

“Life-world: Beyond Fukushima and Minamata”

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October 15, 2012

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Shoko-YONEYAMA/3845>

The 2011 tsunami and nuclear disaster at Fukushima has encouraged comparisons in many quarters with the tragic experience of Minamata more than 55 years earlier, when mercury-poisoned industrial runoff caused widespread illness and death in the human and animal populations. Rather than viewing these disasters as the unfortunate side effects of modern industrial capitalism (to be addressed, in the capitalist view, with financial compensation) Yoneyama Shoko draws on Minamata victim's advocate Ogata Masato to imagine a more humane and life-affirming vision of our obligations to one another. In crafting his response to the Chisso Corporation and the Japanese government, Ogata (who eschewed financial compensation) drew on elements of the popular Japanese religious heritage to affirm an ethos of interdependence and the responsibility that follows. This can be seen, for example, in Ogata's use of the term *tsumi*, an indigenous Japanese category of ritual impurity that encompasses both physical pollution and moral transgression. Combining notions of “defilement” and of “sin,” *tsumi* is a principle that (as Brian Victoria notes) has justified some in shunning the victims of chemical or radioactive contamination. Ogata, however, employs the traditional imagery of *tsumi* to describe, not the victims of pollution but its perpetrators, thereby presenting ecological damage as a profoundly moral matter, one that cannot be reduced to economic impacts or financial compensation.

Life-world: Beyond Fukushima and Minamata 「いのちの世界」：フクシマとミナマタを超えて

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Key words: Fukushima, Minamata, World Risk Society, nuclear disaster, modernity, environmental ethics, connectedness, spirituality, soul, life-world, Ulrich Beck, Ogata Masato

1. Introduction

German sociologist Ulrich Beck writes that Japan has become part of the ‘World Risk Society’ as a result of the 2011 nuclear accident in Fukushima.¹ By World Risk Society he means a society threatened by such things as nuclear accidents, climate change, and the global financial crisis, presenting a catastrophic risk beyond geographical, temporal, national and social boundaries. According to Beck, such risk is an unfortunate by-product of modernity, and poses entirely new challenges to our existing institutions, which attempt to control it using current, known means.² As Gavan McCormack points out, ‘Japan, as one of the most successful capitalist countries in history, represents in concentrated form problems facing contemporary industrial civilization as a whole’.³ The nuclear, social, and institutional predicaments it now faces epitomise the negative consequences of intensive modernisation.

The stalemate over nuclear energy – the restart of Ohi reactors and the massive citizens’ protest against it – suggests that we are indeed at a significant crossroad. But what is the issue? A quick look at the anti-nuclear demonstrations shows that the slogan, ‘Life is more important than money!’, is ubiquitous, suggesting that many citizens see a problem not only with nuclear power generation but also with something more fundamental: the prioritisation of economy over life. The fact that such an obvious proposition has to be raised as a point of protest indicates the depth of the problem. How is this rather extreme dichotomy between life and the economy to be faced at this point of modern history? And what will be Japan’s contribution, if any, in envisaging a new kind of modernity?

This paper explores these questions by drawing upon the notion of ‘life-world’ presented by OGATA Masato,⁴ a Minamata philosopher-fisherman whose ideas developed in response to the Minamata disease disasters in the mid-1950s.⁵ It discusses this concept in order to reflect on the relationship between nature and humankind in an attempt to envision a new kind of modernity that does not generate self-destructive risks as denoted by the notion of ‘World Risk Society’.

2. World Risk Society Japan

The relevance of the concept of ‘World Risk Society’ is obvious with regard to the disaster unleashed at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant on 11 March 2011. There is no question that substantial radiation has been released from the stricken reactors. Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO) estimated, based on data collected at the plant, that 900,000 terra-becquerels of radioactive materials (iodine-131 and caesium-137) were released into the atmosphere,⁶ which constitutes 17% of the fallout from Chernobyl;⁷ as well as 150,000 terra-becquerels into the sea, in the first six months after the accident alone.⁸ An international scientific collaborative study, on the other hand, estimated, based on data collected from across the globe, that caesium-137 equivalent to 43% of the Chernobyl emission was released into the atmosphere between 11 March and 20 April 2011, 18% of which was deposited over Japanese land areas, with most of the rest falling over the North Pacific Ocean.⁹ Brumfiel in *Nature* suggests that the vastly

different estimates may be complementary rather than contradictory because the data were collected at different, mutually exclusive locations.¹⁰

Experts fear that a catastrophe on an even larger scale could still occur. Koide Hiroaki, a nuclear scientist at Kyoto University, warns that Japan ‘will be finished’ if approximately 300 tons of spent nuclear fuel (4,000 times the size of the Hiroshima atomic bomb) kept at the spent-fuel pool in the badly damaged No. 4 reactor building, release radiation as a result of a cooling failure caused by, for instance, another earthquake.¹¹ If this happens, the entire Fukushima nuclear complex will become inaccessible, leading to radioactive emissions on a cataclysmic scale, perhaps 85 times as great as Chernobyl.¹² TEPCO reported previously that as of March 2010 there were 1,760 and 1,060 tons of uranium at Fukushima Daiichi and Daini, respectively.¹³ A simple calculation, based on Koide’s estimate above, suggests that this is equivalent to 28,000 Hiroshima bombs. A ‘chain reaction’ involving all six reactors and seven spent fuel pools at the complex was envisioned as the ‘worst case scenario’ by Kondo Shunsuke, Chairman of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission, in his report submitted to the government two weeks after March 11. The report, which was suppressed by the government, concludes that if the ‘chain reaction’ happens, the exclusion zone may have to be greater than 170km.¹⁴ Tokyo is 220km away from the plant. Kondo’s report thus is largely consistent with Koide’s prediction, although they hold opposite positions on the question of nuclear power generation.



Fukushima Daiichi Reactor No.4, May 2012.

TEPCO insists that the No. 4 reactor building can withstand an earthquake equivalent to the quake of March 11,¹⁵ and the Japanese government has accepted the utility’s plan to start removing the spent fuel from the end of 2013, a task that would then take two years to complete.¹⁶ But Arnie Gundersen, a former nuclear power industry executive, disagrees with TEPCO’s risk assessment. He says that ‘TEPCO is not moving fast enough and the Japanese Government is not pushing TEPCO to move fast enough either, [and] the top priority of TEPCO and the Japanese Government should be to move the fuel out of that pool as quickly as possible.’¹⁷ As if to highlight these concerns, the region has had an elevated frequency of earthquakes since March 2011.

Tasaka Hiroshi, a nuclear engineer and Special Advisor to the Cabinet in 2011, warns that a ‘sense of unfounded optimism’ among political, bureaucratic and business leaders ‘presents the

biggest risk since the government declared the conclusion of the nuclear disaster at the end of 2011'.¹⁸ Likewise, Gundersen points out that the leaders of earthquake-prone Japan 'chose, in the face of serious warnings, to consciously take chances that risked disaster',¹⁹ and that 'a dismissive attitude to the risks of nuclear accidents' is at the core of the problem.²⁰ On October 12, 2012, TEPCO's president for the first time stated that the utility could have mitigated the impact of the meltdowns if it had diversified power and cooling systems by paying closer attention to international standards.²¹ In relation to the risk posed by the spent fuel pool in reactor No. 4 building, systemic inertia continues. Japan constitutes a potentially catastrophic risk to itself, to its neighbours, and to the world.

3. Sociological Theories on Late/Second Modernity and the Question of Ethics

The inability of TEPCO and the Japanese government to take effective action in the face of a nuclear crisis, however, is to be expected to some extent, if, as Beck maintains, world risk is an unfortunate by-product of modernity. After all, corporations such as TEPCO and nation-states such as Japan play a central role in pursuing economic development, which commonly correlates with maximising corporate profit. To the extent that Japan's modernisation was rapid and successful until recently, the risk it now carries is great. If indeed the nuclear accident is a by-product of modernity, prevention of future accidents will have to involve a transformation of the social system that is key to modernity.

The concept of world risk society represents the conundrum of the era in which we live: a highly industrialised society since around the 1980s, which sociologists variously refer to as 'late modern' (Giddens),²² 'second modern' (Beck),²³ or 'liquid modern' (Bauman).²⁴ This era is distinguished from the earlier, 'first' or 'solid' modern in that in the late/second/liquid modernity individualisation of social institutions advances, and social bonds, which connected individuals to modern institutions such as the (predominantly nuclear) family, (reasonably stable) workplace and, and in the case of the West, (still influential) church, weaken. Instead, living one's own life, and pursuing individual life projects has become the common denominator of the late/second/liquid modern in the advanced industrial countries.²⁵ The question is what can provide an ethical foundation in the face of a world risk that can jeopardise our own existence, when the risk itself is the product of the social system in which we live.²⁶

In order to explore this question, the report from the Ethics Commission for a Safe Energy Supply, which was convened by German Chancellor Angela Merkel immediately after 3.11, and of which Beck was a key member, presents a significant point of reference. It reads:

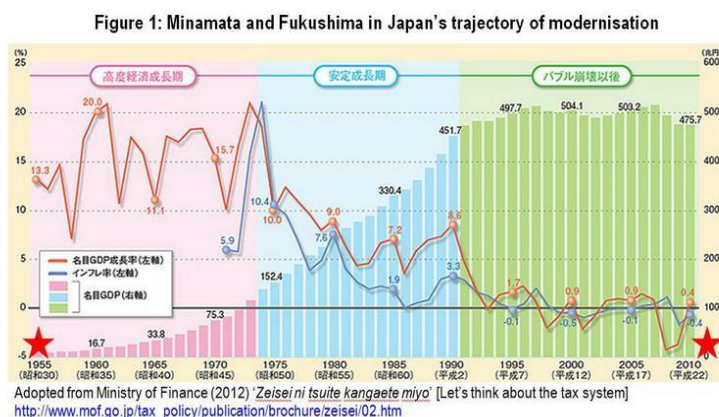
The progressive destruction of the environment has prompted the call for ecological responsibility – not only since nuclear accidents and not only in this area. It is a matter of how humans interact with the natural environment and the relationship between society and nature. A special human duty towards nature has resulted from Christian tradition and European culture.²⁷

There are two significant points to note about this statement. One is that it draws upon a spiritual tradition – that of Christianity – as the foundation of its ethical position. The other is that it highlights Europe as the cultural basis of its ethics. While this ethical foundation may be suitable in the context of Europe, it leaves a question of what might be an appropriate ethical and cultural foundation in other world regions. Given the fact that Asia plays an increasingly significant role in relation to global warming and nuclear accidents, which are two key issues in the World Risk Society, it seems urgent to address this question at this critical juncture of human history. In the frame of this broad theoretical concern, this paper explores the specific question: what ethical

foundation might Japan draw on to frame its future in response to the multiple crisis posted by the March 11, 2011 disaster?

4. Minamata and Fukushima in Japan's modern history

Figure 1 shows Japan's economic growth from 1955-2010 by GDP growth rate (shown by the red line with the corresponding percentage range on the left) and the nominal GDP (shown by the histogram with the scale on the right).²⁸ The different colours of the bar chart indicate three distinct economic periods: the high economic growth period (1955-1973 indicated in pink), the stable growth period (1974-1990 in blue), and the post-bubble low growth period (1991-2010 in green). The graph begins in 1955, the final year of the postwar reconstruction period according to the then Economic Planning Agency; the beginning of Japan's rapid economic growth period; the onset of the '1955 system' (one-party rule by the Liberal Democratic Party which lasted until 1993); and the beginning of Japan's nuclear energy policy with the enactment of the 1955 Atomic Energy Basic Act.²⁹ The star on the left of the chart indicates the official 'discovery' in 1956 of Minamata disease, large-scale methyl-mercury poisoning caused by industrial effluent from Japan's leading chemical company, Chisso. The star on the right indicates the 2011 nuclear accident at Fukushima Daiichi. It occurred only days after China officially displaced Japan as the world's second largest economy.³⁰ The incidents at Minamata and Fukushima thus coincided almost exactly with the beginning and the end of Japan's period of rise as an economic power and its positioning as the world's second economic superpower, what might be called its period of super modernisation.



In 2012, 56 years after the 'discovery' of Minamata disease, with a sordid record of corporate denial, court battles by victims and supporters stretching over decades, and compensation for some victims, the Japanese government is determined to bring political closure to the Minamata disease problem by enforcing a strict deadline for applications for government compensation under a special law passed in 2009. Applications closed at the end of July 2012, and over 65,000 people have applied to receive 'relief measures'.³¹ This number does not include about 3,000 victims who had been officially certified as Minamata disease patients before 2010, under the most stringent 1977 criteria,³² and some 11,000 sufferers who received a payout in 1995, an earlier attempt to bring political closure to the Minamata disease problem. These figures are indicative, in the sense of the tip of an iceberg, of the vast devastation caused by the industrial pollution in Minamata.

In response to the government push to achieve a ‘final and complete’ solution yet again, individuals who have worked closely with the sufferers emphasise that Minamata disease will not be over.³³ Numerous people, including congenital Minamata disease patients across generations, some of whom now face the added challenges of advanced age, still suffer incapacity. Epidemiological studies by independent medical researchers, including one conducted in 2009, have repeatedly found expanding areas, and increasing numbers of people affected by Minamata disease.³⁴ The strongest sense of problem consciousness, however, comes from the realisation that the lessons of Minamata disease have not been learnt by those in power, either to prevent, or to adequately deal with the 2011 nuclear disaster: most notably, failure on the part of administration to take action to minimise harm and to adequately compensate victims. In the case of Minamata disease, it was not until 1968, twelve years after its official discovery, that the government took action to stop discharge of the effluent. The year 1968 was the year when the Japanese economy became No. 2 in the world. It was not until 1973 that the first victims received compensation after protracted court struggles.

The crisis in Fukushima is even more serious in many respects. In Fukushima, the level of devastation is extremely high, and as at August 2012, approximately 111,000 people have been forced to evacuate by the government with no or limited prospects of returning to their homes.³⁵ The impact of the nuclear crisis is global rather than regional, and in respect of the ecosystem, it is not yet possible to determine its ultimate impact. The underlying power structure of the Japanese ‘nuclear village’ is more formidable than that of Chisso. Its power is reinforced by close links to the international nuclear regime. The causal link between exposure to the poison and illness is much harder to establish in the case of irradiation: low level irradiation does not result in distinctive symptoms as in Minamata disease; it takes many years to manifest as cancer, the cause of which is difficult to single out; and impact upon the unborn, infants and young children is unknown.



Namie became a ghost town

Nonetheless, there are important similarities between Fukushima and Minamata: both involve wide-scale and irrevocable environmental destruction caused by humans; both occurred as a result of placing excessive faith in flawed science; both were driven by relentless pursuit of corporate profit and a warped vision of national development; both were promoted and supported by a collusive relationship among national and local governments, bureaucracy, industry, the mainstream-scientific community, and the media (the nuclear village); both marginalised critical scientists; both sacrificed the wellbeing of local residents, reflected a deep-seated discrimination against rural people, and revealed the structure of dependence of the periphery on the

core.³⁶ Moreover, neither methyl-mercury nor radiation can be detected through our five senses, and victims are obliged to be dependent on the government and the offending industry for the release of data crucial to their life, data which are often subject to manipulation.³⁷

5. 'Connectedness' as the Legacy of Minamata and Fukushima

Seen from a different angle, the commonalities between Minamata and Fukushima can be summarised as a breakdown of connectedness at a multitude of levels: family (e.g. the impact of death or health impairment of a family member, loss of housing, land and other possessions); (loss of) work; food production (farming and fishing); traditional and local ways of life; and sense of connectedness with nature, past and future, ancestors and descendants. Both disasters caused deep schisms and paralysis in affected communities. Minamata disease caused many rifts in the community:³⁸ depending on one's position towards Chisso, e.g. whether or not one admitted to having Minamata disease, applied for certification as a Minamata disease patient, or pursued compensation. The nuclear disaster in Fukushima has also caused often invisible rifts in the community and within families, depending on one's stance on nuclear energy; whether to stay in Fukushima or not (especially between mothers with young children who wanted to leave and in-laws who wanted them to stay); whether to consume locally produced food or not; whether to work for TEPCO or not, etc. Physiologically, Minamata disease destroyed connectedness in the nervous system, whereas radiation severs the connectedness in DNA and cells. If one of the characteristics of modernity is the weakening connectedness (of bonds between people and society), both Minamata and Fukushima epitomise it to its extreme, not only sociologically but also biologically.

Is it any wonder then that connectedness emerged as a legacy of both Minamata and Fukushima? The devastation of the March 11 triple disasters met with overwhelming sympathy, abundant aid, and offers of volunteer work from other parts of Japan and all around the world. Within the affected districts, people strove to revive the spirit of the community, for example, by efforts to salvage traditional festivals and seasonal events. The disaster created a sense of cohesion in Japan. At the end of 2011, the word '*kizuna*' 絆 (bond/connectedness) was chosen as the kanji character that best symbolised the year of disasters.³⁹ Indeed, the triple disaster affected the people of Japan in profound ways. A public opinion poll conducted in 2012 by the Cabinet Office found that almost 80 percent of the 6,059 respondents indicated that they came to realise, after the 2011 disaster, the importance of connectedness with society to a greater extent than they did earlier.⁴⁰



In the case of Minamata, the word ‘*moyai*’ 舫 (mooring boats) has become its legacy,⁴¹ although it took nearly forty years for it to emerge as a key concept. The word was first used officially in 1994 in a speech by the then Minamata Mayor, Masazumi Yoshii. It was Ogata Masato, a Minamata fisherman and Minamata disease sufferer, however, who first proposed the concept as a keyword for the future.⁴² He is one of the ‘creative and persistent small leaders’ within the community with whom the Minamata patients have been blessed,⁴³ and one of the key persons in Minamata who can create new knowledge.⁴⁴ He writes:

We have an expression, *moyai*, which I hold close to my heart... It comes from the verb *moyau*, which means “to tie two boats together,” or “to moor a boat to a piling.” For instance, when we fished for sardines, two boats of the same size would drag a net between them.... If a storm should blow up while we were fishing, we would tie our boat together with another and head for port. This, too, is called *moyau*. The other boat didn’t necessarily belong to an acquaintance.... As we headed for port we would talk about our fishing villages, how the fish were running, and so on.... *Moyai* began as a fishing term, but it has been applied to other aspects of our daily lives.... It implies that a small group of people will go somewhere and also return together. Villagers enjoy going places together.⁴⁵

As Beck points out, different phases of modernity: pre-modern, first-modern and second-modern, have coexisted in the process of the modernisation of Japan.⁴⁶ In post-3.11 Japan, Minamata presents a vantage point with which to survey this multifaceted modernity. For Ogata this multiplicity has been his lived history, and the foundation of a philosophy which is based on the notion of the life-world that puts the highest and absolute priority on life. As touched upon earlier, ‘life over economy’ is a phrase often seen in the recent anti-nuclear demonstrations, so that ideas resonating with Ogata’s may well be developed based on experiences of Fukushima. Meanwhile, as Beck points out, ‘we need a new frame of reference for the world risk society [from] non-Western countries’.⁴⁷ What is attempted below is to construct such a frame of reference by drawing on ideas that Ogata developed in his fifty year struggle with Minamata disease.

This author had the occasion to interview Ogata in Minamata on 15-17 January 2012 and again on 25 August 2012. What follows draws upon these interviews as well as his two autobiographies – *Rowing the Eternal Sea: the Story of a Minamata Fisherman* (1996 Japanese and 2001 English) and *Chisso wa watashi de atta* [Chisso within] (2001). By drawing upon these research materials, it is suggested below that:

- 1) Ogata's philosophy of 'life-world' (いのちの世界・生命世界), developed from his critique of modernity, presents a notion of the world where humans are envisaged as part of the connectedness of all living beings, souls of the living and the dead, and animate and inanimate elements of nature;
- 2) the philosophy is based on Japan's cultural tradition of animism and may provide a spiritual basis for Japan (and possibly other parts of Asia and beyond), constituting an ethical foundation equivalent to that of the 'Christian tradition and European culture'; and
- 3) the philosophy has the potential to provide 'a new frame of reference for the world risk society [from] non-Western countries'⁴⁸ by directly addressing the lacuna in (Western-made) social science: spirituality and nature.

6. A Critique of Modernity by a Minamata Fisherman, OGATA Masato

Ogata Masato was born in 1953, three years before the 'official discovery' of Minamata disease, the youngest child of Ogata Fukumatsu, a leader of local fishermen. His father died from acute Minamata disease when Masato was six. Masato's parents, eight of his siblings and their children have all been officially certified as Minamata disease patients. Masato himself applied for certification, and dedicated himself as a key member of the Minamata Disease Certification Applicants' Council for over a decade (1974-85).



Ogata Masato confronts government officials with a banner that reads 'Are you telling us to wait until we die?' (circa 1983). Adopted with permission from Oiwa and Ogata (2001) *Rowing the Eternal Sea*, p.86.

Masato gradually became sceptical about the true meaning of compensation, however, withdrew his application for certification, which was a prerequisite for compensation, and left the movement. As a result, he was isolated and alienated from Minamata society. More than 25 years later, he explains his thoughts on compensation with extraordinary clarity:

The biggest problem I had was why everything was decided by money. There has been a massive devaluation of compensation. The first compensation [in 1973] ranged from 16 to 18 million yen per patient, but in 1995, it was 2.6 million, and then, 2.1 million (US\$26K). The amount went down. This is the case for the lung disease lawsuit (塵肺訴訟) and lawsuits over drug-induced

suffering (薬害訴訟) as well. It was as if life is traded in markets and was devalued in the 40th (1995) and 50th markets [counting from the outbreak of Minamata disease]. With the compensation being slashed like this, the biggest problem is the very fact that the existence of life itself (本来的生命存在) is calculated and converted into a commercial value. The government sees compensation as a ‘cost’. It is the same for TEPCO in relation to the nuclear disaster.⁴⁹

1) If not money, what?

This deep scepticism about money, especially in its relationship to life, constitutes Ogata's most fundamental critique of modernity. This led to an even more difficult question: ‘If not money, what?’⁵⁰ The answer he gives is:

The original meaning of ‘*nintei*’ (認定 certification), I think, is to ‘*mitomeru*’ (認める certify) a person’s existence. In the final analysis, the question is whether or not the person’s existence is cherished (存在が愛されているか) in an equal dialogical relationship in which you ask a question and get a response (受け答えの関係). What sufferers want essentially is proof that they are cared for. But such matters as certification of patients and environmental pollution are turned into a question of criteria. If the existence of sufferers is cherished, we wouldn’t have been left alone suffering to begin with... My father died within two months of onset of the illness. When I think about what my deceased father would have wanted to say, I think that it would be ‘*I am human!*’ (おらあ人間ぞお). He wouldn’t have wanted to be certified as a Minamata disease patient!⁵¹



Ogata Masato at the Minamata Disease Centre
Soshisha 16 January 2012. Photo by S. Yoneyama

Ogata's scepticism about money, however, does not make him simply an advocate of a pre-modern life style, or an outsider to modern life. Quite the contrary. He definitely sees himself as part of the system of modern society. Moreover, he realises, reflexively, his own position in relation to Chisso, the perpetrator of the disease. This realisation did not come easily to him. It meant shifting his position completely from the safety of being a victim-sufferer-patient-plaintiff who expects and accepts the responsibility of others, to someone who admits to being on the side of the 'accused', the system that caused the Minamata disease. It turned his life upside down to the extent that it caused him to have a nervous breakdown. In retrospect he writes:

What Chisso represented is a question we must ask ourselves today. This may sound abrupt but I think that Chisso might have been another me, myself.... The age we live in is a period driven by 'affluence', such as money, industries, and convenience. Our everyday life is part of a large and complex system which is extremely difficult to get out of. We are very much dominated by the values of the era that caused Minamata disease. In the past forty years, I myself bought a car and started to drive, and at home we have a television and a fridge, and the boat I use for work is made of plastic. Many things in my home are made of materials from chemical factories like Chisso. Fifty years ago most of the PVC (polyvinyl chloride) used for water pipes was made by Chisso. More recently, they make LCs (liquid crystals). We are very much in a 'Chisso-ish' (チッソ的) society. If we narrow our thinking to only Minamata disease, Chisso is responsible. However, in a historical sense, we are already 'another Chisso'. *This society which has pursued 'modernisation' and 'affluence' has been ourselves, has it not? A big question seems to me how we can break ourselves from our own spell and liberate ourselves* (emphasis added).⁵²

Ogata thus re-positioned himself in relation to Chisso by recognising his own position in the broader historical context of modernisation. This re-positioning is highly relevant today in relation to the nuclear crisis and energy consumption. Unless we find ways to live independent of electric- and nuclear power-generating utilities such as TEPCO, we can be regarded, strictly speaking, as 'another TEPCO' in Ogata's words. Here, he asks an important question: how can we break ourselves from our own spell and liberate ourselves? In relation to energy, recent developments in Japan and elsewhere to switch to renewable energy, may represent a step forward towards 'liberation'. As will be discussed later, Ogata sees the potential of renewable energy to provide an economic system that enables us to live more in tune with the 'life-world'. Whether it be chemical products (produced by companies such as Chisso) or energy (produced by corporations such as TEPCO), however, there remains a conceptual knot in the relationship between modern human existence and nature that is beyond a technical solution.

Ogata says his realisation that he is 'another Chisso' led to an even more fundamental shift: namely, to reposition himself from within human society alone, into a broader system of the 'life-world' of which human society is part.⁵³ He says:

'Then my eyes opened to nature. I was awakened to the life of nature. That was it!'⁵⁴

He writes:

I was beginning to see that everything is interrelated.... Grass, trees, birds, the sea, fish, human gestures, and words – expressions of nature to which I had grown indifferent – all seemed to

offer subtle hints.... I was drawn to the hills. When I spoke to the trees, they would answer. Of course, they didn't use human words. It was more like the voice of the wind, explaining to me in a different way what it meant to be alive. I was participating in a communion of living spirits, in an exchange of feelings unencumbered by words.⁵⁵

This awakening of his senses became the foundation of Ogata's philosophy of the 'life-world'.

2) Being human in the life-world

It was not just humans who suffered and died in the Minamata incident. Vast numbers of other creatures, including fish, cats, birds, and domestic pigs,⁵⁶ died, and rich ecosystems such as tidal zones were destroyed.⁵⁷ These 'other lives' have rarely been part of the mainstream Minamata discourse.⁵⁸ Ogata points out that it is the same with regard to the nuclear disaster in Fukushima. The damage humans inflict upon other living things is rarely discussed, and if it is mentioned, it is primarily as 'trouble': the trouble caused by a loss of their commercial value, the danger we face as a result of contaminated food, or the nuisance associated with life that needs to be 'destroyed'. It has been reported that almost 3,000 cows, 30,000 pigs and 600,000 chickens as well as numerous pets were left behind in the nuclear exclusion zone at Fukushima to starve to death.⁵⁹ A recent international study found that there has been 'a negative consequence of radiation for birds immediately after the accident on 11 March'.⁶⁰ After shifting his position from that of a victim of industrial pollution to that of being part of the social system that caused it, Ogata began to think about the responsibility of humans towards other living things. He writes:

[Compensation] does not mean anything to the sea. It means nothing to fish or cats. The truth is that compensation does not mean anything to the dead either. So how can we take responsibility? I think that it is by being aware of the *tsumi* ('sin') of having poisoned the sea, by facing the fact itself. I myself am confronted with the question of responsibility.⁶¹

Ogata's sense of responsibility as a human being came with a sense of loss of connectedness with the life-world.⁶² He ponders:

When I considered Chisso as offender, I thought that I had nothing to do with it. I thought that it was just a company, with power in the system. But when I began to perceive myself as 'another Chisso', I experienced a sense of crisis that I myself was moving away from the connectedness of life.⁶³



Starving cows in Fukushima

Underlying his notion of life-world is the tradition of animism which is epitomised by the word *gotagai*, a word from the Minamata dialect which means; ‘we’re all in this together’. It is a name given to the sense of connectedness with all life within nature. Ogata continues:

[*Gotagai*] doesn’t mean simply that we humans rely upon each other for our existence but that plants and animals are also partners in this life. *Gotagai* includes the sea, the mountains, everything. Human beings are part of the circle of *gotagai*; we owe our existence to the vast web of interrelationships that constitute life.⁶⁴

What we see here is not an image of humans controlling other living things from above, but something more humble, a vision of people as being on an equal basis with other life forms, constituting part of a complex and mutually supporting web of life. Underlying this notion of *gotagai* is a cultural tradition of animism and pantheism:

Beyond the pale of [institutionalised] Buddhism were local gods like Ebisu [god of the sea and fishing] and the gods of the hills. These were the gods important to the villagers’ daily lives.⁶⁵

Placing faith in life and treating it with reverence and gratitude is at the core of this philosophy of the ‘life-world’,⁶⁶ and underlying it is the way of life of fishing villages in Minamata:

In the lost world of Minamata fishermen] we caught lots of fish every day, and we lived on them. We were nurtured by the fish and the sea. We would wring a chicken’s neck a few times a year to eat them, and once every few years we might also have caught a mountain rabbit to eat. We lived by killing creatures. There was a sense that we were given life by other lives. In this way of life, I think people knew the depth of the sin of killing.⁶⁷

Ogata’s ‘life-world’ is perhaps best portrayed by the image of ‘Biohistory’ which illustrates: ‘the history and diversity of life which came into being over the course of a four billion year period’ (<http://www.brh.co.jp/en/>).⁶⁸ The image was created based on the idea of Nakamura Keiko, Director General of the Biohistory Research Hall, whom Ogata invited to the 50th Anniversary of the Official Acknowledgement of Minamata Disease. In her presentation Nakamura stated that all living beings share the same origin (genome), that human beings are only one of the diverse species which share the same history of development over 3.8 billion years (instead of being at the top of the pyramid), and that human beings are *in nature* (not outside it). Nakamura also stressed the importance of regaining our sense of being living things (生き物としての感覚をとりもどす).⁶⁹ Nakamura’s call to regain our sense as living beings resonates with Ogata’s idea of regaining the memory of living things. According to him:

In the age of “modernity”, we standardised, institutionalised and mechanised many things in the name of modernisation. In the process, we reclaimed the sea of Minamata⁷⁰ that was full of life saying that it was polluted by mercury. But perhaps it was not just the sea we buried. We have perhaps created a system of concealment to continue institutional and mechanical burying. That can be summarised as the creation of a “false memory system” (偽りの記憶装置). By doing so, we have perhaps moved away from the essence of life, and the memory of the essence of life. I cannot help but feel that various social problems we face today happened because we have lost the “memory of life” (命の記憶).⁷¹

Ogata’s Minamata discourse thus developed into a critique of modernity from the standpoint of the life-world. It addresses the change in our perceptions and senses, what Nakamura calls the loss of ‘the sense of being living things’, or what Ogata calls the loss of our ‘memory of life’, that has been shared for billions of years with other living forms. Ogata’s philosophy is a call to regain our sense of connectedness with this vast world of life.

In order to understand his notion of life-world, however, it is necessary to discuss yet another layer of connectedness, that is, connectedness with the soul. This is the dimension of his Minamata discourse that challenges most deeply the current modes of perception, analysis and evaluation of social phenomena in mainstream Western social science.

3) Connectedness with the ‘Soul’ (*tamashii* 魂)

Further pondering the meaning of the Minamata disease incident, Ogata writes:

The Minamata disease incident has left a question that cannot be dealt with as a political issue. Actually, it is the biggest and most fundamental question. In other words, there is a question that cannot be transformed into a question of policies or institutions. That is the question of the soul.⁷²

The question of soul is difficult to address in social science language. It is a question that may belong to the realm of what Lyotard calls ‘paralogy’, the basis of a new kind of knowledge which produces not the known but the unknown, widening the imagination and opening it to possibilities of an ‘unknown’ knowledge. Lyotard argues that the possibility of paralogy lies in ‘little narrative(s)’, like the story of Ogata Masato. Beck, on the other hand, points out that the ‘enrichment of the soul’ through the spiritual quest for a ‘God of One’s Own’ has been one of the strong trends in spiritual culture since the 1960s.⁷³ Ogata’s discourse on the soul is thus not necessarily alien in the context of social science. He writes:

I feel that we need to express what soul is more substantively and in a way that is easier to understand. I have been thinking lately how we can convey what soul is, and what we can say about the soul.... Previously I stated that it is another name for life, but in a way, I think it can also be called ‘the stamp of humanity’ (*ningen no akashi* 人間の証). Especially after the war, various things have been modernised and mechanised so they can be integrated into the system society (システム社会). *This has devoured the soul, which is the basis for the connectedness among people, between humans and other living things, and between humans and the sea, rivers and mountains....* I think that the promise of being human is to sense life (*inochi o kankaku suru* いのちを感覚する) and to manage life (*inochi o tsukasadoru* いのちを司る). Humans exist with this duty. We will never be an existence that can be mechanised and institutionalised (emphasis added).⁷⁴

Ogata’s critique of modernity in the deepest sense is that modernisation (including mechanisation) has ‘devoured the soul’, the very basis of connectedness. For him the soul is the essence of life that enables humans to be connected with other living things and with nature. He considers it the duty of humans to use this sense of connectedness to preserve and maintain the life-world. His notion of soul can then be understood as something like the energy that connects people with other living things and with nature, which altogether constitutes the whole of the life-world.

It is with this holistic notion of the relationship between humans, soul, other living things as well as inanimate nature in the life-world that Ogata and sixteen other Minamata disease sufferers established the ‘Association of the Original Vow’ (Hongan no Kai 本願の会) in 1995. The “Original Vow” for them is a spiritual concept. The statement of the Association begins:

Once Minamata Bay was the treasure chest of our sea. Here schools of fish came to spawn. The young fry matured here and then returned to repeat the cycle. The bay was like a womb. In what is now landfill between Hyakken Port and Myojin Point, the silver scales of sardine and gizzard shad shimmered in the sunlight. Mullet leapt. Shrimp and crab frolicked in the shallow.⁷⁵

Landfill was used to cover the area where pollution was most severe. Fish from the area, which were contaminated with high-concentration methyl-mercury, were caught and stuffed in 2,500 oil drums and buried underneath the landfill as ‘polluted fish’. For Ogata, this landfill symbolizes ‘the depth of human sin’.⁷⁶ On the field of the reclaimed land, members of the Association have enshrined small stone statues of Buddha and other deities, including ‘Totoro,’ as a special Minamata deity for deceased children and other young lives lost. The statement of the Association continues:

On this land reclaimed from the Sea of Sorrow, we vow to enshrine small stone images. Bowing down before [the stone Buddhas], we will clasp our hands in prayer, contemplate the sins of man, and pray for the salvation of those souls lost to organic mercury. It is our deepest wish that this land of disease and death be transformed into a Pure Land of the spirit, where all creatures may be consoled.⁷⁷

From this position of recognising our *tsumi* (‘sin’) and praying to find spiritual consolation, Ogata reflects on the significance of the Minamata disease incident. He writes:

I think that the question Minamata disease poses to people ... [is] essentially, the meaning of life. It was the incident which destroyed a world where we could catch lots of fish, octopus, shellfish and prawns from the sea in front of us, collect bracken, *tsuwabuki*⁷⁸ and ferns from the mountains behind us, and harvest vegetables from the fields where insects were hovering around us, and birds were soaring above.⁷⁹

In the past, we were permitted to live in this world and we had a variety of practices that helped us to feel the connection. Each one of us was connected as a living life with various other lives. We lived it out.... When I was involved with the Minamata movement, I thought, deep in my heart, that I was living on my own. But when that sense crumbled, I realised that I live, and am allowed to live by being connected to various other living things.⁸⁰



A Stone Buddha on the reclaimed land in Minamata. Photo by S. Yoneyama

Ogata's sense of connectedness is not only towards nature and the souls of the deceased but includes connectedness among people; all of which he calls his 'spiritual community': The spiritual community is like an old-fashioned country stew, in which each person has a different face, physique, character, and age. Some would be disabled. But regardless of their characteristics, all would have valuable roles to play. No one would be dispensable. In such a society there would be no discrimination. To acknowledge each other's differences is to acknowledge our essential equality.⁸¹

The strength of Ogata's notion of spirituality is that it is not 'other worldly'. Instead, his concept of spirituality is firmly rooted to this world, which includes not only intangible but also observable aspects of nature and people. The spiritual community Ogata describes above epitomises it. It depicts a community where each individual is accepted and cherished for their very existence (存在そのものが愛される) regardless of physique, quality and ability, including disabled Minamata disease sufferers. Ogata writes elsewhere that he remembers his father welcoming intellectually-disabled people to his house, people who otherwise would have nowhere to go. He cherished (*kawaigaru* かわいがる) them by protecting them from being bullied.⁸² Ogata's notion of the spiritual community also reminds the author that congenital Minamata sufferers – many in wheelchairs with severe disabilities – have often been called 'treasure children' (*takarago* 宝子) in Minamata.⁸³

Minamata, however, is also a place where discrimination against such sufferers has been strong and many rifts occurred in the community, as discussed earlier. Ogata's notion of a spiritual community, where other people's differences are appreciated as their essential qualities, is like his prayer. And with this 'prayer', he uses the word '*moyau*' [to moor] to say, '*moyatte kaeroo*' [Let's us moor together to return].⁸⁴

But where does he want to return? He writes:

Was not the crux of the Minamata struggle a call from the spiritual world of Minamata fishermen and victims? It seems to me that the heart of the Minamata question lies in their call to live together in a world where life is revered and connected.⁸⁵

Here lies the essence of Ogata's philosophy of the life-world: *to regain the sense of living together in a spiritual world where life is revered and connected.*

The question remains, however, as to how to reconcile this notion of the life-world with the reality of highly materialistic late-modern society? Is such a notion compatible with the everyday life of an advanced industrialised society? Or is it possible only by pursuing a hermit-like '*hikikomori*' life, after denouncing aspirations, comforts, and sense of progress, which are key to modern living? Asking these questions leads us back to the questions raised at the beginning of this paper:

- How is the dichotomy between 'life' (*inochi*) and economy to be faced at this point of modern history? Is it a matter of either-or, ultimately?

The final section of this paper addresses this question in relation to Ogata's philosophy. It also addresses three other questions.

- Might there be some Asian principle of environmental ethics that corresponds to Angela Merkel's 'Christian tradition and European culture' of the West?
- What is the significance of Japan in the post 3.11 era in regard to envisioning a world beyond the 'World Risk Society'?
- How is it possible to overcome the shortcomings of modernity, its 'self-reflexivity', the tendency to turn the Earth into a 'World Risk Society' like octopuses which have a reputation of consuming their own tentacles?

7. The Life-world for a New Modernity

1) The Life-World and the System-Society: Dialogue

'How [can we] break ourselves from our own spell and liberate ourselves' from the spell of the 'system-society' driven by the pursuit of affluence? -- Ogata asks. By system-society he means a composite of legal and institutional systems that support modern society.⁸⁶ He does not suggest that we should give up living in the system-society in pursuit of living in the life-world. Rather, he sees the relationship between the two as 'right foot and left foot': both are indispensable for walking. The question is how to live within this potentially contradictory dual structure.

We need to think how to live with the dual structure. In the global-capitalist-market economy, we are controlled by a view of the world dominated by the economy and we cannot escape from it. It is a world regulated by clock-time, and we feel as if everything is controlled by the

overwhelming power of the economy and politics. But precisely because of this, I think it is necessary to have our own time in ‘cosmic-time’, in order to relax and refresh, and find and regain a sense of our true selves. I think that each person is like a small universe and that it is possible for each of us to find our own way, existentially, to connect to the cosmic-time where life is eternal. It seems to me that living this duality provides a very important hint for us to remain and regulate ourselves as humans. To put it differently, we work in the system-society to earn our living, and we live in the life-world to live our life. It’s like doing two-sword fencing, or having two different, top and bottom, streams of wind, or a double helix structure in one’s life.⁸⁷

For Ogata, to recognise this duality meant to understand that he himself was part of the ‘Chisso-ish’ society and to recognise that he was ‘another Chisso’ as discussed earlier. Ogata emphasises, however, the importance of knowing where each of us ‘stands’, i.e. ‘where you put your centre of gravity’ (重心) and ‘where you put your soul’.⁸⁸

Sadly, I myself cannot escape from the money economy or the economic system. I use my mobile phone and my boat is equipped with GPS, for instance. Although I cannot escape from the system, I am still resisting stubbornly. What is it that I am defying? *There is only one point ultimately. It is where you put your ‘trust’ (どこに信を置くか shin as in shinrai 信頼). In the end, it is the question of where you place your trust, the system-society or the life-world.*⁸⁹

For Ogata, the life-world presents an absolute, ethical frame of reference in which, he as human being, has a sense of responsibility to nature even though he is living in the system-society. In this sense, Ogata’s notion of the life-world may sound somewhat similar to what Turner⁹⁰ calls the ‘centre’ or what Birkeland⁹¹ calls the ‘north’ in their work on pilgrimage; an inner space which constitutes a separate ‘place to be’ independent of socially constructed morals and values. Ogata’s life-world is no doubt *his* ‘place to be’ and it provides *him* an absolute ethical frame of reference.

The significance of his thoughts, however, goes far beyond his personal sphere, beyond a spiritual quest of his own god/centre/north, which may be interpreted as a postmodern quest for spirituality. Instead, Ogata presents a philosophy, a foundation for environmental ethics that addresses human responsibility vis-à-vis nature at this particular point of history when the globalising world faces the life-threatening reality of ‘self-reflexive’ modernity.

2) Intangible Heritage: Animism

The strength of Ogata’s philosophy lies in its dual historical backgrounds. One is the history of contemporary Japan through which he has lived, from Minamata to Fukushima, a period of radical modernisation which now faces an undeniable turning point. The other is the cultural tradition of Japan inherited and transmitted for centuries: animism. His philosophy is based on what UNESCO calls an ‘Intangible Heritage’. It is similar to the Okinawan value of ‘*Nuchi du takara*, the affirmation of the supremacy or sanctity of life’,⁹² as well as the ancient Shinto⁹³ whose polytheistic/pantheistic world accommodates an infinite number of *kami* (gods or deities) as ‘a natural force or manifestation of energy or life-force within given objects or places, and spirits and signs of spiritual energy within the world’.⁹⁴ In this tradition, nature is spirituality, and spirituality is nature. Not at all solemn or abstract, Ogata’s spiritual world is crowded with many types of spirits, living and dead, human and others, including plants and inanimate entities in nature such as mountains, rivers and the sea. It is an eternal world full of diversity, all connected by the soul.⁹⁵

Animism is not unique to Japan. Its primordial-indigenous tradition merged with Daoism from China that constitutes a strong cultural heritage of East Asia and beyond. Ogata's philosophy can be considered as a late-modern version of this cultural heritage and thus has a potential to provide environmental ethics that is widely relevant in Asia. If, as the German Ethics Commission for a Safe Energy Supply points out, environmental ethics should be drawn from a spiritual tradition, an animistic culture might be as appropriate in the East as Christian tradition and European culture is in the West.

In the animistic tradition of pantheism, the relationship between nature and humankind is very different from that in (mainstream) European culture. In Ogata's view of nature, for instance, there is not the slightest hint that humans are above other living things. The image of humankind is humble. The responsibility of humans, who nonetheless have the power to destroy nature, emanates from within the 'life-world', rather than from the position external to it. This notion of a life-world is very different from the discourse on 'human rights' and 'animal rights', which are often used as keywords in the discourse on environmental ethics.

This cultural heritage, however, has not been part of Japan's intensive modernisation as seen above. As a consequence, we see a situation where many people in Japan feel as if they are compelled to make an unreasonable choice between 'life' and the economy. It is at this historical crossroad that Ogata sees a new possibility emerging, a possibility of redressing the conflicting relationship between the life-world and the system-society. It is through the systematic introduction of renewable energy.

3) Renewable Energy

According to Ogata, the tension between the life-world and the system-society is the problem of the relationship between nature and contemporary human civilisation as a whole.⁹⁶ With the triple disaster of earthquake-tsunami-nuclear meltdown in 2011, this tension came to a head, but, he remarks, there has been 'a historical push' (時代の後押し) to redress the problem, i.e. people came to realise how important it is to live with a sense of safety. Today, Ogata sees a possibility of reducing the tension further by shifting towards green energy. He says:

I think it is possible to change the existing paradox between economy and life to make them more compatible. If people look back 50 or 100 years from now, it will probably be clear that we have been going through a stage of evolution, a type of new industrial revolution. Previously, 'economy' meant manufacturing and industry, but it has gradually changed. From about 20 years ago, the environmental business became part of the economy. Eco-tourism, for instance, sells the environment to attract tourists. And now we reach a stage where we cannot sustain ourselves without maintaining a balance with nature. We cannot but realise that the tipping-point is near. This is not just the case in relation to the nuclear crisis. It is also the case with global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, water pollution, *kosa* (airborne sand) from China's spreading deserts, and photochemical smog, etc. With these global issues, how to maintain a balance with nature has become an economic question. Before, economy and nature were conceived separately, but now, nature has become the first thing to consider for the economy.

Renewable energy, Ogata says, increases the compatibility of the life-world and the system-society. He is particularly interested in the alternative energy project advanced by Son Masayoshi, who is one of the key proponents of green energy in Japan.⁹⁷ Ogata is particularly positive about solar energy which, unlike wind, has no conceivable harm to humans: in his

words, there are ‘no worries about pollution’ (公害の心配がない). He also sees the positive impact it might have towards local autonomy.

Mr. Son constructively engages himself with renewable energy and many heads of local government endorse his view. I think his project will eventually promote local autonomy and local sovereignty. The nuclear accident has threatened life in a broad area, not only in Fukushima. Because it is an issue directly related to survival, sovereignty should be with local residents, and not with the central government. Decisions about the matter of life should be made by the local people themselves.

Ogata is also interested in the international scope of Son’s project, which covers a vast area of Asia from Mongolia to South East Asia. He continues:

Mr. Son brings the whole of Asia into his perspective, collaborating with other parts of Asia to create mutually beneficial relationships. Because issues such as air pollution and nuclear crises have impact beyond national boundaries, I think their counter measures must also be thought about beyond national boundaries. In that sense, I find his ideas very interesting.

Ogata, however, is apprehensive about the system-society that is supported by alternative energy. He says:

In my neighbourhood, contracts have been signed to build two mega-solar stations. One is on reclaimed land that has been left idle because some factories moved overseas. The other is a pasture used as a cattle farm before. Because agriculture cannot be sustained economically, rice paddies, mountains and fields have been neglected and gone wild. Building solar power stations usually means just putting solar panels on the land that is least valuable. Now, it feels as if nature is being integrated into the commodity economy (商品価値化する) in a different way. Increasingly, nature, mountains and the sea, are been looked at through economic lens, and it feels as if our sense of awe of nature is weakening (畏怖の念が弱体化). Maybe it can’t be helped, but I fear that our reverence towards nature is fading away.... I am a fisherman and I see myself as a kind of ‘thief’ who ‘takes’ from nature. In a sense, fishermen and farmers are all thieves. That’s precisely why, it’s important to treat nature with dignity and respect (仁義を通す).

He implies that the same thinking should apply to renewable energy. If greater commodification of nature indeed leads to a diminished sense of awe, there is perhaps more reason to treat nature more mindfully with dignity and respect. In Ogata’s philosophy, this means to feel connected with the life-world and to have a sense of responsibility towards it from within. This suggests that no matter how compatible the system-society becomes with the life-world, the *raison d’être* of the life-world is to provide ethical and spiritual dimensions that are not covered by the system-society.

In fact, the duality of the ‘life-world’ and ‘system society’ does not mean that they simply co-exist. During our interview, Ogata repeatedly talked about the significance of maintaining *dialogue* (対話的關係): for one person to ask a question and for the other to respond. For Ogata, the ‘Chisso within’ has been a significant ‘other’ with whom he maintains a dialogue, while Chisso Corporation avoided dialogue with sufferers at all costs. For Ogata, it is such a dialogue that makes humans human. The life-world is like a sounding board with which individuals can hold inner dialogues, raise existential questions, and seek ethical references to

live more meaningfully in a highly industrialised, late-modern world. At the same time, the life-world is not just an abstract spiritual world. It is nature that exists in the tangible world, as birds, fish, grass, trees, rocks, water, wind, sunlight, etc. The uneasiness Ogata expresses about the diminishing sense of awe to nature is a cautionary note from the life-world, a composite of spirituality and nature, towards the commercialisation of nature.

4) Spirituality and Nature: the Lacuna of Social Science

Ogata's philosophy of the life-world is, more than anything else, a critique of modernity. He questions the two most fundamental premises of modernity. One is the dominance of money-centred social values as discussed earlier. The other is the exclusion of matters related to spirituality. There seem to be three interrelated levels in the incongruity between modernity and spirituality. The first is empirical. Namely, there is a sense, to quote Ogata again, that modernisation and mechanisation have 'devoured the soul' from everyday life. To put it differently, modernity has a capacity to 'de-spiritualise' cultures.⁹⁸ The second is historical, that is, one of the key features of modernity has been to pursue freedom from the oppressive power of religious institutions, as epitomised by the Nietzschean claim that 'God is dead'. And, the third is epistemological, which is most relevant in the context of this paper.

Social science, and sociology in particular, is a product of modernity and has operated with secularism as its basic assumption, putting spiritual matters outside its boundary. Spirituality is understood to be something belonging to an 'other reality' as against 'this world'.⁹⁹ Issues of animism, among other things, have been treated in sociology 'with the utmost reserve, if not disdain',¹⁰⁰ as if it is 'magic'. The elimination of 'magic', according to Max Weber, is 'one of the most important aspects of the broader process of rationalization,'¹⁰¹ that is to say, the key to modernity.

On the other hand, the critique of modernity has been presented within social science itself as one feature of postmodernism. For Lyotard, in particular, incredulity towards a metanarrative, in this case the fundamental premises of social science, is the very definition of the postmodern.¹⁰² He sees in the 'little narrative' the potential to produce a new kind of knowledge which opens up our imagination to the unknown, something which has been outside the epistemological boundaries of existing knowledge.¹⁰³ The 'little narrative' denotes the kind of knowledge that has been outside the legitimate sphere of (social) scientific knowledge. The 'little narrative' of Ogata presents this possibility of creating a new knowledge as discerned long ago by Tsurumi Kazuko.¹⁰⁴ Founded upon the intangible cultural heritage of Japan that is shared with other indigenous cultures, it directly addresses problems of modernity based on his first-hand experience as a key person in the historic Minamata movement, that is, on *the very frontline* where modernity and the indigenous culture of Japan collided.

Connectedness – *moyai* (tying boats together) and *kizuna* (bonds) – emerged as a response to the devastation in Minamata and Fukushima at the beginning and end of radical modernisation in Japan. This is a response from the ancient cultural wisdom to the reckless aspect of super modernity that brought Japan not only affluence but crises. In the post-3.11 world, the indigenous tradition expressed in late-modern Japan may open new epistemological possibilities in social science.

The sense of 'connectedness that an individual feels to everything that is other than self' is spirituality.¹⁰⁵ And enriching one's soul by having one's own god has been a definite trend in the

modern world.¹⁰⁶ Ogata's philosophy is very much in line with this trend in a world which might be called 'postmodern'. In his philosophy, however, this connectedness is not based on a one-to-one relationship with one's own particular god. Rather, it is based on a strong sense of being connected organically to a rhizome-like life-world. In that sense, it presents a philosophy that is counter to the reality of 'individualization',¹⁰⁷ and 'new individualism',¹⁰⁸ in the globalising late-modern world. Precisely because of this, it is possible, paradoxically, that there will be a greater need to restore a sense of connectedness at a different level in everyday life.

Every philosophy and every social theory is culturally and historically specific. While the impact of the increasing economic power of Asia is felt all over the world, as yet no ethical framework to support its sustainable development has been identified. Ogata's philosophy may provide a first step for us to start imagining a new way of perceiving everyday life for a different kind of modernity. And to do this may demand an epistemological change in the social sciences. But perhaps there is nothing new in that. Sociology did not exist before Durkheim established the concept, and *the existence*, of social phenomena '*sui generis*' that are independent of the actions and intentions of individuals in society.¹⁰⁹ Would it be going too far to say that recognition of the existence '*sui generis*' of the life-world might be the pre-condition for a new modernity where sustainable development is possible?



Minamata Bay in winter. Photo by S.Yoneyama

Acknowledgments: Many people contributed to the completion of this article. Gavan McCormack was the original catalyst of this project, introducing me to the work of Ogata Masato some years ago. Okura Shonosuke, a Noh otsuzumi player, personally introduced me to Ogata Masato, and gave me the opportunity to conduct rare interviews with him. Ogata Masato shared his thoughts and ideas freely with me on two separate occasions, once in Minamata, and then through Skype from Sydney. It was the power of his spoken words that enabled me to write this article. The presence of my friend, Kimura Hiroko, a foot-painter and poet, was indispensable for my fieldwork in Minamata. Kato Takeko, the Director of Hot House, a facility to support congenital Minamata disease sufferers, provided us with a wonderful space of dialogue that was a catalyst for my fieldwork. Critical comments from Mark Selden and Katalin Ferber were most valuable. And it was with the generous editing and encouragement of Shirley Leane of Tottori University that I could complete this piece. My deepest gratitude to all.

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Recommended citation: Shoko Yoneyama, "Life-world: Beyond Fukushima and Minamata 「いのちの世界」：フクシマとミナマタを超えて," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol 10, Issue 42, No. 2, October 15, 2012.

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Notes

¹ Beck, Ulrich (2011) 「福島、あるいは世界リスク社会における日本の未来 [Fukushima, or the future of Japan in the World Risk Society], in Sekai, July, pp.68-73.

² Beck, Ulrich (1999) *World Risk Society*, Polity, Cambridge.

³ McCormack, Gavan (1996) *The Emptiness of Japanese Affluence* (first edition) New York: M.E.Sharpe, p.5.

⁴ All Japanese names (except the author's) in this paper are presented in Japanese order: family name first.

⁵ The term, 'life-world', has been used in philosophy and sociology to refer to the subjective and conscious dimension of everydaylife (Husserl) including the phenomenological aspects (Merleau-Ponty), which is sometimes posited vis-à-vis the 'system-world' (Habermas). Ogata's discourse can be called phenomenological and he also talks about the dichotomy of the 'life-world' and the 'system society' (システム社会). With these similarities, it will be interesting to examine Ogata's philosophy in relation to the western philosophical tradition. This, however, is well beyond the scope of this paper, and will have to be left to a later date.

- ⁶ TEPCO (2012) Press Release 24.05.2012 「東北地方太平洋沖地震の影響による福島第一原子力発電所の事故に伴う大気および海洋への放射性物質の放出量の推定について（平成 24 年 5 月現在における評価」 ([here](#)) (accessed 29.05.2012)
- ⁷ Obe, Mitusuru (2012) 'Tepco's Estimate Of Radiation Rises', *Wall Street Journal Asia*, 25.05.2012, p.5.
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⁴² Interview with Ogata Masato, 16 January 2012.

⁴³ George (2001) *Minamata*, p.284.

⁴⁴ Tsurumi, Kazuko 鶴見和子(1998) 『鶴見和子曼荼羅 VI 魂の巻 水俣・アニミズム・エコロジー』 [Tsurumi Kazuko Collection Mandara VI Minamata: An Approach to Animism and Ecology], Fujiwara Shoten, Tokyo, p.39.

⁴⁵ Oiwa & Ogata 2001, p.173.

⁴⁶ Beck, Ulrich (2011) 'Postscript: Individualizing Japan and Beyond: Comment on Comments', in Beck, Ulrich., Suzuki Munenori, Ito Midori (eds.) *Risukuka suru nihonshakai: Ulrich Beck tono taiwa* 『リスク化する日本社会』 Iwanami Shoten, p.252.

⁴⁷ Beck (1999) *World Risk Society*, p.3.

⁴⁸ Beck (1999) *World Risk Society*, p.3.

⁴⁹ Interview conducted with Masato Ogata, 15 January 2012, Minamata.

⁵⁰ Oiwa and Ogata, p.98.

⁵¹ Interview.

⁵² Ogata 2001, p.49, my translation. All quotations from this volume have been translated from Japanese to English by the author.

⁵³ Ogata's terminology, '*seimei sekai*' (生命世界) or '*inochi no sekai*' (いのちの世界), becomes 'life-world' when translated into English, which happens to be the same phrase as used by Habermas. Both are the same in that 'life world' is conceived as an antithesis of the 'system world/society'. While the 'life world' of Habermas refers to everyday life of humans, however, Ogata's notion of 'life world' covers a much wider spectrum including the biological, ecological and spiritual world of all beings living and dead.

⁵⁴ Interview.

⁵⁵ Oiwa and 2001, p.99.

⁵⁶ Ogata 2001, p.66

⁵⁷ Oiwa & Ogata 2001, p.164.

⁵⁸ Except the work of some Minamata residents: Ogata Masato, Ishimure Michiko and Sugimoto Eiko.

⁵⁹ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 19 April 2011.

⁶⁰ Moller, A., Hagiwara, A., Matsui, S. and others (2012) 'Abundance of birds in Fukushima as Judged from Chernobyl', *Environmental Pollution*, 164, p.36.

⁶¹ Ogata 2001, p.68.

⁶² Ogata 2001, pp. 64-5.

⁶³ Ogata 2001, p.66.

⁶⁴ Oiwa and Ogata 2001, p.164.

⁶⁵ Oiwa and Ogata 2001, p.171.

⁶⁶ Oiwa and Ogata 2001, p.164.

⁶⁷ Ogata 2001, p.62.

⁶⁸ See the homepage of Biohistory Research Institute for the image of 'Biohistory' at [here](#).

⁶⁹ Nakamura, Keiko (2007) 'Seimei kagaku: Ikimono kanaku de kangaeru' 「生命科学：生き物感覚で考える」 [Bioscience: To think about it with senses of a living creature], in 水俣病公式確認 50 年事業実行委員会 『創世紀を迎えた水俣：未来への提言』 [Minamata which Entered a New Period for Life and Creativity] (*souseiki o mukaeta Minamata*)

⁷⁰ This was done as a solution to the pollution caused by the organic mercury.

⁷¹ Ogata 2001, p.63.

⁷² Ogata 2001, p.67.

⁷³ Beck, Ulrich (2008) *A God of one's own*, Cambridge, Polity, p.27.

⁷⁴ Ogata 2001, pp.192-3, emphasis added.

⁷⁵ Oiwa & Ogata 2001, p.122.

⁷⁶ Oiwa & Ogata 2001, p.122.

⁷⁷ Oiwa & Ogata 2001, p.122.

⁷⁸ *Farfugium japonicum*. Its leaves look like shiny *fuki*, but it is not *fuki* and it has small yellow flowers in autumn. It is evergreen and often seen in Japanese gardens, next to stones.

⁷⁹ Ogata 2001, p.74

⁸⁰ Ogata 2001, p.75

⁸¹ Ogata and Oiwa 2001, p.172.

⁸² Ogata 2001, p.10.

⁸³ Ogata and Oiwa 2001, p.162. A strong counter-example to this would be the case of the 14-year-old 'school killer' in Kobe in 1998 who murdered a small child and displayed his decapitated head at the gate of his school, in order to demonstrate to society how his 'existence has been erased' (存在が消された) by the 'school society, an incident that has had a prolonged empathic impact among Japanese youth ever since. Yoneyama, Shoko (1999) *The Japanese High School: Silence and Resistance*, London, Routledge, pp.1-17.

⁸⁴ Oiwa and Ogata 2001, p.173.

⁸⁵ Ogata 2001, p.63.

⁸⁶ Ogata 2001, p.48.

⁸⁷ Interview with Ogata Masato, 25 August 2012.

⁸⁸ Ditto.

⁸⁹ Interview with Ogata Masato, 16 January 2012.

⁹⁰ Turner, Victor (1973) 'The Centre Out There: The Pilgrim's Goal', *History of Religion*, 12 (3): 191-230.

⁹¹ Birkeland, Inger (2005) *Making Place, Making Self: Travel, Subjectivity, and Sexual Difference*, London: Ashgate Publishing.

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⁹³ This is a far cry from state-*shintoism* which has been in place since the Meiji period.

⁹⁴ Reader, Ian (2001) *Shinto*, Simple Guides, London, pp.40-41. See also, Kagawa-Fox, Midori (2010) 'Environmental Ethics from the Japanese Perspective', *Ethics, Place and Environment*, 13 (1): 57-73.

⁹⁵ This image of this spiritual world has been adopted in many ways, including anime films by Miyazaki Hayao, most notably in 'Spirited Away' (2001) and 'Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea' (2008). A strong feature of Miyazaki films is the presence of numerous spirits and (mostly lovable) monstrous beings that live in the unseen world, especially in nature. There are other famous Japanese manga and anime films such as 'GeGeGe-no-Kitaro' by Mizuki Shigeru, and more recently, 'A Letter to Momo' (2011) by Okiura Hiroyuki, where beings from the invisible world play central roles. The animistic tradition is perhaps best expressed in 'Tales of Tono' (1912), a presentation of folk legends by Yanagita Kunio in literature, as well as by woodblock print artists such as Munakata Shiko and Naka Bokunen in art.

⁹⁶ All quotations in this section, unless otherwise indicated, are from an Interview with Ogata, 25 August 2012.

⁹⁷ Son Masayoshi and Andrew DeWit (2011) 'Creating a Solar Belt in East Japan: The Energy Future', *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol 9, Issue 38 No 2, September 19.

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⁹⁹ Berger, Peter, L. (1969) *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*, Doubleday & Company, New York, p.2.

¹⁰⁰ Flanagan 2007, p.1.

¹⁰¹ Parsons, Talcott (1930/1974) 'Translator's note', Chapter IV, Endnote 19, in Weber, Max (1930/1974) Parsons, T. (trans) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Unwin University Books. Parsons 1930/1974, p.222.

¹⁰² Lyotard, J.F. (1979) *The Postmodern Condition*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis. Lyotard 1979, p. xxxiv.

¹⁰³ Lyotard 1979, pp.60-67.

¹⁰⁴ Tsurumi, Kazuko 鶴見和子(1998)『鶴見和子曼荼羅 VI 魂の巻 水俣・アニミズム・エコロジー』 [Tsurumi Kazuko Collection *Mandara* VI Minamata: An Approach to Animism and Ecology], Fujiwara Shoten, Tokyo, p.39.

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¹⁰⁷ Beck, U., Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2001) *Individualization*, London, Sage.

¹⁰⁸ Elliott, A., Katagiri, M. and Sawai, A. (2012) 'The New Individualism in Contemporary Japan: Theoretical Avenues and the Japanese New Individualist Path', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, Online: 30 May 2012.

¹⁰⁹ Durkheim, E. (1895) *The Rules of Sociological Method*. See Jones, Robert, *Emile Durkheim: An Introduction to Four Major Works*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1986. pp. 60-81.