

# My Way to the Philosophy

## Attempts at Critiquing the Times

During late autumn to early winter on the Japan Sea side of the Japanese archipelago, strong northwesterly seasonal winds from the continent begin to blow. Gradually, these winds mix with hail showers, and a penetrating chill seeps further into the skin. The seasonal winds, laden with moisture, collide with the folded mountain ranges of the archipelago, bringing heavy snowfall. Thus begins the hibernating season for the Japan Sea side. Even in years with sparse snow, from the onset of winter thunder to the return of early spring sunshine, the skies over the Japan Sea side remain relentlessly leaden and overcast. The Japan Sea side of the archipelago carries an atmosphere that somehow exudes a melancholic and lonely climate.

For those who grew up on the Sea of Japan side, the arrival of spring is an especially joyous season, marking the revival of life. The sight of small, vivid blue flowers of hepatica peeking through patches of remaining snow, sparkling in the early spring sunlight, evokes a sense of wonder that is difficult for those on the Pacific side to fully comprehend.

I was born and raised in an environment that nurtured sensitivity towards the budding of life while imbued with a melancholic atmosphere. If within my thoughts there lies a subdued melancholy alongside admiration for living things, it may well be due to the climate and culture of the Japan Sea coast, which has formed the backdrop to much of my life.

Even in such a traditional land, over the past half-century or so, as time progressed, the flood of modern information inevitably surged forth, swiftly causing the communities that still retained remnants of old customs to collapse in the blink of an eye.

Certainly, today is an empty age where an immense number of publications, treated as consumable goods, along with vast amounts of fragmented information, are indiscriminately spewed out from nowhere and then vanish into nothingness. In this era of mass production and consumption of information, shallow and transient thoughts that merely cater to the times are generated one after another, only to be consumed. What is popular in the modern age leaves no trace of anything enduring.

In the midst of today's information deluge, scholarship is solitary. Even in the realm of philosophical thought, it has become specialized and literary, to the point where its achievements often seem devoid of contemporary relevance, akin to speaking to oneself. This was already the case when we first ventured into academia and embarked on the path of research. Indeed, the philosophy professors we studied under were knowledgeable scholars well-versed in the minutiae of Western philosophical texts, yet none of them spoke of their own philosophy. As time passed, philosophical research transformed into a kind of antiquarianism better suited for display in a museum.

It was probably around the end of the twentieth century when, on the other hand, we began to see in the field of philosophical thought the emergence of "philosophers" who, conversely this time, were merely talents who rode the waves of the times and said clever things.

Generally speaking, in contemporary times, intellectuals tend to fall into one of two tendencies: either they isolate themselves within their own specialized fields and pay no heed to others, thus becoming mere specialists, or they conform to the trend of populism, merely echoing what the masses want to hear, thus becoming mere jesters.

In such times, how much meaning is there really in deeply contemplating matters and expressing them? In the present day, even if profound philosophical reflections or profound thoughts are presented, they quickly get overshadowed and swept away in this hollow era.

In such times, I encountered the question of whether it is possible to truly delve deeply into things, that is, to engage in philosophy. Therefore, I had to start my own philosophical inquiry, beginning with the immediate issue of "what kind of era is the present age?"

The background behind my publication of several works on contemporary civilization theory was rooted in the recognition of the times as described above. These works, which included rigorous critical examinations of the mental conditions faced by modern individuals, can be seen as attempts at societal critique. What I aimed to do in these works was to capture various aspects of the mental fragmentation that has expanded with each passing century from the nineteenth to the twenty-first, thereby revealing the overall picture of modern civilization.

Amidst these harsh criticisms of the times, I have been searching for a firm ground, observing how modern civilization has emerged from there and seems to be returning there. Even amidst this spiritual end of the age called the present, I have sought to endure until its pioneering end, aiming to find a path that transcends it philosophically.

### **The Development of a Biophilic Worldview**

Subsequently, I returned to the ancient primitive societies of Japan and the world, diametrically opposite to the present day, to contemplate their perspectives on life, the universe, nature, and the soul. This exploration aimed to find a philosophical path that transcends contemporary issues. In delving into the worldview and outlook on life of ancient people, filled with vitality, I discovered a philosophy: the concept of "Eternity of Earth and Life." It embraces the belief in the regeneration and cyclical nature of life—"everything is born from the earth and returns to the earth." This faith in eternal recurrence embodies the profound vitality of the universe as perceived by ancient civilizations, a philosophy that modern society has largely forgotten.

Having arrived at the philosophy of "the eternal bond between the earth and life," I then turned to exploring a naturalistic worldview based on this philosophy. This shift led me to investigate modern cosmology, physics, biology, ecology, and other disciplines as the basis for a new understanding of nature. It aimed to reveal "living nature" while incorporating the achievements of contemporary natural sciences. The ideas that emerged in this philosophical exploration were that "this universe is a

realm of perpetual creation, pure dynamic energy, infinite creativity, and its life is eternal.”

Based on this idea, I have developed my own worldview that extends from the essence of life to the truths of the universe, influencing not only nature but also society, history, ethics, art, religion, civilization, existence, and general perception. In essence, it would be described as the construction of a biophilic worldview.

When developing practical philosophy, I have also considered human society as a constantly changing “living society” from this biophilic worldview, which underpins my approach. Naturally, the meaning and value of actions also evolve depending on the circumstances. Therefore, my ethics have evolved into an unfolding “dynamic ethics” that captures the meaning and value of actions amidst their generation and change.

At the core of my philosophy lies religious philosophy. Here, I interpret religious ideas, as articulated in Buddhism and Christianity, through a biophilic worldview. I understand the state of liberation sought in Buddhism as a return to the fundamental unity of life, and I interpret the salvation found in Pure Land Buddhism and Christianity as absolute trust in the fundamental life. Religion begins with awe towards cosmic life and is fulfilled through a return to cosmic life. My philosophy of religion seeks to explore a biocentric worldview within the realm of religious thought.

My development of religious theories may have been influenced by the cultural atmosphere of my childhood days on the Japan Sea side, which still carried a strong religious aura. The place where I was born and raised is known for its harsh climate and was where Dogen established the Japanese Soto Zen sect, and where Rennyo spread the Jodo Shinshu sect. Indeed, the roots of my religious philosophy lie in the thoughts of Dogen and Shinran (origin of Rennyo). Furthermore, I experienced my father’s death at the age of fifteen, and despite pursuing academic studies, I often struggled with my own powerlessness from a young age, experiencing various wanderings. Additionally, at the age of forty, I lost my second child. I believe these experiences deeply permeate my religious theories.

In whatever length of life, it can be summarized in a single phrase. If I were to summarize my philosophical journey and the evolution of my thoughts in one phrase, it would be “Through critical examination of contemporary civilization, constructing a biophilic worldview that transcends it.”