

Sustainable Society, Sustainable Mind

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Symbiosis is a key mechanism of evolution, as was revealed by the American biologist Lynn Margulis in her theory of symbiotic evolution. Evolution, however, also depends on the process of "individualization". The history of life actually seems to have been shaped by a dynamic interplay of these two processes.

As an example, consider the "paradox of symbiosis". Throughout the history of evolution, there have been numerous instances of individual organisms forming symbiotic relationships, which then create new divisions and rifts. Religious history abounds with examples of this pattern.

Looking through human history from a similar perspective, one will recognize another pattern, namely, that of expansion/growth and steady-state phases occurring one after the other. The expansion/growth phase is marked by rising material production, accompanied by expanded use of natural resources for energy. This trend inevitably leads to an increased awareness of the finiteness of resources and the vulnerability of the natural environment, thus triggering a search for sustainable futures and ushering in a steady-state phase.

An intriguing feature of this type of transition is that it tends to spark interest in the concept of symbiosis, and catalyze a transformation of the *kokoro* (human mind or consciousness). In fact, this phase typically gives rise to entirely new concepts, such as the "universal human being" not associated with any ethnicity or tribe, as well as new internal and spiritual values. Humanity seems to be currently going through one such period, and be in need of concepts or thoughts that can foster its capacity for symbiosis — especially in relation to fellow humans, nature, and nothingness, the three levels on which contemporary society seems to be faced with major challenges.

I believe that working to build a "sustainable welfare society" as part of efforts to solve these problems will help lay the foundation for a symbiotic existence and "sustainable mind", and that a local and symbiotic approach to addressing global issues, such as establishing regional economic cycles, will be key to these efforts.