

# Facing the Challenges of Globalization: Japan's New Fundamental Law of Education and the Social Imaginary of the Harmonious Society\*

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## 0. Introduction

In December 2006, Japan's new Fundamental Law of Education was enacted. It replaced the Fundamental Law of Education of 1947, which had been created under the auspices of the SCAP. Symbolizing a starting point for postwar Japan, the main purpose of the old law was to contribute to a democratic transformation of Japanese society after the period of ultra-nationalism and militarism.

No doubt, the Law of Education has served its purpose well. Nobody would deny that today, more than sixty years after the end of World War II, Japan has gained full membership in the club of democratic societies. Moreover, Japanese postwar education boosted the tremendous economic growth of the country. The high standard of Japanese education is a truism. For a long time, education in Japan primarily served the purpose of raising men and women who, due to their high qualifications, were able to further contribute to the prosperity of their country. Thus, Japanese education served a particular, i.e. economical national interest. As Brian McVeigh has pointed out, in Japan, educational policy is "motivated by an overarching ideology of state-guided economic nationalism"; it is "not known for instilling impassioned devotion to the defense of the state" (McVeigh 2004: 128). However, as we will see, recent tendencies in Japanese educational policy are showing that this estimation is, at least, one-sided.

Despite its success, Japan's conservatives constantly urged for amending the education law. Discussions about the lack of notions like nation or patriotism started soon after the law came into effect. Abe Shinzō, Prime Minister from September 2006 to September 2007 and a staunch conservative, put its amendment on top of his agenda. Plans for a reform had begun taking shape already in March 2000, when "The National Commission on Educational Reform" was established. As we will see, the proposals made by the Commission are to be understood as a response to the challenges of globalization. Obviously, for them it is the education that counts.

In this paper, I will offer a discussion of the new Fundamental Law of Education. In particular, I will relate the core value promoted in the new education law, i.e. harmony, to a strand of Japanese cultural nationalism represented in the genre of literature called *Nihonjinron* (discourses on Japanese-ness). I hope to show that this value of harmony is rooted in ideas of Japanese cultural nationalism which can be traced back to the Meiji and early Shōwa eras. However, in contrast to common criticism, I will not treat the nationalistic notions put forward in *Nihonjinron* as mere myths or ideologies. Rather, my hypothesis is that they reflect an incorporated common Japanese sense of self. Accordingly, I would suggest that the new law gives expression to this sense of self, and hence reshapes / represents a certain social imaginary in modern Japan.

The course of my argument is as follows: First, I will give an account of how the amendment of the education law was triggered by the challenges of globalization (1). Then, I will analyze the new law in comparison to the old one in order to give a brief overview of the main points of criticism brought against the new law, and assess whether or not they can be justified (2). After that, I will interpret the value of harmony within the context of *Nihonjinron*. Thus, I will open a perspective at the Japanese abovementioned sense of self (3). I will then explore how this sense of self is achieved through education

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/ schooling, that is how the social imaginary mentioned above is incorporated (4). Finally, I will draw conclusions regarding the nationalistic character of the new law by showing how it gives expression to the social imaginary of harmony (5).

## 1. Japanese society at the verge of crisis: The impact of globalization on education policy

In 2000, “The National Commission on Educational Reform”<sup>1)</sup> was established under the auspices of Prime Minister Mori. In the final report this commission submitted in December 2000, entitled “Seventeen Proposals for Changing Education”<sup>2)</sup> the motivations for amending the education law are expressed very clearly.

The report begins with emphasizing the importance of education in general. For the authors, the “greatest characteristic of mankind is its ability to grow through education.” Moreover, education is “the basis for human society”.<sup>3)</sup> The prosperity of post-war Japan is attributed to the education system, including the Fundamental Law of Education. However, if we follow the authors, the Japanese education system is at the verge of a serious crisis.

“Continued occurrences of bullying, students who refuse to go to school, school violence, classroom disruption, violent juvenile crimes and other problems concerning education have become serious. We are on the verge of a crisis; our society will be unable to carry on if the current situation continues.”

How could this change occur? As one cause for the emerging of this crisis the authors are identifying the fact that “[a]dults who are responsible for raising children do not look at life with their feet firmly on the ground but have selfish values or a simple-headed sense of justice.” Such adults “are sometimes unable to make the distinction between fiction and reality.” Another cause is seen in the education system, which is no longer appropriate in times of globalization. “The possibilities open to each person are increasing and, at the same time, the weakness and self-interest of individuals is also increasing, which accordingly increases the fragility of society.”<sup>4)</sup>

If Japan is facing a social crisis, and if education is the basis of society, we can conclude that the causes for the crisis, that is egoism and extreme individualism, have to be traced back to education. People are becoming corrupted and selfish because they lack education, or because they are educated in a wrong way. The kind of education appropriate for post-war Japan no longer provides the means to cope with the crisis Japanese society is facing today. Consequently, to overcome the crisis, education has to be

1) The commission was affiliated with the Prime Minister’s Office and comprised twenty-six members, most of them university professors and school teachers, but also company-presidents, journalists, and the head of the nationwide PTA association. The chair of the committee was Reona Ezaki (born in 1925), who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1973.

2) See the governmental site <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/kyouiku/houkoku/1222report.html>

3) For an English translation of the report see the governmental website

<http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/education/report/report.html>

For my impression the English version appears slightly tuned down when compared to the original text in Japanese. It reads more innocuous than the Japanese text. Besides that, it is not free of mistranslations.

4) For the economic background of this social crisis see the following remarks: “Since 1990, gross domestic product per capita has grown by a 0.6 per cent annually in Japan, compared with 1.7 per cent annually in the United States. As a result, the gap in GDP per capita between Japan and the United States widened from ten per cent in 1990 to over 20 per cent in 1999. Japan’s unemployment rate rose from 2.3 per cent in 1990 to 4.9 per cent in 2000. In mid-1998, the unemployment rate surpassed that of the United States. Japan’s government, once lauded for its masterful management of the economy, has only exacerbated these problems with futile attempts at a Keynesian stimulus. The country’s debt-to-GDP ratio grew from 60 per cent in 1990 to nearly 120 per cent in 1999 — twice the level of the United States and Germany.” (Reviving Japan’s economy (22/08/2001). Source: *McKinsey Quarterly 2000 Number 4 Asia*. James Kondo, William Lewis, Vincent Palmade and Yoshinori Yokoyama).

changed. The commission's report lists up numerous concrete measures, which are supposed to lead to a betterment of the situation in education. But it also stresses the importance for amending the education law.

At this point, it is necessary to pay attention to the moralistic stance we can see behind the account of the crises outlined above. The crisis Japanese society is facing is described not so much as a crisis of knowledge but rather of morals. Globalization is seen as a threat for Japanese society, not so much because it challenges the level of knowledge of this society (which, in fact, it does) but rather because it causes its disintegration and fragmentation. This, says the report, shall be cured by means of a new, appropriate education.

It is interesting that the causes for the crisis are never sought inside Japanese society. The authors have to admit the fact that Japanese society has changed over the last decades. However, for them, this change is caused by something coming from outside, that is, not the Japanese society, its structure and power relations are to blame for the increasing egoism and selfishness among Japanese, but the anonymous processes of globalization coming from outside. Morals are declining not because there is something wrong with Japanese society in itself, but rather because this society is corrupted by something coming from the outside.

The report clearly states the principles education has to be founded on in order to overcome the crisis:

“Self-discipline, consideration for others, love of nature, a feeling of deep respect for that beyond an individual's capability, respect for traditional culture and social norms, fostering a mentality and attitude which show affection toward one's own homeland<sup>5)</sup> or nation, learning basic knowledge or culture required for life in society must be the basis for all education.”<sup>6)</sup>

Thus, education has to aim at shaping the students' hearts and minds. Consequently, the re-introduction of moral education is one of the concrete measures proposed in the report. Education is understood as a means for making people capable to deal with the harmful effects of globalization. This can be realized not by the individual alone but only within an intact society. Education thus aims at forming people who will fit into a society wherein the abovementioned principles are realized in everyday practice. These ideas constitute the ideological centerpiece of the new education law. I now turn to an examination of the new law. I will start with giving a brief overview of the critical objections that have been put against it.

## 2. The new education law and its critics

Ever since the plans for the amendment of the education law became public, it has been the subject of harsh criticism from various sides; it was condemned by left-wing intellectuals as well as by members of the teachers' union and by politicians of the opposition DPJ. In particular, the new law was criticized for its blunt promotion of nationalism and patriotism. Japanese intellectuals feared a roll back to war-time ideologies, a revival of an ethnically homogeneous nation state, and mind control. The new law, says its critics, promotes an interpretation of the Japanese nation as a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, a community of people thrown together by fate. Moreover, the new law was criticized for promoting the alleged uniqueness of Japanese culture and society. Thus, says the critics, the high ideals of the old law, that is “the creation of culture, general and rich in individuality” (Preamble) as well as “the rearing of people [...] imbued with an independent spirit” (Art. 1) were distorted. In other words, the principle of universal culture was sacrificed for cultural particularism, as was the notion of an “independent spirit” for that of the “honor of the public spirit” (see, for instance, Ichikawa et al. 2004; Satō 2004; the Japanese internal discussion is neatly summed

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5) The official translation says “home country”, a term playing down the nationalistic aspects of the Japanese term *kyōdo*, a notion ideologically charged.

6) See the source given above in footnote 3.

up in Hirota 2005). If the view of the critics holds true, the new education law would have to be designated as a document of cultural nationalism, reviving an ideology that we thought had been overcome. In order to verify this claim, I will examine some key passages of the new law and contrast them with the according passages of the old one.

When we compare the two laws, some facts are obvious at first glance. First, the text of the new law is much longer than that of the old one. The old law was very concise, consisting only of the preamble and eleven articles, each of them rather short. In contrast, the new law consists of the preamble and eighteen articles divided into four chapters. In some instances, long explanatory sections have been added. With the number of articles plus sections totaling forty, it is almost as long as the war-time education Edict consisting of fifty-eight articles.

This quantitative growth is due not only to the fact that the new law includes some issues which had not been taken into account before, for instance the “Principle of Lifelong Learning” (Chapter 1, Art. 3), the education of “Persons with Disabilities” (Chapter 1, Art. 4 : 2) and “Education in the Family” (Chapter 2, Art. 10). Another reason is that it goes much more into detail than the old one. It is particularly striking how much labor has been spent on setting out the “Objectives of Education” (Chapter 1, Art. 2). The old law dedicated only one article with fifty-one words to this point while the new one contains five sections consisting of altogether one hundred and sixty-seven words, more than three times as many.

Another formal point which needs to be mentioned is that of language. The language used in the new law is clearly more nationalistic than that of the old law. It starts with the somewhat bombastic “We, the people of Japan” (*wareware Nippon kokumin*), which functions as the grammatical subject of the preamble. In comparison, the old law simply used the pronoun “we” in a humble, almost colloquial form (*warera*). Moreover, the old law used phonetic *Hiragana*-syllables for this term while the new one uses Chinese characters, which adds to the bombastic character.

Even more important is the introduction of emotionally charged vocabulary which, strictly speaking, does not belong within the language of law. There is, amongst others: “to love” (*ai-suru*), “homeland” (*kyōdo*), and “sublime” (*sūkō-na*). The introduction of these emotional terms correlates with a significant change regarding the ratio of terms that positively refer to notions of individualism to those which represent collectivistic notions: this ratio changed from 5 : 3 to 4 : 10. This means that in the old law, terms referring positively to the notion of individualism were used 1.6 times more frequently than terms representing collectivistic notions, whereas in the new law ‘collectivistic’ terms are used 2.5 times more than ‘individualistic’ ones. This change can be shown, for instance, in a comparison of Article 1 of the old and the new law.

(New) Chapter 1: Aims and Principles of Education

Article 1

Education shall aim for the total development of personality and shall strive to nurture people sound in mind and body, who are imbued with the qualities necessary for the builders of a peaceful and democratic state and society.

(Old) Article 1: Aim of education

Education shall aim for the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the people sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual value, respect labor and have a deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with an independent spirit as builders of a peaceful state and society.

In the new law, the notion of an “independent spirit”, that is necessary to build a “peaceful state and society” is replaced by the vague expression “qualities necessary”. This corresponds with the text of the preamble where the “honor of the public spirit” is promoted, a notion which has no equivalent in the old law. The preamble of the new law furthermore calls for an education “which transmits tradition and aims

at the creation of a new culture". (One can assume that the phrase "creation of a new culture" aims at the slogan "breaking free from the postwar regime" often used by Prime Minister Abe.) This notion is developed in Article 2, Section 5. There, the following is outlined as one of the objectives of education.

"Foster a disposition to respect Japanese tradition and culture, love the country and homeland that nurtured them, together with respect for other countries and a desire to contribute to world peace and the development of the international community."

One should note that in this section, respect for tradition is brought into relation with the "love [for] the country and homeland that nurtured them". Moreover, this relation is not an equal one. Tradition is "nurtured" by country and homeland, both of which have to be objects of love. That means the respect for tradition is grounded in the love for nation and homeland. Students are not supposed to assess their own tradition critically but rather to have a positive emotional relationship with this tradition. The critics of the new law have justly identified this section, together with the preamble, as the ideological centerpiece of the new education law.

To sum up: A comparison of the old law with the new one reveals an ideological shift from the individual to the collective. Key notions of the old law are removed or counterbalanced by opposite notions. Where the old law stressed the ideal of an independent spirit, the new law introduces the idea of honor of the public spirit as a goal of education. In addition, along with demanding respect for foreign cultures, the new law propagates respect for traditional culture and love for the homeland. The last two notions are new additions; they have no equivalent in the old law, whereas the first notion has been adopted from it. However, the ideological core value promoted in the new law is expressed in the notion of the "public spirit"; it still remains vague and, thus, needs clarification; to make sense of this notion is one purpose this paper aims to serve.

So far, the critical objections against the New Fundamental Law of Education mentioned above are, to some extent, justified. The new law does promote patriotism and nationalism; it also installs the legal and ideological framework for fostering an attitude that honors the collective; it furthermore installs the idea of a unique Japanese culture that has to be respected and loved. Although it cannot be said that the new law simply promotes the notion of a society where the individual is subordinated to the public, tradition, and homeland, this notion of society will doubtlessly play a crucial role in future Japanese education. As I will show later, this notion derives from the ideal of the harmonious family-state, which was a cornerstone of education in the Meiji and early Shōwa era. An enquiry into the historical context of the new law will enable us to extract its core value, i.e. the idea of harmony.

My hypothesis is that the value of harmony which the new law promotes is meant to recall certain notions of the individual self, society, and their relation to each other that are deeply incorporated in the collective consciousness of the Japanese. These notions are part of what I will call "the modern Japanese social imaginary". Inasmuch as the new law of education gives expression to this notion, I will speak of "reshaping / representing" this social imaginary. Throughout Japanese modern history, this imaginary had been given numerous expressions not only in the genre of *Nihonjinron* in general but also in official documents. In the field of education, which I am going to focus on, two important documents representing this imaginary exist: the "Imperial Rescript on Education" (*Kyōiku chokugo*) (1890) and *The Principles of National Polity* (*Kokutai no hongī*) (1937). In these documents, the notion of harmony is developed as a leitmotif which fuelled discussion within the genre of *Nihonjinron* from war-time Japan until the present.

### 3. The new education law and *Nihonjinron*

The values promoted in the new law, i.e. the uniqueness of Japanese culture, an uncritical and emotional relationship to this culture, and the honor of the public spirit, are ideological centerpieces of *Nihonjinron* in general. In recent examples of this genre, they have come to the fore again. (Abe 2006, Fujiwara 2005). For the sake of argument I will focus on the third of the values mentioned above, i.e. the

honor of the public spirit. To show how it is related to *Nihonjinron*, I will refer to the notion of the harmonious family.<sup>7)</sup> An examination of this notion will enable us to gain an insight in how the relation between individual and the whole is generally understood in Japanese society.

In *Nihonjinron*, the notion of the harmonious family functions as a normative prototype for society. Many *Nihonjinron* directly apply the relation between the individual and the whole, as it is determined in the ideal of harmonious family, to the structure of society in general (cf. Yoshino 1992). Thus, within *Nihonjinron*, the designation “family-state” is widely used to describe the Japanese society.<sup>8)</sup>

The central value of the Japanese family and, accordingly, the whole society is “harmony”. Many *Nihonjinron* invoke the picture of a harmonious society where people are living within “bonds of tenderness” (Abe 2006: 219), which are grounded in a conservative ideal of the harmonious family (Abe 2006: 215–219; Fujiwara 2005: 211). In modern Japan, the notion of harmony embodied in the family was first charged with a nationalistic ideology during the Meiji-era. Its most powerful expression, the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890) heavily stresses the connection between harmony and the public. In the Rescript,

“The Japanese family system was the embodiment of virtues and the foundation of the nation. The emperor was the father figure for the subjects, who were likened to his children. Social values as *on* (indebtedness) and *giri* (obligation) had created social order unequalled around the world. This imperial message no doubt remained the most influential document for propagation of the hegemonic ideology of the time.” (Befu 1993: 124)

With reference to the new education law, it should be noted that the Imperial Rescript calls on students to contribute to “furthermore advance public good and promote common interests”. Moreover, the authors of the text connect the assertion of the superiority of the Japanese nation state with the urge for spiritual unity of the Japanese people. Nationalism is promoted as well as the readiness to “offer” one’s life “courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth”. Although the new education law makes no reference to the Emperor, the similarities cannot be overlooked. The emphasis on the Japanese nation state and, in particular, the emphasis on the public reminds us of the ideology promoted in the Imperial Rescript on Education.

It is not surprising that the ideology expressed in the Imperial Rescript was to play a major role in war-time Japan. In 1937, the Ministry of Education published a pamphlet called *Kokutai no Hongi* (The Principles of National Polity). Many noted scholars were involved in drafting *The Principles*, among them Watsuji Tetsurō, then Professor of Ethics at the Imperial University of Tokyo. A brief examination of his ethical thought will reveal the theoretical foundations of the ideal of the harmonious family; thus we will also get a clue for understanding the social imaginary I wish to explore.

Watsuji’s writings of the 1930’s can be understood as contributions to Japanese war-time *Nihonjinron*.<sup>9)</sup> Like all authors of this genre, Watsuji stresses the uniqueness of Japanese culture, in particular the normative order of Japanese society, and the Imperial lineage. In his *Ethics* (Watsuji 1996), he develops the concept of a genuine Japanese way of being human. Its key notion is *aidagara* (between-ness), which means that the very essence of man lies in his interrelatedness with other human beings. In fact, the Japanese term for “human being”, *ningen* (man-between) already displays the structure of between-ness. According to Watsuji the uniqueness of Japanese social order stems from an understanding of the self that allows the individual to make himself fit completely into a bigger whole, e.g. a community or association.

7) As Yoshino (1992: 87–103) has shown, this notion is the core of many *Nihonjinron*.

8) It should be mentioned that, following this terminology, the social, understood as an independent sphere located between the family and the state, disappears, as the individual is connected directly with the state.

9) To be sure, this is only one aspect of Watsuji’s multifaceted work that does not represent it as a whole. For an in-depth analysis of Watsuji’s thought see Liederbach (2001). Nevertheless, his contribution to a Japanese “totalitarian state-ethics” (Piovesana) cannot be whitewashed.

In terms of *aidagara*, the relation between individual and the whole / collective has to be described as one of dual negation:

“On the one hand, the standpoint of an acting ‘individual’ comes to be established only in some way as a negation of the totality of *ningen*. An individual that does not imply this meaning of negation, that is, an essentially self-sufficient individual, is nothing but an imaginative construction. On the other hand, the totality of *ningen* comes to be established as the negation of individuality. A totality that does not include the individual negatively is also nothing but a product of the imagination. These two negations constitute the dual character of a human being. And what is more, they constitute a single movement. On the very ground that it is the negation of totality, the individual is, fundamentally speaking, none other than that totality. If this is true, then this negation is also the self-awareness of that totality. Hence, when an individual realizes herself through negation, a door is opened to the realization of totality through the negation of the individual. The individual’s acting is a movement of the restoring of totality itself. The negation moves on to the negation of negation. This is the essential feature of the movement of negation.” (Watsuji 1996: 22)

Ontologically speaking, every single action of an individual implies a negation of the totality / the whole. However, according to Watsuji, the individual depends on the whole, as it can be grasped only as its negation. I wish to point out particularly that Watsuji determines the dual negation as “one movement”. Hence, the acts of an individual which are to be understood as a negation of the totality / the whole, cannot but terminate in restoring this totality. Furthermore, the possibility for an authentic existence of the individual can be found it is nowhere but in the return to the whole. To clarify this rather abstract ontological conception, Watsuji refers to the image of the harmonious family, which serves as an example for how the essence of man is realized in Japanese culture. Corresponding to the ontological determinations given above, Watsuji describes the structure of a family in terms of role-adjustment which the individual has to fulfill. Albeit it is true that a family cannot exist independently from its members, the family as a whole prescribes the roles that the individuals are expected to follow:

“Although the family as a whole depends on its members, it is not merely the sum total of them but an organic system as well. Here, the whole prescribes that each of its members be as they are.” (Watsuji 1996: 89)

If the individuals adjust to their roles and thus negate their very individuality, the family as a whole continues to exist. Furthermore, if the individual family members subordinate themselves to the rules and prescriptions of the family, harmony reigns. Of course, Watsuji does admit the existence of conflicts in the family as well as in other social units. However, as he puts it, these conflicts only emerge when an individual refuses subordinating himself to the prescriptions given by the whole. When this occurs, for instance, the family as a whole is in danger of getting dissolved. In such situations, the aspect of power or coercion in the relation between individual and the whole appears.

“The wholeness of a house [i.e., a family / HPL] reveals its nature forcefully when some of its individual members deviate from the part they are obliged to follow as family members. For instance, a father’s prodigality or a child’s rebellion can plunge the family as a whole into a state of affliction. As a result, the family as a whole concentrates its pressure upon the individual members. It is a force that ties to the whole those members who are trying to disconnect themselves from it. In traditional Japanese society, this kind of force was strong enough to control the members of a family in the name of its ancestors or under the authority of a family name.” (Watsuji 1996: 88)

Deviation or dissent put forward by an individual is regarded as an action that is potentially endangering the existence of the whole. To avoid this, the individual has to subordinate himself to the family / collective for the sake of harmony.<sup>10)</sup> According to Watsuji, this is the authentic way of being human which, as he claims, has been fully realized only in Japanese society and within its order. Thus, for a Japanese, subordinating oneself to the whole, following its demands and prescriptions, actually is not experienced as coercion but as the only possibility to achieve authenticity and self-fulfillment.

As we have seen, Watsuji exemplifies the ontological structure of social units, that is “between-ness”, with the ideal of the harmonious family. According to him, the structure of the Japanese family provides the pattern for all other associations in society, from neighborhood associations and local associations to the state as the supreme embodiment of “between-ness”. From this point of view, Watsuji puts forward critical objections against Western notions such as the individual or the subject as well as the very idea of individualism. These objections derive from his concern over the continued existence of the harmonious family and society as a whole.<sup>11)</sup>

Moreover, in two pamphlets published during the war, Watsuji propagates loyalty to the Emperor and claims the superiority of the Emperor system over all other forms of political order (cf. Bellah 1965). In *The Principles of National Polity*, Watsuji’s ideas are put into political practice. Here again, we find the notion of the family-state, but now combined with that of Imperial lineage.

“Our country is one great family nation, and the Imperial Household is the head family of the subjects and the nucleus of national life. The subjects revere the Imperial Household, which is the head family, with the tender esteem [they have] for their ancestors; and the Emperor loves his subjects as his very own.” (Hall 1949: 89–90)

“The unbroken line of Emperors, receiving the Oracle of the Founder of the Nation, reigns eternally over the Japanese Empire. This is our eternal and immutable national entity. Thus, founded on the great principle, all the people, united as one great family nation in heart and obeying the Imperial Will, enhance indeed the beautiful virtues of loyalty and filial piety. This is the glory of our national entity. This national entity is the eternal and unchanging basis of our nation and shines resplendent throughout our history.” (Ibid. 59)<sup>12)</sup>

One should note that because this ideal of the family is inseparably linked with the ideology of Japanese emperorship, it is meant to be something uniquely Japanese which cannot be applied to other societies—hence the “social order unequalled around the world” mentioned above.<sup>13)</sup> Moreover, this unique social order implies a specific attitude towards Japanese culture and tradition. If the Imperial lineage is the central axis of Japanese culture and tradition, and if the Emperor and his ancestors have to be the recipients of love and reverence, then, we can conclude, Japanese culture and tradition as such have to

10) Watsuji too uses terms like “tender relations”, and thus can be regarded as a predecessor of Abe and Fujiwara (cf. Watsuji 1961: 136–142).

11) As we have seen above, in their final report the members of “The National Commission on Educational Reform” express similar concerns.

12) Fujiwara (2006: 211–212) is fully in line with these ideas, when he finds the love for the nation on the love for family and homeland. However, as Fujitani (1993) has shown, such assertions are not grounded in historical reality but rather in myth. They are, speaking with Hobsbawm, “invented” (cf. Hobsbawm 1983).

13) According to Yoshino (1992: 88), in *Nihonjinron*, Japanese society is interpreted in terms of “holism”, a kind of “reproductionism” (or ‘extensionism’). In *Nihonjinron* the idea of modern Japanese society as an extension of pre-modern social structures is put forward: “According to this perspective, industrial society is not contrasted with pre-industrial society but portrayed as an extension of *Gemeinschaft*-type pre-industrial society. Industrial society is orderly because the traditional realms of communal conscience collective have expanded to the level of the total society. ‘Modernization’ is thus viewed as a process by which the base of social order characteristic of pre-industrial social units become the prototype of order in industrial society.”



be loved and revered. Harmony and personal sacrifice are demanded not only in the various associations but also in the broader context of culture and tradition. As far as it demands an emotionally positive relationship towards nation, culture, and society, the ideological stance taken in the *Principles* clearly resembles the according passages of the new education law.

This demand is articulated in current *Nihonjinron* as well. According to Abe, Japanese history and culture are something that the Japanese should be “proud of” (Abe 2006: 202, 232). The nation founded upon this tradition, uninterrupted since earliest times, cannot but be “noble” (Abe 2006: 207). Fujiwara who urges his fellow-countrymen and countrywomen *ad nauseam* to “love” their country, even goes as far as to recommend Japanese culture as a model for the whole world. “It is the Japanese people that is to rescue the world.” (Fujiwara 2005: 191) It is worth noting that terms like “pride” or “love” are primarily emotion-terms. Within the context of *Nihonjinron*, their usage implies that the proper relationship a Japanese citizen should have with his country and its tradition is not so much a rational and critical one but rather an emotional and affirmative one. Accordingly, it is suggested that the Japanese should not view the culture and history of their country critically. Rather, they should simply be proud of it. The new education law puts this suggestion into political practice.

To sum up this section: the values propagated in the new education law stem from a long tradition of *Nihonjinron* and the nationalistic war-time ideology. The positive emotional relationship towards culture and homeland as well as the “honor of the public spirit” demanded by the new law has its predecessors in the Imperial Rescript, the *Kokutai no Hongi*, and Watsuji’s theory of *aidagara*. As we saw, there is a line of continuity between the Imperial Rescript, the *Principles of National Polity*, and Watsuji’s *Ethics*. This continuity is represented by the ideal of the harmonious family, which is a centerpiece also of current *Nihonjinron*. Although the term “harmony” does not appear in the new law *expressis verbis*, it can be concluded that the new law aims to invoke the notion of the harmonious family, which forms the background necessary for achieving an appropriate understanding of the ideological contents of the new law.

Watsuji’s discussion of this ideal in particular serves as a key for understanding the notion of the “honor of the public spirit”. Referring to Watsuji, we can interpret this notion as a call for preserving the harmony of society, that is, the individual is required not to display dissent against the whole. Thus, “honor of the public spirit” implies the notion of an individual who does not get into conflict with the collective but voluntarily subordinates himself to the collective, and thus strives for a harmonious relationship with the others.

One is apt to regard this notion of harmony as a myth, a fiction typical for *Nihonjinron*, put forward by conservative intellectuals and politicians for the purpose of propagating cultural nationalism. However, I would like to suggest that the ideal of the harmonious family is far from being a mere idea or theoretical construction; it rather reflects a robust sense of self, a firmly incorporated common understanding of how one can act and behave in Japanese society. It is a central part of the background of understanding, which enables Japanese to define themselves as individuals and act in relation with others; it also implies normative assumptions of what one should do and should not do.

In order to come to grips with this part of background of understanding, an extensive in-depth inquiry into how “harmony” is put into practice in everyday life is necessary. However, in this paper I will concentrate on the field of education, particularly schooling. If the new education law does promote values that are representations of a specific social imaginary, we should be able to find traces of these values in Japanese education and schooling. Which role does the ideal of harmony play in Japanese education / schooling? How does this ideal contribute to achieving a sense of self? What does it tell us about the Japanese social imaginary?

#### 4. The ideal of harmony and Japanese education / schooling

It is a truism that education “reflects the society of which [it is] a critical part” (Stephens 1991: 11). An examination of the question whether the relation between individual and collective that we have found in

*Nihonjinron* appears in Japanese education / schooling as well will help us to clarify the relation between cultural nationalism and education in Japan. Moreover, if it is true that

“Educational models reflect and recreate cultural conceptions of development of social organization, of adult responsibility, and of maturity itself” (Fukuzawa 1998: 258),

then, we can conclude that one major purpose of education is to guide children towards the incorporation of specific social imaginaries which need to be understood for becoming a full member of society.

Over the last decades, scholars in the field of comparative education have gained valuable insights into the characteristics of Japanese schooling in comparison to that in the United States. In this section, I will introduce some common characteristics of Japanese education / schooling with respect to the ideal of harmony which, as we saw, plays a crucial role in Japanese official documents on education and in the ideology of *Nihonjinron*.

One main purpose of schooling in Japan is to foster a “sense of collective identity” (Kotloff 1998: 67), which also has an emotional aspect. As Plath (1975) has pointed out, Japanese people, regardless of age, form strong emotional relationships with the groups they belong to. Thus, students also develop a “need and desire for unity and harmony” (White 1998: 89) with their peers and teachers. This requires a specific skill in human relations. The training for achieving this skill already begins in pre-school.

“Skill in human relations is considered essential to the educated person, and Japanese teachers accordingly place high priority on developing students’ interpersonal competencies and promoting a sense of social cohesion and collective responsibility among students. [...] The fact that Japanese students advance to each grade with age-level peers regardless of achievement reflects the priority Japanese society places on group identity and cohesion.” (Sato / McLaughlin 1998: 152)

To achieve this “skill in human relations”, emphasis in the classroom is put on group assignments (at least at the primary school level). There, the “sense of collective identity” appears, for instance, in the fact that special contributions individuals made for the group are not recognized as such. Instead, the students learn that their work is appreciated only so far as it contributes to the whole, i.e. the group.

“Individual children’s work is woven into collective endeavors and praised as valuable contributions to the group rather than individual achievements.” (Kotloff 1998: 80)

However, Japanese students most likely will not experience this as a lack of recognition. They rather find fulfillment in being a part of the group and contributing to its goals. Therefore, they need to develop a specific sense of the self as a group member rather than an identity that is grounded in the idea of the self-reliant individual. In other words, Japanese students are trained to voluntarily identify themselves with the group they belong to.

“A central feature of Japanese group processes is the readiness of group members to identify with and contribute to collective goals.” (Kotloff 1998: 67)

“The Japanese goals of the classroom engagement are early emotional maturity, compliance, and social courtesy, as well as engagement for its own sake. All this implies self-reliance, which seems to us inconsistent with compliant dependency. However, the ‘self’ on which the child must learn to rely is in service to the social environment in which he must fit completely: thus the child faces no real conflict.” (White 1998: 89)

In Japanese early childhood education, particularly within the relationship between child and mother, “self-discipline” and “role-perfectionism” are emphasized (Befu 1986: 24–25); they are necessary to achieve the abovementioned sense of self. Terms like *ganbaru*, *nintai*, and *gaman* reflect the importance which self-discipline takes in early childhood education. The English equivalents of these terms are “endurance”, “hardship”, and “perseverance”. While these terms hardly have a positive meaning in an English context, in Japan they are highly valued. A child that shows perseverance and can endure hardship, even with little or no prospect of success, is regarded as a child that has achieved self-discipline, which is a precondition for acquiring “role-perfectionism”.

Role-perfectionism means the ability to identify oneself with an assigned role. A student who has developed role-perfectionism will be able to accept a certain role and successfully co-operate with other group members who, accordingly, are playing their role in order to achieve the goal set for the group as a whole. In this context, an “internalized receptive diligence” can be observed in Japanese students (Hess / Azuma 1998: 12). Self-discipline is required insofar as a student is expected to accept every assigned role, even if it is an unpopular one. “The cultural ideal of endurance enables a person to overcome the feeling that a role is unworthy.” (Befu 1986: 25) Consequently, a student who has developed self-discipline and role-perfectionism will be able to efficiently co-operate with others for the sake of the group; this student will not feel any dislike towards any of the roles assigned to him/her. It will, thus, become less difficult for the individual to identify with the group and its goals.

These results can be achieved through the common Japanese notion of a “good child”, which means a child that is perseverant, compliant and is able to fit into a group of peers. Thus, for raising a “good child”, in Japanese education the fostering of attitudes that make it easy for the child to subordinate him/herself to the group is emphasized. Again, this should not be understood too hastily as a means to achieve subjection to the coercion of the group. Rather, it should be seen as a way to reach personal fulfillment within the cultural framework of Japanese society.

“In Japanese child development theory, no conflict exists between goals of self-fulfillment and goals of social integration.” (White / LeVine 1986: 57)

The facts mentioned so far show obvious similarities with Watsuji’s ethical theory. Watsuji’s ontological determinations regarding the relation between individual and the whole reappear, now in an empirical shape, within the investigations of Japanese education / schooling. As in Watsuji’s theory of the harmonious family, it is of interest also in education how naturally occurring conflicts are handled. We already saw that for Watsuji, the key to solving conflicts within the family lies in negating the individual self and, thus, returning to the whole. What are the conflict solving strategies in Japanese education, particularly in schooling? How are Japanese students disciplined?

“When misbehavior occurs, then, Japanese discipline tends to be emotional not legalistic or mechanical. It appeals to feelings and to the child’s bonds to teacher and other children.” (Lewis 1995: 137)

Conflicts or problems that occur in class are regarded as problems which the whole class is emotionally involved in. “Issues of control and misbehavior [are] issues of the community.” (Lewis 1995: 135) Misbehavior disturbs the emotional harmony of the class. Since the whole group is involved, in principle everybody in class is responsible for sorting out conflicts, and thus restoring harmony. In fact, control of behavior is not so much exerted by the teacher; it is the students who are expected to control each other. “Students [are held] accountable for each other’s behavior” (ibid.). In middle school, classes comprise several small groups of students (*han*) that are “responsible for the behavior of their members” and, furthermore, “class representatives [are] responsible for class misbehavior.” (Fukuzawa 1998: 252) Everybody is expected to develop an attitude of “understanding”; that means internalizing school norms

and routines (cf. Fukuzawa 1998: 257).

Again, we can observe how social cohesion is emphasized in Japanese education. Problem solving aims at restoring the emotional bonds among the students and between them and the teacher, and it aims at fostering the social cohesion in the group. Hence, students learn to identify themselves with the group and, finally, with the whole school. Accordingly, misbehavior is regarded as something that affects not only one's own class, but also the harmony of the school as a whole. Being good and behaving well has no value in itself but is related emotionally to the harmony of the group and the school.

“Japanese children behave well not because of rewards or punishments but because they genuinely care about the school's rules and values.” (Lewis 1995: 102)

It is remarkable that so many researchers are pointing out the emphasis which Japanese education puts on fostering individual attitudes necessary for adapting smoothly to demands from the whole / collective and, by doing this, maintaining or restoring the harmony within the group. Even more interesting is the fact that adapting oneself to the collective seems not to be experienced as self-negation but as individual fulfillment. This clearly resembles Watsuji's notion of “between-ness”, where self-negation of the individual is the only way to achieve authentic existence.

“Personal development in Japan is a progression through a number of predetermined social roles. This sequence establishes strong expectations of age-appropriate behavior along a predetermined developmental path. [...] Gradually the child moves from a quite free, unrestrained existence to one increasingly defined by social demands. Maturity is the ability to fully adapt to outside social realities and responsibilities which lead not to self-negation or conformism, in the Japanese view, but to personal fulfillment.” (Fukuzawa: 1998: 257)

In this section, we gained an insight into the kind of social skills in which Japanese children are trained. Schooling in Japan—as in any other country—is not only about acquiring knowledge but also about instilling social habits. Again, we encountered the notion of harmony, which plays a major role in Japanese education. Children are trained in habits and attitudes that enable them to cooperate efficiently with their peers for the sake of the whole group. Thus, children learn to identify themselves with the whole; which means to negate their individual self and follow the prescriptions of the group. However, and it has to be stressed again, if we follow the findings of the researchers in the field of educational science, this negation has to be regarded as personal fulfillment, not as coercion.

## 5. Conclusion: The social imaginary of the harmonious society

This paper aimed at revealing a certain Japanese social imaginary. Now, after having examined the new education law, its historical and ideological background, and empirical studies on Japanese education and schooling, we gained some idea of what is involved here. But before summing up this discussion, it is time to put forward a definition of the term “social imaginary” that has been used throughout this paper. According to Charles Taylor who has coined this term, it means

“The ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.” (Taylor 2004: 23)

Thus, a social imaginary is not to be confounded with a theoretical construction about a given society. It is rather a common background of understanding—shared by most of the members of this society—which makes social practice possible.

“It incorporates a sense of the normal expectations we have of each other, the kind of common understanding that enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life. This incorporates some sense of how we all fit together in carrying out the common practice. Such understanding is both factual and normative; this is, we have a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go, what missteps would invalidate the practice.” (Taylor 2004: 24)

The social imaginary reshaped by the new education law is represented by the notion of “harmony”. As we saw, Japanese education since the Meiji-era aims at fostering attitudes that enable students to fit into a group completely, and thus contribute to the creation and maintenance of harmonious relationships among each other. To achieve this attitude, students are constantly trained in human relations skills, i.e., students have to become aware of their role within a group, class or school. Their behavior and their actions are prescribed inasmuch as they are not permitted to disturb the harmony. When disturbances occur (and it goes without saying that they do occur) the delinquents are urged to strive for reconciliation with the group which is actually involved in this process as a whole.

As with any educational program in any society, education and training are to serve a particular social purpose—to raise human beings that fit into a preexistent society. In other words, the habits and attitudes that are emphasized in education reflect those which are valid in society in general. Accordingly, in Japanese education, students are prepared to be constantly aware of maintaining social harmony. I would like to suggest that this is the real meaning of the phrase “honor the public spirit”. Japanese students are expected to honor not only the group they actually belong to but the broader area of the public and its spirit as well. Understood as an ideal, this goal of education put forward in the new law, aims at a society living within “bonds of tenderness”, to use former Prime Minister Abe’s phrase.

If “honor of the public spirit” is to be understood as an attitude that maintains social harmony, then education and schooling in modern Japan were always meant to serve this purpose, even under the old law. Thus, the ideological core value of the new law is not a newly introduced conception, but a representation of an ideal of education that is rooted in the nationalistic ideology of the Meiji-era. As the discussion of education in Japan has shown, the notions of individuality and independent spirit that the old education law celebrated, were not to be understood literally, but within the context of Japanese culture where the notions of individuality and independence carry different connotations from those in the West (for instance those in the United States). During my review of the research carried out by various specialists in the field of education, I have not found any hint of a goal for Japanese education that would include fostering individual autonomy, encouraging students to stick to their convictions even if they are not in line with the general opinion, or celebrating habitual diversity; instead, I found rather the opposite notions. If harmony shall reign, nobody can stand apart; everybody has to be involved. However, it has to be noted again that the highly inclusive character of the notion of harmony does not necessarily imply coercion. Education in Japan could never have been so successful if students would have been coerced into valuing harmony. Rather, it can rely on, and further develop, a background of understanding that has been instilled into the children’s minds already from preschool on.

The social imaginary which this paper intended to explore has been represented in various documents and philosophical theories throughout the history of modern Japan. As we saw in the third section of this paper, the cultural conception of “harmony” stands within a long tradition of Japanese cultural nationalism. Education / schooling in Japan follows this conception and, hence, is ideologically affiliated with *Nihonjinron*. We can, for instance, observe strong similarities between Watsuji’s ideal of authenticity as is extant in the mode of “between-ness” and the aims of Japanese education as pursued in everyday classroom work. Needless to say, neither the family state propagated by the Imperial Rescript on Education and the *Principles of National Polity* nor the ethical system created by Watsuji and other *Nihonjinron* writers were accomplished in social reality without any reduction. Hence, this social imaginary can be regarded as an ideal. However, as the examination of Japanese education and schooling has shown, it functions as a

normative notion that provides a measure to judge concrete actions and behavior of individuals. Schooling and education in Japan serve the purpose of incorporating this imaginary in order to raise human beings that fit into society.

One is apt to judge the new education law in Japan from the viewpoint of power relations and, consequently, criticize it as a document of indoctrination that serves the purpose of the ruling elite. This point of view must not be disregarded, and most critics of the new law stress this point. However, it is most unlikely that the emphasis on harmony in Japanese education is solely the result of indoctrination or “prescriptions” by conservative intellectuals (cf. Befu 1993). Even if we admit the influence that *Nihonjinron* exert on educators (cf. Yoshino 1992: chapters 6 and 7), the lack of exceptions and alternatives in Japanese schooling is as striking as the compliance students generally still display. Therefore, again, I would suggest that the ideal of harmonious existence in “between-ness” (Watsuji) should be understood as a background of understanding which, in Japan, underlies common social practice as well as education.

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## Facing the Challenges of Globalization: Japan's New Fundamental Law of Education and the Social Imaginary of the Harmonious Society

### ABSTRACT

In this paper I offer a discussion of how Japanese conservative elites are responding to the challenges of globalization. My focus lies on the field of education. In particular, I give an analysis of the New Fundamental Law of Education (enacted in 2007). As a result, it is shown how the new law is rooted in a strand of cultural nationalism which can be traced back to the Meiji and early Shōwa era.

However, my hypothesis is that the nationalistic attitude the new law displays is grounded in a robust Japanese sense of self of which the center is the notion of harmony. As shown in this paper, this notion lies at the core of the cultural nationalism of an eminent scholar like Watsuji Tetsurō as well as in official documents like the Imperial Edict on Education and the new education law, and, moreover, in the everyday practice of schooling.

Thus, so my conclusion, the new education law should be understood not as a document of indoctrination that serves the purpose of the ruling elite, but as an expression of the abovementioned Japanese sense of self, that is a normative understanding of how interpersonal relations and social practice should be. This understanding usually is not explicit, but in the background of everyday practice. Thus, it can be called a “modern Japanese social imaginary”. Further inquiries into this imaginary should be a rewarding and fruitful task.

**Key Words:** Globalization, Nihonjinron, Japanese nationalism, Fundamental Law of Education.