Japanese in Search of Happiness:
A Survey of the Utopian Tradition in Japan

by

Koon-ki Ho (Hongkong)

There are two intrinsic difficulties in discussing the Japanese utopian tradition before the twentieth century. The first is that "utopia" is not an indigenous concept of Japan. The second is that "utopia" and its related terms are not clearly defined. To what extent can we talk about the Japanese "utopian" tradition? Is it valid to apply Western utopian terminology to describing similar phenomena in Japanese literature and philosophy? If we accept that the wish underlying utopia is to achieve social betterment by setting up a paradigm for emulation from an iconoclastic approach, then we can say a utopian tradition exists in Japan. In this article, I shall attempt a survey of various kinds of utopian manifestations in Japanese history before the twentieth century with an emphasis on the literary realm.

I am using all the terms related to utopia in this article in the sense of their widely accepted thematic definitions, that is, "eutopia" stands for an imaginary society which the utopist believes to be better than his contemporary world; "utopia" is used as a collective term so that "utopian tradition" comprises eutopia and its related species. A satirical utopia is defined as an imaginary society by which the author displays a satirical caricature of the present world and which is not intended as a substitution of the present world as in eutopia. Escapist utopias are eutopias of pure fantasy that serve the function of escape and compensation, whereas planned utopias are eutopias achieved or intended to be achieved by plans of social and/or political reforms.

Many scholars deny the existence of a utopian tradition in the East and their conviction is strongly supported by the absence of a kind of state romance, as Thomas More's *Utopia*, in which the main purpose is to portray an ideal society achieved by socio-political planning, which can be called literary planned utopia or planned utopia in fiction.¹ The Japanese utopian tradition is obviously not

¹ See for example Gerard Dudok, *Sir Thomas More and His Utopia*, Amsterdam: Firma A. H. Kruyt, 1923, p. 19. Dudok points out that in oriental and Arabic tales, there exists not a kind of state-romance embodying the authors' ideas on social improvement.
very prominent and comparatively less complicated than either the Chinese or the Western counterparts. Japan is considered, by both native and foreign critics, as a culture lacking a conspicuous utopian tradition prior to the introduction of this Western concept in the late nineteenth century. Seiji Nuida maintains that strictly no utopia existed during the time when Japan was isolated from the West, while Isao Uemichi shares with him a similar opinion.\(^2\) Jean Chesneaux, on the other hand, argues that egalitarian and utopian tradition in Japan held far less an important place than in China.\(^3\) It is no wonder that when Thomas More's *Utopia* was first introduced to Japan in 1874 by Tatsuro Takahashi, the term utopia was understood only as "any theory of human conversation based on *impractical* human objectives" (my emphasis) and eutopian speculations in general were ridiculed.\(^4\)

Such rather common observations reflect a generally poor sense of utopian awareness among ancient Japanese, even though philosophical and practical speculations concerning eutopia are not altogether absent in the cultural history of Japan. As a result, Japanese utopian thoughts and perspectives exhibit themselves more in mythical and legendary tales and religious beliefs than in philosophical treatises and political practice. As a matter of fact, the Japanese eutopia generally adopts the escapist model, while a tradition of the satirical utopia also marks the pre-modern literary utopia in Japan. My task in this article is to briefly outline these utopian aspects in literature, philosophical and political thoughts, and religious beliefs in the history of Japan.

Unlike the Western or Chinese mythology which plays a key role in the heralding of utopian thinking, the ancient Japanese mythology betrays a Japanese mind rather indifferent to utopian speculations. The oldest extant Japanese book, *Kojiki* or "*The Record of Ancient Matters*" (c. 712), a semi-mythological and semi-historical account of the birth of Japan and the ancestral gods of the imperial family, contains no significant account of an ideal or perfect society.\(^5\) To be sure, it twice mentions the existence of *Toko-yo-no-kuni* or the Country of Eternity,\(^6\) but records no detailed description of the land. Although innumerable references to this place

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\(^3\) Jean Chesneaux, "Egalitarian and Utopian Traditions in the East", in: *Diogenes* 62 (1968), 79.


\(^5\) Nuida, p. 19, denies the significance of *Kojiki* in the birth of Japanese utopian thinking, and attributes the merits to *Man'yōshū*, the first great collection of *waka* poems of Japan.

can be found in early Japanese literature, one cannot be sure whether it actually refers to a hell or a paradise. Some critics even argue that The Country of Eternity refers to Korea, or Southern China, or the Loochoo Islands, or foreign countries in general, or even a place in the province of Hitachi in Japan herself. Even though one critic has treated The Country of Eternity as an archetype of Japanese utopias, it is perhaps quite safe to conclude that Japanese mythology has very little to do with utopian thinking.

Uemichi argues that there were no "utopias" in Japanese literature before the concept was imported from the West. He asserts that only various forms of paradise can be found. While explaining that "there was no clear distinction between paradise and utopia" in ancient Japan, he insists on calling the examples of Japanese paradise he found "utopian paradise". Even though we are willing to skip the legitimate question, what differentiates a paradise from a utopian paradise, Uemichi's apology may appear somehow frivolous and superfluous for a scholar well versed in utopian studies in the West, for what Uemichi called "paradise" or "utopian paradise" could easily fit into the category of "escapist utopia".

The Japanese escapist utopia usually incarnates in a story or folktale. An often cited classical utopian example is Taketori Monogatari or "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter". In this tale, the moon is treated as the ideal world: "the moon, facing the earth, was believed to be at the other end of the earth. Everything was, therefore, contrary on the moon to the earth like reflections on a mirror." It is, however, important to note that no actual description of this ideal world is given in the narrative itself, even though we hear the celestial beings from the moon call the earth a "filthy place". The female protagonist, the Shining Princess, is herself a celestial maiden banished to the earth, but determined to return to the moon. The story recounts how this Shining Princess is found as a baby, captures the hearts of all the males in the country when grown up, and is taken back to heaven. The fate of this Shining Princess, who is portrayed as faultless according to human standards, reveals that the celestial beings are not perfect and that laws and punishments exist in the heavenly sphere of the moon. If the human judgment on the Princess is not biased, we may infer that the faultless Shining Princess

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7 Ibid., p. 104, note 12.
9 Uemichi, p. 358.
11 Uemichi, p. 356.
was banished because of a corrupted authority. It is somehow supported by the Princess’ reluctance to go back to the moon. She confesses that "the people of the Moon are very beautiful and do not grow old. They have no worries either. And yet it does not make me happy to be going there." At least, the moon is not an ideal place where everyone is satisfied. It is, therefore, not very appropriate to associate this tale with the eutopian genre, not even with the escapist kind. Little can be said actually about this tale in utopian terms. On the contrary, the Shining Princess’s preference of the filthy earth to the ideal moon implies an anti-utopian mind in action.

It is strange to find Japanese scholars to treat "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter" as a "utopian" sample and at the same time consider it unique and different from a typical Western eutopia. In fact, the motif of a celestial being exiled to the earth and then returning to heaven could never be considered as eutopian by any standards, except that the author uses this motif to contrast the ideal conditions of the celestial world with the inadequacy of the mundane world and encourage his readers to either aspire after the celestial world or treat it as a model for emulation. In "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter", as argued, there is no such eutopian elements.

By the same token, another tale, namely, Ama no Hagoromo or "The Robe of a Celestial Maiden", usually read as a eutopian tale of the Japanese kind should not be attributed to the eutopian genre either. In this tale a celestial maiden is forced to live on earth and marry to a mortal because the latter stole her celestial robe while she was bathing. Without this robe, she cannot fly back to the celestial realm. The maiden finally finds the robe at the bottom of her husband’s chest of drawers and manages to go back to her native land. Before she departs, she blames her husband for keeping a celestial being for his wife and admonishes him not to overreach himself. This tale is again not eutopian. First, there is no description of the celestial world. Second, instead of encouraging readers to go after this eutopia, even if we accept the celestial world as eutopian, the tale actually discourages them to do so. Thus, tales like "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter" or "The Robe of a Celestial Maiden" should not be read as the "Japanese kind of eutopia".

An eutopian tale of Chinese origin also plays an important role in the Japanese utopian tradition. What I mean is T’ao-hua-yüan chi or "The Story of the Peach Blossom Spring" by a Chinese poet, T’ao Ch’ien (365 or 372 or 376–427). The terms tōgenkyō ("realm of the Peach Blossom Spring") in Japanese, derived from this source, has enjoyed the same position as "utopia" in the West to become the label for eutopias in the Japanese utopian tradition until it was finally replaced by the transliteration forms of the words "paradise" and "utopia". This Chinese eutopia is named after the forest of peach trees which hides the access to it.

13 Ibid., p. 352.
The tale narrates a fisherman’s unintentional discovery of a eutopian community hidden in a mountain. How the fisherman discovers the access to this community, his observations there, and how he leaves and fails to return are briefly recounted. The inhabitants, as reported, are living in harmony with nature with man-made artifices reduced to the minimum. The entire description reminds us of a typical Chinese Taoist utopia.¹⁴

The shadow of the eutopian community of the Peach Blossom Spring is seen in many Japanese utopias. A famous tale, namely "The Story of Urashima Tarô, The Fisher Lad", can be perhaps considered as a parallel of "The Story of the Peach Blossom Spring". Indeed the Japanese tale is amazingly similar in plot to the Chinese counterpart and fits more closely the criteria of a utopia than "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter" or "The Robe of a Celestial Maiden". Both the plots of the Chinese and Japanese tales conform to a typical formula of a special kind of eutopian tales commonly found in both Eastern and Western utopian traditions. The formula involves a motif of mortal's visit to an immortal world. A male protagonist for various reasons accidentally enters the immortal's realm and enjoys a pleasurable and even sensuous experience there. Upon returning to the human world, he realizes that a few hundred years have passed. He either goes back to the immortal world if it is possible, or becomes a hermit retiring to a desolate mountain, or simple dies of old age. Although the utopia is primarily a spatial one, to reach and leave it also involves a time travel. Such escapist utopias can only be reached by accident, and only on rare occasions is a visitor able to return to it. These tales are always short and sketchy, reflecting the author's uncertainty about intangible paradises.

In the Japanese tale, Urashima Tarô, a fisher lad of no heroic prowess or special talent, incidentally gets access to the Sea Palace (described as a palace of great luxury) and spends three days (in some other sources, three years) there, during which he is treated with hospitality and made husband of the princess. When he returns to the human world, he finds that three hundred years have already passed. He dies shortly after of old age on opening the souvenir brought back from the Sea Palace.

Although this tale, containing a very brief description of the Sea Palace, can be classified as an example of the escapist utopia, it is also loaded with anti-utopian overtones. The price of the three days’ happy experiences in the Sea Palace costs the fisher lad’s precious life. The author thereby seems to discourage a mortal from overreaching himself. We can find hardly any evidence to affirm that the tale

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disparages the value of mortal existence as many of the Chinese Taoist utopian tales do. Thus, even though the tale of Urashima could be classified as utopian, its moral is in line with the "anti-utopian" spirit in the tales of the "Bamboo Cutter" and the "Celestial Maiden's robe".

Messianic belief, realization of an earthly utopia following the descent of a messiah, was held by some Buddhist sects in Japan. The cult of Miroku or Maitreya, brought from China through Korea in the sixth century, is a very prominent example. Maitreya, the future Buddha to come after Buddha Sakyamuni, resides in the heaven of Tushita and is determined to come down to save all living beings on earth. Since the descending of Maitreya will not only bring about the true Dharma but also a just order over the entire world, Maitreya is a savior in both religious and socio-political senses. Perhaps because of this reason, Maitreya is portrayed as an eschatological messiah in some Buddhist apocrypha and popular Buddhism, in which he is far more emphasized as a secular savior than as a religious savior. In short, the Maitreya's utopia is conceived not as a supernatural world or a land of Cockaigne, but a reconstructed human world of peace and order: "the time of Metteyya (Maitreya) is described as a Golden Age in which kings, ministers and people will vie one with another in maintaining the reign of righteousness and the victory of the truth." As a result, Maitreya had become a symbol of hope for the members of various suppressed and deprived classes in a society. Chinese history, for example, records many sectarian movements under the banner of Maitreya.

Maitreya has never been taken seriously by the Japanese orthodox Buddhist folds. The cult of Maitreya as a saviour was eventually superseded by the cult of Amitabha, his Pure Land Sukhavati, and his Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, while Maitreya was absorbed by folk religions for other purposes. In the most important Japanese esoteric Buddhist sect, namely the Shingon sect, Maitreya is worshipped as a future savior only to highlight the sacred position of its founder Kūkai or Kōbō Daishi as the savior of all suffering people coming between Buddha Shakyamuni and the future Buddha Maitreya. In other folk religions, Maitreya is nearly always appropriated into "aspirations for this worldly benefits". Only once in Japanese history, sometime prior to the Meiji era, has the figure of Maitreya inspired the notion of the rectification of the existing social order, and it has never promoted or incited rebellious movements as in China.

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17 For the career of Maitreya in Japan, see Kitagawa, pp. 120-5; Yasunaga, 67-163.

18 Kitagawa, p. 124.
The Japanese satirical utopia incidentally is manifested in stories of fictional journeys from Japan to some exotic lands comparable to Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*. Like the Western counterpart, the Japanese satirical utopia also presents a distorted mirror image of Japan in the disguise of an exotic country which does not serve as model or paradigm but target for satire. All in all, among the various literary utopian sub-genres, the Japanese and Western satirical utopias are perhaps most similar to each other.

The Japanese satirical utopia emerged in the eighteenth century, a time when Japan had already been invaded by Western cultures. Therefore, the similarities between the Western and Japanese satirical utopias may constitute a case of literary influence. The eighteenth century was also a time hallmarked by the appearance of more systematic utopian visions in Japan. The Japanese eutopias flourishing at the time can, nevertheless, hardly be described as planned utopias, because they are mostly the products of iconoclastic and anti-social thinking which are in line with the spirit of Chinese Taoist philosophy to oppose and challenge the Neo-Confucian thoughts dominant in that period of time. The Confucians attempt to impose upon human society an artificial system to achieve a utopian harmony. The Taoists on the other hand look to the natural world order as the solution for all human problems. The Taoists consider civilization as the root of evil, alienating men from their natural environment. A typical Taoist utopia, therefore, locates in a remote countryside or desolate mountain. The population is small and the inhabitants work only for minimal sustenance. No actual kings, governments, or even friendship exist. Civilization is permitted only to serve the basic necessity of life. Because of this rejection of civilization in favor of a natural order, the Taoists sometimes locate their eutopia in the past when civilization was still in its inceptive stage.\(^{19}\) In fact, from the Taoist perspective, life is only a phase of a natural sequential form of existence, most probably a degrading and undesirable one.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{20}\) The Taoist ideas about life and death are very well exemplified by a parable in Chuang Tzu. Once Chuang Tzu sees a skull in his way. He asks the skull if it would like to become alive again. The skeleton answers angrily "Why would I throw away more happiness than that of a king on a throne and take on trouble of a human being again?" Chuang Tzu, chap. 18, in CTCC, vol. 4, p. 111; c.f. Burton Watson, tr., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, New York & London: Columbia Univ. Press, 1968, pp. 194–8. See also Bauer, pp. 38–43.

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The planned utopia aiming at attaining happiness in this life through artificial means is perforce rejected by the Taoists.

The most important utopian thinkers of the eighteenth century Japan include Kamono Mabuchi (1697–1769) and Andō Shōeki (1701–1758?). Both regarded artificial society as evil and exalted a natural way of life and therefore could be described as Taoist followers. Incidentally, the social and political atmosphere in the Tokugawa period (1600–1868) was greatly influenced by Chinese Neo-Confucianism. It is, therefore, not at all surprising to find that the utopian theories, which are by nature iconoclastic, at this time exhibited an anti-Confucian or even a Taoist spirit at work. The conflict and contention between the Confucian (rules, regulations, and rites) and Taoist (natural way of life) ideals were moved from their native land to Japan. Kamono projected his utopian vision into the past, inishie or "the ancient of days" as he called it, whereas Andō projected his famous "world of nature" into the future.\(^{21}\)

Of the two, Andō is the more influential figure in the history of Japanese utopian tradition in both the utopian and satirical utopian genres. His utopian thoughts are collected in his Shizen Shin'eidō or "The Way of Nature and True Vocation", a book of a hundred volumes, published probably in 1755. The book is written in Chinese, even though Andō himself disliked Chinese culture, especially Neo-Confucianism.\(^{22}\) In volume 24, Andō presented a critique of his contemporary society, which he called the "world of law" in the form of an animal fable, which can be therefore considered as belonging to the satirical utopia. Volume 25 contains the sketch of his eutopia, the "world of nature".\(^{23}\)

The "world of nature" is a society in which everybody works for self-sustenance, whereas the "world of law" is a society functioning on an artificial system. Volume 24 is devoted to satirizing this "world of law". We see the human world through its distorted reflection on the animal world. The eagle of the world of birds and the monkey in the world of beasts correspond to the emperor in the human world. Crested eagles and lions represent the generals; cranes and elephants, the court nobles; hawks and tigers, the feudal lords; peregrines and wolves, kites and leopards, the minor warriors. Other animals also have their human counterparts. Dogs, for example, which bark at suspicious persons and rely upon their master for sustenance, refer to scholars. In short, human follies, social institutions, and social classes are magnified, distorted and ridiculed.

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22 Kato, p. 137. Andō considered the using of Chinese language in writing as a necessary evil.

Andô's utopian "world of nature" greatly resembles a typical Taoist utopia. It is a society in which everybody is able to support himself. No money, no tax, and above all no class distinctions ever exist. Even scholars and priests have to work for self-support. People of different trades exchange their products (which solves the problems of division of labor and the need of currency). Consanguineous marriage is permitted, whereas polygamy is not allowed and adultery is punished by death. This eutopia is therefore a classless and egalitarian society. Its freedom and flexibility reflect the author's hatred of the highly rigid social structure of the Tokugawa period. Perhaps, it is more helpful to emphasize the iconoclastic than the eutopian (in the sense of setting up a paradigm) aspect of this ideal world, for given that historical context, a free and open society is far from feasible. 24 Interestingly, Andô believed that his "world of nature" had been realized in Ezo (Hokkaidô) and in Holland which, he thought, was an island country similar to Japan. This portraying of an existing and exotic country as a eutopia is a common theme in both Eastern and Western utopian traditions. For a Japanese utopist who has never visited Europe, or a European utopist who has never set foot on Japan, using an existing exotic country on the other side of the earth as the basis to incarnate his eutopian vision is not very different from creating an imaginary country existing in nowhere, except that the reference to an actual country may enhance credibility among his contemporary audience.

After Andô, there appeared some more satirical utopias embodied in the records of imaginary journeys, a very popular form of the satirical utopia in world literature. I want to mention two particular works very similar to Gulliver's Travels: Hiraga Gennai's (1728-1780) Fûryû Shidôken-den or "The Elegant Tale of Shidôken" (1763) and Yûkokushi's Ikoku kidan, Wasôbyôc: or "Strange Tales of Foreign Lands" (1774).

Hiraga's The Elegant Tale of Shidôken is basically a story of initiation. The hero Shidoken is an old missionary who preaches by telling stories in Edo. The body of the novel is the narrative of his initiation into the mission of spreading the true knowledge of life. Once he met a magician who gave him a magic feather fan by which he was able to travel wherever he chose. He traveled to a land of giants, a land of dwarfs, a land of long-armed people, a land of long-legged people, a country in which the inhabitants have a hole in the middle of their chest, and finally to a land of women. In the land of women, all foreign male visitors are kept in a pleasure quarter as prostitutes, which reminds us of the licensed quarters in Edo. In this case, however, men are put in the same deplorable condition they had prepared for women. Before this miserable fate fell on our protagonist, the

magician appeared again and pointed out the relativity of values in life and urged him to awaken from the illusion of worldly pleasure. The hero was then appointed to return to Japan and preach what he learned in this series of journeys. The magician concluded with a statement loaded heavily with Japanese nationalistic overtones. He asserted that Japan was by nature a country of righteousness and humanity; therefore there was no need to import from foreign lands any philosophy and ethics like Confucianism. Like Andō’s masterpiece, Hiraga’s book is overtly didactic, which as a result undermines its satirical force.

*Strange Tales of Foreign Lands* is a more interesting work, even though overt didacticism is not absent. Like the other two Japanese works discussed, this novel also shows a strong skepticism toward Confucian values and a preference for the Taoist ideals. The surname of the protagonist connotes a flavor of Taoism. *Waso*, stands for Japan; whereas *byoe* is the Japanese form of the family name of the famous Taoist philosopher Chuang Tzu. A critic explains that the name *Wasōbyōe* suggests that the nature of the work is a Japanese adoption of Chuang Tzu’s method of teaching by parable and simile. I would add that the word also implies a Japanese outlook of Taoism, especially its utopian aspects.

Wasōbyōe has visited the Land of Perennial Youth, the Land of Idlers, the Land of Shams, the Land of the Followers of the Ancient Customs, the Land of Paradoxes, the Land of Giants. The two journeys that best exhibit the Taoist utopian views are the first and the last.

The Land of Perennial Youth is a satirical utopia, in spite of its escapist utopian elements. Inhabitants there more or less enjoy a perennial youth free from all kinds of diseases. The land itself has perfect weather and abounds in wealth. In fact, even Wasōbyōe first regarded it as "a truly happy land." The satirical intention, however, soon comes to the foreground. One particular place in this strange land is especially worth attention, the Peach-Tree Mountain, a name reminding us of the Chinese utopia, Peach Blossom Spring. The Peach-Tree Mountain is a place modeled after the licensed quarters in the Tokugawa Edo, but much exaggerated. The purpose of placing this land of worldly pleasure in a supposed fairyland is exposed in the concluding sentence of this episode: "thus may it be seen that not even a land inhabited by sages and wizards can escape being the scene of


\[26\] The novel consists of separate tales of different foreign lands. At the end of each tale, there is a section to expound the moral of the tale.


\[28\] Ibid., p. 292.
the conquests of love." The underlying meaning is that a human being can never lead a purely intellectual and spiritual life, and a real utopia should be a land of worldly pleasure. The episode may be seen as a satire on the Neo-Confucian theory of "principle of nature" and "human desire" distinguished by the renowned Neo-Confucian philosopher Chu Hsi (1130–1200). Chu Hsi advocated that we should try to maintain the tien-li or "principle of nature" and eliminate jen-yü or "human desires", but only sages can achieve that ideal stage of freedom from human desires. The author here points out that even sages cannot get rid of human desires altogether. Licensed quarters in the Tokugawa period were established to provide an emotional outlet for the Japanese suppressed by the rigid social system which was partly a product of the Neo-Confucian influence. The glorification of the licensed quarters is an oblique protest against the highly suppressive social system of the time.

The main satirical thrust of this satirical utopia is, however, on the insatiable desires of human beings. Although the inhabitants are all immortals, they do not consider immortality as a privilege endowed by heaven, but a curse. The inhabitants resent immortality not because they have the same problem as the Luggnaggian Struldbrugs in Book Three of Gulliver's Travels, who enjoy immortality without perennial youth. They have perennial youth, but prefer an afterlife in a Buddhist paradise, a notion which they learn from some Buddhist scriptures brought from China. The aspiration after death promotes the development of the "art of death". All food that Japanese believed may prolong life is rejected; whereas poisonous matters are treated as invaluable treasure. The most welcoming congratulation to a new born baby is this: "the little thing doesn't look as it would live long." The author's target of satire is obviously man's insatiable desires; he suggests that even when immortality and perennial youth are achieved, man will still not be fully satisfied.

The spirit of Chuang Tzu is very much embodied in the journey to the Land of Giants, which is situated in another world as if in other galaxy as the description

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29 Ibid., p. 294.
30 Chu Hsi once said, "no one but the sage can reach the point of having no desire." It seems that the concluding statement of this episode really aims at refuting Chu Hsi's theory of "principle of nature" and "human desire". See Chu Hsi's statement in Chin-ssu Lu ("Reflections on Things at Hand") compiled by Chu Hsi and Lu Tsu-ch'ien. An excellent English translation is available by Wing-tsit Chan, Chin-ssu lu, New York & London: Columbia Univ. Press, 1967. The above statement is on p. 155. This work has been of great influence in Tokugawa Japan. Chan has listed sixty-three items of Japanese commentaries, annotations, and translations of this work, out of which only nine were published after the Tokugawa period, see pp. 347–58. One of the best works written on the Neo-Confucian influence in Tokugawa period is Maruyama Masao, Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan (Nihon Seiji Shisōshi Kenkyū), tr. Mikiso Hane, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974.
31 Chamberlain, 1879, p. 296.
suggests. The country possesses all important features of a typical Taoist eutopia. The inhabitants’ simple way of life, however, leads Wasōbyōe to think that they are big only in physical size but empty headed. He, therefore, endeavors to teach them his knowledge of Confucianism, Buddhism, and all that he acquired in his traveling experiences. For six or seven days he shouts at the top of his voice trying to convey his knowledge to the giants, but none is impressed. At last, he is told by his host Kuwochi that the giants fail to respond to his teaching not because they are slow at wit, but because they are at a much higher mental level than Wasōbyōe. Confucianism and Buddhism are good only for beings with narrow intellect like human beings, but not the giants with unlimited intellect. The moral of this episode implies that neither Confucianism nor Buddhism is the true path to a perfect society.

The theme of the initiation of a conceited and ignorant figure through the teaching of a seemingly ignorant but actually knowledgeable figure is probably inspired by the chapter "Autumn Floods" in Chuang Tzu. The chapter consists of a number of parables centered upon this theme. The first parable is about the Lord of the Yellow River and the God of the North Sea. At the time of autumn floods pouring into the Yellow River, the Lord of the Yellow River is so proud of his greatness that he believes "all the beauty in the world belonged to him alone." He is not enlightened until he has reached the North Sea and realizes the vastness of its water. As the God of the North Sea observes, he is limited by the space he lives in. Wasōbyōe’s attempt to enlighten a people with a broader intellect than himself can be compared to the Lord of River’s exaggerated self-esteem.

The theme that the small visitor considers the giant hosts as ignorant and empty-headed fools is also found in Gulliver’s voyage to Brobdingnag. Gulliver reports that the Brobdingnagians have not "reduced Politicks into Science", and that "the learning of this People is very defective, ... consisting only in Morality, History, Poetry and Mathematicks, ... And as to Ideas, Entities, Abstractions and Transcendentals, I could never drive the least conception into their Heads." Swift is being ironical here. The simpler Brobdingnagians are portrayed morally better than the Englishmen. It has been argued that the portrayal of the moral Brobdingnagians was influenced by the reports of China and Chinese available in Swift’s time. It is interesting to see how different Chinese sources inspired


two writers in different places and at different times similar idea in writing their satirical utopias. We are even tempted to believe that the Japanese novelist was influenced by Swift’s famous work. At least there is a chronological possibility. The first and partial translation of *Gulliver’s Travels* into Japanese, however, did not appear until 1880.  

Although written by an obscure writer, *Strange Tales of Foreign Land* produced quite an impact on the literary scene of the time. There were at least two sequels to this work, namely, *Wasōbyōe kohen* ("Part Two of Wasobyōe“, 1779) by Sawai Iro and *Wasōbyōe zokuhen* ("Sequel to Wasobyōe“, 1854) by a certain Kokunen Kōchō Sanjin. The rather famous playwright Santō Kyōdan (1761–1816) also wrote an parody on the work and entitled it *Wasōbyōe gōjitsu hanashi* ("The latter days of Wasobyōe“, 1797). Another famous writer Takizawa Bakin (1767–1848) published his novel *Musobyōe kōchō monogatari* ("The tale of the Dreaming Musobyōe“), modeled on *Strange Tales of Foreign Land*. It is, however, generally agreed that the imitations or sequels are of lower artistic quality than the original.

Nature and a natural way of life therefore play a dominant role in the classical Japanese utopian tradition. The formal planned utopia did not emerge, however, before the late nineteenth century. Ironically, rejected by the utopian thinkers in the Tokugawa period, the spirit of Neo-Confucianism came to the front stage of the modern Japanese utopian tradition. As George Bkle maintains, ”many aspects of Neo-Confucianism . . . may have contributed to the emergence of a utopian planning tradition" in Japan. When appeared in literature, the Japanese planned utopias are temporal utopias projecting alternative futures for the Japanese government and society. Important examples are Takase Naokuni’s *Nijūsan-nen miraiki* ("An Account of the Future Twenty-three Years [of Japan]“) (1883) and a more influential work bearing the same title by Suehiro Shigeyasu (1848–1896) published in 1886.  

These modern eutopias, however, do not fall within the province of this study.

Before closing the present discussion, I want to mention three early Japanese translations of More’s *Utopia* which can be incorporated into the Japanese utopian tradition. The earliest translation is by Inoue Tsutomu (1850–1928) under the title *Ryō seisfu-dan* or *On Good Government* (1892). I treat this translation as a Japanese eutopian work because Inoue translated Utopia with a special purpose in mind. His ultimate aim is that his translation may enlighten his readers about

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36 George Bkle, Jr., "Utopianism and the Planning Element in Modern Japan", in: *Aware of Utopia*, p. 40.

37 See the brief discussion of the political utopias during the Meiji era in Nuita, pp. 30–1; see esp. the list of utopias from Tokugawa to Meiji on p. 31 for further examples.
ways to carry out social reforms. The work therefore loosely fits the criteria of a eutopia. His aim is more easily seen in the title that he gave to the second print of the translation, namely, *Shinseifu soshiki-dan* ("On how to organize a new government"), which expresses his intention more clearly than the previous title. In order to fulfil his purpose, Inoue did not faithfully translate the text but deliberately distorted it here and there.

After Inoue, Ogiwara Kengai and a rather obscure figure Mikami S. published their translations of *Utopia* in 1893 and 1913 respectively. Ogiwara entitled his work *Risōteki kokka* ("Ideal state") and Mikami, *Yūtopia*. Ogiwara did a more faithful and accurate translation than either Inoue or Mikami and showed a better understanding of the work, even though he shared with the other two the same conviction that the state Utopia described in More's work could be used as a paradigm for emulation.

Like his predecessor Inoue, Mikami openly spelt out his intention that his translation was meant for providing a paradigm for social reforms. He, therefore, freely translated, edited, and omitted parts of the original to suit his purpose. Although a failure in the standards of translation, this particular translation is very important in the history of Japanese utopian tradition. For it is due to its publication that the word "*yūtopia*" became almost a household word in Japan and More's *Utopia* was made known to nearly all the Japanese readers of Western literature. In a nutshell, all the three translations have in one way or another promoted and popularized the knowledge of More's masterpiece and the concepts eutopian planning in general among the Japanese public, which are chiefly responsible for the birth of modern utopianism and the spirit of social reforms in Meiji Japan.

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38 For details of these three translations, see Sawada, pp. 23–43.