

Terada Torahiko's "The View of Nature of the Japanese:" Translation with Critical Essay (Part 2 of 2)

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Physicist Terada Torahiko's "The View of Nature of the Japanese" was written in 1935, in the midst of the Second Sino-Japanese War, and in a time period when the intellectual discourse of Japan was deeply concerned with several of the themes taken up in this essay. The relationship between a nation's milieu and its culture had been the main theme of Watsuji Tetsuro's *Climate and Culture*.¹⁾ This book was also released in 1935, though it was serialized several years earlier in the journal *Shisō*. Its influence was already being seen in a slew of recent analyses of Japanese art and literature.²⁾ Discussions of the nation, or *kokutai*, as an "organic" body encapsulating the land of Japan, the emperor, and the people, were also becoming popular. These would culminate in *Kokutai no Hongi* (Cardinal Principles of the National Polity) of 1937, wherein this organic relation would be raised to religious heights. Also, and this is important to the ecocritical research of which the present essay is a part, Terada's essay forms a link in a burgeoning discourse about the supposedly special Japanese way of looking at and interacting with nature. This discourse may be traced back to 1894 with the publication of Shiga Shigetaka's popular and influential *A Theory of Japanese Landscape*. It continues through Haga Yaichi's *Ten Thesis on National Character* in 1908, and Masaharu Anesaki's *Art, Life, and Nature*

in Japan, as well as Watsuji's work. This notion of a unique Japanese view of nature would be developed through 1945 by writers such as D.T. Suzuki and Ienaga Saburo, as well as in the *Kokutai no Hongi*, and would take on slightly different forms after the war to become the basis of Japanese environmental nationalism right up to the present time.

Terada's essay is divided into five chapters:

1. Opening Words 2-4
2. The Nature of Japan 5-19
3. The Daily Life of the Japanese 19-26
4. The Spiritual Life of the Japanese 26-32
5. Conclusion 32-34³⁾

We should start by mentioning that the title of the piece is actually quite misleading. Only a small portion of the work actually discusses anything like a "view" of nature. Terada narrowly defines his project as demonstrating "how the Japanese have seen and responded to their environment" and "comparing that with the way that non-Japanese people of other lands have seen and responded" to their own environments (Terada 2), and many more words are given over to explain the unique features of the Japanese milieu (Chapter 2, 14 pages), and how Japanese culture has developed in response to that milieu (chapter 3, 7 pages), than are spent discussing a "view of nature" (primarily chapter 4, 6 pages). To that extent, Terada's essay is quite similar to chapter three of Watsuji's *Climate and Culture*, wherein he discusses "The Distinctive Nature of Monsoon Climate," with a focus upon how the distinctive milieu of Japan helped to shape Japanese culture. Terada nowhere uses the word "monsoon," and, following his own expertise as a physical geologist and seismologist, pays much more

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attention to geographical and geological features, particularly earthquakes, and to flora and fauna than Watsuji did, but the resemblance is unmistakable.

Terada's basic argument is as follows:

1. Humans and human societies evolve by adapting to their environment.
2. The particularities of each different environment leave their unique imprint upon the people who live there.
3. The Japanese environment is singularly unique.

Therefore, Japanese culture has grown out of its environment to become like no other in the world. Likewise, the way the Japanese view nature is unique in the world.

Terada seems to understand this argument as the basis from which to understand all of Japanese culture—indeed all of any culture. His main interest in this article, however, is to differentiate Japanese nature and culture from that of Europe on the one hand, and that of the surrounding countries of Asia on the other. Understanding the differences between Japan and Europe is necessary to explain how it is that the superlative culture of Japan failed to discover natural science on its own, and ended up having to learn it from the West. Understanding the differences between Japan and its neighbors in Korea, China, and Manchuria is necessary for Japan to successfully expand its sphere of political and cultural influence into those areas and integrate those lands into its empire.

The remainder of the present essay will be divided into four sections. In the first, we shall trace Terada's arguments regarding the uniqueness of the Japanese environment and his environmental determinism, which leads him to a position where the culture of Japan is a natural and even necessary extension of the milieu of the national land. We shall also

briefly compare Terada's thought with that of Watsuji Tetsuro and Shiga Shigetaka, two thinkers whose influence is quite clearly seen. In the second section, we shall consider Terada's understanding of Europe, his tendency to caricature European culture and environment, and his argument as to why it was that Europeans, and not Japanese, first discovered natural science. Thirdly, we will elucidate the "organic" relationship that he describes as existing between the Japanese people and state to the Japanese milieu, and to see how this is related to imperialist ideology. Lastly a few words will be necessary to situate Terada's work within the larger discourse concerning the "Japanese View of Nature."

1. From a Unique Milieu Evolves a Singular Culture

The thrust of Terada's argument is that Japan's unique milieu has caused a unique culture to evolve on the archipelago, one that has a particular relationship to, and view of, nature. The main points we need to examine here are those regarding Japanese uniqueness, and the relationship he draws between milieu and culture.

The Unique Archipelago

Throughout his essay, Terada uses words that I have translated "unique (*tokushu*, *koyū*, *dokuji*)," "singular (*tokui*)," "peculiar (*tokuyū*)," "special (*tokubestu*)," or "first in the world (*zuiitsu*)," more than 25 times. His argument begins with the innocent claim that each and every place on earth is special:

Humanity...has been brought up at the bosom of nature for ages and ages, brought up so as to adapt to our environment, so that the particularities of each and every environment will, even if just to

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a small extent, have left their unique imprint upon the people who have been raised within it. (Terada 3)

There is little to argue with here. He even avoids sounding too deterministic with his qualification "even if just to a small extent." As we move through the essay, however, we start to realize that such uniqueness accrues more to Japan in his thought than anywhere else, and that it does so to no small extent.

Japan's geographical position is not only "unique on earth," it also manages to encompass "every little specific gradation from the coldest area of the temperate zone to the warmest (Terada 5)," and is possibly even more varied than any portion of Africa. Alas, Japan is more unique than other temperate lands: "(c)ompared with other countries within this temperate zone, Japan has various singular qualities (Terada 6)," not only because it is an island chain separated from a large continent, but because it is on the east side of the continent, which gives it a much harsher climate than Britain, for example, which is on the west side. The Sea of Japan also provides Japan with a much milder climate than Korea and Manchuria.

Terada stresses the unique character of Japanese weather, using a linguistic argument based upon the large amount of weather-related vocabulary in the Japanese language (Terada 7-8). He stresses the existence of volcanoes, and the frequency of earthquakes and typhoons, to show that Japan is unlike any place else on earth (Terada 9-11).

Terada's description of the nature of Japan seems influenced by Shiga Shigetaka's attempt to explain Japan's unique landscape in scientific terms. Shiga gave four scientific conditions for Japan's beauty: 1) A unique geographical position leading to a diversity of climate and biological variety. 2) Being an island experiencing a variety of wind and sea currents. 3)

Having many volcanoes. 4) Erosion, leading to unusual rock forms (see Pyle 1969 160-161). Terada repeats the first three of these four arguments.

If Terada's bare description of the climate and geography of Japan leaves little room for criticism, his insistent stress upon Japan's singular uniqueness reveals gaping holes, for there is no real argument here. Japan is unique, we might agree, but so is every other location on earth. His argument (or lack thereof) that Japan is special is reminiscent of Shiga's claim that Japan was surely the most beautiful country in the world (Shiga 1894). Terada's moves from bare description in scientific language to normative claims copy one of the main strategies of Shiga in *A Theory of Japanese Landscape*. As described by Shin-ichi Anzai, Shiga's "nationalism is based on the almost automatic justification of the superiority of the beauty of the Japanese landscape over that of other Asian and Western countries by virtue of those characteristics of the Japanese natural environment objectively testified to by science" (Anzai 2009 74-75). That is, Shiga goes from scientifically explained "is" (the percentage of volcanic rocks, the axial lines of Mt. Fuji) to normative statements regarding Japan's beauty, which he implies follow from the science but which under analysis do not. Shiga also used his notion of the superiority of Japanese landscape to justify imperialism (Anzai 2009 76).

Terada likewise enumerates objective statements about the Japanese environment, but goes from there to emphasize the singularity of the Japanese milieu, and therefore of Japanese culture, even going so far as to describe it as a microcosm of the entire earth.

Terada and Watsuji

It was of course the name of Watsuji Tetsuro that, more than any other, became attached to the notion that culture evolves out of the milieu

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that surrounds it. It is important in analyzing this essay to consider how Terada was influenced by Watsuji's work.

It is rather shocking that Watsuji's name does not appear in the main body of the text, although Terada seems to refer to him once, without naming him: "There was a person who once said that it was in the bleak, monotonous desert that monotheism was born" (Terada 14). Watsuji argues this in *Climate and Culture* (Watsuji 1961 52). Watsuji's name appears only in a Postscript:

I...direct you to Watsuji Tetsuro's article "The Phenomenon of Milieu"...as well as to the extremely original, organic view of nature shown in his recently published book *Climate and Culture*... In my preceding explanation, I believe that there are many points in which I have been influenced by Watsuji's previously published theories of the relationship between nature and humans. (Terada 18)

In fact, Watsuji's influence is everywhere. Watsuji himself is often criticized for having a sound phenomenological method in chapter 1 of *Climate and Culture*, while not sticking to that method in the latter, more popular parts of the book. He is often accused both of nationalistic *Nihonjinron* as well as environmental determinism in the latter. I tend to agree with such criticisms, though this is not the place for an in-depth examination of Watsuji's theory. The question here is: how did Terada understand the causal relationship between environment and culture? Did he grasp the dialectical nuances visible in Watsuji's beginning, or did he see it as a direct, deterministic form of causation? At first, his view seems nuanced:

Normally, for convenience sake, we set up nature and humanity

as opposites and think about their existence separately. This is the strong point of the modern scientific method, but it is also its shortcoming. Because these two poles actually constitute a single organic whole which is impossible to cut apart in order to consider each pole independently. (Terada 1-2)

Throwing in a characteristic dig at Western science, Terada describes the relationship of humanity to nature as an organic whole. He continues with the quotation given above, stating that “the particularities of each and every environment will, even if just to a small extent, have left their unique imprint upon the people.” While he qualifies his argument here, in the actual method he uses, he shows little else aside from the environment influencing human culture. His strategy works to naturalize everything about Japan, including its traditional culture as well as its contemporary political system. The influence of other cultures, be they Eastern or Western, is negated, as are the roles of individual Japanese actors past or present.⁴⁾ In fact, because of the determining power of its environment, it seems that there is no way in which Japan could be anything other than it actually is.

Terada clearly wants to downplay any cultural links between Japan and the rest of Asia. He hints at this even in the introduction:

Setting aside the problem of where the ancestors of the Japanese were born and from where they crossed to these islands, the Japanese who have been settled on this land for more than 2000 years since history began, whatever kind of genetic memory they might have once possessed, have harvested enough experience in this very environment of Japan to be able to cover up the majority of those deeper layers... (Terada 3-4)

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Any argument that Japanese culture is somehow derivative of continental culture is cut off at the root. Terada goes on to give several examples of how anything that originated in Asia was only able to continue in Japan because it suited, or could be adapted to suit, Japan's milieu. The first example is, unsurprisingly, rice:

It is likely that the native inhabitants and early immigrants to Japan in ancient times ate seafood and the meat of birds and beasts as part of their regular diet. At some point, however, various agricultural methods were transmitted from China or Southeast Asia, and a plant-based diet developed, alongside a taboo on meat eating that was transmitted here with Buddhism. As everybody knows, from that point on rice became our staple food. *However, we must not forget that the fundamental reason for this is that rice agriculture either originally suited the milieu of our country, or that it was adapted to that milieu as it developed.* (Terada 10, my italics)

Both agriculture and religion come from Asia, but the most important thing is that Japanese adapted these to best suit their environment. Any cultural influence from the continent is subsumed into this unique milieu and becomes purely Japanese. This approach is made clearer in a later statement: "(t)hat Buddhism could come here from a far-off land, and yet become indigenous, then continue to develop here, is only because various factors in its doctrines were suited to the milieu of Japan" (Terada 14). Any influence that Buddhist teaching may have had *upon the manner in which* people in Japan adapted to their environment is left out of the equation. Certainly one might argue, for instance, against Terada, that a Buddhist attitude of resignation led people to passively accept natural disasters, simply rebuilding after earthquakes and

typhoons, rather than developing a scientific approach to confronting them. His argument is rather that nature was too stern to be tested. We shall return to this idea later.

Again, in speaking of traditional straw raincoats, Terada states: “This may have originally come to Japan from somewhere around China, but it stuck because of the way it was suited to Japan’s milieu” (Terada 11). One wonders if anything Japanese could not be described this way—is there any part of the culture that remains, even though it doesn’t really suit the milieu? His circular method precludes us from finding such an example: cultural phenomena arise as people adapt to their surrounding environment, and the fact that these phenomena continue to survive proves that they are suited to that environment. What remains could not but remain.

There are political reasons why Terada wishes to discount forces other than environment in the shaping of Japanese culture. He is emphatic in his desire to draw distinctions between the Japanese race and both Westerners on the one hand, and other Asians on the other. Japan, as the one Asian country at the time that had embraced European science, technology, and economics, was singular. It was neither East nor West, but wholly unique. This uniqueness could come neither from its Asian heritage (cultural or genetic) nor in the Western science it had embraced: the only grounding for it was in the land of Japan itself.

This is why, though he speaks of humanity and nature as an inseparable whole in his preface, Terada does not in fact understand culture as being something which develops while interacting organically with a milieu, so much as something that simply evolves to correspond to its dictates. This fact becomes clearer as Terada personifies, or basically deifies, Japanese nature in his discussion of it as both mother and father of the people.

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Here we can say that Terada is indeed guilty of a particularly strong environmental determinism, in ways that Watsuji and even popular writer Jared Diamond are not.⁵⁾ Causation for him is a one-way street from environment to culture. This is an important point, though, because it will mesh nicely with Terada's implicit racial ideology as well as the contemporary vision of the land, people, and emperor of Japan as one organic, even mystical, whole.

2 . Europe Lacks a Compassionate Mother and Stern Father

Terada was a renowned physicist, one of the first generation of Japanese scientists to emerge on the world's stage. Through this essay, however, we catch many hints of just how uncomfortable he was with that position. Culturally, he was Japanese through-and-through, but his profession was not only something he felt to be radically un-Japanese, it was something, as a method of revealing the truths of the natural world, the value of which he could not deny, and the fact that Japanese had to learn this from Westerners seemed to have been a source of shame for him. This tension leads Terada to make contradictory claims throughout the essay: he attempts to rationalize or naturalize the reasons why it was that the West, and not Japan, came to discover this powerful tool, while at the same time, he strives to show that much of the traditional wisdom of Japan was actually super-scientific, better than knowledge that could be arrived at in the "Western" way. To advance his argument, he draws a simplistic caricature of Europe, makes claims about the uniqueness of Japanese "wisdom" regarding nature, and finally creates something of a religious tale to explain why Japanese failed to discover science.

Terada's Occidentalism

In a manner similar to both Haga Yaichi (see Haga 1908 176, 179) before him and many writers who would follow, Terada signals a kind of grudging respect for Europeans and their culture while at the same time pigeon-holing it into simplistic formulas which stress its radical difference from all things Japanese.

He often references statements from unnamed Westerners as evidence for his own claims. Westerners wearing *yukata* in Japanese summer are more comfortable than those wearing business shirts (Terada 21). Westerners too realize that Chinese food is boring (Terada 20). A Frenchman who knows Japan agrees that the Japanese are a nation of poets (Terada 30). Obviously there is a kind of authority ascribed to Westerners who see Japan as he does.

And yet the picture that Terada draws of Europe is one of extreme generalizations rooted in subjective impressions. His statements about the West amount to little more than one caricature after another, and yet it is disturbing to consider that many are still taken as common sense in discourses about comparative culture in Japan.⁶⁾

For example, start with his claims about diet. He claims that Westerners (as well as Chinese) “all year long are nibbling (*kajiri*) on their stored-up potatoes and onions, and chowing down (*kutteiru*) on the meat of pigs and cattle along with dried or salted foods with no regard to seasonality” (Terada 20). We can ignore his disparaging language here and simply ask: Is this true? Even in northern Europe, which he experienced more than elsewhere, “stored-up potatoes and onions” have been foods to get one through the hard winter, while the period from late spring until early autumn is more the time for seasonal fruits and vegetables. We needn't bother to speak of southern Europe. The notion he embraces here, that it is

only the Japanese who understand *shun* and *hashiri*, is simply preposterous. Peoples all over the world, even in the tropical cultures that he also disparages, have since Paleolithic times known seasonality in food. Modern industrial society has reduced our connection to seasonal foods, to be sure, but most of that came after his writing, and of course now that is no less true in Japan than anywhere else. And yet, the notion that *shun* is unique to Japan still persists widely.

Terada similarly paints a caricature of European gardens and art that today remains common sense among many Japanese. As opposed to Japanese gardens, wherein the "Japanese pleasure in inviting the natural mountains and waters close to their homes *without defacing them in any way*," it is Europeans who "mostly delight in making geometrical gardens wherein they forcibly fit nature into hand-crafted molds." While Japanese enjoy the natural beauty of the stems of their flowers in ikebana, Westerners use flowers in their homes "only to achieve a mass of color" or as "a natural bottle of perfume" (Terada 23-24, my italics).⁷⁾ One wonders just how knowledgeable Terada was of the long and varied history of the European garden. One also wonders if he has any idea of the amount of pruning and "crafting" that go into caring for a Japanese garden. Stranger still is the fact that he generalizes concerning what people enjoy about flowers in the home, as if all Japanese simply look at *eda-buri* and ignore both color and aroma.

Even more audacious is his implicit claim that only Japanese find aesthetic value in agricultural landscapes: "Ears of rice fluttering in the wind, potato fields wet with dew: it is the Japanese who also count these among objects of aesthetic appreciation in nature" (Terada 24-5). The pastoral tradition stretching from Virgil through to the Romantics and up to this very day may have focused on herding and pastures, but agricultural scenes have always been a part of it as well.

Terada's claims about poetry and painting similarly draw caricatures of the West. In "foreign" poetry, "the opposition of self and outside world is always obvious, and from there philosophy is born, morals are configured," whereas Japanese poetry reveals a "harmonious fusion of humanity and nature" (Terada 28). Likewise in Western painting, nature is "simply an object which is opposed to the subjectivity of the painter," whereas in Japan it is "the expression of a holistic world in which both subject and object are joined and blended together" (Terada 31).

We may begin to approach such claims by simply asking what Terada means with his metaphysical terms "harmonious fusion," "holistic world," and "subject and object ... blended together?" Nowhere are they explained. We can also point to *waka* poetry wherein natural objects are used solely as metaphors for emotion, or painting that is as objective as anything in the West, to challenge his idea that there is some kind of primordial harmony being expressed within.

His picture here is a Western world made up of humans like Descartes, doubting if anything outside themselves exists. Opposed to that is a Japanese world of sages grasping reality directly through their enlightened intuition. Everything in Western society, in Terada's view, simply boils down to a scientific, objective attitude, whereas everything in Japan is a simple harmony between humans and nature. The slightest familiarity with the concrete realities of either civilization exposes these images as the caricatures they are.

When discussing his understanding of pillow words, he gives us a clue as to the roots of his bias. After describing pillow words as a kind of spell which sets up the stage for a poetic act, he claims, referring quite obviously to "The West:" "For ethnic groups who only know nature as seen from a logical, scientific standpoint, and feel no possibility of seeing nature

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in any other way, this sounds like complete nonsense" (Terada 29). It appears that Terada's own obsession with the notion of science as an import from the West has made it impossible for him to imagine that Europeans could possibly interact with nature in any way other than by dissecting it, manipulating it, observing it logically, and mathematizing it.

Can we really read all European garden art, flower arrangement, poetry, and painting as scientific approaches to the world? When Terada extolls the "super-scientific" wisdom of Japanese agriculturalists, fisherman, and architects who understood how to interact with their environment without science, and who often know or sense things that science still cannot explain, does he really believe that such wisdom can be found only in Japan? Does he not realize that Europeans (and others) in the same professions have claimed the same such wisdom for centuries?

Such claims lead Terada into a kind of contradiction, where he extolls such "super-scientific" knowledge as something that Western science cannot explain, on the one hand, while then calling for Japanese scientists to employ their new-found method in an attempt to validate and explain the traditional wisdom of Japan, on the other. If it might be explained at some point, is it really super- or anti-scientific to begin with?

The Environmental Conditions for Science

As a leading physicist in the first generation of Japanese scientists, Terada struggled in a very personal manner with the question that had preoccupied nearly all Japanese thinkers since the early Meiji era: why was it that Japan was so clearly behind the West in its material civilization and knowledge? This was especially painful to those who, like Terada, believed that Japan possessed a superior spiritual culture.

But they could not discover science for themselves. This is the

root of an inferiority complex that not only pained Terada but also plagued a whole nation for several generations. It is the question of science that, more than anything else, underlies and motivates Terada's understanding of nature and the Japanese relationship to it. He has no doubt about the power of science to lead to truth, and yet seems to hate the fact that it was Westerners, and not Japanese, who discovered that. The trick, then, is to turn a weakness into a strength: the Japanese had no need for scientific truth, he claims, because they were snuggled deep in the bosom of Mother Nature and learned to follow her closely as she provided all their needs. On the other hand, they had a difficult relationship with strict Father Nature, who struck them down with typhoons, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions whenever they got too bold and strayed from nature's course. In Europe, he claims, nature was both much more stingy than in Japan, withholding her blessings, and yet also was much less strict, as they did not suffer from the rash of natural disasters which plagued Japan. Therefore Europeans became both greedy and haughty, and stood up in the face of nature without fear, using science to control and manipulate their dear Mother without suffering the punishment of an all-too forgiving Father.⁸⁾

Terada can thus rest easy, knowing the reason why things developed as they did. His anxiety is revealed most clearly in the following lines: "At any rate, it is clear that the reason that analytic science did not develop in Japan is because of the domination of the environment, and not because the Japanese possess a low-grade intellect" (Terada 27).

We need to examine the claims that Terada is making here, along with the logical connections between them.

1. The Japanese environment is more bountiful than anywhere in Western Europe in fulfilling vital human needs.

2. The Japanese environment is more severe than that of Western Europe in inflicting hardship on humans.
3. The growth of science in Western Europe was governed solely by the above two factors, as was the lack of a growth in science in Japan.

None of these claims is demonstrably true. The fact that the Japanese environment is very bountiful, on the one hand, and yet rife with natural disasters on the other, is by now a truism. The question is, however, is this really *more true* of Japan than anywhere else? Specifically, is it *more true* than it is of Western Europe?

In regards to nature's bounty, it seems to me to be questionable at best. Consider a Greek shepherd, minding his sheep and goats while taking time out at certain times of the year to tend to his olive trees and grape vines. Watsuji himself claimed that it was this mild, bountiful environment that afforded the Greeks the leisure time to undertake philosophy! Or imagine a German farmer, growing wheat and barley and fattening his pigs on the freely given fruits of the forest. Does he experience less of nature's bounty than a Japanese rice farmer, struggling to maintain his paddies?

As for natural disasters, this is also a relative claim. Southern Europe has experienced its fair share of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The Lisbon Earthquake of 1755 is a prime example of the "wrath of Father Nature" being let loose on a European community, and leading to a profound existential crisis in Portugal and beyond. Lands north of the Alps experience few earthquakes, but the argument could be made that the harsh winters there—which Watsuji downplays as being colder than Japan but less wet, and thus easier to bear, a claim somewhat conflicting with Terada's claim that European winters are wet whilst in Japan they are dry—cause the inhabitants more difficulty than earthquakes or typhoons in that they come

yearly and could at any time claim the life of the unprepared.

Clearly the claims that Japanese nature is both more bountiful and also stricter than the environment in Europe are little more than Terada's subjective impressions. His description of Europe as a continent of bogs, swamps, and deforested mountains lends more evidence to this. He saw what he wanted to see—only things which coincided with his views of Japan.

Finally we must question two logical moves that Terada makes from these questionable prepositions. First, can we really agree that Mother Nature in Europe is so impoverished that the people there had no choice but to develop a scientific approach to the environment, lest they perish? Millennia of European history would seem to go against this assertion. Next, does it really follow that Japanese were so afraid of earthquakes and other natural disasters that they dared not try to understand why they occurred? Terada here anthropomorphizes nature to a dizzying degree, like some vengeful *kami* waiting to strike back at humans who dare to understand his ways. We will come back to this point in the next section. Lastly, it seems to me that his image of the Japanese who have “learned to enjoy (nature's) full blessings” solely through submission (Terada 32) is demonstrably false. Much recent literature on environmental history shows a people whose engagement with their environment is anything but a simple act of submission.⁹⁾

We must thus reject that Terada's explanation for why science was developed first in Europe and not Japan as far too simplistic and deterministic. While environmental factors must have played a role in this development, it seems to me that we must also ask: were there no non-environmental factors that contributed to the growth of science in Western Europe? For example, Historian of technology Lynn White Jr., well known for situating Christianity at the root of environmental destruction in “The

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Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis" in 1967, also sees Christian theology as providing the stimulus for the growth of science: medieval notions of the creation as revealing the mind of God led Christians to try to understand nature better, which ironically led to the growth of a science that later was said to have made the existence of God both unnecessary and impossible (White 1967 1206).

We cannot here enter any more deeply into the question of the causes of the scientific revolution. We can only here contend that Terada's account is quite unsatisfactory, as it leaves out any kind of cultural influences that cannot be explained environmentally, and also completely discounts the role of individual genius in building up the edifice of science—what science would have existed without Galileo and Newton?

3 . A Psychological and Physiological Connection to the Land, Spreading Out to Surrounding Areas

While metaphors for nature as mother and/or father are plentiful throughout the world, Terada's use of these ideas goes beyond metaphor. Rather, in line with the growing national ideology of his time, he attempts to reify what was seen as a substantial, familial link between the Japanese race and its homeland, one that would be explained primarily using the language of the Shinto religion, but also one that would come to rely heavily upon Watsuji's *fūdogaku*. Mother Nature and Father Nature are anthropomorphic constructions of natural forces that in many ways mimic the notions of Shinto deities, or *kami*.

Before approaching this ultimate question, we must take a look at the somewhat strange racial ideas in Terada's essay. To start with, in several places he stresses the manner in which life within a specific milieu can alter the race of people who live there, in their "genetic memory," their

“psychology,” and even their “physiology and anatomy.” That is to say, Terada seems to freely endorse the notion that environment can alter the genetic makeup of a people, over relatively short historical time periods, to distance them not only psychologically but physiologically from the peoples of neighboring lands.

Terada begins with the psychological argument we referenced above, namely that 2000 years of adapting to the environment of Japan would have covered up “whatever kind of genetic memory (the ancestors of the Japanese) might have once possessed” (Terada 4). He later makes the somewhat confusing statement that these mental changes came about by the working of the environment upon the physiology of the people:

However, the same environmental variety in climate and milieu which gave birth to the great variety in differentiation of plants must also have brought some variety of psychological differentiation to the Japanese people, working through their physiology. (Terada 14)

Does his simply mean that people sense the environment through their bodies, which then brings about psychological changes? Or is he reaching for some deeper connection? The latter interpretation seems to better fit his essay. For instance, he states that for people living in a land of earthquakes and storms, the Buddhist “notion of the impermanence of nature is a genetic memory passed down to us from our furthest ancestors, and has penetrated right in to our internal organs” (Terada 27-28). Has the impermanence of the Japanese environment caused their very organs to evolve? Later, he claims that haiku and the seasonal words within it should not be changed until people who attempt to do so “first thoroughly study and recognize the

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so-called holistic Japanese anatomy and physiology that I am here laying out" (Terada 31). Haiku is thus somehow an expression of the physical bodies of the Japanese. He goes on to claim that technology and worldwide communication will bring about "a remodeling of the racial characteristics of the Japanese people" (Terada 33), although he doesn't say just how that might occur.

While it is clear that environmental factors play a part in the process of natural selection in the evolution of species, Terada here makes at least two mistakes. First is equating the differentiation of plant species, which has occurred over geologic time spans, with that of a human community over 2000 years. Next, and more importantly, is the mistaken notion that the environment actively works to cause evolutionary changes. Genetic selection occurs randomly, and is not directly caused by nature. It is simply that certain random changes privilege some individuals more than others in the struggle to survive.

Terada's is no measured application of evolutionary theory. It rather falls in more closely with the *kokutai* ideology of the time. In *Kokutai no hongii*, for instance, it is argued that the Japanese people are siblings (*dōhō*) to the land itself, which is, according to the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, the child of the kami Izanagi and Izanami (Kokutai no Hongi Sec. 2.2). It goes on to state that the people and the land of the nation become one and together serve the emperor.¹⁰⁾ Was Terada thinking specifically of Izanami and Izanagi when he spoke of Mother Nature and Father Nature? It is doubtful that a scientist such as Terada took the ancient Japanese myths literally, and yet the parents he speaks of do take on a strong anthropomorphic character, the mother blessing and coddling her indulgent children, and the father frightening and punishing them. The claim that the physiological and anatomical characteristics of the Japanese were shaped by their environment

also seems much more plausible when the land is seen as possessing a divine agency toward its inhabitants.¹¹⁾

Nature, Race, and Empire

On account of the changes wrought by the land upon its people, Terada claims that the Japanese are very different from the peoples around them, so much so that they may be considered even as different species. Slavic peoples brought up on vast plains, for instance, do not understand life in mountainous and fragmented Japan, so should not even be considered the same species: “We can here see one basic, unscientific mistake of that group of intellectuals who think of Japanese and Russians as possessing the same basic humanity (*Nihonjin wo Roshiajin to onaji ningen to kangaeyō to suru*)” (Terada 13). He is here clearly not saying simply that these groups are different *types* of humans, but that to stress the common humanity of both groups is mistaken.

As the Japanese have become closer to Westerners in their grasp of science, they have inevitably moved away from Asia. This thinking, similar to the “Leaving Asia” (*datsua*) ideology attributed to Fukuzawa Yukichi, is embraced by Terada:

I go on a tangent, but it seems to me a meaningless classification to draw distinctions between races based only on skin color. Viewed from the organic whole as humans living within nature, it seems to me that Japanese and Chinese are not very close races at all. Even to refer to “Orientals” as one group seems fictitious. (Terada 33)

This leads us to the imperialist message that Terada has hinted at throughout but makes clear in the last two paragraphs. The message is that

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since Japan is blessed with a unique environment that resembles that of the Asian continent, but differs from and is superior to it in various ways, Japan has come to have a superior culture. It is thus the destiny of the Japanese to adapt their culture to Asia.

He makes the point that, geographically, Japan is a microcosm of the entire earth: "the crustal structure of Japan forms a detailed mosaic, a miniature form wherein the various parts of the rest of the world are compressed into one narrow area" (Terada 11). It is because Japan was seen as a miniature of the entire earth that, under the *hakkō ichiu* (All the World under One Roof) ideology, it was destined to lead humanity in a new world order. This message becomes explicit in Terada's conclusion. The Japanese, being separate from and superior to the rest of Asia, must embrace their destiny, which is the realization of what amounts to the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere:

It is the destiny and *raison d'être* of the Japanese people, and will be a contribution to the healthy progress of humanity, for them to recognize every peculiarity of this land of Japan and, making the most of these, adapt them to the environment surrounding our country (*shūi no kankyō*). (Terada 33)

It is thus their destiny to Japanize East Asia, to lead these less advanced peoples by sharing the gifts of wisdom that they Japanese have learned from their unique milieu. With that, let us conclude this essay by looking at Terada's claims about the Japanese view of nature.

4. Solidifying the Notion that Japanese possess a Unique View of Nature

To conclude, I wish to situate Terada's discourse concerning the special way that Japanese view and understand nature within the larger discourse of the Japanese "*Shizenkan*" that continues to this day. While the mystical imagery of *Kokutai no Hongi* has mostly been discarded, many of the stereotypes and caricatures remain, and have been reiterated time and time again by post-war *Nihonjinron* apologists hoping to prove the uniqueness of Japanese culture, by reactionaries calling for a return to the values of "good old Japan," or by environmentalist thinkers eager to put the blame for the degradation of the planet on others, and portray the Japanese as innocent victims, or else to suggest that a "Japanese" approach to nature might solve the world's problems. Here is not the place to attempt any comprehensive interpretation of this discourse, but it will be a useful step on the way to one. I find in Terada's essay five major claims regarding the manner in which Japanese view nature that will become consistent in the later discourse.

A. The natural environment of Japan is particularly abundant, but also particularly harsh, and this colors the manner in which Japanese people view nature.

Other authors focus on the particular beauty of Japan, which is not very important for Terada. The abundant / harsh dichotomy was invoked by Watsuji before him, and Terada took over from there. We have already seen the problems with this claim, so they will not be reiterated here. The ideas will be used time and again. In the *Kokutai no Hongi* of 1937, the harsh aspect of the environment will be downplayed, seemingly too negative to

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include, and the abundance and beauty of Japan extolled.

B. The Japanese understanding of nature is codified into a culture of the four seasons, which is particularly noticeable in poetry.

This will become a truism and the main point of many arguments about Japanese views of nature, although the details will vary from thinker to thinker. Takase Shigeo's book of the same name as Terada's essay was published in 1942 and included an extensive catalog of the manner in which the poetic and literary view of nature evolved throughout Japanese history. In the same year, Ienaga Saburo in *The Development of the Religious View of Nature in the History of Japanese Thought*, focused on literary statements of a Buddhistic ideal of nature as a salvation from the evils of the world.

It is quite clearly true that a codified, poetic and artistic understanding of the four seasons lies at or near the root of the manner in which nature is understood and represented in Japan. This is of course something that was first imported from China, and something that exists in different forms in many cultures, including the West. The Japanese codification is a unique one, tied to the environment of the main islands and, as Terada stresses, possibly best seen in poetry, passed down in a slowly evolving manner from the time of the Heian Court. His claim that this is most accessible in the *Haikai Saijiki* is an interesting one that few others have taken up in this discourse. Terada, an avid haiku poet on and off throughout his life, would have been well acquainted with this collection. It is disappointing that he did not elaborate it more closely.

C. The Japanese do not try to control or conquer nature, but passively accept her blessings. This is opposed to Westerners, who live in constant struggle to control nature.

This also was hinted at in Watsuji and will become a pillar of the discourse. Strangely enough, it will return most powerfully in the 1970s, after the period of high economic growth and technological advances had initiated Japan into the company of the most advanced industrial nations in the world. This is argued most clearly by Masao Watanabe in “The Conception of Nature in Japanese Culture” in 1974. It is also hinted at by Lynn White in his fore-mentioned essay, and will often be taken up by Western environmentalists, particularly those in the Deep Ecology tradition, in their criticism of their own culture and desire to find a new approach to nature.

D. The Shinto religion has made particular contributions to the understanding of nature, primarily in its notion that myriads of kami exist in natural objects.

From the late 1990s, a Shintoist environmentalism will emerge, often centered in English-language texts. This seems to be partly an attempt to rehabilitate the image of the religion that was tarnished by its guise as State Shinto. The claim will be that Japanese have always considered all of nature to be divine, and thus refrained from damaging or attempting to conquer it. Terada does not go so far in his claims, but the following lines presage the discourse that will follow, including the stress upon shrine Forests:

In a country like Japan, which has a variegated nature packed full of transformation, it is only natural that Eight Hundred Myriad Gods would be born and continue to be worshipped. Mountains, rivers, trees: each one is a god, and is also a person. It is by

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worshipping these, and by following them that are lives are assured. Furthermore, as a result of the people's sedentary inhabitation of the land, in every little village we built forests for the gods. This is also a unique feature of Japan. (Terada 26)

For more on this discourse, see Aike P. Rots 2017.

E. For Japanese, there is no subject / object dichotomy. Humans are able to directly intuit nature and become one with it.

This is a difficult philosophical issue that will for the most part be taken up by Buddhist apologists, particularly Zen Buddhists and those influenced by the Kyoto School of philosophy. Although he frames his argument quite differently, D.T. Suzuki's writing on the Japanese love of nature, starting with his "Zen Buddhism and the Japanese Love of Nature," which was first published in 1936 and then re-worked two more times, has been a constant pillar of this kind of thinking. A similar argument can also be found in Takakusu (1941) and David Shaner's "The Japanese Experience of Nature" (1989).

Discussions of the Japanese View of Nature died out temporarily after the end of World War 2. The manner in which this discourse had been connected to the discredited imperialist ideology was certainly one factor in this. These discussions did not, however, remain dead, but have become more popular than ever. With the rise of a new environmental consciousness in the industrial world, often said to begin with the publication of Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, and also encouraged in the previously cited work of Lynn White, many people in the West, believing Christianity, Aristotelian logic, or Western science variously to be the cause of contemporary ecological problems, started looking to other traditions in hope of finding

answers. This happened to coincide with the new awakening of *Nihonjinron* that went along with Japan's period of great economic growth. Defeated in war, Japanese was, it was argued, now beating the West at its own game—that of science, industry, and capitalism. What were the unique qualities of Japan that allowed this to happen? It was only natural that, in creating a new identity for Japan in the age of ecology, the issue of the Japanese view of nature would be resurrected.

In the process, many of the arguments put forth by Terada Torahiko in 1935, some of which we have already discredited here, would be given new life. In analyzing that later discourse, it is important that we keep in mind its origins in thinkers like Terada. For not only was the idea of a particular Japanese way of seeing and associating with nature conceived in a manner that was imperialist and often racist, it was based upon false caricatures, faulty evolutionary theory, and, in extreme cases, mystical fantasies regarding the nation. Later writers on this theme will attempt to dissociate themselves from these questionable historical roots, but much of the unsound reasoning we find in Terada will be taken over by them as if it were in fact sound, and even go on to be seen by later generations as self-evident truth. The plan for future research is to eventually arrive at a comprehensive interpretation of this discourse, of which the present essay is one small portion.

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Notes

- 1) Japanese names in this essay will be rendered in the traditional style, family name first, except for cases referencing authors of works originally published in English, where the order shall follow that of the published work. Here, as in the translation in Part 1, I use the word *milieu* as a translation of the Japanese term *fūdo*.
- 2) Terada himself references the August 1935 issue of the academic journal *Bungaku*, the theme of which was “Literature of Nature.”
- 3) Page numbers for Terada’s essay reference the English translation published in Part 1 of this essay.
- 4) This approach fits well with the contemporary ideology of the emperor system, namely that the individual Emperor himself is much less important than the imperial line as a whole, founded as it was by the Sun Goddess Amaterasu and gaining its authority from her.
- 5) Watsuji states in his preface: “my problem is not that of the ordering of man’s life by his natural environment” (Watsuji 1961 v). But this does seem to be what Terada is in fact discussing. Also see Diamond 1997. While Diamond has often been accused of determinism, his account is less clearly so than Terada’s in that he traces the development of various cultural aspects of European society, including law, economy, politics, and bureaucracy, and shows how these interact with environmental conditions to create history.
- 6) Here and in the examples that follow, I do not wish to imply that such stereotypes have become common sense solely or even mainly on account of Terada’s essay. One essay cannot be thought responsible for the construction of such a discourse. There is no doubt, however, that the present essay has been well read, and thus we can safely conclude that, at least in some small way, it must have contributed to the establishment of such ideas in the general public.
- 7) Similar claims are made by Haga Yaichi in his *Ten Theses on National Character* (Haga 1908 171).
- 8) Compare this with Watsuji’s similar yet much more subtle claim: “There is a link between the lenience and the rationality of nature, for where she is lenient man readily discovers order in nature. And if in his approaches to nature he takes due account of such order, nature herself becomes even more lenient, and man, in turn, is led further to search for the order in nature. Thus, Europe’s natural science was clearly the true product of Europe’s “meadow climate”.” (Watsuji 1961 74)
- 9) See the research by Totman, an American (Totman 2014), as well as the series published by the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature in Kyoto, *Series: 35,000 Years of the Japanese Archipelago—The Environmental History of Humans and Nature*

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(Yumoto et al. 2011), for in-depth discussions of the manner in which Japanese people have manipulated their environment from as least as far back as the Yayoi period. The paradigmatic example is the irrigated rice paddy, an environment as least as far from the original "nature" of the islands as any European farm or pasture is from its. Both also agree that Japanese manipulated their forests and rivers as much as any European people did. For an investigation into the manner in which Edo-Period *honsōgaku* attempted to systematize the natural objects of Japan in order that they might be used for profit, see Marcon 2015.

- 10) "*Sunawachi kokumin mo kokudo mo ichi ni natte tennō ni tsukamae matsuru no de aru.*" (*Kokutai no Hongi* 2.2). For an in-depth discussion of the use of the concept of nature in *Kokutai no Hongi*, see chapter 8 of Adeney Thomas 2001.
- 11) Terada's argument would be more plausible if he had claimed that pre-modern Japanese *believed* that nature was a stern father who would punish them if they endeavored to understand his secrets, and thus refrained from doing so. However, this is not what he claims.