

An Empirical Case Study of the Impact of Moral Education on the Character of Students at Private Educational Institutions in Japan

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Abstract

This paper attempts an empirical exploration of the impact of the moral education offered at the five private, secondary and tertiary educational institutions in Japan belonging to the Hiroike Institute of Education, the offspring of Moralogy College founded by Chikuro Hiroike in 1935, on the character building of the students there. The youngest interviewees were in their 20s, and the oldest in their 70s. The analysis identified six major categories that seemed to encompass and elucidate the essential components of the moral education offered at these schools. These six categories were; Hiroike as a role model, the passing on of values, connectedness, hope, a purpose in life, and shift in thinking. The virtues most commonly mentioned in the interviews were; respect, benevolence, caring for others, gratitude, connectedness, hope, tolerance, self-examination, and sincerity. Based on these findings, the paper seeks to clarify the extent to which, and the ways in which, supreme morality (i.e. wisdom), expounded first by Hiroike and subsequently taught in the school system, has had a moral impact on students' character building in relation to each of the virtues identified in the interview data.

INTRODUCTION

Japanese moral education between the late-19th and the mid-20th centuries was based mainly on an amalgam of Confucian and Shinto traditions. Confucianism, especially in its Neo-Confucian version that had structured the political and social fabric of Japan since the 17th century, taught that the harmony of the universe depended on a reciprocal relationship, with justice emanating from the superior elements of society and obedience being rendered by the subordinate. Harmony was thought to be ensured by the bonds of the five human relationships: “(1) ruler and subject, (2) parents and children, (3) husband and wife, (4) elder and younger, and (5) friend and friend.”² Shinto, on the other hand, came to provide the religio-political and moral infrastructure of

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² Byron Earhart, *Religion in Japan: Unity and Diversity*. Fifth Edition. Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2014, p.182

Japan after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when Japan transformed itself from a feudal state to a modern nation state with the Emperor at the top of the religio-political hierarchy. A new system of moral education was formally launched with the promulgation of the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education, taking the form of *Shushin*, literally meaning “to order oneself”, which is a translation of English phrase “moral science”³ used by Francis Wayland, the author of *The Elements of Moral Science* published in 1835.

Nonetheless, after the Meiji Restoration, the enrollment rate of children in primary education remained low, especially in rural areas, because their parents required their labor for rice production. By 1883 the overall enrollment rate had risen to over 50%⁴ but in rural areas it was still low. Chikuro Hiroike (1866-1938), the founder of the Hiroike Institute of Education, became an elementary school assistant teacher in 1880 in a rural area where this was the case. He opened a night school for children of farming families in 1885 and wrote a *Shushin* textbook for elementary schools in 1888. He went on to serve as an editor of the *Kojiruien* (an encyclopedia of Japan) in 1895, taught at Waseda University and Jingu Kogakkan, and obtained a doctoral degree in jurisprudence in 1912.

Around 1922, Hiroike became persuaded of the urgent need to establish a set of universal moral principles that would transcend ethnic and religious boundaries to promote the security, peace, and happiness of mankind. He went on to found moralogy (a coinage meaning “moral science”), a system of thought, methodologically based on modern scientific knowledge, that attempts to prove the effects of the practice of “supreme morality.” He derived this concept from the thought and actions of the world sages, (Jesus Christ, Siddhartha Gautama, Confucius, Socrates, and Sun Goddess Amaterasu of Japan), and sought to demonstrate that its efficacy was superior to that of conventional moral thinking and practice. For him, it was practical wisdom.

In 1928 his ideas were given full expression with the publication of *A Treatise on Moral Science: A First Attempt to Establish Moralogy as A New Science*. Believing that moral education based on moralogy could maximize its true value in higher education, he founded Moralogy College in 1935 as the forerunner of Reitaku University, which became a four year university in 1959. The other offspring of Moralogy College were Reitaku Junior and Senior High Schools, and Reitaku Mizunami Junior and Senior High Schools. These five schools, referred to collectively as Reitaku schools, have offered moral education based on moralogy on a continuing basis since their foundation.

Today, Reitaku University provides all its first year students with a compulsory “moral science” course, but its intention is to expand and systematize this program throughout the four-year

³ *The Complete Works of Yukichi Fukuzawa*, Tokyo, Jijishinpo Sha, Vol. 1, p. 72.

⁴ *Growth and Education of Japan*, “Chapter 2: Spreading of Education and Social and Economic Growth,” 2 (2), Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 1962. Web. http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/hakusho/html/hpad196201/hpad196201_2_011.html

curriculum. Its “moral science” course offers students the opportunity to develop their moral character through learning about supreme morality, i.e. practical wisdom, from textbooks compiled by members of the Center for Moral Science and Education. These place great emphasis on virtues such as benevolence, self-renunciation, responsibility, hope, gratitude, connectedness, and self-reflection.

This paper essays an empirical exploration of the impact of the moral education offered at these five schools on the character of their students, based on interviews with two dozen of their students and graduates.

DATA

The interviews were conducted by three interviewers who used the following interview questions: (1) What did you learn from “moral science/morality”? (2) Did studying moral science/morality have any impact on your character? If so, what kind of impact? (3) What are the teachings, words, or maxims that you cherish in the teachings of moral science/morality? (4) Please tell me about the episode that had the most impact on you in your classes about moral science/morality. (5) When you faced difficulties or suffering in your life after graduation, did something you learned through moral science/morality help you in overcoming them?⁵ (6) Please talk about the encounters with people who influenced you. What aspect of your personality has been influenced by such people? (7) What kind of life do you wish to lead? Please talk about your view of life.

The protocol followed by the interviewers was as follows:

It is impossible for interviewers to keep neutrality without biasing the interviewees. Please give the following directions to the interviewees before the interview, in order to clarify the position of the interviewer.

This interview, conducted by the Reitaku University Center for Moral Science and Education, is to what impact does this education on students’ character.

It can be assumed that each interviewee has been impacted differently according to the differences of individuals. So please talk about your experiences in your own words, without beautifying, overstating, or humbly underestimating them.

If you cannot understand a question, please do not hesitate to ask what it means. In order to clearly understand what you mean, I may ask additional questions.

⁵ The interviewees of Group 1 were students of Reitaku University, therefore when asking this question to them, it was modified so as to read “When you faced difficulties or suffering in your life as a student, did something you learned through moral science/morality help you in overcoming them?”

Details of the twenty-four interviewees are as follows:

Group 1 - Interviewer: Prof. Ken'ichi Eshima

Interviewees: Senior students of Reitaku University (4th year in 2013 academic year)

	Name	Department	Sex	High School
1	A	Foreign Studies	F	Other high school
2	S	Foreign Studies	F	Other high school
3	T	Foreign Studies	F	Other high school
4	F	Foreign Studies	M	Other high school
5	A	Foreign Studies	F	Other high school
6	N	Foreign Studies	M	Reitaku High School
7	G	Foreign Studies	F	Other high school
8	M	Economics	F	Reitaku High School
9	H	Foreign Studies	M	Other high school
10	O	Foreign Studies	F	Other high school

Group 2 - Interviewer: Mr. Shinsuke Takenaka

Interviewees: Graduates of Moralogy College (20s ~ 40s)

	Name	Sex	Age	Academic Background	Position
1	I	F	25	Reitaku High School/other university	Staff*
2	O	F	27	Other university	Staff
3	C	M	27	Other university/Reitaku Graduate School	Staff
4	H	M	27	Reitaku High School/other university	Other
5	A	F	30	Reitaku Mizunami Junior High School/Reitaku Mizunami High School/other university	Staff
6	S	F	36	Reitaku Mizunami Junior High School/Reitaku Mizunami High School/other university	Staff
7	M	M	41	Reitaku High School/other university	Staff

3) Group 3 Interviewer: Prof. Kazunobu Horiuchi

Interviewees: Staff and OB Staff of the Institute of Moralogy and Hiroike Institute of Education (70s ~80s)

	Name	Sex	Age	Academic background	Position
1	T	M	70s	Reitaku Junior College/other university (MA)	Retired
2	K	M	60s	Reitaku High School/Reitaku University/other university (MA)	Staff
3	K	M	70s	Reitaku High School/Reitaku Junior College	Staff
4	M	M	70s	Reitaku High School/other (Ph.D)	Retired
5	T	M	70s	Reitaku High School/Reitaku Junior College/other (MA)	Retired
6	K	M	70s	Reitaku University/other university	Retired
7	M	M	60s	Reitaku University	Retired

Abbreviation:

*Staff = a staff member of either the Institute of Moralogy or Hiroike Institute of Education

The data collection period ran from January 2014 through March 2015.

ANALYSIS

A. Findings:

Analysis of the interviews was done in accordance with grounded theory.⁶ Each interviewer transcribed the recorded interviews and then extracted words, phrases, or sentences that they felt was important for understanding the impact of moral education based on morality on interviewees' personalities. Each interviewer then classified and coded the key expressions extracted into several categories and subcategories, and labeled each of them. Individual categories did not turn out to be isolated entities, but could be correlated with other categories based on causal relationships.

Analysis of the categories and subcategories discerned by the three interviewers led to the identification of the following six common ones; Chikuro Hiroike as role model, the passing on of values, connectedness, hope, finding a purpose in life, and changing one's way of thinking.

1. Role model

Analysis of moral behavior in connection with moral science education at Reitaku schools revealed that Chikuro Hiroike seemed extremely important as a role model in stimulating moral and ethical concern among the interviewees. They learned about him through works published by him or written about him, and from diaries that he and his students kept.

Many of the student interviewees recognized Hiroike as a person who had a "challenging and indomitable spirit," and who made constant and unremitting efforts to overcome his circumstances, undaunted by the adversity he faced. They were also impressed with his "attractiveness as a human being," "insightful capacity to see through personality," and "persevering benevolent attitude" toward others. Some noted that they were attracted by Hiroike's personal magnetism, especially the respectable, trustworthy nature of his character, which was full of sincerity and compassion. One elderly interviewee detailed his experience of encountering the spirit of Hiroike; he had tried to follow in Hiroike's footsteps, think of him, and nurture loyalty to him since that time.

Not all the interviewees lived their lives by following Hiroike's example directly. They said that role models were their "parents," "teachers who taught them at Reitaku schools," "their seniors in dormitory life" or "senior moralogians⁷ in their local area." We can, however, say that Hiroike was the indirect role model of these interviewees, since those who greatly influenced them

⁶ Professor Wolfgang Althof of the Center for Character and Citizenship, University of Missouri has been giving conscientious advice to this research in terms of methodology. We would like to express our appreciation for his kind advice to this research.

⁷ "Moralogians" here means supporting members of the research of morality and social education activities based on it. Some of these members are also graduates of Reitaku schools.

in this way followed Hiroike's example, as evidenced by the respect they paid to their predecessors every day, or by their daily mental attitude towards Hiroike, and by their respect for him. The interviewees learned the following from those who had taken Hiroike as their role model: to guard against blaming others for their own shortcomings; to gain the capacity for insight into the personalities of others: to understand the need to repay one's moral indebtedness⁸; to cultivate the qualities of harmony, sincerity, selflessness and benevolence that are born from a mind that cares for one's ortholinons⁹; to set an example as a leader; and to exert an educational influence unconsciously.

2. Supreme Morality---Practical Wisdom

The goal of the moral education provided at Reitaku schools¹⁰ is the practice of "supreme morality," i.e. the morality that, according to Hiroike, was embodied by the five world sages, and which changes the thinking and behavior of individuals who encounter it.

Two interviewees described the benefit of moral science education in the Reitaku schools in the following terms: "It formed the foundational part of my life like a root of a plant," and "I was taught important lessons for my life." Based on this type of self-knowledge, they said they had learned the importance of appreciating, like members of every generation responsible for passing on the values of supreme morality to their successors, the sincere intentions of their ortholinons and the values evident in the example set by their predecessors.

Some interviewees talked about the "importance of personal enlightenment¹¹" and expressed their own aspiration to guide people to a better, happier life by themselves providing a good example, thus transmitting the essence and values of supreme morality to the next generation. This also meant that they would become a role model for others, continuing the pattern discussed in the previous section.

The central virtues of supreme morality emphasized by moral science education at Reitaku schools, i.e., benevolence and tolerance, generate the capacity for empathy that gives individuals opportunities to pay attention to others as well as to broaden their view of the world. The power of

⁸ In Buddhism, understanding one's indebtedness to others and showing one's gratitude toward these people is considered ethical and moral conduct. In Christianity, the equivalent practice is accepting the grace of God given to one and showing gratitude to God.

⁹ "Hiroike's coinage meaning 'line of succession', being derived from the Greek words *orthos*, meaning 'straight', and *linon*, meaning 'thread.' Ortholinon in general indicates series of great benefactors to mankind." (Chikuro Hiroike, *Prefaces & Tributes to the Author from A Treatise on Moral Science*, Tokyo, The Institute of Moralogy, [first published in Japanese, 1928] translated and edited, 1998, p. 15.)

¹⁰ "Reitaku schools" here refers to Reitaku Junior and Senior High School, Mizunami Reitaku Junior and Senior High School, Reitaku Junior College (1950 – 59), and Reitaku University. They are recognized by the Japanese government under the legal name of, and administered by, the Hiroike Institute of Education, and are educational institutions established on the basis of the moral and educational philosophy expounded and practiced by Dr. Chikuro Hiroike (1866 – 1938). The details of Dr Hiroike are given in the footnote 3.

¹¹ A moral guidance in person or group through instruction based on moralogy to achieve a better, happier personal life or family, or more successful business.

empathy is, in other words, the capacity for moral imagination. Some student interviewees emphasized that their moral science education had taught them the importance of becoming aware of the need to care for, and be considerate to, others and to listen to their opinions, as, for example, when saying; “I found it important to put myself in other’s shoes,” “I have come to listen to other’s opinions,” and “I learned that consideration to others is very important to lead a good life.” It is therefore important to become selfless in order to act benevolently and tolerantly toward others.

Some of the older interviewees said that being considerate towards others, i.e. adopting mental attitudes such as sincerity and benevolence, was of serious import; benevolence engendered tolerance of the failures or defects of oneself and others, clearing the path to a positive way of thinking. Former negative ways of thinking became positive ones, and their attitudes toward others changed, allowing them to perceive the brighter, “better side of themselves and others.” The toils and difficulties they had previously faced had been felt only as negative pressure, but shifts in their thinking and perception turned them into positive ones, thus allowing them to see these psychological experiences as opportunities for future growth as people, rather than as things they wished to avoid by all means.

3. Self-reflection

As a result of experiencing certain difficulties in human relationships, the interviewees had reexamined their previous thinking and deeds. In one such case, an interviewee explained how he had first tried to change the attitude and behavior of others, but finally found “it was best to change [his own] thinking and behavior,” because he found he was not able to change others. Following such “self-reflection,” he felt that people could “accept themselves as they are,” thus freeing themselves from the captivity of previous ways of thinking and behavior, even when these were just and righteous.

Having obtained such freedom, we can say that people are able to start to live by pursuing what they really want. They eventually obtain a positive mindset after a series of these shifts in thinking. Instead of thinking in a negative manner as they did before, this process leads them to think in a positive way, changing their attitudes toward others, and making them more likely to see the positive, better aspects of others. One interviewee spoke of this in the following way: “I changed my thinking from negative to positive, I became able to see the positive aspects of others”: another said: “I was able to think that things I had hated would give me a chance to grow.” Before such experiences, such individuals had treated difficulties or hardships as negatives, as sources of unbearable pressure, but after this shift of thinking, i.e. after finding their true selves, such experiences were valued as positives and they could treat suffering as an opportunity to grow.

4. Connectedness

Almost all the older interviewees indicated the importance of the “National ortholinon,” “Family ortholinon,” and “Spiritual ortholinon”; in other words, they pointed out the significance of paying respect and being connected to one’s line of benefactors. They thought it essential always to “think about and act according to their benefactors’ advice,” and to “put the ortholinons first at all times,” “to be ready to serve their benefactors” and to give them “peace of mind,” through “making them feel at ease.”

Some interviewees expressed “gratitude toward their families for their support” and acknowledged the importance of being ready and determined to “pass on life to the next generation.” One repeatedly stressed the “depth of parental love which knows no limit.” Here we see how the family, as the basic unit in the formation of society, plays a vital role in nurturing a life filled with affection, thus preserving the human species and allowing culture to be passed on to the next generation.

No term is more important than “trust” when one thinks about connectedness, especially connectedness in society; as one of the interviewees noted; one “cares about and respects others” based on the “relationship of mutual trust.” People sometimes share common values with others, but in many cases they differ over values. Hence it is important for one to accept the diverse lifestyles of people when trying to build good human relationships; as one interviewee said, “it is important to respect varieties of lifestyles.” The essential thinking characteristic of moral science in the context of social action, according to another interviewee, is to judge and act in ways that benefit the actor, the other person directly involved, and third parties as well. This is called “Sampo Yoshi,” social action benefitting all three sides. The interviewees valued the power and ability that humans have to transmit what is needed for good, smooth relationships with others. Some pointed out that “en” (karma) and “encounters with people” are the important bases on which human relationships can be built.

For those interviewees in their 20s, opportunities to experience a connection with the transcendent appeared to have been very rare. For this reason, no mention of a transcendent being was made by the student interviewees, whereas some of the older interviewees in their 30s and 40s had either had the experience of asking for divine assistance amid personal difficulties or suffering, saying: “I had to ask for God’s help when I had a difficulty in my life,” or believed after accomplishing a difficult task that they had received some assistance from a divine being, repeating the words of Hiroike that “It is not me who accomplished this, but I just followed it [the law of nature].” Some interviewees, rather than anthropomorphizing the divine presence, were convinced that the law of nature had functioned in their lives by saying: “I can see the work of law of nature,” and pointed out “the importance of obeying rather than disobeying the law of nature,” or saying that they “felt vaguely as if they were embraced by something great.”

In relation to connectedness to the transcendent, one elderly interviewee spoke of his faith in the continued existence of the soul after it left this world, and of how he shared Hiroike's belief that the "Soul and flesh are not two," expressing his hope to be able to experience the "eternal now." Another interviewee pointed out the importance of "prayer" as a way of connecting oneself to the transcendent being.¹²

5. Motives for moral behavior---indebtedness, gratitude, and repaying indebtedness

So what motivated the interviewees to act morally and live a good life? To discern the foundations that underpinned their moral behavior, we need to explore the beliefs that impelled them to behave altruistically.

What seemed to matter most to the interviewees was to feel their indebtedness to their spiritual ortholinos, their benefactors. One of them said he had learned that he had benefited from, and was therefore indebted to, his parents and ancestors, and that through moral science education he had been able to recognize this indebtedness. Another said: "I owe my parents and ancestors a great debt of gratitude." Having become aware of this and felt its presence, eventually he came to the point where he believed he must repay this indebtedness, saying: "I was fortunate to be able to become aware of my indebtedness."

Most interviewees recognized the significance of feeling "gratitude to one's benefactors" and "repaying one's indebtedness." One elderly interviewee quoted Hiroike's words "Sincerely expressing gratitude and repaying my indebtedness" in this context. Here we can see that once one has recognized one's indebtedness, one will repay it. Then one will feel at ease and be happy, so that one's worries about the future will disappear and one can see and deal with everything optimistically. This is linked to positive thinking. As one of the interviewees noted, it is essential to "try not to become negative, but to think positively about what one can do, and work to live a better life." Then one can afford to think "it's important to live a good life," and can "try to think what [one] can do for other people." Another interviewee said that "trying to think positively about one's potentiality allows one to regain the energy to be cheerful" and to "become interested in new events happening around one." This interviewee also noted that "the moral science education offered at Reitaku schools taught him that one should lead a life such as this," and "how to live a meaningful life."

¹² It is noteworthy that Japanese culture is a polytheistic one, in which, contrary to a monotheistic culture of Great Britain, for instance, several religious traditions such as Buddhism (whose religious goal is to achieve detachment from worldly affairs through enlightenment to free oneself from sufferings), Shinto (whose religious end is to be purified oneself from defilement), or Confucianism (whose religious goal is to maintain a reciprocal relationship with justice emanating from the superior and obedience being rendered by the subordinate) coexist peacefully. That's why some anthropomorphize the supreme being and use the word "God," (probably meaning Shinto "god") and some refer to the law of nature, though "the law of nature" is a terminology of morality as well.

Some of those interviewed had not yet reached this level of insight. The student interviewees seemed to think that they chiefly valued happiness and preferred “an ordinary, mediocre happiness” to the happiness that comes after experiencing hardship and difficulties. They believed that, in order for them to be happy, “all family members must be happy” and that “there should be harmony among them.” Their ordinary type of happiness meant “living in peace without discord and worries.” It may be that when they have no worries, they experience a lack of constraint in their lives, “being calm and composed,” having “peace of mind,” which leads to “a peaceful life.”

6. Purpose in life

It seems that the older interviewees tended to have a purpose in their lives which guided them to moral behavior. One revealed that he had set his goal in life to become “a person who serves others.” Another said he had “a sense of mission as a moralogian.” Others spoke of their “sense of a mission to contribute to the society in which they live.” Yet another said he was determined to “do his utmost to transmit human enlightenment and salvation,” and so improve life for others.

When people face difficulties or hardships, such as serious illness or an impasse in one’s business, some tend to become desperate; our interviewees, however, faced their hardships squarely. The elderly interviewees in particular “had not turned away from such suffering in life.” Some of them said that, when faced with such hardships, they had “pondered on the meaning of encountering such difficulties in their lives” and “accepted them as ordeal given by the grace of God.” One interviewee revealed that he had developed a severe disease when young and had prepared for the worst, and “was ready to face death”; fortunately, he survived his illness. This had led him to understand that one cannot control one’s life and had deepened his awareness that “[he] was given an opportunity to live by divine being or nature.” We can see that those who become aware of meaning in their lives through encountering difficulties seem to develop a sense of mission.

Sometimes, even when young, people experience the kind of adversity in life that produces the feeling that “one is being tested by something greater than oneself.” This may happen while studying abroad or at university in Japan, and one’s distress and bitterness are most intense in the midst of such hardship. Many student interviewees interpreted such difficult experiences as “a preparatory stage for their future” or as “a step in the process of personal growth.” In other words, they treated adversity as an opportunity to enhance their human capacities, e.g. to engage in self-cultivation, or to discipline their minds. One elderly interviewee mentioned that, when facing such bitter experiences, he always tried to recall the advice given by one of his benefactors to “Accept what is given squarely and cope with what comes”.

B. Wisdom, Virtues and Character

Having analyzed the data obtained from interviews, we can now discuss how the moral education offered at Reitaku schools helped to build the character of each interviewee in relation to wisdom and the virtues, bearing in mind the influence of supreme morality as a form of practical wisdom that generates moral thinking and behavior.

The interviewees experienced character building in this environment in the shape of a focus on Hiroike as a role model. This happened indirectly, with an image of Hiroike as a role model being conceived in their minds through writings by and about him, and through the influence of other role models such as their parents, teachers at Reitaku schools, and local moralogians. Hiroike was filled with the spirit of *benevolence*, *tolerance* and *self-reflection*, i.e. the essence of the supreme morality, and his students are infused with such a spirit. In this context the interviewees show *respect* to all their role models, either in trying to follow in Hiroike's footsteps or listening to those who had been influence by him, and then striving to cultivate the qualities of *sincerity*, *selflessness*, and *benevolence*.

It was especially the case that when interviewees experienced difficult times, they tended to follow in Hiroike's footsteps. They attempted to reflect on what was wrong with themselves with *sincerity*, instead of becoming desperate. Through such *self-reflection*, they interpreted the hardships they were facing as opportunities to grow, becoming optimistic about their future rather than being pessimistic and looking back on the past with regret. The older interviewees tended to face hardships more squarely, not running away from them, but realizing that an ordeal was a gift from the transcendent being. They then pondered on the meaning of such suffering in their lives, knowing that Hiroike had done the same in his lifetime. *Self-reflection* also gave them an opportunity to realize that it was not the responsibility of others to change their thinking, but their own task as moral agents to do so. They also learned the need to be selfless so that they could empathize with others, and they were then able to change their own attitude.

In such situations they felt *gratitude* for being connected to their national, family, and spiritual ortholinsons (benefactors). Older interviewees considered it essential to pay respect, and to be connected to their benefactors by asking for and following their advice, by serving the needs of their benefactors, or by giving them peace of mind by informing them of their deeds. We can learn from this that whether one is dealing with one's family, company, or school, it is essential to think and act in ways that bring benefit to the actor, the other person directly involved, and third parties as well, i.e. *Sampo Yoshi*, social action benefitting all three sides.

In terms of moral behavior, a sense of moral indebtedness seems to play an important role as motives of such behavior. When the interviewees became aware of their moral indebtedness to their benefactors, they felt that they owed their benefactors a debt of *gratitude*. This feeling of moral indebtedness, coupled with *gratitude*, gave them the motive to repay their indebtedness to their

benefactors through types of moral conduct such as filial piety, caring for others, etc. In this way, a sense of moral indebtedness becomes a primary motive for moral behavior.

Once they were possessed of motives to behave morally, they needed a purpose in life to give them a sense of direction like, for instance, serving others, contributing to society, or having a sense of mission as students of moral science to pass on the value of supreme morality to others and so improve their own characters and those of others.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have discussed the way in which the practical wisdom of supreme morality imparted by the moral education they received, exerted an influence on the interviewees' characters. When this wisdom they had learned at school as a form of knowledge was put into practice in the real world, and especially when the interviewees, as moral actors, experienced difficulties in life, we have seen that it aroused virtues such as self-reflection, sincerity, benevolence, tolerance, gratitude, connectedness, etc., that helped them to overcome calamities in life. Wisdom that had originated as knowledge only took practical form and allowed the interviewees to improve their characters and grow as human beings. It is noteworthy that, as we have seen, the actors' sense of moral indebtedness, which then engendered gratitude, began to act as a positive motivation for moral practice and self-improvement.

Finally, we should draw attention to the limitations of this research project. Firstly, the interviewees were selected from graduates who had worked or were working for the Institute of Morality or the Hiroike Institute of Education. Therefore, the sample is not a randomly selected one but consists of those who have deeper knowledge of supreme morality and who practice it. Such a sample cannot be used to assess the effect of moral education at Reitaku schools in its entirety. On the other hand, though, it does suffice to characterize the nature of moral education at Reitaku schools. Secondly, for various reasons, the age distribution of the sample was somewhat skewed; there were ten interviewees aged 21 or 22, four more also in their 20s, two in their 30s, one in his 40s, two in their 60s, and five in their 70s. Future research endeavors must correct this imbalance. Lastly, all that has gone before should be treated purely as an interim report, not least because methodologically it requires further development, not least in terms of its use of grounded theory, for which further input from experts in the field will be required.