

A Spiritual View of the History of Civilizations: Learning from Dr. Chikuro Hiroike's Thought

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1. Introduction

I am very grateful for the invitation to present a paper to this symposium at the International Conference of Moral Science. My focus will be on the meaning of Dr. Chikuro Hiroike's major work, his *Treatise on Moral Science*, and I argue that its chief significance lies in the proof it offers, derived from his own research, of the 'universal validity' of the Japanese thought of the era in which he lived (the early Showa period). Detailed evidence to support this

assertion will now be provided.

2. The Spiritual Revolution of the Axial Period

(1) The Appearance of the Great Teachers

In the 5th–6th centuries B.C. great sages appeared in a variety of places across the vast Eurasian Continent, from Greece in the west to China in the east. These great teachers of humankind included philosophers such as Thales and Socrates in Greece, the prophets of the Old Testament in the Middle East, Buddha in India, and Confucius in China, and their well-nigh contemporaneous emergence led Karl Jaspers to term this era “the Axial Period”. In these great sages who manifested themselves like a galaxy of glittering stars above our world 2,500 – 2,600 years ago, the spirit and wisdom of *Homo sapiens* (‘Man the wise’) reached its highest level since our species first arose in East Africa.

The wisdom of these sages laid the spiritual foundations for the lives of succeeding generations. Supreme morality was born and so, in this sense, the Axial Period was epoch-making. The scholar of comparative civilizations, Dr. Shuntaro Ito, sets a high value on its visionary aspect, calling it “the era of spiritual revolution” in the history of humankind.

(2) How the Spiritual Revolution Spread

The influence of this “spiritual revolution” radiated in all directions across the Eurasian Continent. The directions in which it was diffused are an interesting feature: the two teachings of supreme morality that emerged in the western half of the Continent, i.e., Greek philosophy and Christianity, took their way toward the north-west and merged in Europe; while Buddhism and Confucianism, the other two teachings, appeared in the eastern half and took their route to the north-east, becoming rooted in Japan. Let us examine this process in a little more detail.

Christianity, one archetype of supreme morality, spread west from the Middle East via the Mediterranean Sea, becoming the established religion of the Roman Empire and so prevailed in Europe; whereas Greek philosophy was at first handed down through Islamic society, before becoming known to Christian Europe in the Renaissance, when its teachings were translated from Arabic into Latin and thus merged with Christianity. The Truth of God contained in Christianity, then, was explored by the rational mind of Greek philosophy, and this ultimately resulted in the Scientific Revolution (Dr. Ito has traced the details of this phenomenon in a variety of works). When the Truth discovered in the Scientific Revolution was applied to modern technology, it

brought about the Industrial Revolution.

In the east, on the other hand, the *Nihon Shoki* tells us that Buddhism, another paradigm of supreme morality, was conveyed to Japan in the 6th century, when the Emperor Kinmei received a golden statue of Buddha and a number of Sutras from the King of Paekche on the Korean Peninsula; and in the early 7th century, with the regency of Prince Shotoku, Buddhism became the spiritual foundation of Japan. The *Nihon Shoki* also reports that, some time around the 5th century, during the reign of the Emperor Ojin, Confucianism was transmitted to Japan when the ten volumes of the *Analects* and one volume of *Senjimon* were brought to the country by a scholar named Wani; it also says that during the reigns of Emperors Keitai and Kinmei in the 6th century, a master of the Five Classics of Confucianism (i.e., the Book of Changes, the Book of History, the Book of Songs, the Chronicles of *Lu*, and the Book of Rites) visited Japan several times. As a result, Buddhism and Confucianism became deeply ingrained in Japan's spiritual life, but these two teachings did not make their way west.

(3) The Uniting of Philosophy, Theology, Buddhism, and Confucianism

The legacy of Christianity and Greek philosophy spread further west, and flowed with a rush into Japan at the end of the Edo Period when the country opened its ports to the West. By the 20th century, Japan had thus absorbed all the traditions of supreme morality which had emerged among humankind during the Axial Period. Eventually these teachings flowed into Dr. Chikuro Hiroike's spirit, which ultimately gave birth to the *Treatise on Moral Science*; indeed, only Japan has actively absorbed all the legacies of the Spiritual Revolution of the Axial Period, i.e., all the archetypes of Supreme Morality. Dr. Chikuro Hiroike's work represents the unification of these traditions, the crystallization of which can be found in his *Treatise*.

Chapter 12 of this work focuses on the teachings of supreme morality by the four sages (Socrates, Jesus, Buddha, and Confucius). In addition, in chapter 13, Dr. Hiroike goes on to discuss the virtue of Amaterasu Omikami, the Founder of the Japanese Imperial Family, and the cause of its unbroken line of succession. These two chapters form the climax to the *Treatise*.

Here it is important to note that Dr. Hiroike places Amaterasu-Omikami on the same level as the four sages (Socrates, Jesus, Buddha, and Confucius). This is a prominent characteristic of the *Treatise*, in which Greek philosophy, Christianity, Buddhism, and Confucianism are placed on the same plane as Shinto, the essence of which, according to Dr. Hiroike, encompasses all these teachings. The originality of his book, therefore, consists in regarding the

supreme morality of Amaterasu Omikami as the best of the greatest. In other words, it is a unique attempt to unify the four archetypes of supreme morality, i.e., Greek philosophy, Christian theology, Buddhism, and Confucianism, with the essential teaching of Shinto, an attempt to harmonize the greatest spiritual achievement of humankind with the Japanese spirit.

3. Amaterasu Omikami and the Concept of Unbroken Line of Succession

(1) Fuhito Fujiwara and Kamatari Nakatomi

The *Treatise on Moral Science* places great emphasis on Amaterasu-Omikami and the concept of her descendants succeeding to the throne in an unbroken line. The name of Amaterasu Omikami constitutes the background to the naming of the country as Nippon, which means “under the sun” and thus represents the worship of the sun. Dr. Hiroike’s concept of the unbroken line of succession is an ideological one; it aimed to justify the system or position of the emperors in the sense that it demonstrated the lineage of the imperial family.

What is the evidentiary basis to this discussion of Amaterasu-Omikami and the unbroken line of succession? It is solely the *Nihonshoki*, the first work of history in Japan. Together with the *Kojiki*, it is frequently quoted in the *Treatise on Moral Science* and so the nature of these classics requires examination, one which is unavoidable despite its technical character.

The *Nihonshoki* was compiled by an aristocrat, Fuhito Fujiwara, a fact that is generally accepted in academic circles today. We cannot ignore Fuhito Fujiwara’s involvement even in the *Kojiki* as there is a view, advanced by Dr. Takeshi Umehara, that Fuhito Fujiwara was actually Hieda no Are, who was commanded by the Emperor Temmu to remember and recite the stories that comprise the *Kojiki*. What kind of person was Fuhito Fujiwara, then?

He was the son of Kamatari Nakatomi, whose great importance derives from his close connection with Dr. Hiroike’s description of the thought of Amaterasu Omikami, that is, the content of supreme morality, in which the concept of *O-harai* (‘great purification’) plays a central role. *O-harai* is also called “Nakatomi shinto” or the “*harai* of the Nakatomia.” The presence of the name, Nakatomi, in these phrases indicates the fact that Kamatari Nakatomi played a central role.

(2) The Mystery of Kamatari Nakatomi

Kamatari Nakatomi (614-669 C.E.) appears in the *Nihonshoki*. He was an aristocrat who defeated the Soga family in alliance with Nakano-oeno-oji, who

later became Emperor Tenji and to whom Kamatari was an adviser. There are several puzzling mysteries about the way Fuhito Fujiwara described his father, Kamatari Nakatomi, when compiling the *Nihonshoki*.

Firstly, the family background of Kamatari Nakatomi is not clarified. Fuhito Fujiwara does not clearly say who his own grandparents, i.e. Nakatomi's parents, were. There must have been some interesting reasons for the *Nihonshoki*'s complete silence about this.

Secondly, even though there is no information about his family background, Kamatari behaved so bravely that he became close to Emperor Koutoku when he was prince, enjoying the Emperor's trust to such an extent that he received one of the Emperor's wives as his own. Such a thing would not have been possible for someone who was not of noble lineage.

Thirdly, Kamatari Nakatomi played a principal part in the Taika Reforms, but there is no record of his activities after that. He reappears in a document a year after the fall of Paekche, when gifts were given to a mission from the Tang dynasty. The final mention of him comes just before his death from illness. On this occasion Emperor Tenji called on Kamatari personally and praised his achievements highly, promising him whatever he wanted. In response to the Emperor's words, Kamatari apologized from his bed, saying, "I have no striking military achievements of my own to look back on in life." Five days later, the Emperor Tenji sent his young brother, Oamano oji (later the Emperor Tenmu) to Kamatari and conferred on him the position of minister, the official rank of Daishoku and the family name of Fujiwara. Why did Kamatari receive such great honors from the Emperor? The *Nihonshoki* gives no explanation for this.

(3) Kamatari and the Royal Family of Paekche

The key to the mysteries surrounding Kamatari is in fact to be found in his apology to the Emperor: "I have no striking military achievements of my own to look back on in life." This clearly indicates the fact that he had failed to rescue Paekche; the *Nihonshoki*, however, is silent about what he actually did in this regard.

The commander in chief of the Japanese troops dispatched to rescue Paekche was Toyoaki; this is the clue to solving the mystery of Kamatari. A careful reading of the words of the *Nihonshoki* reveals to us the true identity of Toyoaki; my contention is that Toyoaki was Kamatari Nakatomi himself, which makes him the son of Giji, the King of Paekche.

Toyoaki came to Japan at the age of seventeen as a hostage given by Paekche, and he stayed in Japan for more than thirty years. Taking the name

Kamatari Nakatomi, he defeated the Sogas and carried through the Taika Reforms in collaboration with Nakano-oenō-ōji. Kamatari was eleven years older than Nakano-oenō-ōji, with whom, as a Korean prince, he got along well. To cut a long story short, we may accept that the *Nihonshoki* was compiled by Fuhito, who was actually the son of Toyoaki, prince of Paekche. This explains why there are many (unnaturally many, in fact) references to Paekche in the *Nihonshoki*.

Kamatari was the last member of the royal family of Paekche and his son Fuhito was the first member of it to become Japanese. Fuhito Fujiwara designed the nation of Japan, and the Fujiwara family later deeply infiltrated the royal family. Kamatari was the founding father of the Fujiwaras. Untangling the mystery of Kamatari Nakatomi reveals the story of how the royal family of Paekche reestablished itself in Japan, a fact that was then cleverly concealed.

The family name Fujiwara was bestowed on Kamatari Nakatomi, but Oshima Nakatomi and Imimaro Nakatomi also used it. However, in the second year of the reign of the Emperor Tenmu, Fuhito restricted the use of the Fujiwara name solely to his own descendants, and forced the descendants of his other relatives, including his brother Tarume and uncles Kuniko and Nukateko, to use the family name Nakatomi. The Shinto observed by these Nakatomi families was called “Nakatomi Shinto,” and it differed from traditional Shinto. The Nakatomi family related to Kamatari Fujiwara later monopolized Shinto, resulting in the so-called *O-harai* (the ‘great purification’).

Kogo-shuui (*Collected Archaic Words*), a work quoted by Chikuro Hiroike in the Treatise, was written early in the Heian period by Hironari Inbe, a descendant of the Inbe family which had been in charge of matters related to Shinto since ancient times. In the preface, Hironari explains his motive for writing the book, which to express his accumulated anger against the Nakatomis, which was initiated by Emperor Heijou’s inquiry; this accounts for the book’s very fierce tone. The final words of the epilogue read: “I am old and weak, and already over eighty. My desire becomes more and more urgent. If I die all of a sudden, my deep-seated grudge will remain forever. May these words have the honor of being read by the Emperor.” Thus, Hironari, despite being over eighty, bitterly criticizes the Nakatomi family for monopolizing Shinto and does everything to bring the matter and his desire for justice to the attention of the Emperor.

On the subject of the Nakatomi family’s monopolization of Shinto practices, Hironari Inbe writes, “From the Tenpyō period (729–749 C.E.) on, the Nakatomis introduced the sacred notebook, and had the exclusive power to do

whatever they wanted. They lavished care on even minor shrines if they were connected to the Nakatomis but abolished even major shrines if they were not connected to them. The Nakatomis could do whatever they wanted. Tax revenues from the shrines became the income of the Nakatomis.” Hironari points out here how the Nakatomis had privatized Shinto practices and monopolized taxes, accusing them of eleven counts of arbitrary behavior. It is clear from this that the Nakatomis, who were related to the Fujiwaras, had transformed the country's Shinto into “Nakatomi Shinto”.

(4) Nakatomi Shinto and the Great Purification Ritual

The key concept of Nakatomi Shinto was *O-harai* (the ‘great purification’), which is included in the *Engishiki*, the compilation of which, in fifty volumes, began in the fifth year of the Engi period (905 C.E.) under the order of the Emperor Daigo. About twenty of the *norito* (‘ritual prayers’) are described in the eighth volume, and one of them is the *O-harai*, later known as the “Nakatomi *harai*.” This *O-harai* is recited on the last days of June and December.

The first of its outstanding characteristics is the philosophy of *harai* (meaning to ‘purify’ and ‘get rid of’). Dr. Takeshi Umehara has proposed a unique interpretation of this; he suggests that the object of the *harai* was to expel the deities of the Yamato area to Izumo. I disagree with this, since if we read the *Engishiki* account without any preconceptions, it is clear that the object of purification is “sins”.

The basis of the *O-harai* is the concept of “sin,” and without it the ritual prayer is not possible. The word “sin” appears fifteen times in total; for example, “numerous sins wrongly committed,” “sins committed in heaven,” “sins committed on the country's soil,” “sins committed by one's own mother,” “sins committed by children,” “sins committed by a mother together with her child,” “sins committed by a child together with its mother,” “sins committed by beasts,” “the sins of praying for ill luck for other people,” “various sins like these,” and so on. The prayer in *O-harai* is that all sins would be purified so that “none would exist from today on.” The ritual prayer of *O-harai* consists of a total of one thousand written characters and its basis is to pray to god for the purification of all sins. The character for ‘sin’ does not appear in any of the other ritual prayers in the *Engishiki*. Its presence in the *O-harai* is therefore very striking.

A view commonly held since Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* contrasts Japanese culture, characterized by “shame,” with Western culture, characterized by “sin.” However, the concept of “sin” is clearly

present in the Nakatomi prayers. Comparing these with all the other prayers forces us to ask where this uniqueness comes from.

4. Amaterasu-Omikami and the Supreme Morality of Human Beings

(1) Nakatomi Shinto and the Ideas of Christianity

Is not this notion of 'sin' in the *O-harai* in essence the same as the Christian concept of 'sin' in the West? If so, Nakatomi Shinto would seem to share a fundamental commonality with Western Christian beliefs. How could this have come about? We must pose a very big question here — where did the idea of 'sin' which we find at the base of both Nakatomi Shinto and Dr. Hiroike's thinking originate?

I think that the answer to this question probably lies in Nara during its time as the capital, the *Heijo-kyo*. The year in which I write this is 2009, and next year will be 2010. It was in 710 C.E. that the capital of Japan was established in Nara, where it remained for the next 74 years (the 'Nara period').

So what was Nara, the *Heijo-kyo*, like during this time? We know that the relics, or rather the treasures (numbering more than 10,000) of the Emperor Shomu were kept in the *Shosoin* there. These came from the Korean Peninsula, China, the Middle East, Persia and even from Greece and Rome. This means that Nara as *Heijo-kyo* was an international city like Tokyo is today. Not only Confucianism, but also Buddhism and the ideas of monotheism influenced by Buddhism, were probably conveyed along the Silk Road to Nara in these years.

(2) The Idea of *Miroku* and Messianism

Kamatari Nakatomi must have been one of those who brought these monotheistic ideas from the Korean Peninsula, where the states of Kudara and Shiragi existed at that time; Kamatari must have been the prince of Kudara. In Shiragi, belief in the *Bosatsu* (Bodhisattva) called *Miroku* (*Maitreya*) was common. In the the Koryuji temple in the west part of Kyoto, there is a beautiful statue of *Miroku Bosatsu* called *Miroku Bosatsu Hanka-shiizo*, which was the first National Treasure. It was given to Hatano Kawakatsu by Prince Shotoku and the Bodhisattva sits with one leg crossed over the other. On viewing this statue, the German philosopher Karl Jaspers said that the archaic smile on its face expressed a feeling of true peace and was more beautiful than the smile of the Mona Lisa.

What does the *Miroku* in *Miroku Bosatsu* refer to? It means that the

Miroku Bosatsu will descend to human society to save the humankind five billion, six hundred and seventy million years after Buddha's death, an extraordinary number. The core of this belief in *Miroku* is the same as the idea of the Second Coming of the Messiah in Christianity. The term *Miroku* (*Maitreya*) seems to be derived from the Zoroastrianism word *Mitra*, which is also the origin of the phrase "the Holy Spirit" in the Christian Trinity.

So it is possible that the idea of *Miroku* came to Japan during the *Heijō-kyō* period along with the monotheistic construct that was inherent in Christianity. Dr. Chikuro Hiroike understood the paradigm of supreme morality in the *Nihonshoki* and the *Kojiki*, and thought that Amaterasu-Omikami had all the archetypes of supreme morality. This is the way I read his *Treatise*.

After acquiring the wonderful wisdom created by human beings in the past, Japan must give it to the world in the 21st century. Here we find that Dr. Chikuro Hiroike was a scholar and pioneer who enlightened the Japanese about this mission. But we also have to note that because he did so in the early Showa period, his thought showed a tendency toward State Shinto.

5. Conclusion

(1) The Meaning of the Emperor's Title: *Tenno*

In bringing my discussion to a conclusion, I make two points; one about the title, *Tenno*, the other about *Nippon*, the Japanese name for our country.

Although *Tenno* is usually translated into English as 'Emperor,' this is misleading. The important point is that although the title "Tenno 天皇" originates from the Chinese characters 皇帝 (*Kotei*) or 天子 (*Tenshi*), the title "Tenno" was never used in China. The characters 天皇大帝 (*Tenko-Taitei*) are said to be the origin of the title "Tenno" and, according to Tetsuji Morohashi's *Dai Kanwa Jiten (Dictionary of Chinese Characters)*, they have the same meaning as 北極大帝 (*Hokkyoku-tiatei*). So *Tenko-Taitei* and *Hokkyoku-tiatei* mean the same, but the latter starts with *Hokkyoku*, i.e. the pole star, which shows the exact north and never moves. For nomadic people, it is vital not to mistake their direction of travel when they are on the move. Therefore the pole star, which is essential for this, is like a God who rules Heaven. Nomadic penetrated into China, but although Chinese Emperors were called the "Son of Heaven," they never called themselves *Tenno*. But when the Japanese used the title *Tenno*, it meant that the *Tenno* had the same existence as God, with the characteristics of *Arahito-Gami* (the Incarnated God). So *Tenno* is similar in meaning to "the Son of God" in Christianity.

(2) The Meaning of the Japanese name for our country: *Nippon*

What kind of thinking we can detect in the background of our country's name, *Nippon*? Being situated at the eastern end of the Eurasian Continent, Japan was called *Hi Izuru Kuni* ("The Country of the Rising Sun"). This derives from the same idea, recorded in the *Kojiki*, that Amaterasu was the Goddess who founded Japan, as She was the daughter of Izanagi and Izanami who created the country.

The Japanese believed in Amaterasu, the sun goddess. The sun is the most important phenomenon for farmers; so it is their god, not only in Japan but also in agricultural civilizations to the east of Egypt, where people worship the sun. Thus, farmers' religious belief in the sun is the background of the use of *Nippon* as the country's name.

To draw together the threads of my argument, then; among the gods and goddesses of various races in Eurasia, the pole star was the most important god for nomadic peoples, and the title *Tenno* was the Japanese way of denoting that god. The sun was the most important god for farmers, and *Nippon* (which literally means "the origin of the sun"), used as the country's name, comes from the sun god.

Both titles (*Nippon* and *Tenno*) came into existence just before the Nara period. Therefore we can argue that in those days, the essence of supreme morality originated in the Eurasian Continent and arrived in Japan via the Silk Road and other routes. In other words, universal ideas like these came to Japan and, based on this, Chikuro Hiroike thought that supreme morality could be found in the deeds and minds of Amaterasu Omikami.

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