

# On the Nature of Crisis in Our Time: Transmission from the Toyonbee-Ikeda Dialogue

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## Introduction: What is the ‘Crisis of Our Time’?

THESE days, we see the expressions ‘crisis’ and ‘times of crisis’ everywhere. I myself often use these phrases. What is important, of course, is the content of the ‘crisis’, that is, the essence of the phenomenon of crisis.

This term has often been used in modern history to refer to the Great Depression era, the 1930s. E.H. Carr, a prominent international political scientist and historian, called the interwar period, the period between World War I and World War II, the ‘Twenty Years’ Crisis’.<sup>1</sup> The term ‘crisis’ as used today is not necessarily limited to social crises, but seems to refer to a wide range of adverse situations on a global scale.

Some so-called natural phenomena that are of an extreme nature are called crisis situations. However, it is human beings and their consciousness that perceive a crisis as a crisis. This indicates that human beings exist together with their environment. Without consideration of the relationship between humans and the environment, it is impossible to truly understand the crisis.

The expression ‘Anthropocene’ is used to refer to the period in which human activities are impacting the nature of the soil and ecosystems of the earth. This is a geological term, but it can be said to include how our way of life is directly or indirectly related to the Earth itself. Anyway, as we live on this earth in this time, we cannot pretend to be ignorant of the various problems of our time, which are described as a global crisis. We must treat them as our own problems, and cannot abandon our efforts to solve them.

This article deals with the theme of ‘Religion and Civilization in “Response” to the “Challenge” of a Global Crisis’. Fortunately, there are many books that encapsulate the thoughts and actions of SGI (Soka Gakkai International) President Daisaku Ikeda, founder of Soka University and the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, for such a discussion. Among them, *Choose Life* (English title) or *Dialogue*

*for the 21st Century* (Japanese title), a book recording his dialogue with historian Dr Arnold Toynbee, offers important insights into the crisis of our times and its nature. This year marks the 50th anniversary of this dialogue between Dr Toynbee, a world-renowned historian, and President Ikeda, a leading practitioner of Buddhism, yet their understanding of the nature of current problems is surprisingly accurate and their prescriptions wholly appropriate even for the present day.

The crisis of our time is not a natural disaster, nor is it merely a social crisis. Rather, it is a ‘crisis of civilization’, a ‘crisis of humanity’ in which our own survival is at stake. In this sense, Ikeda’s response to Toynbee, “I agree entirely both that man has created his present crisis and that he holds the key to its solution”,<sup>2</sup> sums up the argument here.

## **1. Witnessing the Turning Point of an Era: The Case of Takashi Tachibana**

How does one become aware of the crisis of an era? The nonfiction writer and critic Takashi Tachibana describes in his book *Paradoxes of Civilization*<sup>3</sup> how he became aware of the crisis and transition of the times through the experience of his youth.

He was born in 1940, and while in college in his 20s, found himself in the midst of a student movement centered on the Security Treaty struggle. He, a young bookworm with a strong intellectual curiosity, became interested in history and philosophy in those unstable times. He was strongly attracted to the upheavals of history that he had read about and wanted to live in such times, constantly comparing the past turbulence of what he read to his uneventful present:

What a boring time our time is compared to these times was an honest impression until early adolescence. Everything seemed to be running on rails that had already been laid. In every aspect of politics, economics, and culture, both internationally and domestically, the status quo that had been established after the temporary turmoil of the postwar period seemed to be basically intact.<sup>4</sup>

After graduating from university, Tachibana quit his job at a publishing company and re-entered the philosophy department as an undergraduate. There, too, he immersed himself in classical languages and ancient thought, paying little attention to the real world around him.

However, when he encountered Ludwig Wittgenstein’s writings, he became interested in the philosophy of science and the philosophy of

language, and his thinking changed dramatically. He said,

I suddenly pulled myself away from the indulgence of the ancient and medieval world and entered the intellectual core of modern culture. And in the midst of it all, I was experiencing intellectual excitement to the point of trembling. I had been lamenting what a boring time I had been born into, but now I was rejoicing at what an interesting time I had been born into.<sup>5</sup>

He interpreted this change in himself as follows: “In other words, by rethinking the world from a larger perspective, I began to see the world in a completely different light. I could see that the establishment, which had seemed so robust and unmatched, was, despite appearances, in danger of a fundamental collapse.”<sup>6</sup>

It can be said that young Tachibana experienced a kind of paradigm shift through his study of philosophy.

In ancient times, where the celestial motion theory was dominant, the earth was believed to be immovable, and it never occurred to anyone that the earth itself could rotate. However, when Copernicus came up with the idea that “the earth moves”, the paradigm shifted. This was a 180-degree turn in worldview, from celestial movement to earth movement. The earth movement theory is superior because it more accurately reflects empirical observations and can explain the flaws in the traditional celestial motion theory. Just as the philosopher Kant later compared his epistemology to Copernicus’s heliocentric theory,<sup>7</sup> a single idea could break through the accepted framework and lead to a fundamental shift in worldview.

Tachibana cites Eusebius Hieronymus, St. Jerome in English, a well-known Latin translator of the Bible. He lived toward the end of the Roman Empire, as a representative person who was aware of the crisis of the times.

St. Jerome, who lived at the end of the Roman Empire, is known to have been so sensitive as to foresee the end of the Roman world. Living as a hermit in the wilderness of distant Palestine, he had a sense of the dying Roman world nearly a century before the Empire’s final destruction.<sup>8</sup>

Although it is generally accepted that the Roman Empire was destroyed by barbarian (Germanic) invasions, Tachibana quotes Hieronymus, who said that it actually collapsed due to internal decay rather than external

attack. Here, Tachibana introduces Toynbee's theory of civilization that external aggression is only effective against civilizations in the process of internal collapse, acting as a stimulus to the problems that are growing internally.

The world is always in motion, but each thing does not move in isolation. In fact, even a single phenomenon is established on the complex relationships among various things. Therefore, acquiring a holistic viewpoint from which one can see this relational nature is an essential condition for knowing the truth. According to Tachibana, this point of view is exactly the position of Toynbee's comparative history of civilization. Without this relational and holistic perspective, we may be indifferent to or unaware of important phenomena occurring in the epoch we live in.

I think that these reminiscences of Takashi Tachibana's youth give us great pointers for understanding the essence of the 'crisis'. *Understanding the crisis of the times and its turning points is not possible if we are passive; it is only possible if we actively strive to develop our own viewpoints.*

In order to develop such a perspective, it is effective to first reflect on one's own way of looking at things. Jürgen Habermas, a German philosopher famous for his critical theory, clarified that all theories and perceptions are formed through the subjective involvement of human beings themselves. He called this subjective involvement 'interest' (German: Interesse).<sup>9</sup>

Habermas argues that one always perceives things with interest, and is not merely passively involved, but rather actively involved. Even so, however, it is not the case that one is aware of this. This is because recognition must be objective, and there is an implicit inhibiting force at work that keeps subjective elements out as much as possible. Habermas fears that such 'scientism' or 'objectivism' in cognition may ultimately alienate not only the subjective but also human reason. Human reason is not merely rational in character, but also includes the irrational. Interest is generally thought of as a kind of subjective desire, as if it were a temporary movement of the mind. However, interest must be seen as an essential element in human cognition.

This epistemological idea is very important for Toynbee's theory of civilization.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the words 'criticism' and 'crisis' are said to have the same etymological origin. In a sense, it can be said that there can be no recognition of crisis without criticism. Criticism is a function of reason accompanied by awareness. That is, the ability to see things holistically and not just as rational cognitive abilities, the ability to

perceive that crisis is a crisis of the human beings themselves. Takashi Tachibana's experience shows that *his understanding of himself and of the outside world are the same*.

## 2. The Concept of 'Civilization' Means a Human Endeavor for Betterment

Next, let us look at the concept or idea of 'civilization' as used by Toynbee.

The best-known definition of 'civilization' is that of Edward B. Tyler, the father of cultural anthropology: "Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."<sup>11</sup> It is a composite whole consisting of all the abilities and practices that people acquire as members of society. This definition is very broad and includes both the material and the spiritual. However, it can be said that Tyler uses civilization in contrast to barbarism, and he considers civilization to be an advanced social state.<sup>12</sup>

In the introduction to the first volume of *A Study of History* Toynbee describes the concept of 'civilization' as "an intelligible field of historical study".<sup>13</sup> This is an empiricist definition, similar to Tyler's, and quite general and inclusive (minus Tyler's idea of Western dominance).

In volume 12 of *A Study of History* (1961), entitled 'Reconsiderations', Toynbee redefines the concept of 'civilization', which he has not elaborated on much earlier.

Following Whitehead's lead, I should define civilization in spiritual terms. Perhaps it might be defined as an *endeavour to create a state of society in which the whole of mankind will be able to live together in harmony, as members of a single all-inclusive family*. This is, I believe, the goal at which all civilizations so far known have been aiming unconsciously, if not consciously.<sup>14</sup> (Italics by the present author.)

Why did Toynbee, at the age of 72, redefine the concept of 'civilization', which is the cornerstone of the study of the history of civilizations? Looking back on his research on the history of civilization, which had just been completed, he took a step forward in terms of content, based on the accumulation of research over the past half century. The

emphasized portion in the quote corresponds to the new definition. The reason why he uses the word ‘might’ is perhaps his empiricist stance of not making a final assertion. What is noteworthy about this new definition is that it defines civilization as a human endeavor rather than a fixed concept, and that it also includes the idea of peaceful coexistence of mankind as the goal of this endeavor.

It can be said that Toynbee saw, or tried to see, a living concept of civilization in the effort (“endeavour”) to build a society toward the idea of human coexistence. The development of world civilization is an extension of these efforts. In other words, *civilization is the constant human and ethical work toward the construction of a world civilization of human coexistence.*

In presenting this new definition, Toynbee quotes a passage from Alfred North Whitehead’s *Adventures of Ideas*. Whitehead identifies two types of intellectual agencies (that is to say, ideas or notions) engaged in transforming the times: general ideas and highly specialized notions. He then states, “Among the former, there are the ideas of high generality expressing conceptions of the nature of things, of the possibilities of human society, of the final aim which should guide the conduct of individual men.”<sup>15</sup>

The “ideas of high generality” here are the idea of ‘civilization’. Toynbee quotes the following passage from Whitehead: “In each age of the world distinguished by high activity there will be found at its culmination, and among the agencies leading to that culmination, some profound cosmological outlook, implicitly accepted, impressing its own type upon the current springs of action.”<sup>16</sup> Here Whitehead’s conception of agency, or ‘civilization’, is a dynamic conception that is advancing, absorbing new experiences and discoveries into itself. This idea has “some profound cosmological outlook”. It can be said that Toynbee proposed a new definition of ‘civilization’ based on Whitehead’s cosmological outlook.

Humans are actively involved in the world together with ideas.<sup>17</sup> Through this adventure, the ideas themselves are also developed and enriched. The same is true of the idea of ‘civilization’. The cycle of challenge and response is the dynamic nature of civilization, and it is this activity that leads the world to a better state. In the concept of ‘civilization’, Toynbee found the realization of the idea of coexistence of all humankind. Thus, it can be said that Toynbee’s view of the history of civilization is based on the theme of how human beings should be proactively involved in the world of coexistence of human beings.

We have been discussing the concept or idea of ‘civilization’,

but another important element when discussing civilization is the ‘relationship between civilization and religion’.

### 3. Higher Religions Save Civilization

In *Reconsiderations*, after defining civilization, Toynbee asks himself “whether civilization can save itself solely out of its own resources”.<sup>18</sup> And his answer is in the negative. He says that no matter how excellent a civilization may be, it cannot sustain itself on its own, and that it is sustained with the help of an intrinsic force that transcends (or supports) it. “*I believe that civilization can be saved only by drawing on the resources of the higher religions as well as on those of civilization itself. I believe that human beings can save civilization by thus rising above it*”<sup>19</sup> (italics are by the present author). Only through higher religions, Toynbee says, can the self-destruction of civilization be prevented.

What does Toynbee mean by ‘higher religions’? He states:

By higher religions I mean religions designed to bring human beings into direct communion with absolute spiritual Reality as individuals, in contrast to earlier forms of religion that have brought them only into indirect communion with It through the medium of the particular society in which they have happened to be participants.<sup>20</sup>

Earlier forms of religion, or lower religions, are those that bring the individual into indirect communion with ‘Reality’<sup>21</sup> through society or mediated by society. Society can be a specific group, tribe, or nation, but in the case of lower religions, the society to which the individual belongs is stronger than the individual. As an alternative to Christianity in the modern era, these lower religions may also include nationalism, communism, and the belief in scientific progress (the belief in the infinite progress of science).<sup>22</sup> Unlike these lower religions, the higher religions bring the individual directly into contact with ‘Reality’.

Toynbee continued to write *A Study of History* with a focus on the history of civilization, but gradually the significance of religion increased. After World War II, the positions of both sides were clearly reversed.<sup>23</sup> Until then, he had argued that even higher religions merely served as a ‘chrysalis’ to pass from the old to the new civilization, but he realized that such an explanation could not rationalize the significance of higher religions:

I laid aside my original hypothesis about the historical relation of

‘higher religions’ to ‘civilizations’ when I found that, while this might serve to explain the transition from an earlier civilization to a later one, the role of higher religions as ‘chrysalises’ for civilizations was, in their own histories, no more than an incidental one that did not explain their true mission.<sup>24</sup>

His emphasis on higher religions is due to the fact that the post-World War II world had entered the ‘nuclear age’. He had a sense of crisis that the science and technology of modern civilization could no longer save the world, that is, human coexistence would become difficult.

This shift in the center of gravity was probably accompanied by a deepening of Toynbee’s interest in higher religions, particularly Christianity and Mahayana Buddhism, as the means for the salvation of humanity and modern civilization.<sup>25</sup> Herein lies the reversal in Toynbee’s theory of civilization, in which civilization does not explain the higher religions, but rather the higher religions explain the rise and fall of civilization. Furthermore, he even suggests a shift from a view of the history of civilization to a view of the history of religion:

May it not be found that the higher religions must be treated as societies of a new species, and must therefore be regarded as phenomena which cannot be dealt with in terms of any other species than their own if they are to be dealt with adequately — that is to say, intelligibly?<sup>26</sup>

The transcendence of civilization is achieved by focusing on and relying on the power of higher religions. But it should be noted, says Toynbee, that it is not enough just to seek help from the higher religions. The world of the higher religions is a world in which human freedom is possible in an open world, a world in which it is possible to make the future what we want it to be (even if not entirely). The transcendence of civilization is not the result of civilization itself, nor is it the dissolution of civilization into religion. The subject is neither civilization nor religion itself.

Toynbee says, “[T]he goal of human endeavours, which is being aimed at in the particular endeavour that we call ‘civilization’, is something beyond and above civilization itself.”<sup>27</sup> Here again, ‘human endeavor’ is mentioned.

Civilizations are built by human beings. Endeavors are required because humans themselves are responsible for it. In the same passage, Toynbee mentions man’s journey toward sainthood. What he means is

that *human endeavor in civilization is based on man's own inner desire to improve himself*. His position is that higher religions are meant to assist man's own efforts. In other words, *civilization and religion are linked only by human endeavor, which is ethical practice*.

Thus, it can be said that Toynbee's view of the history of civilization is based on the fundamental position of aiming at the improvement of man himself. The most important thing is man's desire to improve himself. In other words, from Toynbee's point of view, *the 'crisis of civilization' is man's abandonment of his own betterment*.

It is this concern for the salvation of mankind that led Toynbee to turn his attention to higher religions and to Mahayana Buddhism. He visited Japan, a country with strong ties to Mahayana Buddhism, twice after the war.

During his visit to Japan in 1967, he is said to have inquired about Mahayana Buddhism at study groups and private meetings.<sup>28</sup> It was only natural that he should learn of the Soka Gakkai, which was actually practicing the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism, and that he should wish to have a conversation with its leader, President Ikeda. In the fall of 1969, he wrote a letter to Ikeda expressing his desire to meet and talk with him.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. Actuality of Toynbee-Ikeda Dialogue

The Toynbee-Ikeda dialogue may be said, in a word, to be characterized by *actuality* (or, active reality). The content of *Choose Life*, or *Dialogue for the 21st Century*, is not only a reflection of a living reality, but also a guideline for action toward a future society.

The themes and main points of this dialogue are described in the preface to *Choose Life* or *Dialogue for the 21st Century*, but here I would like to list four features of this dialogue from the viewpoint of actuality.

##### **(1) Spatial Actuality: Individual themes include universal issues.**

While many of the dialogues deal with individual and specific themes, they proceed in a way that points out or suggests that there are universal themes underlying the dialogue that go beyond the specific theme. It can be said that the idea and development are supported by a broad or holistic perspective. For example, in the opening section ('Some of Our Animal Aspects'),<sup>30</sup> the contemporary and individual issues associated with sexual liberation are first taken up, and in the dialogue, it is pointed out that the material view of life prevails today. It is also pointed out that

development and revitalizing of life itself is important for fundamentally solving such problems. Thus, the dialogue is developed within the open space of the individual and the whole (or the universal), the whole (or the universal) and the individual. Herein lies *the spatial actuality* of this dialogue.

**(2) Time-theoretic Actuality: Learning from the past and having predictions and expectations for the next generation.**

It is important to learn from the past, but what is more important is to keep the next generation in mind. In the dialogue, the details of past examples are compelling, but what is most inspiring and stimulating is a strong interest in the future. In his writings, Toynbee cites Bertrand Russell's statement, "[I]t is important to care immensely about things that are going to happen after one is dead."<sup>31</sup> He also quotes the well-known words of the ancient Roman writer Terentius on humanism: "I am a human being, so there is nothing human that I do not feel to be my concern."<sup>32</sup> Toynbee asserts that this is a general statement that means the same as Russell's statement.

Both interlocutors are strongly interested in the next generation. This can be seen in the title of the Japanese edition, *Dialogue for the 21st Century*, which is said to have been Ikeda's idea. It can also be seen in the themes of the dialogue, covering a total of 77 sections, which show a careful consideration of the coming age.

I have already mentioned Habermas's 'interest', and in the dialogue, 'interest in the future' is also a powerful actuality. Of course, there are some differences of opinion between the two, but their strong interest in the future can be referred to as *a time-theoretic actuality*.

**(3) Anthropological Actuality: Man is free, equal, and responsible for himself.**

In the book, there is a dialogue about the status of women involved in childcare and early childhood education ('The Profession of Motherhood').<sup>33</sup> It is often said that children are greatly influenced by their mothers during the period of character development, and that women are superior in terms of mental acuity, which is an important factor in education. In addition, when considering early childhood education by mothers from a social system perspective, it is necessary to guarantee the status of mothers both socially and economically.

Therefore, Toynbee suggests that "mothers, like other educators, ought to be paid a salary; that this salary ought to be high; and that it ought to be paid directly to the mothers themselves".<sup>34</sup> Ikeda agrees that

Toynbee's proposal to redistribute the total income of society between men and women is an excellent and reasonable one. Conventionally, it has been said that child-rearing is a woman's instinct or a mother's duty, but such beliefs show the discriminatory intention of men. Many women engage in work outside the bounds of family, sometimes alone, and they, too, must naturally be protected. Based on the recognition that all human beings, regardless of gender, are free, equal, and responsible for their actions, society should pay a reasonable salary to women in the important profession of motherhood.

The dialogue is based on the anthropological perspective that people do not exist for the sake of institutions, but that social institutions exist for the sake of people. The Toynbee-Ikeda dialogue, exchanged from such an anthropological perspective, can be said to have an *anthropological actuality*.

**(4) Civilizational Actuality: The problem of overcoming human self-centeredness. This dialogue is a response to the crisis of civilization.**

At the root of human existence is a fundamental problem. It is the question of coexistence. While other animals seem to unconsciously adhere to the constraints of coexistence, human behavior is unconstrained. This is related to man's unrestricted desire (greed). Humans have a self-centered tendency to have no regard for others or to treat them only as a means to an end.

Self-centeredness is the biggest challenge in this society, which is premised on coexistence with others. How should it be understood and treated? The problem of self-centeredness is not only an internal problem for each individual, but also a civilizational problem that questions the direction in which humankind should go.

A fundamental question in this dialogue is also how self-centeredness can be overcome. In a sense, the dialogue is a 'response' to the 'challenge' of egocentrism, which can be a force that destroys civilization. This response is a struggle to overcome the fundamental problems of civilization. In this sense, this dialogue has a *civilizational actuality*.

**5. Overcoming the Problem of Self-centeredness as a Contemporary Crisis**

Having completed the planned volume of *A Study of History*, Toynbee still had what he himself called "other business",<sup>35</sup> analyzing the problem of self-centeredness.<sup>36</sup> It seems that Toynbee wanted to have a

conversation with Ikeda to exchange views on this issue. It also seems that Ikeda wanted to clarify the position of Buddhism on this issue that lies deep within modern civilization. In this sense, it can be said that the theme of overcoming self-centeredness is an extremely important part of their dialogue.

For Toynbee, the issue of self-centeredness had been an important one since the time he started *A Study of History* (the idea of which was conceived in 1921, writing begun in 1930, and the first three volumes published in 1934). The first volume has an introduction titled ‘The Relativity of Historical Thought’, which begins with a passage from the ancient Greek poet and philosopher Xenophanes: “Each ethnic group portrays the image of God in its own image. If horses and cows had human abilities, they would still portray their gods as horses and cows.”<sup>37</sup> Clearly, the issue of self-centeredness is stated here and it can be said that Toynbee was keenly aware of this issue from the beginning of his research career.

In his introduction, Toynbee discusses two institutions that have gained dominance in the modern era. The first is the modern industrial system in the economy, and the second is the modern sovereign state system in politics. The former, in conjunction with natural science, became a force that gave rise to the fallacy of treating living creatures as inanimate (‘apathetic fallacy’). The latter became nationalism, a force that demanded that even small things be treated as a whole. Francis Bacon, the eminent British thinker, once discussed the ‘idola’ or illusion that humans inherently have. If we were to apply this argument to Toynbee’s discussion here, we could say that the former corresponds to the ‘idola of the race’ (a tendency to see things in human-centric terms), and the latter to the ‘idola of the cave’ (a view of a narrow area as the whole, without seeing the wider world).

The problem of self-centeredness or egocentrism is essentially a practical problem rather than a cognitive one. Self-centeredness itself is an inherent tendency of life, as Toynbee himself says, “A living being’s egoistic attempt to organize the universe round itself is the condition for, and the expression of, its vitality.”<sup>38</sup> However, in everyday life practice, this egocentricity causes problems. The German philosopher Kant also struggled with how to locate the egocentric pursuit of happiness in ethics and found a categorical imperative (a moral proposition in action).

The third part of *Choose Life or Dialogue for the 21st Century* is an unfolding dialogue on Buddhism. Toynbee describes his understanding of Mahayana Buddhism (Northern Buddhism) as follows: “Northern

Buddhism's heroes are bodhisattvas, who, like the Buddha, have postponed their own exit into Nirvana out of compassion for other sentient beings.<sup>39</sup> In the figure of the Bodhisattva of the Mahayana, Toynbee sees a practical solution to self-centeredness.

Toynbee poses a question to Ikeda: If the Buddha had compassion, does that mean that he had a kind of desire, which means that he had not yet completely attained enlightenment? To this question, Ikeda replies, "Northern Buddhism teaches the possibility of entry into Nirvana as a consequence of repeated lives and births and does not advocate the extinction of desire."<sup>40</sup> Ikeda continues, "Sakyamuni, in the Lotus Sutra, explained that this is possible through the awakening to the Buddhahood inherent in each human being."<sup>41</sup>

Regarding Toynbee's negative interpretation of nirvana as the extinction of desire, Ikeda says, "[T]he Nirvana of Northern Buddhism is not the entry into a static state of void but a condition of limitless compassion created as a result of the individual's awareness of the Buddha nature within himself."<sup>42</sup> In other words, he tells Toynbee about *the sublimation of desire into compassion, or the qualitative transformation of desire*, in Mahayana Buddhism. And he concludes, "Northern Buddhism resolves this contradiction. Instead of advocating the extinguishing of desire, Northern Buddhism teaches that it must be overcome by change from greedy desire to altruistic desire."<sup>43</sup> I would like to leave it to another occasion to consider this problem in detail.<sup>44</sup>

Buddhism is said to be a philosophy of life. I think that is correct too. But what do we mean by 'life'? I think it can be thought of in the same way as the concept of 'civilization' mentioned earlier. In short, *civilization is man's effort for coexistence, and life is man's effort for dignity*. The Lotus Sutra, which teaches that life is endowed with the Buddha nature, is a scripture that calls on human beings to strive to realize the dignity of life.

### **Conclusion: The Shift to a Civilization that Respects the Dignity of Life is the Key**

In the early 1970s, when this dialogue was taking place, Soka University of Japan was being established, a long-cherished dream for its founder, Ikeda. He gave a total of three lectures at the university before and after his second talk with Toynbee (May 1973), which took place in London. The three lectures<sup>45</sup> were 'Be Creative Individuals' (the third entrance ceremony, April 9, 1973), 'Scholasticism and Modern Civilization' (the second Takiyama Festival memorial lecture, July 13, 1973), and 'The

Flowering of Creative Life Force’ (the fourth entrance ceremony, April 18, 1974). The common thread that runs through these lectures is the theme of creating a new civilization.

In the ‘Be Creative Individuals’ lecture, he said, “It is safe to say that modern civilization, in a sense, has approached a turning point. The alternatives involve the crucial problem of whether or not mankind can survive.”<sup>46</sup> In his lecture on ‘Scholasticism and Modern Civilization’, he stated that the European medieval philosophy of Scholasticism developed under the conviction of “the oneness of philosophy and religion, faith and reason”.<sup>47</sup> And given the historical fact that it ushered in the modern European civilization, a new meaning of Scholastic philosophy should be the basis for the construction of a new modern civilization. In his lecture ‘The Flowering of Creative Life Force’, he emphasized that the natural state of life is *creative*. Here he drew on the words of French art historian Dr René Huyghe, who said, “The crisis of our times is a crisis of civilization, the danger of materialism carried too far.”<sup>48</sup> Ikeda then said, “I say to you that there is no one lonelier or more unhappy than a person who does not know the pure joy of creating a life for himself.”<sup>49</sup> And he termed the flowering of this creative life ‘human revolution’.

A consistent theme throughout his three lectures is ‘the creation of a new modern civilization’. The challenge of our time is to build a new spiritual civilization for human revival that surpasses the material, scientific, and technological civilizations of the past. In particular, in ‘The Flowering of Creative Life Force’, Ikeda goes one step further to explain the content of the civilization to be built, using the expressions ‘creative life’ and ‘creation of life’. These words also indicate the greatest joy for human life. In other words, it is a statement that a new civilization should be built on such a theory of life.

The challenge that this new view of civilization must overcome is the most serious crisis of our time: the ‘crisis of the dignity of life’. Ikeda’s 1973 article, ‘What Makes Life Dignified’, opens with the following words: “The reality of what we call the ‘crisis’ facing modern civilized society is that life, which should be dignified, is in every sense in danger.”<sup>50</sup> In the final section of *Choose Life*, or *Dialogue for the 21st Century*, entitled the ‘Highest Human Value’, Ikeda clearly states, “I think ... that the highest value must be attached to the dignity of life as a universal standard.”<sup>51</sup>

Thus, it can be confirmed that the essence of the contemporary crisis lies in the fact that the ‘dignity of life’ is at stake. The transformation of civilization, i.e., overcoming the crisis, lies in re-establishing the ‘dignity

of life'. And the movement for its re-establishment, 'human revolution', is the key to this transformation.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> It refers to the 20 years from 1919 to 1939. His research book of the same title, discussing the crisis in international relations from both the real and ideological aspects, was published in 1939.
- <sup>2</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee/ Daisaku Ikeda, *Choose Life: A Dialogue* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 308. (Japanese edition) Arnold J. Toynbee and Daisaku Ikeda, *Dialogue for the 21st Century*, in *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu* 池田大作全集 (The Complete Works of Daisaku Ikeda), vol. 3, (Tokyo: Seikyō Shimbunsha, 1991), 586. Hereafter, the quotations are taken from the English edition but the corresponding page from the Japanese edition are given as well.
- <sup>3</sup> It was published by Kodansha in 1976. The version used in this article is the company's paperback edition: Takashi Tachibana 立花隆, *Bunmei no gyakusetsu — Kiki no jidai no ningen kenkyū* 文明の逆説——危機の時代の人間研究 (Paradoxes of Civilization: Studies on Human Beings in an Age of Crisis) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1984). The quotes from the book used here are the present author's translations.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> Cf. Immanuel Kant, Preface to the second edition of *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787).
- <sup>8</sup> Tachibana, *Paradoxes of Civilization*, 10–11.
- <sup>9</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968). Also, the discussion of Habermas, summarized below, can be found in my article: Yutaka Ishigami 石神豊, 'Hihan ni okeru kijun to konkyō — Popa, Habamasu o tegakari toshite 批判における基準と根拠——ポパー、ハーバーマスを手掛りとして——' (Criteria and Grounds in Criticism: Taking Popper and Habermas as Cues), *Sosiorojika* ソシオロジカ (Sociologica) 12, no. 2 (1998): 68–75.
- <sup>10</sup> Toynbee states that his own position is that of 'hyper-rationalism'. A.J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 12: *Reconsiderations* (Oxford: OUP, 1961), 74. For details, see my article: Yutaka Ishigami 石神豊, 'Toinbi no fukachiron no haikai to igi トインビーの不可知論の背景と意義' (The Background and Significance of Toynbee's Agnosticism), *Hikaku Bunmei* 比較文明 (Comparative Civilization), 35 (2009): 191–209.
- <sup>11</sup> Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1871), 1.
- <sup>12</sup> In a dialogue with President Ikeda, Dr Majid Tehranian states that Tyler has a stubborn application of evolutionary theory that the West is superior to others. Daisaku Ikeda & Majid Tehranian, *Global Civilization: A Buddhist-Islamic Dialogue* (London: British Academic Press, 2003), 72.
- <sup>13</sup> A.J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 1 (Oxford: OUP, 1948), 51.
- <sup>14</sup> Toynbee, *Reconsiderations*, 279.
- <sup>15</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 12.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> This is just like the linguistic adventures of Basho's haiku. For example, his famous haiku, "Old pond, frogs jump in, sound of water", breaks away from the fixed style of conventional 'haikai' and establishes Basho's own style 'shofu'. Here we have Basho adventuring with his haiku. See; Yutaka Ishigami 石神豊, 'Basho to Kanto — Haiku no ronri kozo 芭蕉とカント——俳句の論理構造——' (Basho and Kant: The Logical Structure of Haiku), *Tsushin Kyoikubu Ronshu* 通信教育部論集 (Collection of Papers of the Division of Correspondence Education), 18 (2006): 121–38.

<sup>18</sup> Toynbee, *Reconsiderations*, 279

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>21</sup> 'Reality' here refers to the 'ultimate (spiritual) reality' that Toynbee emphasized, especially in his later years. This Reality is discussed in his dialogue with Ikeda. See also, Yutaka Ishigami, 'Toinbi shukyoron to niju-issei eno taiwa トインビー宗教論と二十一世紀への対話' (Arnold Toynbee's View of Religion and Dialogue for the 21st Century), *Bulletin of The Institute of Oriental Philosophy* 東洋哲学研究所紀要 (Tokyo: Institute of Oriental Philosophy) 34 (2018): 23–47.

<sup>22</sup> Toynbee/ Ikeda, *Choose Life*, 290–96. *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu*, vol. 3, 555–65.

<sup>23</sup> For more details on this process, refer to Shin Yamamoto 山本新, 'II Toinbi no shogai to shiso no henshen II トインビーの生涯と思想の変遷' (II: Toynbee's Life and the Transition of His Thought), in *Jinrui no chiteki isan 74: Toinbi* 人類の知的遺産74: トインビー (Mankind's Intellectual Heritage 74: Toynbee) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1978). Yamamoto identifies three turning points in Toynbee's life, with the second being the transition from civilization to higher religions. In the same article, Yamamoto argues (on page 202) that his assertion regarding the future of East Asia and the communist bloc in Toynbee/ Ikeda, *Dialogue for the 21st Century* was "the final conclusion that Toynbee reached at the end of his life".

<sup>24</sup> Toynbee, *Reconsiderations*, 46–47.

<sup>25</sup> Toynbee highly values the action of saving others. It can be said that he saw a form of devoted salvation of others in Christian 'love' and in the acts of the Bodhisattvas of the Mahayana. However, there is a strong nuance of self-sacrifice in Toynbee's view. This is discussed in section 5.

<sup>26</sup> See; Toynbee, *Reconsiderations*, 84. This new perspective is clearly affirmed in Toynbee's last systematic book: *A Study of History Illustrated* (New York: American Heritage, 1972).

<sup>27</sup> Toynbee, *Reconsiderations*, 279.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Motohiro Fukase 深瀬基寛, 'Toinbi shikan トインビー私観' (My Personal View of Toynbee), in Shakai Shisosha 社会思想社, ed., *Toinbi: Hito to shiso* トインビー 人と思想 (Toynbee: People and Thoughts) (Tokyo: Shakai Shisosha, 1967), 176.

<sup>29</sup> For details on the circumstances leading up to the dialogue, see my article: Yutaka Ishigami 石神豊, 'Kikino jidai to Toinbi-Ikeda taidan 危機の時代とトインビー・池田対談' (The Age of Crisis and the Toynbee-Ikeda Dialogue), in Institute of Oriental Philosophy 東洋哲学研究所, ed., *Bunmei, rekishi, shukyo — Toinbi-Ikeda taidan 50 shunen kinen ronshu* 文明・歴史・宗教——トインビー・池田対談50周年記念論集 (Civilization, History, and Religion: Collection of Essays in Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of Toynbee-Ikeda Dialogue) (Tokyo:

- Institute of Oriental Philosophy, 2022), 47–68.
- <sup>30</sup> Toynbee/ Ikeda, *Choose Life*, 15–20. *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu*, vol. 3, 27–37.
- <sup>31</sup> A.J. Toynbee, *Experiences* (London: OUP, 1969), 106.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.
- <sup>33</sup> Toynbee/ Ikeda, *Choose Life*, 107–110. *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu*, vol. 3, 195–203.
- <sup>34</sup> Toynbee/ Ikeda, *Choose Life*, 109. *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu*, vol. 3, 200.
- <sup>35</sup> Toynbee, *Experiences*, 112.
- <sup>36</sup> This understanding follows Goro Yoshizawa’s interpretation. Goro Yoshizawa 吉澤五郎, *Hito to shiso 69: Toinbi 人と思想69トインビー* (People and Thoughts 69: Toynbee) (Tokyo: Shimizu Shoin, 1987), 33.
- <sup>37</sup> Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. 1, 1.
- <sup>38</sup> Toynbee/ Ikeda, *Choose Life*, 22. *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu*, vol. 3, 41.
- <sup>39</sup> Toynbee/ Ikeda, *Choose Life*, 273. *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu*, vol. 3, 523.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>41</sup> Toynbee/ Ikeda, *Choose Life*, 274. *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu*, vol. 3, 523–24.
- <sup>42</sup> Toynbee/ Ikeda, *Choose Life*, 274. *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu*, vol. 3, 524.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>44</sup> Some of this is presented in, Ishigami ‘Kikino jidai to Toinbi-Ikeda taidan’, 76–80.
- <sup>45</sup> The lectures are published in English in: *Proposals for the 21st Century: Collected Addresses* (Soka University Student Union, 1987). The page numbers are: ‘Be Creative Individuals’, 1–20; ‘Scholasticism and Modern Civilization’, 21–40; ‘The Flowering of Creative Life Force’, 55–69.
- <sup>46</sup> Ikeda, *Proposals*, 18.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.
- <sup>50</sup> Daisaku Ikeda 池田大作, ‘Seimei o songen narashimeru mono 生命を尊厳ならしめるもの’ (What Makes Life Dignified), in Toshihiko Tokizane 時実利彦, ed., *Seimei no songen o motomete 生命の尊厳を求めて* (In Search of the Dignity of Life) (Tokyo: Ushio Press, 1973), 257–91.
- <sup>51</sup> Toynbee/ Ikeda, *Choose Life*, 339–40. *Ikeda Daisaku zenshu*, vol. 3, 643.

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