

BEYOND NATIONALISM IN THIS 'ERA OF DISASTER': Setting a New Relationship for a Sustainable Future

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Abstract: In this paper, the authors analyse the post-apocalyptic narrative as an environmental crisis discourse and suggest a vision of SDGs from the standpoint of ecological criticism. Kōbō Abe's post-apocalyptic narrative in *The Ark Sakura* presents ethical challenges to the readers. Furthermore, the myriad of formal elements (surreal space composition, fictional apocalyptic hypothesis, and biblical motifs) and themes (threat of nuclear war, human greed, loss of humanity, and littering problem) are converged on ecological themes to convey warning messages to humanity. This literary imagination of apocalypse and disaster plays a role as a tool for self-reflection and warning against the absurdities of reality, while at the same time presents alternatives and solutions for a new vision for the future. In particular, it demands critical reflection on collectivism, that is, nationalism founded on human selfishness. This is a strategic worldview that deals with the disasters and the destruction of people and planet, as well as a lesson to be taught by ecological writing for a new future society.

Keywords: Apocalypticism, Ecologism, Disaster Narrative, Ethic, Kōbō Abe, Post-Apocalyptic Narrative, *The Ark Sakura*.

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1. Introduction: Apocalyptic Rhetoric as a Crisis Discourse

The environment is a concept and a way of using language rather than an objective entity, namely a cultural value formed by rhetorical behaviour (Herndl and Brown 3). Moreover, the rhetorical behaviour is becoming more obvious with intensification of environmental controversies such as climate changes and the spread of infectious diseases that are sharply confronted by the public, politics, and scientists (Cox 2). A representative example is apocalyptic rhetoric.¹

The apocalyptic rhetoric of environmental discourse has attracted the attention on ecological criticism. Lawrence Buell considers apocalypticism, which includes criticism from eco-centric perspective on anthropocentrism, as the most powerful metaphor in the modern ecological environment. The imagination from an apocalyptic perspective is an assertion that it works to predict the end of the real world and prevent it from actually happening (Buell 285). Especially, the 'negative' rhetoric of apocalypticism is a preferred method in ecological literature. The apocalypticism, which appeared in Germany between the late 1960s to the early 70s, was in tandem with the 'new social movements' such as peace, women's movement, and ecological movement that were the demands of the era (Hyun-Jeong Park 226). At this time, the newly emerged ecologism and destructionism, which borrowed the ideology of coexistence, were behaviouristic ideologies that criticized the existing hierarchical order.

However, some people are sceptical about the impact of apocalyptic rhetoric on environmental awareness (Garrard 107). This shows that there are various perspectives on the topic whether the apocalyptic narrative can help in creating the public's environmental awareness. This notion will be reiterated in the conclusion; however, both in favour of and against the environmental discourse consisting of the apocalyptic narratives attach importance to the practical legitimacy of the public in terms

¹Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (2006), Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (2003), Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (1962), Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (1968), Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (1989), *Earth* (2010), Al Gore, *The Inconvenient Truth* (2006) are representative books that have contributed to environmental discourse.

of environment ethics. If so, from what aspect should we consider the apocalyptic rhetoric? It is in this regard that we discuss the effectiveness of 'strategic' ecologism using Kōbō Abe's *The Ark Sakura* as a medium.

This paper deals with the literature of Kōbō Abe (1924-1993), who has asked, "Can human beings survive after the nuclear explosion?" It analyses the closed ecosystem in the Atomic Age that was described in *The Ark Sakura*, a novel written by Kōbō Abe in 1984, in terms of its post-apocalyptic narrative and ecological perspective. The characteristics of the novel are identified by comparing its narrative with the disaster narratives of Japan that emerged in the wake of the 2011 earthquake off the Pacific coast of Tōhoku.

This paper takes a liberal arts approach to nuclear power, which is the result of cutting-edge science and technology development as well as an icon of national power, thus allowing us to learn through re-enactment limitations facing human societies that rely solely on technology development. Amid the age of disaster, a violent context in which insecurity involving events such as nuclear explosion and virus infection is rampant, this research will allow us to think about what kind of ethical consciousness humanity should have in order to create a sustainable future.

2. Catastrophe: *The Ark Sakura* as a Post-Apocalyptic Narrative

Apocalyptic discourse has acted based on the perception of the worldview and the imagination of catastrophe, which emphasizes the end of civilization, human extinction, or the end of the world, has captured our imaginary (Kermode 26). The Apocalyptic discourse in literature follows the epitome of religious prophecy or the biblical end-time in which the world of chaos will be saved by Christ. The Flood and Noah's Ark in the Bible signify that the end of the apocalypse is a new beginning. As such, the eschatology consisting of two axes of revelation and salvation has led to the post-apocalypse through the 20th century. In the post-apocalyptic theory, the meaning of salvation that longs for a new world has disappeared, and only the negative meaning to describe the catastrophe remains.

Although the apocalyptic narrative has universality, the cause of such apocalypse contains temporal and regional individuality.

This is because the social crisis awareness of each era is reflected at the centre of the imagination about the apocalypse. Only the perspective on the dystopian future has changed in the post-apocalyptic narratives, that has been actively spreading from the end of the 20th century to the present day, compared to the apocalypticism of the past. Unlike the apocalypse narratives of the past, which were strongly presenting a vision of salvation upon confronting a disaster crisis, the post-apocalyptic narratives depict the future of humankind in a gloomy view by developing a negative perception of reality and a keen sense of crisis. It only depicts 'the imagination of the end of a world without salvation' or 'an isolated individual trapped in reality without the future' where the future disappears and only the present catastrophe continues.

The Ark Sakura is a long novel published by Shinchōsha in 1984, and tells the story of a man who built a nuclear shelter in preparation for an upcoming nuclear war. As mentioned above, the post-apocalyptic narrative is constructed with the imagination of a catastrophe like the end of civilization, humanity, and the world. The cause of the catastrophic crisis in *The Ark Sakura* is nuclear war. However, in other post-apocalyptic narratives, the background is a situation in which a disaster is going on or the dystopia after that, whereas *The Ark Sakura* focuses on 'immediately before' the nuclear war. This is a setting that amplifies the crisis awareness of the nuclear war that might occur immediately. In this novel, Abe likened nuclear war to earthquake, saying, "The variables are far greater than for an earthquake, making prediction far more problematical" (311). Today, however, despite the development of technology for sensing and alerting earthquakes and systems for preparing for various disasters, nuclear war is at the limit of apocalyptic imagination, given that nuclear war is unpredictable.

The novel consists of 25 chapters and begins with self-introduction of the protagonist who built 'a modern ark' by transforming an underground quarry into a huge nuclear shelter. The protagonist lives in the quarry in an abandoned mine, just like his nickname 'Mogura' (モグラ, Mole). Underground streets are visible after passing the entrance to the basement in an empty space like a garbage disposal site located on the hillside of the mountain. This is an abandoned place that has already been legally abolished

and has no name. A large-scale residential complex that looks peaceful has been built on the ground just above it, creating a sharp contrast with the sun-blocked underground world. The location, background, and time of the place are not known. Without a clue to the large housing complex on the ground, due to the empty underground world, the situation would appear as a dystopian future after the initiation of nuclear war.

Inside the underground, there are more than 18 huge wharves connected like a beehive centred around a hall that is wide enough for a sturdy man to look like a thumb. Each space has different uses; dust absorbers for purifying the air and generators are also installed. It is not rocket science to store beverages, foods, vegetables, and grains using huge drums. Also, books such as *Manual for Self-Sufficiency* and *The Family Medical Book* are provided, and you can feel the careful consideration for survivors. What stands out is a huge toilet, shaped like a black hole, in the centre of the hall. Traps have been set up in preparation for invasion from the outside, and various weapons are equipped in the arms warehouse. The arms warehouse implies a chaotic struggle for survival that unfolds later in the novel. It is not a perfectly static world, but a world where time is about to stop and evolution and progress no longer proceed and all energies seem to have been exhausted. The reason for building such a nuclear shelter is unknown. The grotesque underground world is only reminiscent of the darkness that humanity will face after the end.

Captain Mogura, who designed the ark with his own plans, finally with 'the survival ticket', which is the location of the ark printed on it, and 'the key' of the ark, goes on to find people to board. What kind of people are qualified to board the ark prepared to survive the crisis of nuclear explosion? The standard is not specified. Mogura finds an insect called Eupcaccia of a closed ecosystem at the rooftop stand of the department store, which reminds him of himself living isolated in an underground quarry. In response, he decides to give tickets to those who are interested in seeing his Eupcaccia. However, his keys and tickets are stolen by a swindler couple he met on the rooftop of the department store. Later, he returns to the ark with the 'insect dealer' who was selling Eupcaccia and finds that the swindler couple had already broken

into the ark. Mogura has no choice yet to start living with them with a feeling of distrust towards each other.

An incident occurs not long after the beginning of communal life. Mogura has been making money by disposing of factory waste and foetal remains using huge toilet that flushes anything like a black hole. One day, a partner delivers a body, which was Mogura's father. At the same time, 'Broom Brigade' organized by men with an average age of 75 years, led by Mogura's father while he was alive, breaks into the shelter. Besides, as an unexpected infiltration of a gang of delinquent boys is revealed, the ark literally turns into a battlefield for survival.

The ark, which has turned into a chaotic world, becomes a savage world where there is no civilization as per the use of black hole. In the end, the ark was the destination of dirty trash, unidentified bodies, and bulk product waste just as the scraps of civilization dissipates into a huge toilet. It was where the last humans gathered for survival. After the incident, people seize weapons and arm themselves, and move in groups to restrain each other. In particular, Bloom Brigade led by Mogura's father, although the captain has already died, acts in "a spirit of submission" (Abe *The Ark Sakura* 311). Even without the absoluteness of power such as the hierarchical order, the only thing that controlled them was savagery of fear and survival.

Having been injured and embarrassed by the spread of discord between groups in an instant, Mogura eventually makes a dogmatic decision. "The launching of the ark would inevitably take place one peaceful day, catching everyone unawares. There was not the slightest reason why that day should not be today. All decisions are arbitrary in the end" (Abe *The Ark Sakura* 311). He finally decided to set sail for the ark, which had become the mayhem. At that very moment, a sudden flash occurs and the ark is sealed.

Flash and warning beeps are reminiscent of a nuclear explosion on the ground and cause extreme tension. Mogura had placed dynamites on the external portion surrounding the ark to block radiation or radioactive substances coming from nuclear explosion. He sets up the detector to automatically activate the dynamites in the event of a nuclear explosion. People are isolated in the ark without their willingness to confirm the occurrence of actual nuclear explosion. Regardless of the existence of outer world, at this

moment the people who have survived cooperate and strive for human prosperity.

Regardless of the occurrence of actual nuclear war, the ark had to struggle for survival, and the survivors were murderers and looters of each other. They were not aware of their safety from external crisis. The ark had actually turned into a savage world and individual freedom was shrunk to a great extent. The savagery of survival is not restrained, and it is expressed by individual anxiety and fear, and only existential anxiety becomes greater.

Mogura is a staunch survivor, but is in a precarious state where it can be dumped into waste at any time. The fear of existence wandering in the future without an exit is questioning the ethical value of human life that will unfold after the end. Although Mogura is a definite survivor, he feels anxious about being thrown away as waste at any time. The fear of existence wandering in a future without an exit is questioning the ethical value of the life of humankind that will unfold after the end of the world. This is why this novel is read as a post-apocalyptic narrative by inducing a sceptical approach beyond the method of accepting the traditional apocalyptic narratives. The ark symbolizes the paradox of human savagery (selfishness) that is responsible for the catastrophe of nuclear explosion and the end of the world, rather than delivering a message of relief that promises a new life with the disappearance of catastrophic nightmare. Here, a nuclear explosion is nothing more than a medium for revealing the anxiety and fear of civilization, and thereby gaining access to the true nature of human existence. It has the characteristics of post-apocalypse narrative, deeply dissecting that the extinction of humanity is not only exercised by external pressure of disasters but also committed by humans.

3. Restoration: Japanese Disaster Novels after Tōhoku (3.11)

In Japan, which is geographically located in the Pacific Ring of Fire, natural disasters such as typhoons and floods in addition to major earthquakes such as the Great Kantō earthquake (1923), the Sanriku earthquake (1896), and the Great Hanshin earthquake (1995) occur frequently. Leading authors have used it as a motif to depict the Japanese people's distress to survive disasters.² While it is not new

² Representatively, experiences of the Great Kanto Earthquake

that such experiences have been made into works, the term Shinsai Bungaku (震災文学, disaster literature). This Japanese word is a term that focuses on the earthquake disasters, however, it deals with social disasters in a broad sense, including actual natural disasters, such as nuclear disaster) referring to a group of literature based on disaster has been positioned recently after the Tōhoku earthquake in 2011.

The Tōhoku earthquake that occurred on March 11, 2011 (called 3.11 hereafter) rocked the core of Japanese society. Radiation from Fukushima nuclear power plant was leaked along with the earthquake and tsunami, which had the destructive power to easily destroy the existing disaster prevention system. The 3.11 was a combined disaster with a natural disaster and human-made disaster. Historian Yukio Mochida says, "that if the post-World War II era is called 'post-war', then after 3.11, we have entered a new era called 'post-the Great Earthquake'." (Takahashi 142). There has been a bunch of arguments that predicted the 3.11 as a major turning point in Japanese society. In the case of Haruki Murakami as a representative, he also presented his work, urging the transition from 'Detachment' to 'Commitment'.³ These are arguments that emphasize that it is time for Japanese society to change consciously in some way, but there is no precise future picture.

Above such trends, criticisms such as Minato Kawamura's *Literature on Earthquake Disaster and Nuclear Power Plant Explosion* (2013) and Saeco Kimura's *Literatures after Fukushima* (2013) have published. Kawamura, in particular, while treating the issue of the nuclear accident as a disaster, raised strong doubts about Japan's

include Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, *Aphorisms by a Pygmy* (1925), Kikuchi Kan, *Post-disaster Miscellaneous Feelings* (1923), Yokomitsu Riichi, *Earthquake* (1923). Yoshimura Akira, *History Repeats* (1995), a story about the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake, is also famous. In particular, Yoshimura's *Ocean Walls Sanriku Coast Tsunami* (1970), which deals with the tsunami, had a sharp increase in sales after the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011, and was expanded and published under the title, *Sanriku Coast Giant Tsunami*.

³*Underground* (1997), *Underground 2*(998), *After the Quake* (2000) are representative.

nuclear power plant policy, and urged self-reflection and self-examination. He also criticized the passive attitudes of the authors toward the nuclear accident.

On the contrary, there have been attempts to reread literatures dealing with disasters before 3.11, especially natural disasters such as earthquakes. A representative example is Kunihiro Shimura's *Records and Literature on Major Earthquake Disasters* (2011). Shimura argues that it is necessary to recall the lessons learned from pre-3.11 disaster literatures after mentioning the ramification of 3.11 in the preface. He introduced literatures dealing with the experience of the Great Kantō earthquake, including the Japanese medieval literature *Square-jō record* (1212). Also, Masaki Horiuchi edition's *Read Literature after Fukushima* (2013) introduced literature by various authors, regardless of nationality or time. This research book does not go deep into the meaning of disaster novels. It focuses more on disseminating a political message to the society after 3.11 rather than an in-depth analysis based on a kind of ethical sense that the painful experience of 3.11 must be remembered. However, the effort to identify disaster literature and think about its meaning in relation to social issues such as politics is of great significance. However, efforts to elucidate disaster literatures and think about its meaning in relation to social issues such as politics have great significance.

Keita Tokazi's *An Assistant Commissioner in Maze 2, Fukushima's Terrible Secrets* (2012) tells us the story of contamination of the area around the Fukushima nuclear power plant with radiation, and how it turns into a land of fear and violence as the most wanted people and debtors from all over the country gather there. However, the publisher's proof-reader ordered the suspension of the sale, saying, "this kind of content should not be shown to the world" (Livedoor NEWS). The reference to radiation was one of the taboos. When Soichirō Tahara published *Nuclear War* (1976), author Akiyuki Nosaka who wrote the commentary, assessed Tahara's work as "a prophetic writing" challenging modern taboos (Nosaka 3-4). Sadakazu Fujii said the word 'radiation' has even been swallowed up in the face of widespread fear of radiation damage and internal exposure without any solution, and he was concerned about the serious concealment in Fukushima after 3.11. (Fujii 7).

This concealment still poses serious problems with regard to the decision to discharge radiation-contaminated water (Greenpeace).

The current Japanese disaster novels and research urge Japanese society for self-reflection, which emphasizes only the position as a victim without direct mention or self-examination on the nuclear accident and has been buried in mainstream discourses such as 'Cheer up, Japan'. The past disasters originated from nature that could be controlled by human power, and there existed objects of reprimand for the responsibility. However, about 3.11, there was no object that was responsible or held responsible. Individual suffering was expressed in the form of joint solidarity and joint responsibility. Hiromi Kawakami's *God Bless You* (2011) criticizes discourses of Japanese people that are overly emphasized after the disaster, announcing the situation in which individual lives and the world are being buried in the 3.11 accident. They were concerned about Japanese nationalism contained in slogans such as 'Cheer up, Japan' and 'We are one.'

Besides, by blaming the enormous earthquake and tsunami for the nuclear accident, social anxiety can be turned into damage caused by natural disasters. Many disaster novels published after 3.11 depict the nuclear accident in the dimension of simple reflection such that indefinite sense of joint responsibility should not be evoked or past errors should not be repeated. At this point, Yōko Tawada's *The Far Shore* (2014) deserves attention. The novel, depicting the future of Japan by getting hit by the same accident once again that fell into the world's refugee after the nuclear accident, urges to consider how to avoid repeating similar tragedies.

The disaster novels that have been published after 3.11 set the theme of 'Japanese society in the near future'. This is to diagnose the present by drawing a gloomy future society after the disaster, as classical dystopian literatures did, and to cast doubt on the choice of humankind on relying on a nuclear power plant as the legacy of the civilization. Like the two previous works, Toshiki Okada's *Ground and Floor* (2014) deals with the future as a dystopia after the nuclear accident. Okada's literature expands its perspective to the existence of the nuclear power plants and the problems of discrimination and exclusion derived from them by embodying the appearance of 'irradiated persons' as an abbreviation of minority.

This work vividly shows the consequences of development-oriented thinking that excludes ethical consciousness. Intrinsicly, in the disaster novels after 3.11, the Japanese society after the nuclear accident continues to be described as dystopia, the stories of each character living in dystopia, however, correspond to real people who seek a new life out of dystopia, those who have paradoxically discovered utopia in dystopia, and those who force 'remembrance' as beings like echoes of the past. This kind of figure intuitively reflects Japanese society in connection with the nationalistic solidarity awareness and excessive self-restraint in Japanese society after 3.11.

Surprisingly, Japanese disaster novels contain dystopia, that is, apocalyptic narratives after the obvious disaster, however, there was no ecocritical approach. According to Kōichi Haga, who is opening up the horizons of research with this point,

In Japan, ecocriticism remains at a level where only partial introduction of global trends. As an exception, Michiko Ishimure's *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow: Our Minamata Disease* (1969) is known worldwide as a work depicting destruction of nature caused by modernization, however, other works rarely attracted attention as texts of ecocriticism.

It can be seen that Japan's nature and environment have not been taken into consideration as subjects of environmental discourse. As a self-reflection on this, Haga published in 2017, *Crossing the Waves of Ecocriticism: Living during the Anthropocene* and in 2018, *The Earth Writes: The Great Earthquake and the Novel in post-3.11 Japan*, which are drawing attention as they build up the genealogy of Japanese ecocritical literatures. This research is mainly being conducted from the perspective of post-human, and shows the main purpose of demodernization. However, it is expected that the novels will contribute towards building the worldview of disaster literature unique to Japan in relation to 3.11, including the ecocriticism of Japanese literatures.

The Japanese disaster novels that show the dystopian literature are discussed as post-apocalyptic novels in the United States. Both the genres are homogeneous in that the emotions of catastrophe, the crisis awareness, and the dystopian imaginations are the core. However, differences in the names of genres mean differences in literature. The reason why the title post-apocalyptic novel did not

take root in Japan can be understood as the fact that in Japan, as there is no Christian tradition, there must have been complications in accepting apocalyptic rhetoric. Under circumstances of natural disasters, efforts to accept the reality of disasters and restore destroyed daily lives reveal existential patience, that is, the struggle for survival is more important than religious conversion. It can be attributed to the fact that the apocalyptic characteristics have been excluded in Japanese disaster novels. It can also be understood as why Japanese disaster novels are not discussed in terms of environmental discourse.

4. Peace: Another Face of 'Nationalism'

After 3.11, *The Ark Sakura* was mentioned again among people, with the realization of the dangers of nuclear power and the need for a safe zone from nuclear radiation (Murakami). This is because people have come to image nuclear power accidents in connection with nuclear explosions and radiation leaks. With regard to nuclear power, the Atomic Bomb Literature, which deals with atomic bomb damage in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, exists as an independent genre in Japan.⁴

In *Hiroshima Notes* (1965), Kenzaburō Ōe vividly describes the dangers of nuclear weapons that threaten human dignity. He emphasized the attitude of humankind living in the nuclear age in terms of humanism, saying, "We should think about the misery caused by nuclear weapons rather than the power of nuclear weapons" (Ōe 105). He appealed to humankind, who wish to survive the nuclear threat, that the damage situation in Hiroshima should be used as a symbol. His 'anti-nuclearism' posits the atomic bomb experience as the greatest tragedy of humankind, and appeals that the damage caused by the atomic bomb utterly destroys human dignity. This point of view was shared to some extent in the discourse surrounding humanism in the post-war generation in Japan.

⁴ Yōko Ōta, *City of Corpses* (1948), Tamiki Hara, *Summer Flowers* (1949), Kenzaburō Ōe, *Hiroshima Notes*, Kyōko Hayashi, *Ritual of Death* (1975), Takehiko Fukunaga, *Island on the death* (1971), Hisashi Inoue, *The Face of Jizo* (2001), Makoto Oda, *Hiroshima* (1981) are representative. In addition, many experiences of civilians who have survived after the exposure are transmitted.

So, did Abe recreate this trauma of war in his novel? The idea of surviving a nuclear war by constructing a nuclear shelter may have partially reflected his original experience. He was born in 1924, and spent his childhood in Fengtian, Manchuria (now Shenyang, China) and returned to Japan after the defeat of Japan. He, who was not living in Japan at the time, did not experience the atomic bomb directly. However, after experiencing 'the era of disasters' of war caused by the conflicts over rights between nations, he faced the consequences of 'nationalism' that has created a crystal called nuclear.

If you think carefully about what a nuclear weapon is, it is certainly dangerous. This is because Japan is the only country in the world that has been exposed to radiation. However, it was not only Hiroshima and the Japanese who were exposed to the atomic bombing. Earth has been exposed. Why should we think of Hiroshima, Hiroshima of Japan, and Japanese? Why should we only talk about Japan in front of the huge weapon of nuclear weapons?...The state is essentially a system of violence (Abe 28:23). In other words, Abe is not a pacifist advocating anti-nuclearism because of its unprecedented history in a world that has been bombed with atomic bombs. He takes an anti-nationalist position from the point of view that the nation itself became the starting point for the emergence of nuclear weapons.

When *The Ark Sakura* was published, the core of anti-nuclearism was focused on the nuclear explosion and the nuclear weapons themselves as a disaster. As military tensions between the U.S. and the former Soviet Union became strained, the situation in East Asia, as well as in Japan, seemed to be on the verge of World War III, which would become a nuclear war. However, the anti-nuclear peace movement in Japan was at the level of impressionistic and sentimental criticism that 'nuclear is bad', and failed to contemplate the relevance between real politics and nuclear weapons (*White paper on peace by citizens* 2-16). Abe was aware of the problem with the nations or the underlying system of violence that makes the nuclear function. He pointed out the naïveté of the anti-nuclear pacifist movement, which had been making pilgrimages to Hiroshima, simply like an annual event in August, tried to limit the source of all the problems to nuclear bomb itself regardless of international politics of strengthening nuclear armament (Abe 28:27).

Abe has been relatively consistent in his creative activities on anti-nationalism and trans-nationalism. In *The Ark Sakura*, he has tried to make the transition into time and space where the nations do not exist, taking people who survived the catastrophe through the protagonist who built the Ark to be a saviour of humanity. This work reflects the Cold War era (1975 to 1984), in which the anxiety and tension of not knowing when and where the war will occur is amplified against the background of the days of intense ideological conflict. Meanwhile, he satires on Japanese nationalism, which had been strengthened while gradually reproducing the militaristic form. However, the reason why this work has become a hot topic again after 3.11 is because it raises a problem of the weathered awareness of nuclear weapons in modern society where the nuclear has become more common (Abe 21:22).

Abe emphasizes that the ideas of antinuclearists are too simple and in the end, nuclear weapons are an extension of politics as a mirror reflecting human society. Pacifism was also merely a product of the 'nuclear age' maintained by nuclear weapons, the crystallization of nationalism. In a reality where violence for the sake of peace is tolerated and nuclear weapons as a deterrent is justified, we need to face the truth hidden deep in the word peace.

In this way, the threat of a catastrophe that will come upon mankind and planet is inevitable to finally become a problem for the nation, and it can be said that the present is simply 'the Atomic Age'. Through this awareness of the times at the time, *The Ark Sakura* suggests that we should take responsibility for the mechanism of human society that has created the nuclear weapon, which is a kind of suicide method for mankind and the earth, rather than simply opposing nuclear weapons. Humanity's responsibility for nuclear weapons is the forefront of making this planet's SDG possible.

Humans have considerable adaptability to matter and have hope. However, the inability to cope with groups of humans may be genetically driven. Survival is also very fascistic as it is based on the premise that only one will survive and ultimately everyone else will die. Nuclear shelter is also as strange as survival (Abe 27:244).

The Ark Sakura clearly shows the process of the formation of the position of the ruler who wants to take power after the occurrence

of survival game as people gather in the ark designed to survive the nuclear threat. However, the easy idea of surviving a nuclear explosion is nothing more than a nationalistic elitism that gave birth to the atomic age. The relationship between humans and organizations, and broadly humans and nations, is a paradox of human civilization that is contented with victory by competing in a huge ark that is finally closed like a closed ecosystem.

5. Ecologism: Allegory of the Closed Ecosystem of the Atomic Age

It was Captain Mogura who built the Ark in the underground world. Mogura means a mole, and it metaphorically represents the protagonist who lived alone in a dark underground quarry. At the same time, it breeds in the dark and hides in the ground in the event of a nuclear explosion, and represents the role of the last survivor to persistently survive even after a disaster, to observe apocalypse and catastrophe of humans. This setting is reminiscent of Günter Grass's *The Rat* (1986). In this work, rats, who had fallen by rejecting God's command on Noah's Ark, were trivial beings at the very end of all life on Earth. However, after the apocalypse caused by nuclear war, rats are in a position to dominate humans. In this work, rats are anthropomorphized beings who tease animalized humans after the destruction of civilization. Instead of a mouse, Abe emphasizes the self-destruction and self-responsibility of humankind by using the image of a mole that seems more suitable than a mouse in designing the underworld. He demands technological criticism and historical philosophical reflection from the anti-enlightenment standpoint on history, which is immersed only in scientific and technological development. Abe's ideas have many implications when considering the current situation in which the SDGs are a common global goal. In other words, technology-oriented enlightenment or development without ethical thinking is just a house of cards.

A fictional insect called Eupcaccia symbolizing a closed ecosystem is seen in this novel. The first time Mogura saw Eupcaccia, he felt a sense of a kinship with himself. In the beginning, Mogura was trying to use Eupcaccia, which has no legs and uses its torso to slowly rotate in place all day long, with its head always facing the sun to choose a person to board the ark. The power that drives Eupcaccia is its own excrement and it lives in a

closed ecosystem that is completely self-sufficient. Literary researcher Christopher Bolton explains that the spin of *Eupcaccia* represents the irregular progress in waiting for Armageddon and ultimately closed time, as well as the claustrophobia shown by the time and space in the novel trapped in the ark. And he says that American readers would remember the Doomsday Clock, which gained attention in the 1980s as a time of such clandestine fear (Bolton 254). That was when the clock was pointing at 11:57 p.m., as the amount of missile stockpiles and proxy collisions increased due to the intensification of the Cold War and the stalemate of dialogue on weapons restrictions. Based on Jean Baudrillard's nuclear deterrence theory, Abe's apocalyptic scenario reflects concerns about the power of technology to end the world when tensions over nuclear weapons/energy culminate (Bolton 255). Baudrillard expressed the world order of the time by condensing the term nuclear deterrent, which seemed to be competing for technology to make more weapons as less conceivable that nuclear will not be used forever. And he said that the real danger of nuclear power plants lies not in lack of safety, pollution, explosion, but in the maximum-security system that radiates from them, the zone of surveillance and deterrence that spreads by degrees over the entire terrain – a technical, ecological, economic, geopolitical buffer zone (Baudrillard 3-5).

The ark, set as a nuclear shelter in this novel, looks like a perfect system for a solid safe zone, however, it is actually out of control. Here the ark is a metaphor for a nation (national power) that is trusted as most robust safety zone for humanity. Then, why do we feel anxious in the nuclear war? Is it a problem for our safety with the destruction of the nation? Abe carried off the story by focusing on the situation on the verge of a nuclear war. This setting is not based on a sense of relief that nothing is happening at the moment, but on a sense of powerlessness, where the tremendous force is working without us knowing. Science and technology are no longer tools for humans, but turned into an inhuman force that exposes humanity. *The Ark Sakura* demonstrates the catastrophic imagination that such an uncontrollable nuclear power, which is the cutting edge of science and technology for human civilization, will eventually destroy humanity and the planet. It is a warning against the linear perspective of scientific development that continues without knowing that it is self-destructive.

Abe's post-apocalyptic narrative differs from some of the religious and sentimental apocalypticism, which interprets natural disasters as divine revelations. It was conceived from the fact of the possibility of a nuclear genocide (war and radioactive leakage) and reasonably contemplated about the end. His post-apocalyptic narrative is based on a stochastic space where reality and fantasy coexist rather than a baseless prophecy about the future. Also, there exist no classic end of catastrophe and salvation. This can also be regarded as the process by which literature deidealizes from ecologism, which is a cultural ideology by sublimely transforming conventional apocalyptic rhetoric. However, in the setting of 'closed ecosystem in the atomic age,' the metaphor, which depicts and conveys the nuclear as a symbol of scientific and technological civilization and as a symbol of national power, is closer to fundamental ecologism. This is because literary imagination shows that the trust of humanity in the national system, which is the pinnacle of anthropomorphism, is actually an illusion brought about by human anxiety and lethargy.

6. Conclusion: Setting a New Relationship for a Sustainable Future

The argument in favour of asserting the usefulness of the apocalyptic narrative believes that the environmental awareness and practice movements can be more actively developed by the apocalyptic narrative. It asserts that the apocalyptic concept provides morality to environmental stories and promotes ethical behaviour among the public (Veldman 1-23). Hence, the most influential apocalyptic narrative is used as shock tactics appealing to the public to expand their interest and participation in environmental movements.

Criticism on the apocalyptic narrative argues that pessimism about the existence of the earth drives the public to despair rather than awakening to the environmental crisis. When humans are exposed to information on climate change, they initially feel anxious and guilty, however, as the frequency of exposure increases, they become numb (Killingsworth and Palmer 71). Denial or insensitivity to the seriousness of situation is a distorted emotional response to reduce internal despair (Doherty and Clayton 265-276). Therefore, the apocalyptic narrative is criticized for its unscientific attitude of dependence on religious minds rather than on science (Simon 19-23).

The opinions both in favour of and against influence, however, the inspiration of public environmental awareness and substantive environmental practices. Therefore, in the ecocriticism, the social responsibility of authors and scholars has consistently been a core task in the reality that environmental destruction is becoming more and more serious. It has emphasized the role as an intermediary that delivers scientific phenomena and destructive aspects on the environment, and the ethical meaning and value of nature in an easy and meaningful manner to readers. Therefore, literature dealing with environmental destruction or focusing on a harmonious relationship between nature and humans stand on ecocriticism aimed at changing the environmental awareness and attitude of the public.

There is no ecological discourse that is completely free from political ideology. However, the basic theme of ecology called sustainable development, presume an accurate understanding and observation of nature, and a new relationship between humans and nature. Furthermore, environmental discourse goes beyond basic ecological themes and is linked with various discourses such as politics, economy, and women. In order to establish a new relationship between humans and nature, it is also necessary to establish a new relationship between humans and nations that can look back on nationalism. Maybe the reset of the latter relationship is ecogism in a more aggressive sense.

Kōbō Abe's ecological perspective gives us some suggestion as the situation of disasters that inspire crisis awareness of humanity, such as the end of the world, can no longer rely on the development of science and technology and the development of safety systems like existing responses. What we face in this 'era of disaster era,' such as nuclear war, the current coronavirus pandemic, and climate change is not a technical and systemic problem to abolish nuclear weapons, develop treatments, and rapidly predict climate change. More serious is the loss of global humanism that considers coexistence of humanity. We have seen the interference by human selfishness and collectivism. It is another face of nationalism. It is time to reflect more deeply on what is truly necessary for the coexistence of humankind in the age of disaster. Pellow argues that SDG discourse should be revisited in an interdisciplinary context based on social justice and on history,

action and dialogue (Pellow 274). It emphasized the ethics of humankind that the goal of the SDG should be practically implemented on a personal level. In the future, we will also have to develop 'inclusivity' through social justice and the acquisition of diverse knowledge that makes the SDGs possible.

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