THE IDEAL OF NATURE IN JAPANESE RELIGION AND ITS POSSIBLE SIGNIFICANCE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

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The Notion of Nature: A Bridge Between East and West?

East is East, and West is West, and whether the two will ever meet is a perennial topic of discussion. But if some people had their way, the notions of nature in some Eastern traditions which emphasize a harmonious relationship to or reverent participaation in nature--such notions would provide the bridge spanning Orient and Occident. It may be interesting to test this bridge by following its path from America to Japan, before examining in greater detail the Japanese ideal of nature and its actual significance for improving the environment.

Most of my time as a teacher is spent interpreting aspects of Japanese culture and religion to American students. And that aspect of the Japanese tradition which draws probably more interest than any other is the high status of nature and emphasis on man's oneness with nature. For many American students it is a fascinating and liberating experience to learn that a religious tradition not only appreciates the beauty of nature but even accords it a sacred value.

These students readily understand that officially within their

own Judaeo-Christian tradition there is a three part hierarchy with God at the top as Creator and Judge, man in the middle as creature obedient to God and in charge of the world, and nature at the bottom as the creation which God has declared as good. However, nature is good only so long as man does not place nature--creation--ahead of God--Creator. And inevitably man, through his own sin, turns his gaze away from God in Heaven to the things of this world. The Old Testament has several classic versions of this story: for example, Adam and Eve disobeying God to eat of the forbidden fruit in the graden of Eden; or, another example, while Moses ascends Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, the people below make a golden calf in order to worship the powers of fertility. The lesson is that man may not find God through nature; more generally, man may not look to nature for religious fulfillment.

Many Americans, not students alone, are seeking a more vital relationship to nature, and they are openly critical of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. They feel that their own tradition has devalued nature to a level below man such that nature is defined as the matter to be used or "exploited" for sake of man and God. In the eyes of these critics this notion of nature is unsatisfactory because it does not recognize the intrinsic value of nature, such that instead of exploiting we should respect, preserve, appreciate, love, and even venerate nature. Is it any wonder, then, that Americans and other Westerners have attempted to consturct bridges to traditions with more respect for nature?

American students studying Japanese religion are drawn especially to those features which deal with man's relationship to nature. In the creation story of Japanese mythology many

gods participate in the emergence of the cosmos, and the gods remain intimately connected with all phases of life. Almost any dimension of nature--rocks, streams, mountains, thunder--may be or become sacred or kami. The kami, one might say, are a part f nature--but that would be an unfortunate Western way of putting it. It would be more true to the Japanese experience to say that nature itself intrinsically manifests the sacred or is kami.

A general principle of Shinto is that man basically is one with nature, and American undergraduates find this side of Shinto fascinating. In the Japanese religious worldview, the three factors of gods, man, and nature tend to coexist equally on the same plane, rather than in a hierarchical ranking. But of course Shinto is too closely tied to Japanese national history to gain many Occidental "converts."

Those Westerners who try to adopt some of the Japanese worldview usually do so through the popularized versions of Zen, and its thesis that one must become awakened to his oneness with nature. Zen is rich intellectually, esthetically, and in religious techniques; moreover in its popularized versions it makes a universal claim that all men can and should be awakened. A number of Westerners in the past have, and more in the future will have, a degree of faith in this claim. Especially for the young this faith includes the belief that adoption of an attitude of reverence for nature (usually phrased in terms such as a "Zen way of life") will eliminate the problems of pollution. Because these people are increasingly alienated from the American socio-economic system, as well as from their religious tradition. It may be difficult to prove historically that the Judaeo-Christian

tradition's low estimate of nature was the direct cause of the exploitation of nature within the American socio-economic system, but American students often jump to this conclusion.

The assumption, then, is that if Americans would just adopt the general Japanese ideal of nature, American pollution problems would be solved. This assumption usually takes for granted the idea that Japan, possessing a religious tradition with a lofty notion of nature, does not suffer from pollution, or certainly to a much lesser degree than the United States. Now this idea can be checked with the facts, and the sad facts are that Japan probably has a much greater pollution problem than the United States; the greater seriousness of Japan's condition could be measured simply by the one factor of more limited land space. As the world's consciousness of the ecological crisis widens, more people are becoming aware of Japan's pollution problem, and this often forms the topic of discussion in my classes.

Before the news media began to focus on ecological problems, most American students knew nothing about Japan's pollution problems, and would hardly believe me that such problems existed. More recently, as the facts become known, it creates a contradiction in the minds of the students: how can a country with a traditional ideal of reverence for nature develop socio-economic structures which in actuality show disrespect for nature and cause damage to nature? What is the point of crossing the bridge from the West of America to the East of Japan if it simply strats at one polluted beach and leads to another equally polluted beach? Students are intrigued by this contradiction, and when they debate the issue they often divide into two groups.

On the one hand is the group that in my own undergraduate

days would have been called romantic, but now is labelled "hippie." These students are more idealistic, being esthetically or mystically inclined, and may avoid entirely the question of socio-economic structures causing pollution, since they wish to avoid the ambiguities of power politics. At any rate, they take the position that Zen or other areas of Japanese religion are not responsible for the pollution, it must stem from other factors. On the other hand is the group that tends to be activist or leftist. These students think along materialistic and rationalistic lines, and are concerned primarily with questions of socio-economic structures. Activist students may argue that spiritual, idealistic notions like those of Zen are irrelevant for solving materialistic, economic questions such as the causes of and cure for pollution. The more radical activists go further, and tend to blame tradition such as Zen for being too otherworldly, thereby neglecting this world and allowing pollution to occur.

I myself am extremely interested in this debate, and do not wish to choose a side in the fray prematurely. But before even trying to resolve the debate, it seems well to recognize that these two groups represent widely separated, perhaps irreconcilable positions, both temperamentally and philosophically, apart from consideration of observable facts. The romantics or hippies by temperament are esthetically inclined, by philosophical persuasion are oriented toward an unconditioned, timeless moment outside of history. The activists or leftists by temperament are ethically inclined, by philosophical persuasion are committed to the reality of action within the sphere of history. We will have to return to the subtleties of this dilemma, but for the moment I would like to quote a Japanese novel which touches

on the same problem.

> Our argument tended to boil down to this: it depends on how people choose to live--to try to control nature by their own efforts, or yield to it and merge into a broader, deeper order of being. But which of these attitudes, of these ways of life, is better for the world and for humanity? Which should we choose?

Many Japanese readers will recognize the novel from which the quotation is taken, Michio Takeyama's *Harp of Burma.* Japanese prisoners of war in Burma shortly after World War II are hashing over the causes of the war and how Japan can avoid such mistakes in the future. It is not a matter of poor strategy and avoiding military defeat, but how Japan may establish a truly human, civilized society. And even in Takeyama's dramatized debate, the two sides appear. Is the prior consideration man's control over the world, be it by ethical consideration or by technological instrument? Or is the primary pinciple man's recognition that he must first humble himself to the mysterious order of nature? The characters in Takeyama's novel never really end the debate conclusively, but one has the feeling that each side is moving toward a compromise: man must take intitiative in dealing with the world, and yet he must appreciate, not destroy the world in the process.

A similar process of compromise seems to be working in the best minds of American students. They seem to be saying: "Yes, I am attracted to the Zen ideal of harmony with nature, but I won't accept this ideal unless it is actually relevant to socio-economic structures." Or, turned around, "Yes, I am concerned with the material and structural dimensions of pollution, but what spiritual tradition can stimulate and sustain me in this action?" Such students are rejecting oversimplified explana-

tions, and strive to incorporate the ideal and actual within their own thinking. The possibilities of such a compromise--what some might call having your cake and eating it too--are worth examining more closely.

Nature and Ecosystem: a Bridge Between Ideal and Actual?

We have already seen that the ideal notion of nature in Japanese religion (or in other "Eastern" traditions) proves to be a rather shaky bridge for spanning East and West. Be that as it may, we must proceed with our attempt to understand the meaning of nature in Japanese religion and its significance today. And here we find a gap just as difficult to bridge--the gap between ideals and actualities. That is, given the ideal notion of nature in Japan, what can it mean for organized religion and for the socio-economic structure? The scope of the problem is so broad that I can only advance some general considerations for handling the problem, rather than offering specific answers. In discussing these considerations I will move from the more clearly religious dimensions of the problem to the non-religious factors of the socio-economic structure and scientific propositions.

To understand the religious possibilities of the ideal notion of nature in Japan we must first be more precise in our definition of nature. The worst mistake we could make would be to assume that the notion of nature is the same for all people, for the notion of nature is relative to each people and their culture. For example, nomadic people view the world differently from agricultural people, and urban people will hold a view different from the other two. The notion of nature itself is a part of the total fabric of a culture, closely related to the history of a people, their socio-economic activities, and their religious-esthetic tradi-

tions.

It seems to me that the roots of an identifiable Japanese notion of nature are to be found in the early agricultural life of these people two to three millenia ago. The characteristics of this early period are sedentary life in small villages, economic livelihood centered on wet rice agriculture, social structure dominated by extended family or clan organization, and religious attention directed toward veneration of ancestors and the powers of fertility. Out of this context emerged a view of nature as a cosmic order in which man and kami participated intimately, cooperating both to safeguard the sacred order (observing prohibitions and purifications) and to celebrate the cosmic vision by offerings and rituals. When Shinto emerged as a more highly organized religion it was the main repository of this early worldview.

However, as the historical age unfolds, entering religious traditions reinforced and, to a certain extent, transformed this worldview; but, in turn, the entering traditions were influenced by the Japanese worldview. Taoism provided a theoretical framework for the cosmic order and a set of practical means for keeping man in harmony with the cosmic order. Confucianism also contributed metaphysical notions (especially later, with Neo-Confucianism), but its main concern was maintaining the human order of the cosmos in such terms as family stability, veneration to ancestors, and loyalty to superiors (particularly to the state). Buddhism, the most pervasive influence among the entering traditions, offered, among other things, both metaphysical systems and rituals for honoring the dead; generally Buddhist divinities and kami were equated, and Japanese Buddhism's cosmic vision flowered later especially in Zen and

related art forms.

I realize that it is rather bold for a Westerner to summarize several Japanese religions so briefly, one sentence at a time. It may appear that I am "preaching to the Buddha," as a Japanese saying would have it. This certainly is not my intention. And to support my contention that the Japanese ideal of nature, even the ideal of nature within the organized religions, is rooted in prehistoric facts such as rice agriculture, it may be best to quote the great poet Bashō:

The beginning of all art: Fūryū-no hajime ya oku-no ta-ue-uta
a song when planting a rice field
in the country's inmost part.[1]

It seems to me that this notion of nature and its larger world-view has experienced amazing durability throughout Japanese history, in spite of some major socio-economic changes. For until modern times the ethos of Japan has been agricultural and feudal, and this ethos has not yet disappeared. Even when a great number of people were no longer engaged in rice agriculture and small village life, this essentially agricultural notion of nature as cosmic harmony lived on in the hearts of the people. I would venture that the success of Zen and the Zen arts among warriors and city people can be considered partly as an "interiorization" of harmony with nature. That is, people may have an interior experience, within their own consciousness, of harmony with nature, even though they may not participate in the seasonal rhythm of agriculture. Like Bashō, the educated man may then write a poem about rice-transplanting or paint a landscape; even the martial arts may help achieve a similar sense of

1. English translation from Harold G. Henderson, *An Introduction to Haiku*, p.25.

one's own harmony with the world. (Incidentally, I think that this quality of interiorization helps explain how Zen generically has appeal for Westerners: without planting rice or corn, without engaging in agriculture at all, the Western urbanite may still enjoy a sense of oneness with the universe.)

If one had to define a boundary between traditional Japan and its cosmic worldview, on the one hand, and modern Japan, on the other hand, an important landmark would be the novels and woodblock prints of the Tokugawa period (1600-1867). This art is closely connected to urban and commerical life, and secular subjects dominate--the profane and urbane.[2] And as we pass from the Tokugawa period into the modern century, more and more the balance shifts from a rural-agricultural way of life to an urban-industrial way of life. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Japan is still passing through this transi tional state, and this is part of her problem today. The earlier worldview and its notion of nature still survives, but to what extent, and for how long? First let us suppose that this world-view may live on, and that the major organized religions of Shinto and Buddhism have a role in propagating it.

Shinto, as we have seen all too briefly, emphasizes man's essential harmony with the unvierse. Shinto mythology lays the foundation for cooperation between kami and men to partici-pate in cosmic harmony, and rituals insure man's purity as well as the sacred order of the cosmos. Beyond this mythological and ritual basis, some would say that the essence of Shinto is

2. Friedrich H. Spiegelberg, *Die Profanisierung des japanischen Geistes als religions geschichtliches Phanomen dargestellt an Hand einer Anlyse der Farbenholzschnitte des Ukiyo-ye.*

makoto--sincerity. Even without analyzing these facets of Shinto in detail, it is obvious that they hold up an elevated view of nature which, if put into action, would vastly improve the quality of life in Japan today.

Buddhism has its own notions of ridding the self of impurities, and the eightfold path alone would prompt man to ethical behavior in relationship to the world. Zen, of course, teaches that true awakening means harmony with nature. And Tendai Buddhism emphasized that objects of nature can attain salvation; Hajime Nakamura generally calls this dimension of Japanese Buddhism "the acceptance of phenomenalism."[3] Here too, if Buddhism's ideals were enacted, nature might be relieved of her present suffering and attain salvation from eternal pollution.

The question that now arises is, if these ideals exist, then why have they not been actualized; or, at least, how may people try to actualize them? This question implies a criticism of the ecclesiastical forms of Shinto and Buddhism, and here the tone of Japanese critics is severe. For example, Zenryū Tsukamoto and Shōkō Watanabe have faulted Japanese Buddhism's tendency to teach resignation to feudalistic oppression rather than working for genuine enlightenment of the people. More generally Buddhism is seen as trying to live within extinct feudalistic times in depending so heavily on funeral and memorial rites. Shinto, also, has been criticized as trying to live in the past, but not feudal times; rather, it has tried to make the mythological age a literal blueprint for modern Japan. Especially during the Meiji Restoration there were several attempts to imitate the ancient unity of government and religion, and then there was the

3. Hajime Nakamura, *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (1964), p. 359.

institution of State Shinto (Kokka Shintō) which lasted until the end of World War II.

The conclusion seems inevitable, then, that the ecclesiastical forms of Shinto and Buddhism fell far short of their ideals in the past, and that the time is ripe for reform. While making this conclusion, we may stop to admit that any religion and its organized form may never completely actualize its ideals. The very opposite may be true, that organized religion usually tends to support the status quo, rather than its own lofty ideals. For example, a thorough survey of Christian church members and non-members in the United States showed that church members are more racially prejudiced against Blacks than non-members. Racial prejudice certainly is the direct opposite of Christian love and brotherhood. Of course, this does not mean that Christianity in principle (in its ideals) is racially prejuidiced, but it does call for criticism and reform of contemporary Christian churches.

Positively, we might say that every religious tradition needs to reform and revitalize itself periodically. If it is a matter merely of moral corruption, then reform is necessary. If it is a matter of following outmoded models, then new religious models must be found to revitalize the tradition. In actuality, of course, reform and revitalization are not simple procedures. Both reform and revitalization require agreement on at least three counts: the religion's ideal goals, the appropriate institutionalization of these goals, and implementation of these goals in the socio-economic sphere. It would be difficult to gain agreement on just one of these items, for example, the ideal goals of a religion, even by the foremost leaders and scholars of that religion. If agreement on all three counts is next to impossible, nevertheless,

this is the burden of working toward the realization of ideals in human history.

But if makoto, sincerity, is the essence of Shinto, then what would that mean today? One can understand sincerity in the enactment of a ritual, but what would it mean in the socio-economic shere? If it means simply the blessing of all economic activity, rubber-stamping the status quo, then there is little hope for Shinto to be relevant in the present ecological crisis. It is ironic that the word matsuri, festival can be used in two very different senses. Some Japanese scholars say that matsuri is the most characteristic feature of Shinto and even of Japanese religion in general, as the event when the social unit meets the invoked kami and receives a blessing, reuniting the group and its ties with the sacred world. But the same word, matsuri, can be used to indicate meaningless ritual, a decorative and ostentatious display. The leading question is how to revitalize the notion of makoto and the act of matsuri such that they are true to their tradition and yet relevant to the present situation.

Buddhism's leading virtue may be compassion for all sentient beings, and its goal may be to bring all to enlightenment, even the realm of nature. But what would this mean today? Probably the most pressing problem for institutional Buddhism is to replace the preoccupation with rites for the dead with a more vital religious activity. If Buddhism institutionally and ritually is still tied to the feudal age, what would it mean for Buddhism to take on a contemporary style? If Buddhism's concern is compassion for all sentient beings, then how should this be expressed for the victims of pollution--including the natural environment? Zen's spirit has infused the arts of Japan, but can it also

speak to the socio-economic structures?

It is my intention to ask these questions within the framework of each religion, as ethical consideration which might naturally arise out of the religion itself. It may be well to remember, as the late Hideo Kishimoto often noted, that ethics in Japan often finds its expression outside organized religion--for example, in Confucian thought patterns and social units rather than explicitly in Shinto and Buddhism. But still it seems that every religious tradition contains a notion of the ideal world according to which man must try to live. Recalling the debate between activists and hippies in my own classes, I would not try to argue that "action in history" is necessarily more meaningful than spiritual enlightenment. Nor would I try to make a subtle argument that all religion should conform to the sin-and-forgiveness pattern of ethical obedience to a divine Judge, as in the official Judaeo-Christian tradition. Keeping in mind these precautions, we may now refer to Nakamura's thesis that one feature of Japanese ways of thinking is "Weak Awareness of Religious Values," and that "Religion, in the true sense of the word, never deeply took root on Japanese soil."[4] I must confess that I have always felt uncomfortable with this statement, wondering what Professor Nakamura means by "Religion in the *true* sense of the word," and wish that this might be clarified. But if he is right, he may not only be documenting "the weakness of religous orders," but also may be indicating the improbability that Shinto and Buddhism will be able to exert any positive action in actually correcting abuses against nature.

We have been asking what defines the ideals of Shinto and

4. Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples*, p. 530.

Buddhism, and whether they possess the eccleasiastical initiative to apply these ideals in a relevant fashion today. And yet some people will insist that the two religions are totally irrelevant. For example, it might be argued that Shinto's agriculturally based worldview is so anachronistic as to be useless in a urban-industrial setting. Along the same lines, it might be said that Buddhism's universal spiritual message, too, is not relevant in a world dominated by economic matters. That is, even allowing for personal awakening on an individual level, this does not necessarily change the fact that large factories dump poison into streams. Corporations simply do not experience awakened enlightenment. Such arguments are not hypothetical, and will will make all the more difficult the work of concerned Shinto and Buddhist leaders.

This is a good time to shift our attention to the non-religious side of the question, this side might be split into the unreligous and antireligious, as well as the more generally non-religous. Unreligious might be a better term than non-religious for that large number of people in every modern society who are uncommitted, or indifferent to organized religion. If people are not committed to either Shimto or Buddhism, then intellectually relating Shinto and Buddhist "ethics" to social problems is meaningless. The unreligious man may be quite concerned about his relationship to nature, but will seek to define and act out this relationship without the help of organized religion. As men in the modern world tend to live in a profane world, apart from a traditional religous worldview, most organized religions will probably see more of this mood of indifference.

The anti-religious we might characterize as the people who

use a profane ideology in order to attack a religious worldview. It is hardly necessary to mention the well-known phrase that "religion is the opiate of the people." Materialistic arguments will necessarily counter the more idealistic arguments of religion. However, in the battle to save the natural landscape, even materialistic arguments may have to soften. For every technologically advanced nation, the capitalistic as well as the socialistic, shares the deadly bedfellow of human and industrial wastes. Therefore, it is clear that ideology is no safeguard against pollution, and so help may have to be sought from the scientific, or the truly non-religious sector.

The non-religious would be neither indifferent to nor opposed to religion, but simply concerned with another area of investigation. Religion is always expressed in the cultural form of a worldview whose ideals are handed down from generation to generation--a cultural tradition. On the other hand, a scientific view analyzes the most recent information (not just handing down the orthodox ideal) and frames it into a comprehensive system. People may always live within a cultural understanding of their world--a worldview--which includes what we may call generally a notion of nature. But science strives for an understanding of the world which is bound by no traditional worldview and equally relevant to all peoples.

One of the scientific terms to receive wider usage in the concern for nature is ecosystem. This term means the totality of a delicate web of interlocking relationship in a given area. For example, a given marshland or lake supports a variety of plants and animals, all of which are part of an intricate system. Remove any plant or animal, or change any single factor, and it

has repercussions on the entire system. One of the best known examples of upsetting a natural system is the heavy fertilization of lawns bordering fresh lakes. The runoff of phoshates into the lakes causes a tremendous increase in the growth of algae, which in turn clouds the lake and thereby decreases the oxygen content, making it difficult for many varieties of fish (such as trout) to live in the lake. Changing one factor--tremendous increase in phosphates--may cause the lake to grow itself to death in plant life, thus destroying the former ecosystem of a lake community.

A precise scientific analysis of the previous example would be much more sophisticated, but a scientist from any country or of any religious persuasion would make the same general assessment. But the cultural appreciation of a lake is something quite different. Thoreau, in writing about Walden Pond, might be described as trying to do what many in the Western tradition feel impelled to do--to bridge the gap between them and nature, to "get back to nature." We might contrast this with one of the most famous poems of Bashō, in which he says much more than we can paraphrase, but says it in a way that expresses his oneness with nature.

The ancient pond	furuike ya
A frog leaps in	kawazu tobikomu
The sound of the water.[5]	mizu no oto

The significance of such scientific knowledge about living communities, generally called ecology, can hardly overemphasized. For no matter what one's religious commitment, or even lack of commitment, ecological insight is needed to prevent senseless deterioration of the environment. A devout Buddhist

5. English translation by Donald Keene, *Japanese Literature*, p. 39.

or Christian might sincerely want to help a village overcome disease--a laudable act in terms of Buddhist compassion or Christian love. But if the means for implementing this act of mercy is to provide an insecticide like DDT to kill the disease-bearing flies, the end result may be worse than the target disease. For as we have come to realize all too well, because DDT does not break down, it becomes deposited in the vital organs of every link in the food chain. In short, the highest ideals and purest institutions may still set in motion processes which harm rather than benefit the environment, especially if ecological insights are not utilized.

If ecological understanding is so important, one might wonder if it is not self-sufficient, apart from any cultural notions of nature. Some atheists and materialists might so argue, but I think that man is always a cultural animal, and therefore will always seek out a cultural or spiritual vision by which to direct his life. What happens increasingly in the modern world is that people come to reflect on the spiritual visions of traditions other than their own. For scientific knowledge alone will not provide the sense of vision that makes life worth living, that provides a cultural sense of belonging in the world.

Comparative study of religion and other cross-cultural investigations can play an important role in helping the modern world rediscover a meaningful relation to the environment. Although this academic work may seem too abstract to be relevant to immediate problems, it can be crucial within public education. If we take the case of the United States, students who study the Japanese notion of nature may discover for the first time the sacredness of nature. They need not become Zen Buddhists,

but may rediscover St. Francis of Assisi and his ideal of Christian love extending even to the animals and birds.

It will probably be still more beneficial for those in a high religion to study tribal, primitive religions to investigate the sacredness of nature as expressed in a total communal setting. This is one reason why I include American Indian religion in general religion courses. There is always the danger of becoming overly romantic and trying to imitate the model directly, which we cannot do. But the youth of today need to consider a variety of religious models and life styles in order to select the most humane, civilized. As the conversation in the *Harp of Burma* teaches us, confusion about traditional models is the very reason why we must critically investigate the best models known. And there must be some alternatives to the consumption models of the technological-commercial world.

The last non-religious factor, consideration of socio-economic structures, may be the most important factor of all, because it is probably more crucial for the shape of life styles than explicitly religious factors. The main characteristic of socio-economic life in modern countries like Japan and the United States is a total system that can be typified as consumerism. People work for money. With the money they buy, or consume, manufactured goods. The felt "need" to consume certain kinds and quantity of goods is generated by the mass media, particularly television advertisement. The goal of advertising is to create felt need for consumption, as the basis for increased production and profits. To achieve greater production technology is utilized. To maximize profits, the wastes from production are disposed of as "economically" as possible. There is a minimum of concern for their

damaging effects on man and environment.

This may appear to be a rather pessimistic and overly critical view of industrial and commercial activities, and I wish it was. But the facts seem to bear out this dark description. Industry and commerce are sensitive to public sentiment, which must be favorable if they are to sell their products. But usually they are more active in manipulating public opinion than in changing the conditions of pollution: Public relations is most important. It is all too easy to illustrate this.

Every day I pass a highway sign inviting the public to visit a new nuclear power plant on the shore of Lake Michigan. To operate this plant the power company plans to dump millions of gallons of heated water (waste from generating electricity) into Lake Michigan daily. But environmentalists have been blocking the plant's operation in court, arguing that the huge amounts of heated water would damage the balance of life in Lake Michigan. Environmentalists have argued that instead of dumping the heated water into the lake, it should be cooled in large cooling towers; the company has replied this would be too expensive. The power company claims that the warm water will have no great effect on Lake Michigan, but its main advertising appeal in the newspapers has been that people "need" more electricity.

As the court battle has become more bitter, the term "nuclear power plant" has been associated with the overtones of pollution. It is not surprising, then, that the power plant's highway sign has been repainted, omitting the term nuclear power plant. Instead, the new sign reads "Visit our Environmental Center." The term environmental center is probably supposed to project a

more favorable image, but the power plant still is planning to dump heated water into Lake Michigan. It would appear that the power company is more concerned with changing public opinion than with changing the conditions of pollution.

Such illustrations could be multiplied endlessly. As I write this article I hear on the radio an advertisement for Datsun cars. "For every person who test-drives a Datsun, we will plant a tree in a national forest. See how ecologically sound a Datsun is." This is little more than decoration, matsuri in the sense of pretty words which have little actual effect. It seems that in order to reduce pollution drastically in capitalistic countries, a two-pronged approach of enforcement and inducement must be in operation. Enforcement will prevent such catastrophes as extensive dumping of wastes and dangerous levels of contaminants in foods. Inducements such as tax relief for installing waste treatment facilities will encourage positive policies by corporations--instead of their concentration on altering public opinion through public relations.

The severe critique of technology may seem to imply that agriculture is free from the vicious circle of consumerism. But modern agriculture is a an integral part of this business cycle--what has come to be called agribusiness. Heavy use of fertilizer, insecticides, and pesticides constitutes a major pollution problem. Farmers, too, lose touch with the rhythms of nature, and are plugged into the consumption syndrome. But if there is no real hope in either industry or agriculture, what are the alternatives?

The blunt truth seems to be that just as smoke is an indication of fire, where there is advanced technology, pollution is not far

away. All over the world people are seeking a higher standard of living, and technology is employed to achieve this standard, thereby creating the mountains of waste that we term pollution. To a certain extent the contaminating wastes of technology may be minimized by proper treatment and disposal. But ecologists remind us that the earth can only absorb so much waste--even the oceans cannot be used as garbage cans forever.

In America some are advocating a change in life styles to *lower* the standard of living, using less electricity and consuming less technological products. Particularly among college students there is a movement toward subsistence farming or homesteading--trying to live as independently and self-sufficient on a small plot of ground. These college students resent the fact that education is seen mainly as just another cog in the technological-consumerism pattern. One reason why college students are more outspoken against this pattern is because they are more critically aware of it than the average worker. And one of the unfortunate results is the increasing alienation of some of the most capable young people from the "establishment" of organized society. The homesteading venture is too new and too complicated to judge its success and duration. But the investigation of new life styles is an important process in the modern world, and in this regard universities may play an important role--they are best equipped to provide critically interpreted alternatives to the technology-consumption pattern.

I am not in touch with Japanese youth, but suspect that American homesteading is so closely tied to the American experience that it is inappropriate to Japanese culture and geography. I say this because it seems to me that American homesteading

is directly tied to the American (and Western) feeling of alienation from nature, and his need to get back to nature. By contrast, in Japan, even in spite of pollution, it seems that through his own cultural tradition the modern Japanese is more likely to feel at home with his world.[6] Also, the American experience sees land as the frontier, and there is a lot of vacant farm land available; perhaps the only frontier Japan ever had was Hokkaido, and farm land is not available. In fact, viewed in terms of the high density population throughout most of Asia, homesteading might be viewed as just another provincial luxury of America unsuitable for export.

What are the options for Japan? There are a number of communal developments in Japan, which an anthropologist has called "The Fate of Utopia: Adaptive Tactics in Four Japanese Groups."[7] But these experiments in living were not really designed to solve man's relationship to nature, and, like the homesteading ventures by middle class American students, probably are not able to embrace the total society. To live in a homesteading arrangement or in a self-sufficient commune may not solve the worldwide problems of pollution, but then again it certainly won't do any harm. At least the homesteaders realize

6. In his suicide note of 1927 Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, one of the most distinguished of all modern Japanese writers, balanced his extreme personal anxiety with a deep appreciation of nature: 'I am now living in an icy clear world of morbid nerves....Still, nature is for me more beautiful than ever. No doubt you will laugh at the contradiction of loving nature and yet contemplating suicide. But nature is beautiful because it comes to my eyes in their last extermity. I saw, loved, and also understood more than others.' Quoted in Howard S. Hibbett, "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and the Negative Ideal," in *Personality in Japanese History*, p. 449.

7. David W. Plath, in *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 68, Pt. 2 (1966), pp. 1152-1162. The four groups are Atarashiki Mura, Ittōen, Shinkyō, and Yamagishi-kai.

that industry and commerce do not deserve the entire blame for pollution--people in general must share the blame. And if people are serious about curbing pollution and improving the environment, they will probably have to accept the fact of a lower "standard of living"--in terms of the customary measurement of amount of consumed goods.

It may be considered poor form for a Westerner to suggest to Japan that she move backwards in terms of technological development and standard of living. Indeed, she has worked too hard too long to become the only non-Western nation rivalling the Western countries in quantity and quality of manufactured goods. In some fields she is recognized as the leader, and not the follower. For these achievements she may well be congratulated. And yet she must be just as responsible in the elimination of industrial pollution as she is proud of industrial production. It would be unfair for the developed nations to monopolize higher technology and higher standards of living, while asxing the underdeveloped nations to remain vacation paradises. At the same time, underdeveloped nations should ask "What price development," realizing beforehand some of the unpleasant fringe benefits of technology.[8]

Conclusion: Unfinished Bridges

We have traveled a long way, testing first the bridge between East and West, and then seeking a path between religious ideals of nature and a balanced environment in Japan. If the bridge between East and West seemed shaky, the gap between ideals

1. Denis A. Goulet, "Development for What?," *Comparative Political studies*, Vol. I, No. 2 (July 1968), pp. 295-312.

and actualities in Japan proved to be a yawning chasm. There simply are no easy solutions to be reported. Religiously committed people may begin with faith in their respective traditions, but eventually they will have to seek help outside religion. And they may find that the people most helpful in saving the environment are those who are not committed to any particular organized religion. Unable to offer any final solutions, then, we may best close by encouraging continuation of the debate found in the *Harp of Burma*: "Our argument tended to boil down to this: it depends on how people choose to live--to try to control nature by their own efforts, or yield to it and merge into a broader, deeper order of being."

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