

# Now Is the Time to Unleash the Extraordinary Power of “Hope”

By Kazumasa Kusaka

*“One of the biggest and most important things in life is hope... I think by just giving someone hope, that's a big thing.”*  
- PGA Tour star Marc Leishman

*Swimmer Rikako Ikee, the 2018 Asian Games MVP, more than a year after being diagnosed with leukaemia, took her first dip in the pool. Ikee, who has turned her sights to Paris 2024, said it is nothing other than her love for swimming and her appreciation for medical staff that have got her this far. “For me, it's that desire which helped me get through treatment. I know how the feelings of athletes watching a goal as big as the Olympic Games vanish right before their own eyes, because of what I have gone through with leukaemia,” she said on the day that had been scheduled for the 2020 Opening Ceremony.*

We are still searching for a way to deal with living with the coronavirus and hereafter with a “post-corona” world. When one discovers light at the end of the tunnel, one is encouraged to move toward it. But is that light really the tunnel exit or the headlights of an oncoming locomotive?

The question is whether an exit strategy to reactivate the economy is a wise choice or a risky one. The cautious voices come from the medical community which is used to dealing with most of the diseases within a community. But this pandemic is destroying communities along with the economy and jobs. That is why we have to see the total picture to understand the structure of risk: if we avoid any particular risk, usually we are forced to assume another risk. Measures taken can transfer the risk to another group. The choice of policy measures is the outcome of bargaining among the communities of economy, society, politics and science.

Are we escaping from the crisis and burying our heads in the sand? Or are we directly facing the questions posed by the crisis and trying to see exactly what the coronavirus will change in society? Will the changes just accelerate ongoing trends? Or will they bring about a 180-degree turn? Trying to grasp the overall picture can lead to the road to hope. Who will emerge as opinion leaders? And what kind of media will effectively be used to communicate with diverse stakeholders and players?

In the past, the public used to listen to their governments, especially during periods of rapid economic growth, or political

leaders who could deliver policy pledges, and as a result they trusted them. Experts are now segmentalized and in the world of the Internet where barriers to entry are low, quasi-experts can drive out the few remaining good experts. This decline in authority and erosion in trust means we have lost some “public goods” that play a crucial role in times of crisis. One hope is that when liberated from the government's monopoly on goal-setting, we shall see the principle of competition start to distinguish the best views.

In addition to national measures, we need a global vision to overcome this challenge. The capability of nations to cope with the pandemic differs among OECD countries, emerging economies, developing countries and the poorest states. Cooperation will make the difference in shaping a new international order for the next decade. The leadership of the United States and international organizations has started to decline, but here again we hope that diverse players, not only great powers like China, but also middle powers, can fill the vacuum. The US-China rivalry should not be confined to their bilateral issues, but should rather be focused on who will demonstrate a more appealing model, i.e. provide “hope” in a world of Covid-19.

This note began with a reference to the social impact of athletes inspiring hope. Music, especially chamber music and other small groups of volunteer musicians, gave hope to many people suffering in the wake of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and is still fresh in our minds. Human beings are social animals. It is the human-to-human interface that triggers chemical reactions and gives birth to creativity and energy. Social distancing, in one sense, denies the very essence of being human.

The performing arts touch a string in our heart and inspire hope. Local restaurants have set up stages for such gatherings and have helped to make our lives colorful as the bearers of regional culture for many years. They now face the crisis of their sustainability. This is a kind of change which we have to stop. Let's support and strengthen these resources of hope.

Kazumasa Kusaka is chairman and CEO of the Japan Economic Foundation (JEF), as well as being a professor of public policy at the University of Tokyo. He previously served as special advisor to the prime minister on global warming after having been vice minister for international affairs at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.