

## Surrounding Inventions: #3: Optimism

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### Surrounding Inventions #3: Optimism

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There is a small port town called Uchino that lies to the west of Niigata City. This area is the hometown of Minoru Endo, a composer who produced many masterpieces during the 1960 to 80s, such as *Kitaguni no Haru* (The Spring of the Northern Country), *Hoshikage no Waltz* (The Waltz of the Starry Shadow), and *Koukou Sannensei* (Senior High School Student). Moreover, the brewery of several reputable sake brands, such as “Tsuru no Tomo” (Friends of the Crane) and “Joujou no Morohaku” (First-class Morohaku), is located here.

If you go farther west about 10 kilometers, you can enjoy a winery known as Cave D’occi, as well as a hot spring. The outdoor bath offers a panoramic view of the Kakudayama mountain. Mount Kakudayama is full of flowers that bloom all year round and vary from season to season, including *Primula farinosa*, Asian fawnlily, and cosmos.

The students and townspeople once painted Nazca Lines (a series of geoglyphs) at the elementary school grounds of this small town.



The most famous of the Nazca Lines is the Hummingbird. The students and I wanted to draw it at its true size to see how it looked. Having no real idea of how big

it actually was, we were worried that we may not be able to find a place where we could draw it. Fortunately, we learned that it could fit in a local elementary school playground. As such, we requested and obtained permission from the school.

Despite the fact that it was the middle of September and the temperature had risen to 37 degrees Celsius, it was a beautiful day for aerial photography. Drawing a picture with a tape measure and a protractor is actually quite a difficult task. The elementary school kindly provided the lime we used to draw the geoglyph's lines.

We drew the lines as precisely as we could by following the blueprint that had been prepared in advance. When drawing the geoglyph, one is unaware of the larger scope of what they are doing. We were simply working silently under the scorching sun in accordance with the blueprint's instructions. Nevertheless, when an unmanned drone flew over the playground and took an aerial photograph, the spectacular Nazca Lines Hummingbird was clearly visible.

Why was such a geoglyph created in the desert lands of Nazca, where there were neither mountains nor high plateaus? Why was a hummingbird drawn when there were, of course, no airplanes to view it from? Who were the people who drew it thinking of showing it to? The mystery deepened as we drew it. At the same time, I realized that, instead of focusing on the task at hand like we usually do, new discoveries could be made if we took a break from daily life from time to time and looked at things from afar in the context of a longer timeframe and broader spatial context.



The Uchino Geoglyph Drawing Project

I want to emphasize that it is necessary to pause sometimes so as to take in a panoramic view of the path we have taken thus far, as well as to visualize the future that we intend to create for ourselves. When we look back on our life, what appeared to be a disaster at the time might have been a blessing or a springboard for the next leap forward.

Have you ever noticed something completely new, even in a familiar place, after pausing to look around? When we look at things from a distance, we are able to see that there are numerous options available to us. Alternatives that we once thought were impossible suddenly become possible. As our options expand, we realize that the decisions we had to make to prioritize our short-term goals can be improved. When one looks at things from a distance, the mind naturally expands and becomes optimistic. Then, good ideas emerge, and one's dreams start to expand. Being optimistic also gives courage.

Projects developed with this frame of mind receive support from everyone in the company, as well as customers and society, and, in this way, they develop on their own. I believe that when Ninomiya Sontoku said, "Those whose eyes are set to afar become rich," he was referring to something similar.

I have heard that, with masters of Go, when their formation at one corner becomes tricky and is unable to move, they leave that corner without hesitation and start the game in another. As they repeat this process, the formations of other games are connected to and merged with the above-mentioned difficult corner, and, in this way, every formation begins to improve. Even when you are up against a giant wall, getting a bird's eye view and looking at the big picture without focusing on the wall can sometimes pave the way forward.

You may have had the experience of getting stuck while doing a large task and then starting to finish small errands one by one—the difficulty that you did not know how to handle earlier disappears without you realizing it.

This style of writing may give some readers the impression that it is too "Japanese" overly optimistic. However, there is another aspect to optimism. Sir Winston Churchill, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, once said, "I am an optimist. It does not appear to be of much use to be anything else." At the time, the

United Kingdom was in the midst of World War II, and London had been forced into a tough situation as it endured air raids. Churchill was Prime Minister during the country's most difficult period. For the United Kingdom, optimism was probably the best strategy for overcoming the nation's survival crisis. Only in times of adversity does optimism reveal its true worth.

There is a phrase in Japanese, "One prays to the Gods when one is in trouble"—what it probably means is, "Seek optimism when you are in trouble." Helen Keller once stated, "Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement; nothing can be done without hope." Perhaps those who have faced numerous challenges and have overcome great adversity may be more likely to understand the value of optimism.

