

The Philosophy of the Expo '90 and Its Inheritance

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1. Introduction

In 1990, the International Garden and Greenery Exposition, Osaka, Japan, 1990 (hereinafter “Expo '90”) was held at Tsurumi Ryokuchi Park, Osaka. It was the fourth international exposition held in Japan, and the first World Horticultural Exhibition (A1^{*Note 1}) ever held in Asia. The theme of Expo '90 was the “Harmonious Coexistence of Nature and Mankind.” It concluded successfully, with the participation of 55 international organizations and 650 companies/groups from 63 countries, attracting more than 23.19 million visitors in total. I presume that the key to the success of the exposition lay in its basic principles, in which flowers and greenery are regarded not as just things but as the symbol of life and culture as described below: “The development of industrial civilization in the 20th century now reminds us of the greatness of living things in nature, symbolized by flowers and greenery. Greenery has the power to convert inorganic matter to organic matter and create life from scratch. Flowers are the elegant expression of such hidden power, an anthem to the celebration of life itself. It can be said that loving and respecting greenery and flowers are the instincts of humans who share life with nature, which form the simplest foundation of our yearning for mutual respect between people and world peace. (Excerpts)”



2. Historical Background

Global environmental challenges began with regional industrial pollution in the 1970s. Around 1990, ozone depletion, acid rain, global warming, and other issues emerged as global challenges resulting from lifestyles based on large-scale production and consumption. To address these challenges, the international community took a number of actions. As a starter, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was convened in 1972 in Stockholm. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) published a report entitled “Our common future.” The report proposed the concept of “sustainable development”: Environment and development are not separate challenges; they are inexorably linked. Development cannot subsist upon a deteriorating environmental resource base; the environment cannot be protected when growth leaves out of account the costs of environmental destruction. After Expo '90, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the “Earth Summit,” was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Earth Summit adopted Agenda 21, an action program calling for international initiatives in the environmental area, accelerating efforts for international cooperation.

In the 1980s, Japan was said to be undergoing an exposition boom, hosting more than 50 expositions of various sizes. At the end of 1986, an unprecedented economic boom (bubble economy) began, and Japanese people enjoyed a high level of amusement and consumption.

In this period, the general public were worried about global environmental challenges and tended to be bored with stereotyped exposition venues comprising pavilions and commercial facilities during the exposition boom. Against such a background, Expo '90 presented “a shift from material wealth to spiritual wealth” and “the chain of life and the ideal state of coexistence on the mother earth.” I think that this approach enabled Expo'90 to earn empathy from many people.

3. Trend in International Expositions and the Roles of Expo'90

In 1862, the first world exposition, the London International Exhibition of Industry and Art, took place. Since then, various international expositions had been held, representing an “apocalypse” of the world meandering through the history of the Industrial Revolution. When the Japan World Exposition, Osaka, 1970 (Osaka's Expo '70) was held, a moon rock, moving walkways, videophones, and other “dream equipment” that have now become commonplace attracted much attention as items that symbolized Japan's steadily growing economy at that time, as indicated by its theme “Progress and Harmony for Mankind.” The Okinawa International Ocean Exposition of 1975 selected the theme “The Sea We Would Like to See” to explore better ways of ocean development and utilization. In the International Exposition, Tsukuba, Japan, 1985, held on the theme “Dwellings and surroundings— Science and Technology for Man at Home,” visitors paid special attention to a piano-playing robot and a giant

tomato that was grown using biotechnology. Unlike these expositions exhibiting industrial technologies, Expo '90 placed primary focus on “flowers and greenery,” which had conventionally played supporting roles, rather than state-of-the-art science and technology. Through this approach, the exposition provided many people with opportunities to reconsider the roles and importance of plants and to envision a near-future city that harmoniously coexists with nature.

It is said that an international exposition is a testing ground for a future society. When an official of the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) visited and witnessed the Expo '90 venue, he said “This is what a future international exposition should be like!” with admiration and excitement. Moreover, two years later, in 1992, the Government of Japan submitted the “Final Report on Analytical Survey of International Expositions' Effects” to the BIE to make recommendations on the ideal form of international expositions in the future. At its general meeting in 1996, the BIE adopted these recommendations and redefined the objective of world expositions as “to provide opportunities for raising and resolving global issues.” It was a significant change from the previous objectives of organizing these expositions. It is safe to say that Expo '90 became a turning point for international expositions, raising questions about the trend that had continued for over 150 years.

4. Harmonious Coexistence of Nature and Humankind

As stated above, while enjoying the booming “bubble” economy around 1989, Japan saw emerging issues. Among them were urban problems such as soaring land prices, traffic congestion, and the heat-island effect, as well as global environmental issues, such as acid rain, global warming, deforestation of tropical rainforests, ozone depletion, and uneven distribution of chronic famine. Just as if responding to these issues, Expo '90 integrated a Japanese and oriental concept of “harmonious coexistence” into a horticultural exposition traditionally held in Europe. Consequently, Expo '90 differentiated itself from conventional international exhibitions, which had been held since the mid-19th century to enhance the national prestige of a country by displaying the most prominent inventions and achievements of the times. The theme of Expo '90, “Harmonious Coexistence of Nature and Mankind,” remains important even now.

As an aside, the Japanese term “共生” (*Kyosei*), which literally means symbiosis (or harmonious coexistence), was originally a biological term that encompasses mutualism, commensalism, and parasitism. According to the proposal by Sakyō Komatsu, a writer and a general producer*^{Note 2} of Expo '90, “共生” (*Kyosei*) was adopted as the keyword of the theme, so that the exposition was called the “festival of life” in praise of life on earth. In 1989, a year before Expo '90, the Berlin Wall fell, accelerating the move to establishing a new social order. It can be said that one of the great outcomes was that Expo '90 advocated the creation of a symbiotic society where all people live together in harmony, in place of a conventional society that had caused only catastrophic consequences such as war and division,

by highlighting flowers and greenery as well as harmonious coexistence as a common language of the world.

At the Expo '90 venue, there were facilities called “Hill of the Sun” (Tsurumi Shinzan), “Sea of Life” (large pond), “Green Gate” (central gate), “Kaori-ga-Tsuji” (rotary plaza) and “Suzuyaka-ga-Tsuji” (facility plaza), etc., all of which were so named to embody the principle of the exposition. Also, “Synchronicity” and other artistic performances were held at the venue. Moreover, Expo '90 was the first exposition to achieve a 50% green coverage rate for the pavilion site. The Republic of Senegal displayed exhibits on the theme of the “desert” instead of flowers and greenery.

Later, the Japanese term “共生” (*Kyosei*) became a social term that was used to describe measures taken by Japanese ministries, agencies, and local governments as well as political manifestos, and was found in the names of new departments at universities/colleges, real estate advertising, and the like. Now, it is used as a term that connects not only various countries and ethnic groups, but also diverse identities and cultures, regardless of differences in language, gender, generation, etc. In addition, the number of hits on the internet for “共生” was 25.9million in 2009 (searched by the author). The number has increased to 51.5million as of the spring of 2023.

One of the origins of “共生” *kyosei* is the Buddhist concept of “ともいき” *tomoiki*, which means attaching importance to the continuous interconnections of all life forms that exist today. The concept is part of the background behind the Japanese view of life and death. In other words, “共生” *kyosei* can be narrowly interpreted as the relationship between organisms in terms of biology. However, in a wide sense, “共生” *kyosei* represents the view of nature inherent in Japanese people—humans are also part of nature—and their gratitude for the blessings of nature, as exemplified by the Japanese terms “*itadakimasu*” (which is used to express appreciation for food) and “*mottainai*” (lit. What a waste!). So far, we have addressed global environmental issues from the perspective of “shallow ecology.” This is a human-centered perspective that uses “sustainable” and “earth-friendly” as keywords. Expo '90 focused on the Japanese view of nature using the term “共生” *kyosei*, which does not mean simply living together, but the interrelationships and interactions between life forms. Japanese people have been awed by and respected many gods living in abundant nature while enjoying the beauty of the four seasons, embracing the traditional idea that humans live in nature and nature lets them live there. Through their lifestyles, Japanese people have nurtured the idea that there is no conflict between nature and humans, nature and city, nature and industry, etc.

I know it's probably superfluous to say this, but I have heard that before the theme "Harmonious Coexistence of Nature and Mankind" was finalized, in-depth discussions took place to determine which should come first, nature or mankind, and to make detailed word choices.

5. Inheriting and Developing the Concept of *Kyosei*

After Expo '90, Aichi Prefecture hosted the 2005 World Exposition, Aichi, Japan (Expo 2005 Aichi, Japan), whose theme was "Nature's Wisdom." Mr. Shinya Izumi, who was one of the general producers of Expo '90, served as the general producer of Expo 2005 Aichi. He decided on this theme after looking for an analog of *kyosei*, or harmonious coexistence.

Among initiatives to maintain and further develop the Expo '90 principle, worthy of special note is the International Cosmos Prize, inaugurated by the Expo '90 Foundation in 1993. His Imperial Majesty (then His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince), who was the Governor Emeritus of Expo '90, has been continuously engaged in this project of international commendation. Each year, an individual or a team is selected from around the world as the prizewinner, to receive a monetary prize of 40 million yen. The prize is awarded for research work that is recognized as contributing to a significant understanding of life phenomena on the earth through an inclusive and integrated methodology. The body of work should be characterized by the perspective of a holistic approach towards living organisms, ecosystems, and the complex and synthetic social issues that are entangled like a mesh. These selection criteria are consistent with the concept of "deep ecology," which contrasts with the shallow ecology mentioned earlier. Deep ecology was proposed in the 1970s by Arne Næss, a Norwegian philosopher. The concept is that humankind can never resolve any environmental issues without realizing anew the worldview that human lives are supported by nature. The characteristics of deep ecology include: (1) Viewing humans and other life forms through a holistic approach and by focusing on their interconnectedness, without seeing them as separate, individual beings; (2) Increasing the potential possibility of survival, opportunities for the emergence of new life, and the richness of lifestyles, as the principles of diversity and coexistence; and (3) Regarding highly the enhanced complexity found in life forms and nature and realizing it in the social system. These characteristics bear close similarities to those of the International Cosmos Prize.

Even now, wars and conflicts continue in various parts of the world. There has been a proposal to codify a new geological epoch called "the Anthropocene" to reflect how profoundly humans have impacted the planet. In a time like this, I feel again the significance of the passage "Flowers are home to green fairies, and greenery conveys a message from the earth."^{*Note 3} Currently, preparations are under way to organize the International Horticultural Expo 2027, Yokohama, Japan, which is an A1 world horticultural exhibition to be held in Japan for the first time in 37 years. I sincerely hope that Expo 2027 Yokohama

will serve as a venue for reflecting the times and prove to be an epoch-making event whose significance will be widespread across the world. I also expect that Expo 2027 Yokohama will help, in synergy with the trend set by EXPO '90, to create a new era characterized by spiritual richness.

Note 1: A1 category events are international horticultural exhibitions held for three weeks to six months.

Note 2: Expo '90 had three general producers: Mr. Sakyo Komatsu, Mr. Shiya Izumi, and Mr. Arata Isozaki.

Note 3: The passage was coined by Yoichiro Oshio, who was Secretary-General of the Japan Association for the International Garden and Greenery Exposition, Osaka, Japan, 1990, and the first President of the Expo '90 Foundation