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New Spirituality in Japan and Its Place in the Teaching of Moral Education

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Abstract: This paper begins by examining so-called “spirituality movements and/or culture” in Japanese society today. It then focuses on research into spirituality as it relates to Japanese education, and specifically moral education, where, for example, our connectedness to the sublime and lofty is one of the four themes of the new moral education classes introduced into Japanese elementary schools in 2018. It is far from easy, however, to teach such a subject, since Japanese moral education is required to keep its distance from popular spirituality as well as from the institutionalized spirituality of organized religions. Furthermore, the conventional knowledge that underpins modern Japanese moral education struggles to deal with spirituality and the vast range of human existence, including our search for the purpose and significance of life. Accordingly, this paper will examine current work on such issues and attempt to outline the future role that scientific and academic approaches to religion and spirituality might play in moral education in Japan, especially from the viewpoint of human connectedness to nature and the sublime.

Keywords: spirituality movements; SBNR phenomenon; popularized spirituality; Japanese moral and religious education; feelings of awe; sublimity; *shizenism*; autopoiesis; Moralogy

1. Spirituality Movements in Japan

From as early as the 1960s in some areas and the 1970s in others, Western countries as well as Japan witnessed the rise of movements pursuing a new spirituality that differed from traditional religions. Termed “New Age” in the United States and the United Kingdom, such movements in Japan, originally designated “spiritual world”, are today described as *supirichuariti* (spirituality) or *supirichuaru* (spiritual) in *katakana* (the Japanese syllabary used primarily for loanwords). However ambiguous and diverse the concept of spirituality might be, it was able to establish itself in modern Japanese vocabulary because, from the 1980s onwards, a popular trend saw many spiritual movements emerge as conspicuous phenomena in the consumer culture that characterized Japanese society. During this period the new spirituality, which had previously been marginalized in the world of public information, became the focus of attention for major Japanese media outlets and academics in a variety of fields. Since 2000, as noted above, Japan’s mass media have quite frequently used “*supirichuaru*”, the *katakana* version of “spiritual,” in the contexts of self-exploration, mental and physical health, beauty cosmetics, improving one’s fortune and so on (Hirano 2007, pp. 69–70).

This expansion of popularized spirituality movements may be understood more clearly if we consider them in relation to the secularization and individualization of Japanese consumers in the present age. Shimazono has collectively termed these movements “spirituality movements and/or culture” (Shimazono 2011, p. 27), arguing that they all involve practical and learning activities aimed at transforming the self in its spiritual dimension through connectedness with something sacred. It is in this spiritual dimension that people may come to realize the limitation of the knowledge provided by modern science and rationalism. This leads them to look for a different kind of knowledge and the mental and physical practices that might transform their bodies and mind-sets, and to notice that their

pursuit of spirituality differs from that of traditional or established religions. Generally speaking, then, this new spirituality is seen to be antagonistic to the principles of modern scientism, which concerns itself exclusively with the tangible. A distaste for authoritarianism and exclusionism likewise sets this new spirituality apart from that of Japan's institutionalized and organized religions.

It is not so easy, however, to clarify the contours of the new spirituality in Japan, as it comprises highly complex and diverse phenomena. One common assertion is that these movements are not a group of individual entities that have developed independently region by region. Rather, they should be regarded as a group of "global" movements that interact with one other and flourish in developed countries and their big cities (Shimazono 2011, p. 27). Such movements in Japan, for example, can be said to be internationally interactive in the sense that the new spirituality enabled American counter culture, whose waves were already lapping Japan's shores in the 1960s, to exert considerable influence on this country's culture. Evidence of this trend is provided by the Japanese publishing industry, which surely stimulated at least some Japanese readers and led them to a new spiritual world in the 1970s and after by issuing a flood of Japanese translations of New Age works from the U.S. These included, among others: Ram Dass's *Be Here Now* (Dass 1971, Japanese translation 1987); Andrew T. Weil's *Natural Mind: A Revolutionary Approach to the Drug Problem* (Weil 1972, Japanese translation 1977) and *Spontaneous Healing* (Weil 1995, Japanese translation 1995); Theodore Roszak's *Unfinished Animal: The Aquarian Frontier and the Evolution of Consciousness* (Roszak 1975, Japanese translation 1987); Ken Wilber's *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (Wilber 1977, Japanese translation 1985); Marilyn Ferguson's *Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in Our Time* (Ferguson 1980, Japanese translation 1981); Fritjof Capra's *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture* (Capra 1982, Japanese translation 1984); Shirley Maclaine's *Out on a Limb* (Maclaine 1983, Japanese translation 1986); Brian Weiss' *Many Lives, Many Masters* (Weiss 1988, Japanese translation 1991); and James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy* (Redfield 1993, Japanese translation 1994).

There is, of course, the caveat that Japanese spirituality was not merely an imported culture, but also represented "an aspect of revivalism," even if this was affected by best-selling New Age books from English-speaking countries. One example here is the re-evaluation of Japan's traditional Shinto religion, whose animistic worship of nature can constitute "an effective idea in salving the global environment" (Horie 2013, p. 99). Researchers also highlighted another distinctive feature of the new spirituality in Japan, namely that it was embedded in a very different society to that of the U.S., with elements not found in American counter-culture. The U.S. at this time was grappling with and reflecting deeply on its own social and political problems, including the Vietnam War, environmental destruction and the dehumanization of its society. All of these provoked New Age reactions, escapes or challenges that Japan shared only to a limited degree (Haga and Yumiyama 1994). Hence, it seems more accurate to describe the new spirituality movements in Japan as "glocal" phenomena rather than "global" ones.

The ill-defined shape of Japanese spirituality, with its complex and interrelated constituents, also hampers any statistical analysis of it. For example, in a 2008 Yomiuri newspaper survey of religious views, 56.3% of Japanese people replied "yes" to the interesting question, "Do you sometimes feel there is something greater than human power in nature, or not?" An attempt at an international comparison of interest in New Age spirituality in Japan, the U.S. and the U.K. was made using this Yomiuri survey and two others: one where 40% of British people said that they believed in the existence of "some sort of spirit or life force" (Eurobarometer 2005; Horie 2013, p.101); and the other in which 15% of American people acknowledged belief in "a universal spirit or high power" (Gallup 2008; Ibid., p.101). This evidence was used to argue that Japanese people, "even though they seem to be the most secularized, are the most likely of the three nations to believe in something 'spiritual'," and that "such 'spirituality' is not necessarily understood as "New Age" in Japan," but "falls into the category of folk and traditional spirituality" (Horie 2013, pp. 100–2).

Before any inferences like this can be drawn from an analysis of even the simplest of comparative surveys, we first have to consider whether the questions posed in different countries were identical.

In this instance clearly they were not, since in the Japanese case, unlike those of the USA and the UK, the phrase “in nature” was included. This is important since both historically and culturally Japanese people have enjoyed and still enjoy a feeling of a unique connectedness with nature, as will be discussed in more detail later. Western people, generally speaking, tend to objectify nature in terms of materialistic existence, drawing clear distinctions between God, humankind and nature as independent entities. Japanese people, by contrast, have long worshipped nature as part of their cultural tradition, cherishing a sense of unity with it. Their feelings toward nature can be regarded as embodying, in a sense, a religious connection or dimension, whether they are aware of it or not. For their animistic view of nature is in fact derived both from ancient Shinto beliefs that underlie the Japanese way of life, with a view of the natural world where distinctions between gods, human beings, and nature are opaque (Ueda 2004, p. 484), and from Buddhism, whose philosophy teaches that “all things have a Buddha nature” (Nakatani 2009, p. 226). Given this amalgam of two religious traditions, since ancient times Japan has been thought of as the country of the gods as well as the land of Buddha. In less religious terms, as Torahiko Terada, a famous physicist, poet and essayist (1878–1935) notes, since the Japanese inhabit a land where natural disasters are all too frequent, they are very aware of the mutability and uncertainty of nature, which implies that there is “something greater than human power in nature.” This attitude has seeped into every fiber of their existence through the genetic memories inherited from their remote ancestors (Terada 1948, p. 599). Given these historical and cultural elements, Japanese people have quite naturally come to understand, either instinctively or religiously, that there is something greater than human power “in nature”. Can we regard this as proof of a spirituality equivalent to Western belief in “some sort of spirit or life force” or “a universal spirit or high power”? Surely, further investigation and analysis must be undertaken before we can label it as “non-religious ‘folk’ spirituality” (Horie 2013, p. 101) and treat it as identical to the spirituality of Western people who hold very different views of nature.

In 2008, the same year as the Yomiuri survey discussed above was conducted, additional information on comparative international attitudes to religion was provided by another survey. The International Social Survey Programme asked Japanese people about their religious views. One question was “Do you believe in any religion?” to which 39% of respondents replied “yes” (Buddhism 34%, Shinto 3%, Christianity 1%, others %), and 49% said “no,” indicating that they did not believe in any religion. Yet in answer to another question about their beliefs in “something religious” and their feelings about “what is thought to exist religiously though invisible,” respondents replied that they “absolutely” or “probably” believed in the followings things: “the spiritual power of ancestors” (47%), “a world after death” (44%), “metempsychosis” (36%), “nirvana” (36%), “heaven” (36%), “hell” (30%) and “religious miracles” (17%). Although this has similarities to the SBNR phenomenon (“I am spiritual, but not religious”), the following breakdown of attitudes among respondents shows that this overlap was far from complete. Their answers divided respondents into: (1) those who believed in religion(s) and were also interested in the sacred and spiritual (8.8%); (2) those who believed in religion(s), but had no interest in the sacred and spiritual (16%); (3) those who did not believe in any religion, but were interested in the sacred and spiritual (26%); (4) those who neither believed in any religion nor were interested in the sacred and spiritual (26.3%); (5) those who were not sure and gave no answer (23%). Group (3) here, comprising 26% of respondents, seems most closely aligned with the SBNR category in Japan.

This survey also provided evidence of two other recent trends of considerable interest. One was the increasing number of people who felt much closer to religion than before. In comparison to the 1998 survey, the number of those with friendly feelings towards Buddhism increased from 49% to 65% and towards Shinto from 15% to 21%, with no increase towards other religions, including Christianity, while those with no friendly feelings towards any religion decreased from 40% to 29%. These figures may be taken as evidence for the “revivalism” of Japanese folk or traditional spirituality discerned by Horie, since both Shinto and Buddhism are major time-honored Japanese religions. Certainly, the responses do not reveal anything of the increase in negative feelings towards traditional religions

seen in New Age movements in other countries. Equally, though, the respondents did not indicate how deeply felt their religious faith was, nor did they reveal the extent of any distaste they had for the authoritarianism and exclusionism of Japan's religious systems.

There is also evidence of age-related differences in the attitudes of Japanese people towards spirituality. Kumiko Nishi of the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute has pointed out the following interesting distinctions: many young people believe in "something religious," such as "spirit" and "the other world or heaven", despite not believing in any religion; elderly people, on the other hand, have religious faith and worship their family altars, but do not believe in "something religious" so much; while those who have religious faith do not necessarily believe in "something religious." Nishi concludes from this that Japanese people, frequently said to be atheists, in fact cherish a sensibility leading to something religious and spiritual in the broad meaning of the words, and that a considerable number of them believe in invisible powers and feel they can rely on them, even though they do not believe in any particular religion (Nishi 2009, p. 73). Here again, strictly speaking, it is difficult to regard this as evidence of a Japanese equivalent of the SBNR tendency found in the West. There, especially in Christian countries, people tend to become SBNR after denying the Christian faith and take an antagonistic stance to its religious traditions and systems, while in Japan, especially among young people, the SBNR approach is not based on any positive or deliberate rejection of the religious establishment or its systems. At no stage do such young people show any interest in, or care for religion, nor do they have real knowledge of religious teachings; rather they are merely drawn frivolously toward something religious or spiritual (Noguchi 2018, p. 56). A typical example of this tendency is the recent flood of young people pouring into Japanese temples and shrines in search of so-called "power-spots," or "sacred places to heal or activate visitors" that can affect the human body and mind by producing some kind of spiritual energy (Kotera 2011, p. 110).

The same kind of popularized spirituality is also spreading among school children in Japan. Some researchers argue that the deficiencies in Japanese school education arise from the way it treats religion as a dangerous subject to think about, and so one to be avoided; not teaching religious knowledge, they contend, makes it very difficult to satisfy children's universal curiosity about the irrational and invisible worlds in an educational way. It has also been argued that this shortage of proper religious education contributes to the spreading of a dangerous religiosity among the young (Inoue 1999, pp. 106–10; Horie 2011, pp. 159–60). Others insist that one way to cope with this situation is to provide intellectual teaching about religious feelings or spirituality in school education (Kaizuka 2010, pp. 111–15). If the present Japanese educational system wishes to progress in the direction of holistic education, schools should try harder to offer appropriate knowledge, based on academic and educational research, about "glocal" religiosity and spirituality, and so prevent pupils and students from being deluded by cultish religions and thin spirituality in the tawdry consumer market of the present age.

2. Spirituality and Japanese Education

Having outlined the spread of popularized spirituality, we can now turn to the development of research into spirituality and consciousness in various academic fields, including psychology, philosophy, theology, business studies, medicine, theoretical physics, cognitive science, neuroscience, behavioral science, evolutionary biology, and phenomenology. All of these are subject to criticism of the modern scientific paradigm and the construction of conventional knowledge from various theoretical perspectives, including feminism. The field of education is certainly no exception here, but it remains the case that recent research into spirituality in various academic fields has significant implications for the development of holistic education, especially in connection with the educational principles of insightful progressivism such as Montessori education and Waldorf education, as well as global education (Kono 2013, pp. 25–29; Tsunematsu 2008, p. 29).

From an educational viewpoint, there are good examples of various new spiritual movements playing an important role in expanding the academic range of education, especially in the fields of death

education and holistic education, where spiritual education encompasses the idea of “*Inochi*” (“Life” in Japanese), although it may, of course, take different directions (Takahira 2015, p. 137). The World Health Organization (WHO), an official agency of the United Nations, has played a significant role in amplifying this trend in Japan by pursuing the problem of spirituality in medicine from the viewpoint of Quality of Life (QOL). In fact, from 1995, QOL was greatly expanded to include the domain of spirituality and the existential, i.e., the whole expanse of human existence, in considering the purpose of life, the significance of being alive, one’s growth as a human being, and power beyond death, especially when trying to meet the psychological and spiritual needs of patients suffering from critical symptoms or those who are confronted by death. Significantly, in 1998 the Executive Board of the WHO requested draft amendments that added two words to the conventional definition of health (italicized as follows): Health is a *dynamic* state of complete physical, mental, *spiritual* and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (author’s italics). Although the suggestion was not officially accepted, this new definition of health definitely triggered further consideration of spirituality in many countries, including Japan (Ishii 2006, pp. 48–49), and understandably created, directly or indirectly, a stir about what education in Japan ought to be.

This proposed change in the definition of health and QOL also lowered the barrier between popularized spirituality and professional spirituality in medicine, and so has had a considerable impact on present-day Japanese society. Several professional doctors in the front line of medical treatment began to talk frankly about spiritual phenomena that had previously tended to be treated as occult or supernatural matters. They discussed the topic of spiritual enlightenment in a number of general works, including a sensational book, *Man Never Dies—Speculation over Spirituality and Providence by Some Clinicians*, published in 2011 by Dr. Naoki Yahagi (Yahagi 2011), a professor in the Department of Emergency and Critical Care Medicine at the University of Tokyo, that possibly had the same impact in Japan as Eben Alexander’s (Alexander 2012) *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon’s Journey into the Afterlife* had in the USA (the Japanese version of Alexander’s book was published in 2013 and was much discussed on TV). Other influential Japanese publications here included *Science of the Invisible World Changes Modern Medicine* (Nagahori 2013) by Dr. Nagahori, director of digestive system surgery at Ikuseikai Yokohama Hospital, *People Change If They Know the Meaning of Their Life* (Ikegawa 2015) by Dr. Ikegawa, who runs an obstetrics and gynecology clinic in the city of Yokohama as well as being a research expert in the field of prenatal memories. While in Japan most professional doctors still seem to regard evidence-based medicine (EBM) as a discipline based on scientific foundations, the doctors mentioned above are highly skeptical of EBM’s overemphasis on technicism and scientism in medicine. They assert that EBM may merely be a system within medicine, not medicine itself, which should also include spirituality as a holistic approach to its practice.

Given these new needs derived from spirituality in Japanese society today, there is a growing feeling in relation to moral education that the whole expanse of human existence should feature as a proper subject for study in schools. If not, pupils and students, who are offered no mental and spiritual resources at present in any school curriculum, will find it very difficult to cope with the greatest problems of their lives, such as how to live and how to accept death, once they have graduated. In addition, from 2000 onwards, people began to insist on the need to teach school children the importance of “*Inochi*” (Life) as “education of the mind”, partly because suicide caused by bullying has become one of the most serious problems in schools. In 2011, the suicide of a 13-year-old second-year municipal junior high school boy in the western Japan prefecture of Shiga garnered a great deal of press and public attention. A court found that it was primarily caused by the actions of two of his classmates and there was a causal relationship between bullying and the victim’s suicide. This tragic incident moved the Ministry of Education to make a partial revision of the government course [curriculum] guidelines in 2015 and to introduce moral education classes as a “special subject” in elementary schools in 2018 and junior high schools in 2019. Needless to say, one of the main aims of moral education is to teach school pupils and students the importance of life.

3. The Government Course Guidelines on Moral Education

Before considering religiosity and spirituality in moral education in Japan, a brief description of the current school education curriculum may be helpful, especially in terms of the relationship between education and religion. Hitherto, what has been called “religious education” in Japan has been classified into three categories: denominational education; religious knowledge education; and religious sentiment education. Article 15 of the Japanese Basic Act on Education specifies that “schools established by the national and local governments shall refrain from religious education or other activities for a specific religion,” though at the same time saying that “the attitude of religious tolerance, general knowledge regarding religion, and the position of religion in social life shall be valued in education.” In school education, religious elements are in fact incorporated into moral education, but in a distorted form without using the words “religious” or “religion.” From a legal standpoint, it is true that school education cannot offer any denominational education, but there is no problem at all about teaching religious knowledge. In current educational practice, however, Japanese teachers, except in private missionary schools, seem hesitant about teaching any religious knowledge, and even have reservations about the legally permitted teaching of religious sentiments, especially in schools established by national and local government. Here, it seems, lies one of the fundamental deficiencies of Japanese moral education, namely, its failure to offer pupils and students the indispensable religious knowledge and empathy that can deepen their understanding of a global society that comprises various peoples with different religious backgrounds. How can we establish mutual understanding and cooperation in this globalized age without appropriate knowledge about religion and spirituality?

How are these deficiencies in the present state of Japanese education to be addressed? It is certainly the case that teaching religiosity and spirituality in school moral education will be far from easy, since Japanese moral education is required to keep its distance from popular spirituality as well as from the institutionalized spirituality of organized religions. Further clarification of some of the legal characteristics of Japanese education through an analysis of the Government Course Guidelines on Moral Education may be helpful here. The Guidelines categorize the content of moral education lessons in terms of the following four perspectives: (1) Mainly about the self; (2) Mainly about relationships with other people; (3) Mainly about relationships with nature and sublime things; (4) Mainly about groups and society. In connection with spirituality, the 3rd perspective about “relationships with nature and sublime things” seems of most relevance here, not only because the aforementioned Yomiuri newspaper’s survey found that more than half of Japanese people sometimes feel there is something greater than human power in nature, but also because teachers are required to engage in moral education by looking at the relationship between human beings and nature. The detailed study content and purpose here are separated into 4 levels according to grade (1st & 2nd years, 3rd & 4th years, 5th & 6th years in elementary school, and all three years in junior high school). As Japanese moral education is based on these guidelines, the teaching content is more or less of the same quality in the four levels mentioned above, but the content is elaborated more fully in junior high school. For example, the content for 3rd and 4th years in elementary school aims at (1) perceiving the preciousness of life, and feeling the importance of living things, (2) being moved by the magnificence and wonder of nature, and feeling the importance of nature and animals and plants, (3) having a heart that can be moved by beautiful and lofty things. In junior high school, human connectedness with nature is developed into “to protect nature, have a rich heart to be moved by beautiful things, and deepen a feeling of awe towards things beyond human power.”

In Japan, it is commonly agreed that such a “feeling of awe,” which is supposed to be taught in school moral education, should be directly connected with religious sentiment education. Strangely enough, though, we rarely come across the words “religion” and “religious sentiment education” in any description of the official guidelines or other teaching guidance books. But in the Central Council for Education’s 1966 report on the “Expected Image of a Human Being”, we do find the suggestion that “a feeling of awe”, as the source of all religious sentiments, should be directed to the origins of our physical and spiritual life, such as the lives of our parents, the life of the Japanese race and the life of all

humankind, which is therefore religious and “something sacred.” For some reason or other, however, this suggestion was not reflected in the actual guidelines, in which “the origin of life” and “something sacred” are changed to “things beyond human power,” and “a feeling of awe” is not directed to the sacred origin of our physical and spiritual life but simply to “life,” which now becomes merely the object of our “respect” but not of “awe,” losing the original idea that the source of life should be regarded as something sacred (Iwata 2007, p. 87).

The same kind of ideological distortion is apparent in the departure from the original plan concerning the relationship between nature and spirituality. Since teachers are required to refrain from religious education or other activities for a specific religion, they may find it to be very difficult to discuss something religiously sacred, or transcendental beings like God, gods or Buddha. That is why “nature” and “beauty” are representative examples of “things beyond human power” and only these two objects tend to be inappropriately overemphasized in moral education. In other words, “a feeling of awe” is directed only towards the specific fields of natural things and artistic works (Iwata 2007, p. 98).

Some researchers criticize Japanese moral education on the grounds that, in most cases, they find little active discussion of “a feeling of awe” in Western philosophy, where such emotion is explained as an “inner human fear caused by experiences in nature.” They then strongly urge teachers to acquire detailed knowledge of this Western view (Fuji and Michitaro 2014, p. 183). More specifically here, they seem to mean the Western ideas that appeared in the ideological flowering of the cult of “beauty and sublimity” that arose in Britain and France in the 17th and 18th centuries and reached its peak in the aesthetic Romantic movement in Germany at the end of the 18th and early 19th centuries (Okabe and Chie 2012, p. 83).

We can argue, however, that such Western philosophical studies cannot, on their own, provide anything like sufficient educational resources for Japanese pupils and students to obtain the desired knowledge about the relationship between human existence and nature. Rather, we should say, they are only useful as a point of comparison to Japanese philosophies, thereby deepening the relative understanding of the Japanese concept of interconnectedness between human existence and nature and so of the country’s cultural identity. Without understanding the Japanese concept of nature, teachers will find it difficult to teach pupils and students the essence of Japanese culture and its many aspects that are closely connected with nature, ranging from visible cultural phenomena like the tea ceremony, flower arranging and garden design, to invisible ones like the aesthetic sensitivity, philosophy and religion of Japan.

The study of Japanese literature is also relevant here. As Ito (2009, pp. 264–369) demonstrates from the viewpoint of comparative civilizations, we can trace the Japanese concept of nature to its metaphysical origins in Japanese classical literature. For example, the essence of *shizen* (“nature” in Japanese) is delineated clearly in the *Manyōshū* or “Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves,” an anthology of Japanese poems, which is a prime example of the Japanese literary representation of *shizen*. Even the most casual reader of this Japanese poetical anthology will sense in it a view of nature that is “naturocentric”, or rather “*shizeno*-centric”. A good example of this is a poem in the *Manyōshū* by Yamanoueno Okura, a Japanese poet (660?–733?). It reads: “Over Mt. Ōno/Mist is rising all around,/Mist of my deep sigh,/Blown by the breath of my sigh,/Mist is rising all around” (author’s translation). The poet here is expressing the sad feeling of a husband who has lost his wife. When he looks at the mountain, Ōno, he sees mist rising over it. The poet feels that the mist owes its upward trajectory to his own heartfelt sorrow and deep sighs, lamenting the loss of his wife. He is saying that the lamenting breath of his sighs is flowing towards Mt. Ōno and becoming, as it takes visible form, the mist of the mountain itself. He does not say that mist is rising *as if it were* the breath of his lamentation, which would imply that the mist and his breath are two different things, as with similes or metaphors in the Western literature. His words reveal, on the contrary, a much more direct relationship between nature and human beings; we may say more broadly that the poets whose work is contained in this collection felt and preserved an intimate and commingled unity with nature.

In this shizeno-centric world, nature occupies the centre, and human beings are in perfect harmony with nature or the universe, literally melting into it. Here there is no dichotomy between nature and human beings, but human beings themselves are a homogeneous part of nature, and their hearts and feelings are expressed in their very depictions of nature. Human beings and nature are homogeneously united by what we call a “fundamental bond” or “essential tie” with nature or *shizen*. We may term this Japanese naturalism “shizenism”. It differs from that found in Western classical literature, such as Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, whose subject is not the description of nature itself but the world of epic heroes. Hence their concept of nature may be called “anthropocentric,” since in Greek and Roman mythology, nature is absorbed into gods with human form in such a way that the west wind is expressed as Zephyros, the rainbow as Iris, the dawn as Eos, and so on. In Japan, in contrast to the “anthropocentric” classical literature of the West, gods do not absorb nature, but rather nature absorbs gods. Here we can find neither personification nor anthropomorphism in which everything is personated or apostrophized with human beings as central. Rather, human beings and nature correspond with each other in a relation of what may be called common vital rhythms.

This sensitivity toward nature has been the inheritance of Japanese poets, even down to the modern age. A representative example of this is Sachio Ito, who sings: “At the height of loneliness, all the life in heaven and earth comes home to my heart” (author’s translation). Here the poet expresses how he finds he is receiving an emanation of life from the surrounding natural world with its mountains, earth, trees, grass and so on, even when he feels lonely, indeed precisely when enduring the extremity of solitude in the truest sense of the word. In other words, he keenly realizes the close connection of his own life to that of the universe, a very different world of nature from one where human beings are harrowed by “a feeling of fear.”

The Japanese concept of *shizen* should be also distinguished from the Christian concept of *naturae* (Ito 2009, pp. 264–81), in which the Christian God, as creator of the world, is clearly separated from his creatures, establishing a vertical hierarchy with, in order, God at the top, then man created in the image of God or *imago dei*, with all the other creatures we understand to comprise ‘nature’ at the bottom. Here God as a transcendent being does not exist within nature, nor are human beings a part of it. Nature is an external other for human beings. The Western idea of nature used to be based on this hierarchical Christian idea, with the corollary that human beings can and should exercise dominion over the rest of creation as heterogeneous others. Such a dichotomy between human beings and nature is essential to justify human intervention in the world of nature and its manipulation of all that is natural. It led to the emergence of the new science in the 17th century, with the mechanical and instrumental concept of the world that originated in Francis Bacon’s philosophy and was subsequently developed more fully in the Cartesian worldview. Bacon’s concept of nature is not so mechanical and empirical as Descartes’, for whom nature is merely “*la matière même*” and “dead nature,” lacking autonomy and existential connectedness from a Japanese standpoint. But both philosophers clearly share the same metaphysical point of departure, namely the Christian conception of *naturae*, in which nature is given to human beings “*ex donatione divina*,” with the right to control it as “*divinorum operum imitamenta*.”

It should be also noted that the Japanese concept of nature is not the same as that of Western Romanticism, which rebelled against a division between “matter” and “mind” as well as a dichotomy between “human beings” and “nature,” and attempted to build a sort of bridge that would symbolize the unity between them. European Romanticism emerged in the latter half of the 18th century as a reaction against modern rationalism, established in the 17th century, that clearly distinguished subjectivity from objectivity, mind from matter and human beings from nature. Presupposing this dissociation or opposition, it tried to incorporate nature into human subjective consciousness by means of a certain kind of empathy, aiming in this way to build an idealistic bridge to connect human beings and nature again. Even so, one cannot find here the peace of mind that Japanese people feel through a “fundamental bond” or “essential tie” with nature. Instead, there is always anxiety, a fear that one might fail to construct the bridge. That is why it sometimes takes the form of the adoration of nature, and why this is found to be a kind of impossible dream (Ito 1999, pp. 109–10). In short, the

Japanese animistic concept of nature contains in itself something sacred like gods and Buddha that transcends to all the creatures, including human beings, who thus are both physically and spiritually a part of nature. So we find neither opposition nor dissociation between human subjectivity and natural objectivity. To attempt to explain this Japanese concept of nature by employing western ideas is, to borrow Mencius' words, to attempt to "climb up a tree for fish," or to ask an elm tree for pears.

Of course, today the paradigm of nature established by the philosophical ideas of Descartes has undergone drastic changes, and in this context people are ready to reconsider the relationship between nature and life as well as that between human beings and nature. It is being recognised that the view of nature created in the modern West has, in a sense, reached its limits, and an attempt is being made to break through to the Eastern concept of nature. In some areas of science, the concept of nature is significantly changing, as with the idea of a "self-organizing system" (Ito 2013, p. 136). This new science treats all of nature as a holistic system, and so views biological and social phenomena, such as self-organization and self-regulation, as a form of communication with the environment. Its essence is a symbiosis that continuously renews itself and regulates its own processes to maintain the integrity of its structure. This formation of a new concept of nature, called "autopoiesis", does not, of course, mean a regression to that of the ancient Greek *physis*, because it can be pursued by scientific methodology and ways of thinking. Here again, we should pay more attention to the fact that advocates of the new science feel an affinity to non-dualistic Eastern philosophies and even attempt to learn from them. For example, F. J. Varela, a Chilean biologist, philosopher and neuroscientist, introduced to biology the concept of "autopoiesis" which treats the mechanisms of self-production as a clue to understand both the diversity and the uniqueness of the living, and attempts to bring a shift in perspective about biological phenomena. Together with Humberto Maturana, he founded the Mind and Life Institute to promote dialogue between science and Buddhism. The unifying paradigm of autopoiesis also informs Erich Jantsch's *Self-organizing Universe*, which adopts a new perspective on the evolution of the universe, ranging from the cosmic to the socio-cultural dimension. Jantsch also regards Buddhism as "the most comprehensive process philosophy and religion" (Jantsch [1980] 1984, p. 308) and finds the meaning of life in an evolutionary spirit, in which "to engage with full ambition and without any reserve in the structure of the present, and yet to go and flow into a new structure when the right time has come" embodies the supreme Buddhist virtue of "non-attachment" (ibid., p. 255). He uses this Buddhist virtue to explain his idea of "evolutionary ethics" which "would not only transcend the individual but all of mankind, and explicitly include the main principles of evolution, such as openness, non-equilibrium, the positive role of fluctuations, engagement and *non-attachment*" (ibid., p. 265, author's italics).

This type of scientific approach to religion may be a prescription to cure the problems that Japanese moral education is currently facing now. It would focus on the morals or moral principles found in the teachings and deeds of the founders of religions, rather than on the denominational and systematic activities derived from them. One good example of this approach is Moralogy, established by Chikuro Hiroike (1866–1938), who is known today as the founder of Reitaku University, and of the Institute of Moralogy (a Japanese Public Interest Incorporated Foundation). His philosophy is embodied most fully in his magnum opus, *A Treatise on Moral science: A First Attempt at Establishing Moralogy as New Science*, the first edition of which he published as *Dotoku Kagaku no Ronbun (A Treatise on Moral Science, 4 vols.)* in 1928. Moralogy is the technical term that Hiroike coined for his "new science which is chiefly devoted to a comparative study of conventional morality and supreme morality with respect to their principles, substance and content, but which at the same time aims at a scientific demonstration of the effects of their respective practices" (Hiroike [1922] 2002, Japanese in 1922, vol. I, p. 63). He was convinced that this allowed Moralogy to establish "a definite method of perfecting the supreme character of the individual man, and consequently a definite method regarding moral education" (Hiroike [1922] 2002, vol. I, p. 48). When speaking of religion, he expressed a high opinion of the role it had played in enriching the mental life of humankind and bringing it to spiritual salvation, but he was at the same time sceptical about its universal quality. One reason for this was his belief that each

religion, being “based on a small number of scriptures from a sage’s teachings . . . tries to save the whole of mankind by those narrow and partial doctrines” (Hiroike [1922] 2002, vol. I, p. 92). To overcome the limitations of previous religious approaches to the subject, Hiroike felt strongly that the authority of morality needed to be demonstrated scientifically. He aimed to “enlighten and bring the whole of mankind to salvation through the principle of learning and morality underlying the teachings and deeds” of the sages of the world. To achieve this, the method of study in Moralogy would be “scientific” and its method of propagation “purely educational” (ibid., p. 92). Through studying the world’s great sages, including Buddha, Christ, Confucius, and Socrates, as well as Japanese Shinto philosophy, Hiroike sought to identify what he called “supreme morality” as a means of bridging East and West and enhancing the prospects for world peace. He also coined the word “*ortholinon*” to indicate “one line of succession that has inherited the spirit in a direct line from God” in supreme morality. It should be noted that ‘God’ here has no particular religious or racial association, nor is it detrimental to the universal nature of Reality. From a philosophical point of view, God here is regarded as Reality, which has been recognized of old by philosophers to be immutable and sacred. As Hiroike wrote, in the light of the doctrines, precepts and practices of the world sages, “the essential nature of God is ‘benevolence’ and his activity constitutes ‘the law of nature’, including psychological and physiological laws that relate to man and social laws that work among men.” To believe in God, then, is “to practise his law, i.e., morality” (Hiroike [1922] 2002, vol. III, p. 102), as well as “to believe in his law, i.e., the law of nature or universal causality which informs man’s mind and his conduct as well as all other more purely physical phenomena” (ibid., p.103). He gives us to understand that this word *ortholinon* refers to “the succession of pure orthodoxy that creates or develops the physical and spiritual life” of humankind, and all those predecessors who belong to this *ortholinon* are its “great benefactors” (Hiroike [1922] 2002, vol. III, p.111). The most important feature of this principle is that we should return favours to the *ortholinons* who have bestowed them on us, and Hiroike urges us to understand the importance of this deed as a natural moral law of human society in the following terms: “. . . all things have appeared in the universe and we human beings, having also been born as one of the phenomena, have helped this universe gradually to develop, the older bringing up the younger, the younger in return supporting the elder—which constitutes a biological law of the universe” (Hiroike [1922] 2002, vol. III, p.115). Shedding light on the all-embracing phenomena of the universe as well as the interconnectedness of the human world with broad natural dynamics, Hiroike recognizes an invisible unity between human beings and nature, and between human consciousness and the law of nature, since human existence is an integral aspect of nature itself. In the same way, moral education in Japan requires the development of an educational paradigm capable of dealing with self-transcendence, spirituality and religiosity beyond the boundaries of individual existence. This engenders the joy of connectedness with nature, and from such interconnectedness between the human world and morality in general springs a new sense of humanistic or holistic meaning.

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