

# Toward the ‘Second Axial Age’ — The Spiritual Revolution of Humanity and Self- transformation

Hiroshi Ichikawa

Translated by Shin’ichi Hashimoto

FIRST of all, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the other three participants for sharing their viewpoints on the theme of the symposium: the continued relevance of the Daisaku Ikeda and Arnold Toynbee dialogue in 1972. We have numerous points in common and their valuable insights complement my own views in this article. As it is stated in the title, I would like to propose that from a historical perspective, we are moving toward the ‘Second Axial Age’. I arrived at this conclusion as I was searching for an answer to the question, “What did Professor Arnold Toynbee entrust to Soka Gakkai International (SGI) President Daisaku Ikeda during the course of the Toynbee-Ikeda dialogue?” For 50 years following that dialogue, Ikeda has continued to have dialogues with numerous world-renowned intellectuals. For the sake of argument, let us regard Ikeda as ‘the entrusted’. I reasoned that by studying the contents of Ikeda’s dialogues, I could perhaps arrive at the answer to this question. Dozens of his dialogues, with people who represent a wide range of cultures, have been published. I believe that all these dialogues resonate the essence of the Toynbee-Ikeda dialogue. While this study is an undertaking that will continue to the end of my life, for the present, my working answer to the question ties into my title. In addition, I have been made keenly aware that this path of inquiry forces us to think about the larger question of “How should we view the present in the light of human history?”

## **1. Jaspers’s True Intent was Future-oriented**

The term ‘Second Axial Age’ was coined by Karl Jaspers, and it captures his hope for the future. Because Jaspers’s wife was of Jewish origin, the Nazis strongly pressured him to divorce her. However, he adamantly refused, which resulted in his being earmarked for a concentration camp. Fortunately, however, he was not arrested because the war was lost before this happened. Until that time, Jaspers had

been lecturing at university on psychiatry and philosophy; but after the war, he re-examined human history, and began espousing the view that humanity had entered the second axial age that held immense hope for the future, with 'second' meaning 'from now on'. This new idea, however, was wrought with serious complexities, such as the existence of nuclear weapons, a prime example of the hegemony of materialistic civilizations, threatening the extinguishing of all life on the planet, but whose roots of evil ironically reside in the hearts of mankind. In other words, humanity's self-centeredness and fundamental ignorance are the true underlying cause of humanity's crises, and unless this negativity is overcome, there can be no second axial age. Contemplating this new concept simultaneously heightens awareness of fundamental difficulties as well as limitless hope.

It was actually Ikeda who first spotlighted the historical viewpoint of the second axial age within his numerous dialogues. During his conversation with Ricardo Díez-Hochleitner of the Club of Rome, Jaspers's 'axial age' is brought up.<sup>1</sup> In this dialogue, which was published in 2005, over 30 years after the Toynbee-Ikeda dialogue, Ikeda speaks about the second axial age and the hope that this idea entails. What is significant is that in doing so, he spells out the current position of humanity within a historical context.

We, as practitioners of Nichiren Buddhism, know that contemporary society has entered the era called the Latter Day of the Law. Right after World War II, second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda declared that mankind had now entered an era of 'global nationalism' (also referred to as 'global citizenship'). He also clearly condemned nuclear weapons as a force of evil. Further, the age of the 'Westward Transmission of Buddhism', where Buddhist ideas spread to all corners of the world, was nearing. I cannot help but feel that the 'task' of defining the position of humanity in a historical context falls upon Ikeda. Through Ikeda's explanation in the dialogue, Díez-Hochleitner together with other leading intellectuals from Europe and America were able to come to a common awareness about humanity's position in history and this, in turn, affirmed the imperative that Nichiren Buddhism should be shared globally.

Jaspers's axial age is a famous concept and is often used in the context of the first axial age that defines humanity's place in the past. Humanity's spiritual revolution during the first axial age occurred across the world over several centuries before the start of the Common Era (CE). It was a revolution led by thinkers in ancient China, Upanishadic, Buddhist, Jain and Zoroastrian sages, the biblical prophets, and the

Greek philosophers. In coining the concept of an axial age, Jaspers may have actually been focusing on the second axial age. The influence of Western civilization on societies throughout the world is today predominant, resulting in a state of affairs void of spiritualism and religion. Jaspers warned that unless humanity transcends its preoccupation with materialism, it will not be able to realize the second axial age. In the dialogue with Díez-Hochleitner, Ikeda points out that Jaspers was very future-oriented and imagined the coming of the second axial age after the first axial age ended. For those living in a post-Nazi world and for those who were left in the aftermath of a defeated militaristic Japan, his vision embraced the hopes of humanity. Toda's idea of global nationalism was congruent with this vision of the Western European philosopher and helped define humanity's place in history. Humanity must now move forward toward the second axial age. The biggest hindrance in doing so will be overcoming inexhaustible human greed. Success in moving toward this goal will hinge upon the ability of humans to transform themselves in order to grasp the highest forms of wisdom.

Ikeda comments that Jaspers viewed human history as progressing in two great bursts, or in "two deep breaths".

The first [breath] started with what he called a Promethean Age of technical mastery and flowed through the high point of ancient culture, breathing life into the axial age and subsequent times.... The second breath, a New Promethean Age that will begin with the techno-scientific age, will undoubtedly bring about the reconstruction of the true human ideal, the necessity of which humanity may be reluctant to admit, but will occur with organization and planning comparable to that of the highest culture of ancient times to propel us toward the second axial age.<sup>2</sup>

In the sense of "a New Promethean Age that will begin with the techno-scientific age", the second axial age may already be upon us. At the same time, Ikeda also states that we are heading for the second axial age where "the reconstruction of the true human ideal" will take place. This is akin to Jaspers's call for us to take on this challenge now. Ikeda also emphasizes that this task "is urgently required".<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, it is possible to discern a commonality between the teachings of Nichiren and Jaspers's use of breath as a metaphor for the axial age. Nichiren stated, "The voice does the Buddha's work," and his followers breathe, chant an invocation, and use their voices to carry out actions as

Buddhists and true human beings. This teaching seems to be etched into the hearts of his followers.

## 2. Resonating with Toynbee's View of Civilization

There is another important reason why Ikeda focuses on Jaspers's second axial age in his dialogue with Díez-Hochleitner. Toynbee's study of history is civilizational in nature. Taking the rise and fall of a civilization as one unit, he examines the entirety of human history and seeks the direction which leads humanity to happiness. Past civilizations appear in a specific region, adopt the spiritual culture specific to that region, face the challenges that present themselves, and finally fall and disappear. Nearly all of the world's civilizations of the past are rooted in religions of Jaspers's first axial age. Then, from Toynbee's civilizational perspective, what marks the end of the civilizations of the first axial age? It would unquestionably be the rise of the materialistic civilization and the modern techno-scientific civilization that does away with religions. Let us compare this with Ikeda's view of religious civilization.

If the increasing stalemate in global issues is related to the inability of people to overcome various evils that lie within their own lives, then it is precisely the absence of religion in modern Western civilization that causes it. Critical of this lack in the modern West, Ikeda states:

Shin'ichi suggested that while religion had always been the wellspring of civilization and the source of its creativity, modern Western civilization seemed to have arisen from a separation from religion, becoming, in a sense, nonreligious. However, he said, if we broadened our definition of religion, we could see that modern scientific technology possessed its own kind of religion. And he added that aspirations for material prosperity and the faith in scientific advance could be regarded as the religion of the modern world.<sup>4</sup>

Ikeda writes this in volume 16 of his novel *The New Human Revolution*, but I believe Toynbee fully concurs.

Toynbee is a known critic of Christianity, but in my view, his criticism is actually levelled at the spiritual void that was created in Europe when Christianity declined. Toynbee may have been unhappy with the new broadly defined 'religions' that filled this spiritual void. In place of Christianity, devotion to a faith in progress or nationalism or Communism grew. These new religions were all incomplete, placing human greed as the object of worship at their center. Greed is what

religion is meant to battle. Moreover, as greed is an innate part of life, these new religions prove extremely problematic. Greed leads to wars and inequality in society. It arises always in pursuit of self-gratification and constantly lurks in the background of man-made environments created with science and technology. Perhaps Toynbee was seeking a new religion to combat these incomplete ones.

While Toynbee eloquently paints a picture of modern civilization as an intellectual, Ikeda, as a religious activist wanting to demonstrate his strong resolve, proposes a way to overcome this impasse with the coming of the second axial age. Toynbee, of course, also has a vision for the future. In *A Study of History*, he talks about the Jewish civilization as being a slightly different type of civilization from others. Although he does not discuss it in his dialogue with Ikeda, according to Toynbee, “deprived of its state and its home and . . . reduced to living as a minority — and a scattered one — abroad, the uprooted [Jewish] community has found new means of maintaining its cohesion and continuity under these adverse conditions. It maintains them now through the voluntary observance of an exacting religious ritual and law”.<sup>5</sup> This civilizational format, he foresees, will be ‘the wave of the future’. He envisions a number of different worldwide networks of believers — unfettered by geographical boundaries — cooperating with each other to support the world civilization of tomorrow. There would be no egotistical notions of nationalism to stand in the way of this impulse. Does this not coincide with Jaspers’s vision of a spiritual civilization of the second axial age? Looking across the landscape of our current world, a religious group that fits this description, even more so than Jewish society, has appeared in the East, where spirituality is still held in high regard.

This is the Soka Gakkai and the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), which from 1960 until the present, has continued to expand its global network. Its members aim to spiritually awaken people in all societies to realize the Buddha nature inherent within each individual, and activate the Bodhisattva of the Earth within their own selves to show care for each person through one-to-one dialogue. I believe that Toynbee looked favorably upon the activities of the Soka Gakkai and the SGI, aimed at such an awakening.

### **3. Are Freedom, Human Rights, and Democracy the Prescription?**

If we accept that we are now living at a point in history where humanity is heading toward the second axial age and that Buddhism should be shared more widely with the world’s people, the next question to ponder

will be, “What do we specifically need to do in order to actually usher in the second axial age?” In the latter half of this article, I would like to address this topic as it is pertinent to all of us today.

First, let us examine the current state of civilization. Diez-Hochleitner warns that serious issues regarding the misuse of technology and environmental resources must be resolved. If not, we may perish within the next thousand years.<sup>6</sup> What, then, is the specific prescription for this ailment? The most common answer is the three-value set of ‘freedom, human rights, and democracy’.

These three ideals are often brought up and repeatedly advocated to make up for the negative aspects of the modern materialistic civilization, and these are the same ideals of civilization that were promoted to a global audience by the modern West. However, closer examination reveals the ideals of ‘freedom, human rights, and democracy’ are rooted in the secularism of the modern West’s political system. Following France’s bloody revolution, these three ideals have continued to serve as the foundation of a government ruled by the people. They have no religious underpinning. Therefore, they are simply the principles behind a secular political system and do not address the spiritual needs of humanity. These ideals have their roots in ancient Greece where the idea of the *polis* instilled in its citizens virtue, wisdom, justice, courage, and self-control. For example, Plato in *The Republic* espouses that citizens of the *polis* should have these as basic human characteristics.

Alas, our current society cannot return to the society of the ancient *polis*. Our historical evolution is completely different, and the ideals of a small city-state will not suffice for our current global reality. Even in the days of ancient Greece, the *polis* only thrived for a short time as there were many challenges that this model posed. As one Jewish rabbi pointed out, “An empty freedom is just another form of slavery.” It refers to the biblical story of the exodus from Egypt, where ancient Israelites who were finally freed from slavery, wanted to return to Egypt at the first signs of life-threatening danger. Judaism uses this example to demonstrate that even if freedom is bestowed, unless that freedom is bounded by principles, people will be at a loss when faced with choices. It strictly warns us that in the absence of principles, freedom makes us slaves to desire. The concept of freedom changes in value with respect to the spiritual culture in which a society is rooted.

Therefore, in non-Western contexts where these three principles are simply parroted, success has not been attained. Democracy as promoted by the West has not worked as hoped in East Asia, West Asia, and Africa. The present war in the Ukraine could be regarded as

a touchstone for Eastern Europe. The developments in this region are being carefully watched as it is a test case of whether countries under the planned economy of a socialist regime (the former Soviet Union) which collapsed in 1991, can successfully convert to the political culture of democracy and capitalism.

What is the reason for the failure of Western European ideals in other regions? Skepticism of the West's secular centrism by people outside of European culture is the most likely cause. Other cultures see the faults of a civilization void of spirituality, and the resulting greed and self-glorification that accompanies it. This causes a rejection of its origin — the secular and scientific civilization of the West. Another resentment arises from the hegemonism where the strong force the weak to accept their demands. To be fair, any society that is rooted in the political culture of ancient Greece and Rome may come to successfully adopt the West's three ideals, but those that have a religious cultural background outside ancient Greco-Roman civilization, may find it difficult to see that model as the highest standard.

There needs to be some sort of reflection on what can be done when the three ideals do not work as hoped. The freedom aimed for by the West's secular culture is basically an economic freedom which affirms a lifestyle of unlimited human desire. It is based in the principle that the individuals who make up the democracy all have the right to desire as much as they please.

The problem, however, with this model is that it does not provide for a mechanism through which individuals can squarely face their innate human darkness and other vices. In fact, the spiritual civilizations of the axial age allowed us to do so. These civilizations not only had a means with which to observe human weaknesses, but they also endeavored to heighten individual and collective morality. It is the teachings of the enlightened that led society on the correct path and kept it going in the proper direction. With its decline, the materialistic civilization of the West took over the world. The reason we cannot trust the prescribed three ideals is because they do not allow for direct examination of our human nature. The task set before all of humankind is to nurture a spiritual culture that restores the noble spirit of humanity by providing a means to deal with an innate negativity.

This predicament has been clearly outlined in the Toynbee-Ikeda dialogue. Perhaps, even before their dialogue, the two felt a strong need for reviewing humanity's view of the human being. In that sense, the theme of their dialogue need not have been limited to 'humanity in the 21st century', but could have been something more along the

lines of 'humanity in the second axial age'. In other words, '21st century' just happened to be a chronological reference close at hand, but from a human history perspective, the 'second axial age' seems more appropriate. The long era of multi-civilization and world religions that began from the time of ancient China, India, the Middle East, Israel, and Greece has come to a close. Currently, in all parts of the world, the civilization of materialism and science enjoys great primacy. Looked at in another way, we live at an opportune time to welcome the second axial age. We are well aware of the problems with the civilization of materialism and science and the danger of not being able to overcome them. Within this context, Ikeda has striven for 50 years to hold dialogues with the leaders of the world and the SGI has expanded to 192 countries and regions.

With this background, the next section will invite readers to explore this problem from a personal perspective. Think of it as a personal task. More specifically, what kind of qualities do we need to develop in order to revive a spiritual culture? I would like to contemplate this and draw some conclusions, so that we may formulate an effective response to this challenge.

#### **4. Three Initiatives to be Undertaken**

The next step, then, is to think about what action to take. The answer will vary according to each person, but ultimately, it lies in each of us actively pursuing our individual missions in life. I endeavored to find a resource that I could share with everyone about this point, and fortunately, I happened upon an interesting article by Hidekazu Kawai in the *Seikyo* newspaper about his thoughts regarding the Toynbee-Ikeda dialogue. In the article, Kawai borrows the phrase 'human decency' from George Orwell and characterizes this dialogue as one that seeks to find the essence of humanness.<sup>7</sup> I would also like to use this phrase as a key term.

The reason why I focus on this term is because 'decency' is an important construct among philosophers and thinkers. The term 'decent society' has been defined by Isaiah Berlin and his disciple Avishai Margalit to mean 'a society that is humane'. The significance of this goal is that it is not merely a lofty ideal, but a reasonably attainable goal. Kawai's point of view seems to be a testament to the empiricist tradition of British political thought. By using the humane society model of civilization as the basis for the second axial age, we can extrapolate the course of action we should take to realize this. In other words, we must



first identify the components that make up a 'decent society'.

Here, for the sake of argument, I list three components. They are all interconnected, so they could be regarded as a trinity of components. The first is religion, the second is education, and the third is social institutions.

### **Religion**

The first component of a 'decent society' is religion. This is an expectation that in such a society, religious activities are carried out vigorously. There is freedom of religion and the society guarantees that religious activities can be carried out proactively. There will be many who feel disgust at the mention of the word 'religion', but there are also those who think religion is the most important aspect of our lives. Religion is viewed differently in various societies around the world, and some may even feel disconcerted that I evaluate religion so highly. However, there is a reason that I explicitly include religion as an essential component.

Previously, I referred to the 'Jewish model' in Toynbee's view of civilizational history. There is much to be learned from Toynbee's opinion that this model is the "wave of the future". Imagine a vast network of small communities in all areas of the world aligned by a common religion and unshackled by ties to the land. Although each community may be small, the different communities distributed throughout the world would be large in number and coexisting with other communities with mutual respect. When such is the state of the world, a majority of the world's nations will be multi-religious and multi-ethnic and in direct contrast to ideas of intolerance. It is my hope that the religions that supported the spiritual civilization of the first axial age, although in a slightly different format, will again play an important role among the peoples of the world. The activities and ideals of the SGI serve as a present-day example of this kind of global network.

As stated earlier, in the 50 years after the Toynbee-Ikeda dialogue, the SGI has spread to 192 countries and regions throughout the world. Considering the sheer number of people who have been given encouragement to live life more proactively, it is clear that Toynbee's ideal has been realized, or perhaps it has gone beyond what he himself had imagined, and the hopes of a better tomorrow in the second axial age become that much higher.

This does not mean, however, that any religion should be allowed to flourish. Religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam underwent struggles to make a clear distinction between truth and

falsehood. This is both a natural and necessary process within a religion. In order for this process to continuously occur, it becomes important for society to educate its members to be able to separate the true religions from the false. It is also important that society protects human rights and guarantees basic freedoms so that healthy dialogues and mutual understanding can be established. This leads into the next two components.

### **Education in Religious Thought**

The second component of a 'decent society' is education. The *Seikyo* newspaper is very informative on issues such as the importance of human rights, SDGs, and abolition of nuclear weapons, but these are universal for all those living in the modern era and do not need to be reviewed again here. However, two topics that do need revisiting are the teaching of history that develops a sense of civilizational past and education in religious thought. For example, I would like to propose that not only should religious organizations provide consistent education in human development from primary to higher education levels based on their own educational philosophy, but the state should also incorporate religious education into the general education curriculum. It is vital for researchers, instructors, and people in general alike to understand the importance of religious philosophy that attempts to discern the essence of evil within human beings, and these lessons should be learned from actual history.

The first pillar of education should be the development of a civilizational view of the past in the teaching of history. Put simply, this is education that places modern society in the correct context within the history of humanity. In Japan, there are many that feel a loathing toward religion but that may be due to the actions of the government during World War II in justifying militarism by way of state Shinto, which supported the invasion of the mainland. As a result, Japanese society collapsed. The people of post-war Japan greatly regretted this, and from this arose a revulsion and indifference toward religion. They learned the danger of blind faith.

There is also another reason behind this suspicion of religion in Japan. Toward the end of the Edo period, Japan was made aware of the coercive colonial policies of Western powers. Japanese intellectuals of the time who tried to understand the true nature of the powers of the West contemplated whether or not the tendency for foreign aggression and expansion arose as a natural outcome of excellent domestic politics.<sup>8</sup> Both Takamori Saigo and Sun Yat-sen were convinced that the barbarism

of the modern West was due to its hegemonic position, and that the morality of the East was the higher road of politics. Unfortunately, Japan later bought into hegemony and based its government on a survival-of-the-fittest mentality. In this light, the contemporary Japanese aversion to religion can be traced to the influence of the materialistic scientific civilization of the modern West and the adoption of this worldview. From the perspective of human history, the history of modern Japan fits perfectly with the description of the end of the first axial age. There is now a need to make this awareness of history our common understanding.

By adopting this historical view, it becomes easier for us to understand how Nichiren Buddhism came as a pragmatic answer to the question, "What kind of faith is required in the Latter Day of the Law?" It becomes apparent that the second pillar of education is inevitably the education in religious thought. The goal, then, becomes to study the religious thought of the first axial age and how human beings are viewed by the world religions that supported spiritual civilization. This gives us insight into our goal for the second axial age. Therein lies the essence of religious thought education and this keeps us on the proper path to the second axial age.

So how should this be implemented? Education of religious thought does not mean teaching the doctrines of a particular religion but begins from a more fundamental approach, that is, to contemplate what it means to be human ranging from issues such as filial piety to daily occurring bullying to larger, more serious issues faced by humanity as a whole. For example, if issues such as abolition of nuclear weapons, organ transplants, and global warming are examined, education of religious thought would help get at the core of these issues, and address specific questions such as what leads individuals to trust or distrust each other, whether or not organs should be donated to help when one or one's family faces a life-threatening situation, and how should workers take responsibility for their daily activities inside a company which contributes to global warming. How should one approach the answers to such questions? In order for that answer to have universal significance, they must be justifiable and logically consistent with universal human values from the perspective of the sanctity of life, which naturally leads us to philosophy and religion. From there, we can begin to gain deeper understanding about hatred and empathy, sickness and health, healing and peace of mind, mental stability, justice, and charity. Although the issues may be universal, we can also examine whether or not a consensus can be reached on these issues with people from different

cultural backgrounds through discussion. At that time, we can compare the ideas of people from different religious backgrounds, for example, Buddhism and Islam, Christianity and Confucianism, and theme by theme, discuss similarities and differences, to eventually deepening the discussion toward a universal way of thinking about human beings. In this way, education of religious thought is nothing other than holistic value education. This can, of course, be done sitting at a desk or in the classroom, but the most motivating and challenging way to accomplish this is to actually have dialogues with people from different cultures.

Taking the above in consideration, the Toynbee-Ikeda dialogue provides an ideal example of this type of dialogue. Using this as a resource and debating its points helps us fine tune our thinking toward universality. This dialogue serves as a starting point for what has been defined as education of religious thought. In fact, this volume has already been translated into many different languages and has been adopted as a university textbook. Ikeda's subsequent dialogues also contain many hints that lead us on the path forward to the second axial age. Another interesting perspective to consider when thinking about the road to the second axial age, is the extent to which we can expect the restoration of the spirituality of the first axial age. What about the regions where the spiritual cultures are different from those of Europe, such as China, Indonesia, India, Iran, and Turkey? What about Africa and South America? What has become of the spirituality of the former axial age in these places? What new religious awakenings have actually taken place, and can we expect a new spiritual revolution toward a second axial age here?

Questions such as these are posed in Ikeda's dialogues with intellectuals from South America, China, Korea, India, and other countries and regions. The dialogues conducted by Ikeda serve as insightful examples of furthering mutual understanding through exchanges of views. For example, it may be useful to know how people in the Islamic world think about this issue, and for this, Ikeda's dialogue with Majid Tehranian, who studied under Professor Paul Tillich at Harvard University, is highly interesting. The dialogue took place 30 years ago in 1992. Ikeda intriguingly described the dialogue as one between two religious people, a Buddhist and a Muslim. In Chapter 6, 'Renaissance of the Religious Spirit: Creating Value', he begins by asking, "There is a sense that the religious spirit has been steadily waning in our time, especially among young people. Is this also true in Islamic countries?"<sup>9</sup> To which Tehranian replies, "Buddhism and Islam

certainly offer their prescriptions.”<sup>10</sup> He also fondly recalls, “I learned from him [Professor Tillich] about the religious spirit that is common to all great spiritual traditions.”<sup>11</sup> After first talking in universal terms about religion, he goes on to explain about Islam. Thus, we can see that although the approach everywhere is different, the attempt to perceive the innate darkness within human beings is common throughout the world. Therefore, there is a need to extract these perceptions and compare them.

### **Social Institutions that Support Humanity**

The third component of a ‘decent society’ is the institutional aspect. There would be no problem if the three-value set of democracy first discussed could be actualized. However, the standards of ‘character and decency’ are more realistically attainable, and to realize them, a discussion about social institutions needs to take place. Isaiah Berlin and Avishai Margalit offer a definition of a ‘decent society’ from the fields of social philosophy and political philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

The principle of ‘decency’ comes as a response to the principle of ‘justice’. ‘Justice’ is a lofty ideal, which in most cases, may be very distant from the actual state of affairs. Aiming for a decent society, on the other hand, seems more realistic and attainable. To begin with, we must ask, “What does a decent society look like?” At a very basic level, it could be said that a society devoid of negative features such as cruelty and humiliation may be a crucial starting point. A decent society aims to respect diversity and people in a decent society make compromises to avoid misery. The Islamic world, which strives to achieve coexistence of various religions encompassed under the ‘People of the Book’, may be inclined to agree to such an approach.

A decent society also strives for the balance of two freedoms. One is a passive freedom to protect individual liberty from the oppression of state power and the other is an active freedom to pursue self-fulfillment through organizations to which one has a sense of belonging. For these two freedoms to be fully protected, citizens must constantly be vigilant of politics. If efforts to improve the dignity of society are not neglected, the second axial age will become feasible for humanity.

### **Conclusion**

This article, based on the resonance between Jaspers’s concept of an axial age and Ikeda’s thought, proposes religious activities, education, and the establishment of a decent society as the three ways to realize the

second axial age in human history. Humanity, having built an advanced spiritual civilization, is now nurturing a non-religious scientific and technological civilization that originated in the modern West. This has brought much prosperity, but it has also brought a crisis of human survival. A spiritual revolution through the restoration of religion will help heal the sickness of humankind — this is the expectation and hope held in common by Jaspers, Toynbee, Ikeda, Díez-Hochleitner, and Tehranian. Our generation has the responsibility and mission to make this hope a reality.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Ricardo Díez-Hochleitner and Daisaku Ikeda, *A Dialogue between East and West: Looking to a Human Revolution* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008). During the process of editing this article, Mr Eiichi Tsutaki, Commissioned Researcher at the IOP, had kindly pointed out that President Ikeda had already mentioned the 'Second Axial Age' in a dialogue with Chinghiz Aitmatov in 1991. This was certainly an important proposal that President Ikeda made about the prospects beyond the collapse of the Soviet Union. Chinghiz Aitmatov and Daisaku Ikeda, *Ode to the Grand Spirit: A Dialogue* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009). I would like to thank Mr Tsutaki for the suggestion.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>4</sup> Daisaku Ikeda, *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 16 (Santa Monica: World Tribune Press, 2008), 158.
- <sup>5</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History (The one-volume edition Illustrated)* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 65.
- <sup>6</sup> Díez-Hochleitner and Ikeda, *A Dialogue between East and West*.
- <sup>7</sup> Hidekazu Kawai 河合秀和, 'Taidanshu wa "jinrui no hyakkazensho": Kiki o norikoeru tamenno shiza ga 「対談集は『人類の百科全書』危機を越えるための視座が」' (The Dialogue as an 'Encyclopedia of Humanity': Perspectives Toward Overcoming Times of Crisis), *Seikyo Shimbun*, May 21, 2022, page 3.
- <sup>8</sup> Words by Kazan Watanabe 渡辺崋山 in, Saburo Ichii 市井三郎, 'Meiji ishin' no tetsugaku 「明治維新」の哲学 (Philosophy of the Meiji Restoration) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1967), 75. Translated from Japanese.
- <sup>9</sup> Majid Tehranian and Daisaku Ikeda, *Reflections on the Global Civilization: A Dialogue* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), 82.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.
- <sup>12</sup> For details, see, Hiroshi Ichikawa 市川裕, 'Nijuisseiki no shinko to risei — Yudaya jin ni miru shukyosha no shimei 二十一世紀の信仰と理性——ユダヤ人にもみる宗教者の使命' (Faith and Reason in the 21st century: Jews and their Religious Mission), *Toyo Gakujutsu Kenkyu* 東洋学術研究 60, no. 1 (2021): 209–35.

**About the Author and Translator**

**Hiroshi Ichikawa** is Professor Emeritus at the University of Tokyo and has served as a Japanese pioneer in Jewish studies research. Although he specializes in the Jewish religion, especially the Torah and the Talmud of Judaism, he also conducts comparative studies on religions. His recent books include *The Spirit of Law in Rabbinic Judaism* (ユダヤ教の精神構造, 2020) and *Jews and Judaism* (ユダヤ人とユダヤ教, 2019).

**Shin'ichi Hashimoto** has been translating journal articles and interpreting at the functions of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy since 2002. He obtained his MA TESOL from Soka University of America in 1997. Currently he is Associate Professor at Tokai University. His areas of academic interest are teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL).