Meiji era, Japan, even by creating the religion called State Shintoism, pushed forward on the path to nation-state formation and wealth and military might. However, the result was a huge disaster, where Japan greatly restricted the freedom not only of other countries that Japan had advanced, but also of its own country, and forcing enormous sacrifices on its own people and other countries, and lost its independence in defeat. I have come to feel a strong desire to re-acknowledge this history as I look back at Chiune Sugihara.

Freedom is, in short, the freedom to criticize power. Deprived of this freedom, those who defy authority were arrested only on suspicion without evidence, and sent to Siberia without trial or executed. This was the loss of freedom that Lithuania experienced after the Second World War.

In other words, freedom is to demonstrate the courage to correct injustice when you find it in your organization, society or state that includes you. Courage is the highest virtue required for men with free spirit since the days of Aristotle, and the courage is to realize the righteousness of "to see righteousness and not to do, it is to lack of courage" as stated in the Analects of Confucius. I believe that exercising that courage is what makes freedom and peace possible. In Belarus, many people with such courage have been arrested and imprisoned. We Japanese should look back at our history and take it to heart that freedom is to exercise the courage in the pursuit of justice.

Shortly after I arrived in Lithuania, a politician recommended me "The History of Lithuania", an English translation of a history book compiled in 2013 by the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a wider range of readers. In the preface, the reason for compiling this history book is stated as "a nation's future is contingent upon its memory", and a phrase from a letter sent by a Lithuanian educator to a Polish history writer in 1859 was quoted as a typical example of this. It says, "a nation's history must be on every citizen's lips, and then the nation will be immortal." This is the essence of what I am learning from Lithuania, a country that has always respected Chiune Sugihara.

This year that marks the 100th anniversary of the friendship between Japan and Lithuania, as we are taking another look at Chiune Sugihara, I would like to discuss Japan's history head-on, especially with those of younger generations who will lead in next generation,

and to reconfirm the preciousness and importance of freedom and peace, and the difficulty of maintaining them. We would also like to reconfirm at the same time our historical awareness that the war Ukraine is fighting on the Ukrainian soil is a war for freedom and democracy in the world, and we would like to once again have our determination to utmost support for the people of Ukraine.

Finally, as you know Prime Minister Simonyte made a working visit to Japan at the end of October, and I would like to share with you what she said in an online interview just before her visit. Russia has a history of Stalinism, which made enormous sacrifices both inside and outside the Soviet Union, but including such a history, she said "Russia is a country that has not obliged itself to re-examine their own past", and if, at the end of this war, some kind package revival plan for a defeated Russia is presented, "a rational rethinking of their past must be imposed as a condition for the Russian state, otherwise a similar Russia will emerge sooner or later. As it has been the case for hundreds of years of Russian history".

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