

“Modern Witch Hunting” and “A Study on Atmosphere”

Tadashi Saito

"If you want to make a good magazine, you should review contents of past issues," Shimpei Ikejima, reputed as an excellent editor for monthly Bungeishunju Magazine, told us at Bungeishunju Ltd. Even after I retired as Bungeishunju editor, it is an ingrained habit to remember contents of past Bungeishunju issues.

Anonymous group exposing mass delusion

I was assigned to the Bungeishunju editorial department from 1974 to 1976, nearly 40 years ago, for the first time. Then, Bungeishunju carried "Tanaka Kakuei Kenkyu (A Study on Kakuei Tanaka)" by Takashi Tachibana and "Etsuzankai no Joo (Queen of Etsuzankai)" by Takaya Kodama, which led to Tanaka's downfall from politics. The magazine also carried "Gendai no Majogari (Modern Witch Hunting)" by an anonymous group called Group 1984.

Group 1984 originated from the title of a near-future novel by George Orwell. The group's view can be summarized as follows:

"The recent society has clearly been infected with mass hysteria. As unfavorable developments such as pollution and wars come, people instinctively find their causes and attribute these developments fully to these causes. When 20 million people died of plague in the 14th to 16th centuries in Europe, the society blamed the disaster to witches and victimized 9 million innocent people as witches. The witch hunting represented a mental disease originating from mass delusion. Japan is now put under the same situation. People unilaterally allege others as witches and get into infallibility, believing that they themselves are absolutely right."

Now, various issues including nuclear plants, disposal of debris, China, the consumption tax, the Trans-Pacific Partnership initiative and Okinawa have brought about a sense of stagnation that clings to us like rainy season sweat.

Those calling for protecting the Constitution are viewed as good, while those seeking to revise it are branded as bad. If we call the 1946 Constitution into question, we may be viewed as witches in the present atmosphere.

● **Yamamoto's study is still brilliant**

Shichihei Yamamoto wrote "Kuki no Kenkyu (a study on atmosphere)" on Bungeishunju in the 1970s. "Atmosphere is called so because it cannot be explained

logically. While saying they have made logical decisions, people in fact based their decisions on some firm and absolutely dominant standards including 'a thing that the atmosphere does not tolerate.' Those who resist such standards are ousted from society as dissidents or witches."

Both "Modern Witch Hunting" and "A Study on Atmosphere" are still brilliant. These articles look as if they were on the latest issue of Bungeishunju.

"The people who do most harm are the people who try to do most good," said Oscar Wilde.

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