

Encounter with «Moral science» in Late Nineteenth-Century Japan

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Abstract: The term «moral science» was used in universities and academies prior to the emergence of the expression «humanities and social sciences». However, its connection with the modern eastern Asian context has not yet been sufficiently investigated. This paper tries to fill the gap with a case study on its import and appropriation by late nineteenth-century Japan to its socio-cultural sphere, having lacked the framework of classifying the sciences into «moral» and «physical» ones. The study achieves this by examining the activities of *Meirokeisha*, a learned society created in 1773 to promote Western studies, and the writings of one of its leading members, Yukichi Fukuzawa, who tried to understand Francis Wayland's *Elements of Moral Science* (1835), a famous American textbook in his time.

Keywords: Moral Science, Meirokeisha, Francis Wayland, Yukichi Fukuzawa, Shigeki Nishimura

Introduction

Recent historical studies have deepened our understanding of the history of social science in Europe and North America, from the late eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. The terms «moral science», «moral and political sciences» (and its equivalents in other European languages), or «science of men» were used in universities and academies prior to the emergence of the expression «humanities and social sciences». However, the connection of these terms with the modern eastern Asian context has not yet been sufficiently established. This paper tries to fill this gap by conducting a case study on the import and appropriation of the concept of «moral science» by late nineteenth-century Japan to its socio-cultural sphere. The study achieves this by examining the activities of *Meirokeisha* or the Meiji Six society, a learned society created in 1773 to promote Western studies (*yogaku*), and the writings of one of its leading members, Yukichi Fukuzawa.

The origin of the expression «moral science» in the European context goes back to the medieval period, especially to the tradition of education for kingship, which included both political and religious moral education.¹ However,

¹ See for example, 'Autre declaration du roi, Louis XII. Du dernier aoust 1498', in *Recueil des actes, titres et mémoires concernant les affaires du clergé de France*, Paris (1716), t. I, p. 858. It

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during the Age of Enlightenment, the expression «moral and political sciences» gradually took on the meaning of an ambitious intellectual project for organising all the non-physical sciences, which were still emerging. Its scope covered a wide range of intellectual fields corresponding to ethics, law, political economy, economics, history, geography, and a sort of psychology due to the existence of several competing models.

Academies and private learned societies played an important role in the diffusion of these endeavours. As Julien Vincent says, the protagonists of «moral and political sciences» created a section in several academies on the European continent, especially during the first half of the nineteenth century, often imitating a model found in other countries. These institutions were places where not only researchers but also practitioners, such as politicians and bureaucrats, could gather, before the universities began to institutionalise social sciences at the end of the century (Vincent 2016).

Until the mid-nineteenth century, moral science had not yet diverged into specialised disciplines, and existed as fields of both philosophical and political negotiation between opposing reactions to the changes introduced by modernity. Some desired more rapid economic and political change for «progress», while others the re-establishment of the social order. The frontiers between conservatism, liberalism and socialism were not clarified and each segment proclaimed moral science as an extension of its own social reform programme rather than as a theoretical endeavour (Chappey 2006; Steiner 2006; Vincent 2007). When Japan opened the door to the external world around the 1850s, it encountered this complex intellectual landscape without grasping its complexity.

The Meirokusha began promoting Western studies by bringing together intellectuals and government officials, and tried to import Western moral science into Japan. In the following section, we first describe the process of its development and its possible institutional origin. Secondly, we explain the epistemological assumptions they shared on the structure of knowledge to understand their initial unfamiliarity with the intellectual framework of classifying the sciences into «moral» and «physical (or natural)» ones. Thirdly, we look closely at Fukuzawa's attempt to understand Wayland's *Elements of Moral Science* (1835), a famous American textbook on this subject in his time. We examine his attempts to modify Wayland's original arguments on moral science into those on

derives its principles from the 'moral' in a religious sense. It was also common practice to juxtapose three elements of 'morals' such as 'Ethics or Morals', 'Economy' and 'Politics', as seen in François de La Mothe Le Vayer's writing in the seventeenth century. While the sources cited are invariably ancient scholars such as Xenophon, Aristotle, and Plato, according to literature researcher Marie-Laure Acquier, this threefold constitution was in keeping with the schema propagated in the Middle Ages, particularly in the thirteenth century, by the theologian Giles of Rome, who wrote *De Regimine Principum*, a classic kingship text belonging to a literary genre referred to as 'mirrors for princes' (*specula principum*). Giles's work was republished multiple times up until early modern times; and during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it influenced Spain's courtly culture and education of nobles. See Acquier (2010).

moral education, based on his interests, namely the modernisation of Japanese society. Apparently Fukuzawa had little interest in Wayland's Christian-minded concerns on the epistemological relationship between moral principles and natural laws, being more preoccupied with political concerns, such as national independence and the realisation of a market economy. Finally, we will attempt to create a brief sketch of the divergence among the members of the Meirokusha, following Fukuzawa's attempt to conceptualise a version of liberalism, in order to situate it as the starting point of the history of social science in Japan.

The Meirokusha. The Protagonists of Westernisation

Meirokusha's statute from 1773 claims that its main purpose is to promote communication and discussions among learned volunteers on the issue of «the education of our nation».² According to Shigeki Nishimura, one of its founding members, it had the following two objectives: firstly, the promotion of learning, and secondly, the establishment of «moral norms» (Nishimura [n.d.], 34r; Nihon-gakushiin 1962, 9-10).³ We can assume that this objective-setting was derived from its members' initial conviction that both were necessary to construct a «civilised» society in the nineteenth-century sense of the term (Tozawa 1985, 294). This interpretation was derived from contemporaneous definitions of «civilisation» in famous European or American texts. For example, Samuel Smiles, a Scottish reformer, says in his work *Self-Help* (1859), that «the nation is only the aggregate of individual conditions, and civilization itself is but a question of personal improvement» (Smiles 1859, 2). François Guizot in his *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe* (1828) emphasises the importance of «progress», enabled by the moral and intellectual improvement of each citizen (Guizot 1828, 16-17). Both authors would later be translated and read widely in Japan as manuals for understanding the notion of *bunmei* – civilisation.

It should also be noted that the definition of civilisation itself constituted a legitimate research object of moral science in the Euro-American context at that time, not only because moral science includes history, but also because historical studies of that period cannot be separated from the descriptions of the «moral» state of the populace. The so-called «moral state» was considered to directly influence the development of a society where one belonged, and is typified by Guizot's arguments (Zékian 2006, 55-82). Therefore, it is not surprising that Guizot, a historian, is the re-founder of the Moral and Political Sciences sec-

² The statute of Meirokusha, Art. 1. Though many studies exist in Japanese on each member of the Meirokusha, there are few on the Meirokusha as a group of intellectuals. In Japanese, the following two studies are well known: Nihon-gakushiin (1962), Okubo (1976) and Tozawa (1991). In other languages, the Meirokusha and its members appear mostly as a part of the general history of Japanese thought, such as the «Japanese Enlightenment». See Blacker (1964). The journal of Meirokusha, *Meirokuzasshi* is also well studied in media history. For example, see Braisted (1976).

³ See also Tozawa (1985).

tion of the Institut de France, which would later come to be called the Academy of Moral and Political Science.

Thus, the Meirokusha was a learned society that sought to address the issues of national education under the strong influence of the Euro-American moral scientific discourses of the same period. The initial 10 members of the Meirokusha included many high-ranking officials, such as Arinori Mori, Shigeki Nishimura, Masanao Nakamura, Hiroyuki Katō, Masamichi Tsuda, Amane Nishi, Kyoji Sugi, Rinsho Mitsukuri, and the founders of private higher education institutions, such as Yukichi Fukuzawa and Shuhei Mitsukuri. The society grew to encompass more than 30 in the end, and it could cover a wide range of literature due to their expertise in English, French and German.

It was the youngest member, Mori, who first had the idea to establish an academic society, when he was in the United States as Japan's first chargé d'affaires in Washington at the beginning of the 1870s. Few previous studies have explained the source of his inspiration and only cite a later account by Nishimura, who himself cites Mori as having said:⁴

I should like to see our scholars organize a society, along American lines, in which they could gather for discussion and research. Moreover, the morals of the Japanese people have in recent years shown a steady decline, with the bottom yet in sight, and it is precisely our senior scholars who must come to the rescue (Nishimura [n.d.], fol. 33v-34r).

According to Nishimura, Meirokusha was the first «society of sciences and arts (*bungei no kaisha*)»⁵ in Japan. Few historical studies, both in Japan and the West, seem to pay much attention to this expression. Its history reveals a process of importing the Euro-American model of learned societies and academies into Japan, as Meirokusha is the direct origin of all national academies in Japan, the Science Council, and the Japan Academy in Tokyo.

Our hypothesis is that the idea of establishing a society «along American lines» came to Mori under the influence of Joseph Henry, the first secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and Mori's intellectual guide and protector in Washington. Henry had founded the Philosophical Society of Washington in 1871, which corresponds with the beginning of Mori's stay in the American embassy. Henry's society was oriented more to the investigation of natural science, but it never narrowed its scope of interest, following the traditional model of learned societies, which were open to several different fields, typified by the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, established in 1743 by Benjamin Franklin.⁶

⁴ See for example, Hall (1973, 235); Julsrud (2021, 5).

⁵ *Meirokuzasshi*, I: fol. 12v.

⁶ Many American learned societies followed the model of the American Philosophical Society or the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Boston. See Bell (1972, 271-272, 269-278). As for Henry's intention to use the term 'philosophical' for his natural scientific society, see Henry (1874, 5-6).

The statute of Meirokusha shared many features with that of the traditional Anglo-European learned societies. It begins with the definition of the organisation's name, its structure, the types of membership, procedures for joining the society, the descriptions of its office-bearers, their roles and election process, and so on.⁷ However, it is not a mere copy of its American counterparts and has several original characteristics. For example, the Meirokusha's statute presupposes honorary members (Art. 6), a feature not always common in Anglo-American learned societies, but more usual in the European continental academies. We can also say that it shares more features with the original statute of the Philosophical Society of Philadelphia (PSP) from 1769,⁸ rather than the contemporary statute of the same society, which has a more complicated structure. Similarly, it differs from Henry's society, despite the similarity in the scale of the organisation.

According to its statute, unlike contemporary Euro-American academies or societies, the focus of its activities leaned heavily towards the promotion of education rather than that of research. We need to look closely at their cultural and intellectual context to understand their objective-setting.

Moral and Physical in the Japanese Context

The 10 founding members shared a similar cultural and social background. Except for the young Mori and Rinsho Mitsukuri, who were both in their twenties, the founding members were aged around 40 on average during that period and were at the height of their fame and social maturity. They all came from families of low-ranking officials or in the medical profession, who more or less made up the intellectual class among the samurai under the ancient regime. They received a general education in Confucianism in their youth and many of them, especially Fukuzawa and Nishimura, were well versed in that field.

The Meirokusha was created to promote Western studies and its members agreed on the need to import the whole set of Western sciences with its culture. Their attitude was thus naturally closer to that of intellectual social reformers than to that of amateurs and scholars gathering in learned societies. Education mattered more than research, at this stage, for this huge project of cultural importation to be possible.

Their actions were derived from their syncretic perception that found European civilisation to be a better model than the Chinese one for the realisation of Confucianist moral values. As noted by Hiroshi Watanabe, until the 1860s, moral value was the central concern of many Confucianist intellectuals who wished to modernise Japan. Their motivation did not come solely from a utilitarian attitude, but from a humanitarian (Confucianist) point of view as well. They thought Western countries, both in Europe and in North America, had a more stable and

⁷ Statute of Meirokusha.

⁸ The 1769 statute of PSP was published at the beginning of the first volume of *Transactions*, which was quite probably available to Mori in public libraries.

solid society, with better educated citizens and social safety networks, than any Asian countries, which were in political turmoil at that time. The advances created by the steam engine, and the number of hospitals, orphanages, and schools for people with disabilities in Europe and the United States impressed them as a form of achievement of the Confucianist moral values.

It goes without saying that the encounter with Western natural (or physical) science and technology had a great impact on Japanese intellectuals. However, it should also be noted that the distinction between the «moral» and the «physical» sciences was a totally unfamiliar framework for Japanese intellectuals before the 1860s. Confucianist intellectual culture did not separate nature from society. The most important aspect in this framework was to seek the right Path, *Michi* (or *Tao* in Chinese), which refers to the norms and moral principles necessary for human beings to live in harmony and prosperity. No other Japanese intellectual cultures, including those related to the local religions, such as Shintoism and Buddhism, contradicted this vision uniting nature and society (Watanabe 2010, ch. 17).

The problem is that historical studies paid little attention to the reception of Western moral science in Japan. The whole process made it inevitable for Japanese intellectuals to discover the dichotomic conceptual distinction between the «moral» and the «physical» (or «natural») both in the Westerners' worldview and in their vision of related intellectual fields. Masao Maruyama pointed out the importance of this discovery, which marked the thought of Yukichi Fukuzawa, one of the leading intellectuals of the above-mentioned Meirokusha. Fukuzawa discovered the concept of Nature, which was completely independent of any social or moral order, and governed solely by natural law, while studying Western natural science. He observed that this kind of conceptualisation of nature made it possible to assert the independence of human beings from any pre-existing social order (Maruyama 1995, 54-55).

The Meirokusha organised meetings and published its own journal, *Mei-rokuzasshi*. It contained more than 150 articles on various topics, although most shared the common feature of being introductory analyses of various Western systems and ideas. As a result, it covered a wide range of societal topics related to the moral science of the time. In its table of contents, we find such topics as professional ethics of scholars; family ethics – including discussions on equality between men and women, and the suitability of concubinage; educational issues, such as the need to invent a new Japanese writing system; arguments on legal institutions, such as the abolition of the death penalty; and the monetary and trade system.⁹

Despite leaning heavily towards the introduction of a foreign system, and its aim of «enlightening» the Japanese people, its contents have much in com-

⁹ Meirokusha, *Mei-rokuzasshi*, April 1874-November 1875, vols. 1-43. The back numbers of *Mei-rokuzasshi* can be accessed at the following address: <https://dglb01.ninjal.ac.jp/nin-jaldl/bunken.php?title=mei-rokuzasshi> (last accessed 08/01/2023).

mon with those included in the discussion of a European academy of moral science. For example, in 1872, the meetings of the Parisian Academy of Moral and Political Science included discussions on such topics as the moral, intellectual, and material condition of industrial workers, attitudes in England to social and political questions, the principles of morality, discussions on the judicial system in France, monetary policy in France and Germany, forms of government in modern society, and so on (Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques 1872). Nonetheless, deeper analysis is necessary to ascertain the similarities and differences between the activities of the Meirokusha and the moral science section founded in Euro-American academies; however, our investigation reveals at least the overlapping elements in their choice of subjects.

Yukichi Fukuzawa's Interpretation of North American «Moral Science»

The first author to mention «moral science» is Yukichi Fukuzawa. At the end of the 1860s, he coincidentally obtained the fourth edition of *The Elements of Moral Science* (1865),¹⁰ a textbook by Francis Wayland, an American Baptist educator and the fourth president of Brown University. Fukuzawa soon became interested in it and ordered about 60 copies. He perceived the book as holding «the code of ethics in general». Then, following discussions with his colleagues, he assigned the word *shushin* (修身) to the expression «moral science» (Fukuzawa 1995, 48). The term deriving from the Confucianist classic, the *Great Learning* (*Daxue*), means literary moral cultivation of the individual, which would be necessary for the ruling class.

Before examining whether Fukuzawa's choice of translation is adequate, we need to take a look at the history of moral science in the West during the nineteenth century. There were several different attempts in that category, and «moral», especially as an adjective term in English or French came to be polysemous, implying not only morality, but also the principles of human habits, or human capacity to understand the difference between right and wrong, which can be innate.

These attempts included the pioneering endeavour to create modern social sciences, adopting natural science methodologies, such as observation and quantification. French physiocrat Nicolas Baudeau coined the expression *sciences morales et politiques* in the middle of the eighteenth century, and became one of the precursors in the history of economics.¹¹ Then, Nicolas de Condorcet diffused the same expression through his attempt to apply probability theories to evaluate the probability of decision making in a range of social phenomena, such as political vote and judgements at court trials. Influenced by empiricist philoso-

¹⁰ The first edition was published in 1835 and it contains an abridged edition for young readers.

¹¹ Authors like Nicolas Baudeau and Pierre-Samuel Dupont de Nemours used this expression to explain their theories of political economy, which was a newly emerging field at that time. See Steiner (1998).

phers, such as Locke, Hume, and Condillac, these attempts presupposed that moral principles, as well as laws of nature, could be obtained from the accumulation of sensations or repeated quantifiable observations and were a matter of knowledge (Baker 1975). Their successors congregated in the departments of «Moral and political sciences» in the academies of the European continent.

However, it is the other current of «moral science» that is directly related to Wayland. It dates back to the moral philosophy of common sense in the Scottish Enlightenment, as expounded by the likes of Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart and their students. Opposed to the above-mentioned current, their emphasis was on philosophical endeavours to establish moral principles, without distancing themselves from traditional religious belief. Thus, moral principles are a matter of knowledge acquired not by the accumulation of sensations from external experiences, but by conscience, a capacity that is inseparable from the revelation given by God (Madden 1985, 301-302). After incorporating a number of aspects from the moral science of the continent, this trend was integrated into the curriculum of universities and colleges in English-speaking countries, for example, Cambridge University in 1848, and in many colleges in the United States, in the context of clerical education prior to the Civil War (1861-1865). Brown University was one such university and Wayland was in charge of the course, using his *Elements of Moral Science* as the textbook. Therefore, his works are situated in the tradition of Scottish realism, with particular influence from Thomas Reid and Victor Cousin, a French philosopher (Vincent 2007, 38-43; Martin 2019, ch. 2).

Returning to Fukuzawa's translation of the word «moral», understanding the word in English appears to have been problematic for him and his colleagues. Fukuzawa cites the term in the transliterated form, *moraru*, several times and attempts to interpret it. For example, he explains in one of his writings that «virtue (*toku*) implies codes of virtue (*tokugi*), which is called *moraru* (moral) in Western language. *Moraru* means the manners of a heart [or soul]» (Fukuzawa 1995, 119). His understanding finally settles on a very moralistic interpretation, guided by his Confucianist cultural background. Fukuzawa's concern focuses on «moral» as a level of one's virtues, relating it to a disciplined mental state with education, missing all other connotations of the term. In the same piece, he says that a virtuous act should happen voluntarily when one enjoys oneself, even behind closed doors without being watched by anybody, citing Chinese classics, such as the *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean (Zhongyong)* (Fukuzawa 1995, 119).

While Fukuzawa did read *The Elements of Political Economy* by Wayland, it appears that he did not recognise «moral science» as a general framework encompassing a series of different social scientific fields. The same is the case for his colleagues, Nishi and Tsuda, who were familiar with several texts related to political economy, mainly via Dutch versions.¹² They recognised the existence

¹² They read Vissering, *Handboek van Praktische Staathuishoudkunde*, Hooft Graafland, *Grondtrekken der Staathuishoudkunde* (1852), William Ellis, *Outlines of Social Economy* (1846) from 1867 to 1868. See Mizuta (1999).

of specialised disciplines, but not the framework of «moral science» that linked them loosely to each other.

Fukuzawa's writings never incorporated the elements deriving from Christian theological arguments in Wayland's original writings. From the viewpoint of the history of moral science, it is to be noted that Fukuzawa never shared Wayland's main concern for reconciling scientific endeavours as the pursuit of laws of nature with religious faith, in which both laws of nature and those of morality were considered to be known to humans through Divine revelation. Wayland was against natural theology, disseminated with William Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785), under the huge influence of John Locke's sensualist philosophy and utilitarianism. He dedicated pages to discussing how God assures the structure of a human mind enabling the latter to have knowledge by causal reasoning regarding both moral laws and laws of nature through sensations and perceptions (Martin 2019, ch. 4; Madden 1985).¹³ Unlike them, Fukuzawa focused his arguments on more concrete, socio-political issues and skipped all the elements concerning the dispute about the nature of moral principles (whether it was a matter of knowledge obtained from the accumulation of sensations or from the revelation by God), despite the crucial role played by the argument in moral science. He seems to have been satisfied with not questioning the origin of human moral capacity, perceiving it as more or less a matter of education.

Putting aside all the theological and epistemological arguments, Fukuzawa focused on and absorbed fully from his readings of Wayland the ideas of liberalism and civil rights, as is shown by his famous book, *An Encouragement of Learning* (*Gakumon no susume*). In this book he explains that the ideas of equality and liberty are the necessary basis for a civilised society and its military independence. He had somewhat liberal feminist views and was opposed to violence against women and polygamy, unlike the majority of his contemporaries (Fukuzawa 1942, 90-91). However, the subject that occupied his mind the most appears to have been ridding the Japanese people's minds of what he perceived to be the remnants of the feudal mentality. He opined that the Japanese people of the time lacked the capacity for self-determination and were too servile to the upper classes. According to him, Japanese citizens were too immature to form an active bourgeois «middle class», a crucial driving force for achieving a prosperous commercial society and military independence (Fukuzawa 1942, ch. 5). It goes without saying that Fukuzawa did not see the contradiction between natural scientific endeavours and his version of «moral science», in spite of his interest in Wayland's writing. As he wished to separate the moral principles from traditional feudal moral values, he welcomed the dichotomic vision between human society and nature, which assured him of the existence of human liberty and rights, independent of any pre-existing social order.

¹³ See also Mizuta (1999).

Shushin and Fear of Disintegration: Nishimura's Case

«Moral science» as a transitional conceptual framework failed to be fully incorporated into Japanese intellectual culture in the 1870s. However, Fukuzawa and his students gradually imported more specialised and disciplined forms of social sciences in the next decades. For example, they contributed to the first efforts to introduce the corpus of political economy in Japan. Eisaku Ishikawa, graduating from the University of Keio, founded by Fukuzawa, would partly translate Adam Smith in 1887.¹⁴

The year 1880 saw a divergence of opinion among the original members of the Meirokusha concerning acceptance of Western moral science, especially in the civic education of young people. *Shushin* became a subject in the newly introduced public education system, especially at elementary school level; however, Shigeki Nishimura, who worked for the Ministry of Education, had already criticised in 1875 the utilitarian mood of the government education policy, which encouraged only economic independence and promotion of new industries without «any single word on the education of humanity, justice, loyalty and filial piety (仁義忠孝)».¹⁵ Indeed, during the 1870s, public primary schools in Japan used translations of foreign textbooks, including Wayland's *Elements of Moral Science* and French educator Louis-Charles Bonne's *Introduction au cours élémentaire et pratique de morale*. Despite these texts being used by local teachers in classrooms, their reception was not very successful (Martin 2019).

Feeling anxious about the «moral vacuum» in Japanese society, Nishimura turned to revitalising Confucianist values for better social integration. Nishimura was not a simple conservative; he wished to syncretise Western moral science and Oriental moral philosophy. He was not like Emperor Meiji and a group of his subjects who gave a high priority to Confucianism. Similarly to Fukuzawa, Nishimura appreciated the spirit of independence and patriotism in his reading of Wayland and other related Western documents. However, the key difference between the two laid in Nishimura being less tempted by the ethos of a newly developed commercial society and remaining more deeply attached to the mentality of the pre-existing ruling class, the samurai, and its moral order guided by Confucian values, such as loyalty and honesty.

He was more interested than Fukuzawa in the metaphysical and religious approach to moral issues (Manabe 2009). He failed to recognise the framework of Western «moral science» and constructed his own definition of the term *shushin*, after absorbing a series of classics in Western philosophy, including Aristotle and Plato. He classified *shushin* (moral science) under «moral» itself and above them placed *Ten* as the ultimate «reason of Heaven», «Great Path» or «Truth». *Ten*, derived from *Tien* in Confucianism, not only means a literal heaven, but also nature or creators. This juxtaposition is possible because

¹⁴ He died before completing his work and his friend Shosaku Saga continued it, producing a version that was not a faithful translation.

¹⁵ Cited in Manabe (2009, 77).

the Japanese general public of the 1870s did not distinguish clearly between nature, heaven, and creator, as is noted by Alberto Millán Martín (Martín 2019).

Although Nishimura clearly understood the difference between secular philosophy and religious thought, he did not hesitate to juxtapose religious and moral philosophy to achieve the education of the Japanese people. He suggested that even Japanese universities should have a faculty of «Holy science» (*seigaku*), to replace Europe's faculty of theology. This is because he believed it necessary for Japan to have a systematised ideological system similar to Christianity, reusing and revitalising pre-existing traditional religion, such as Shintoism. It should be noted that Nishimura admired August Comte, who also attempted to create a system of positivism as the ideological substitute for religion.

Nishimura believed that the education of younger generations must include *shushin* as a useful moral code for citizens, by which the people could unite and strengthen the nation and uphold its independence against the threat of colonisation. He was perfectly in line with the contemporary governmental policy of «*Fukoku Kyohei*», Enrich the Country, Strengthen the Armed Forces. He firmly believed that the military strength of Western nations derived from the high «moral» standard of the entire nation, as well as of each citizen, and that this had enabled them to maintain a civilised commercial society equipped with a trained national army. He agreed with Fukuzawa's argument that traditional Oriental moral philosophy, including Confucianism and Buddhism, made citizens less independent. Interestingly, he suggested that those traditional philosophical thoughts nurtured an individualistic vision of society, delineating moral issues as matters of personal consciousness. However, unlike Fukuzawa, Nishimura believed that Western moral science was too foreign for Japanese people to relate to. It is the influence of both his moderate nationalist school and the more conservative group associated with the emperor that led to the authoritarian moral education policy of the 1880s.

Conclusion

Japanese intellectuals in the 1870s imported elements related to the history of moral science, such as the discourse on civilisation and a Western style of learned society, without fully recognising the underlying concepts of moral science. Involving a broad range of public officials and scholars, the Meirokusha undertook discussions on societal issues, which themselves were part of the moral scientific endeavours of the time. Through this process, all its members appropriated the imported «moral science» according to their own agendas, as typified by the case of Fukuzawa. He focused his attention on the ideas of social equality and liberty as important causes that would enable the Japanese people to unite and construct a prosperous nation, while his strong Confucian background made him miss the other important epistemological elements inherent in «moral science».

In the next decades, the orientations of Meirokusha members diverged according to their ideological positions on politics and national education, as a result of

having absorbed a range of «Western» social thoughts. On the conservative side, Nishimura felt it necessary to educate the next generation without the direct influence of the liberalism originating from imported Western moral science. Another member, Hiroyuki Katō, took a more extremist position, as he was attracted to the newly imported concept of Social Darwinism. In the 1880s, he tried to refute the idea of social equality by insisting that it lacked any scientific foundation (Watanabe 2010, 112-120; Takeda 2003). Katō served as a bureaucrat and later became a deputy of the Senate and president of the Imperial University in 1890. On the opposite side, others devoted themselves to the civil rights movement, which was seen as an almost anti-governmental position at that time. Chōmin Nakae, for example, a follower of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Du contrat social*, continued to embrace human rights theory and encouraged one of his disciples, Shusui Kotoku to become an anarchist. The latter would be executed for treason in 1911.

The period when the Meirokusha members gathered and diverged corresponds to the division within moral science in the West. European academia gradually abandoned this framework and developed several specialist disciplines, such as economics, sociology, anthropology, and so on, especially around the 1870s. The newly developed Japanese universities institutionalised these segmented disciplines more easily than the transitional conceptual framework of «moral science». However, the term *shushin* survived as the word representing the obligational moral education subject in public elementary and middle education in Japan, far removed from its original meaning as a translation of «moral science.» Later, the subject disappeared from public education suddenly after WWII because of its ideological role played under the totalitarian regime, and the history of the word sank into oblivion.

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