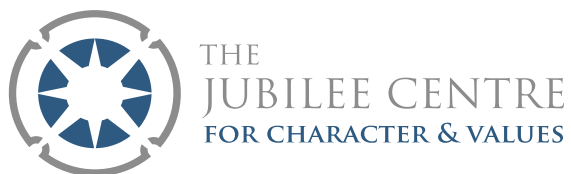


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UNIVERSITY OF  
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**Measuring Virtues in the Context of Voluntary  
Activities by Students of a University in Japan:  
A Pilot Test**

**Kazunobu Horiuchi**

These are unpublished conference papers for the 'Can Virtue Be Measured?', held by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Values at Oriel College, Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2014. These papers are works in progress and should not be cited without author's prior permission.

**School of Education  
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Birmingham**

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**Measuring Virtues in the Context of Voluntary Activities by Students of a University in Japan: A Pilot Test**

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INTRODUCTION

Since March 11, 2011, volunteers from all over Japan have gathered in the affected areas to help the people in many ways. Not only in such extraordinary situations as natural disasters but also in ordinary situations, people spend their time on voluntary activities, visiting nursing homes and so on.

In Japanese higher education, volunteering has become an important part of curricula; universities now give credits to those students who give their time for voluntary activities over certain periods. Government agencies such as the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology are actively encouraging universities not only to give credits to student volunteers but to facilitate student volunteering in many ways.

In the discussion and practice of volunteering by college students, virtues play an important role. Indeed, during their four years at university, students have ample opportunity to nurture and cultivate, through volunteering, such virtues as responsibility, justice, and compassion for instance. Through voluntary activities during their college days, students transform and grow morally and improve their moral character.

At Reitaku University, in which I teach, moral education occupies the foundation of the core curriculum; all the freshmen are required to take a compulsory subject called Moral Science for one year, because the university's founding spirit is moralogy, a moral science<sup>1</sup> expounded and established by Dr. Chikuro Hiroike. When teaching Moral Science course, instructors use two textbooks developed and written by the university's Center for Moral Science and Education (CMSE)<sup>2</sup>. One is *The Textbook for College Students: How Do You Lead Your Life?* (2009), and the

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<sup>1</sup> "Moralogy," or moral science was established by Dr. Chikuro Hiroike in 1916 when he published *A Treatise on Moral Science*, the seminal work of the new field of study, moralogy. Hiroike established a research and social education institution based on moralogy, the Institute of Moralogy in 1926, and in 1935 he founded Moralogy College, the predecessor of Reitaku University in 1935. Moral science based on moralogy has been taught at this institution ever since, after becoming a four year college and changing its name to Reitaku University in 1959.

<sup>2</sup> The Center also produced a book entitled, *Happiness and Virtue beyond East and West: toward A New Global Responsibility* in collaboration with Boston University's Center for Character and Social Responsibility in 2011. The book reflects upon nine virtues: courage, justice, benevolence, gratitude, wisdom, reflection, respect, responsibility, and temperance.

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other is *The Textbook for College Students: (Practical Version): How Do You Think and Lead Your Life?* (2011).

CMSE has been developing a virtue impact scale where seven virtues: benevolence, responsibility, life with hope, gratitude, connectedness, respect, and self-reflection, extracted from the principles of moral science, thus permeated through those two textbooks, are operationalized as questionnaires to be answered by the university students.

There are three major traditions of virtues that have influenced Japanese people or can be commonly detected in their thinking and behavior. The first is the Japanese virtues of honesty, sincerity, modesty, industriousness, and thrift, influenced by Shinto and Buddhist traditions. The second is Confucian virtues which originated in China: compassion, righteousness, polite behavior (or proper rituals), wisdom, sincerity, filial piety, and loyalty. The third is Greek philosophy: Aristotelian virtues of temperance, courage, justice, generosity, pride, good temper, honesty, wittiness, friendliness, modesty, righteous indignation and consciousness. These virtues were imported to Japan through a long history of civilizational, cultural, commercial, and human contacts and exchanges.

The virtue ingredients of the moral science expounded by Hiroike, including those seven virtues, can be discerned in the following five spiritual traditions, i.e. in Buddhism, Christianity, Shinto, Greek philosophy, and Confucianism<sup>3</sup>.

## THEORETICAL CONTEXT

The volunteer course from which this research obtained data is designed to be a service learning course, although the title of the course does not reflect such nomenclature. Service learning is related to Dewey's assertions regarding the value of reflective experience. Dewey<sup>4</sup> argued that education should not only be a matter of "schools, isolated from the subject matter of life experience." Hiroike shares the core idea of the relationship between academic activities and experience in one's life as evidenced by his use of the phrase "unity of knowledge and morality,"<sup>5</sup> meaning that as people gain in knowledge, then, they ideally become more moral and virtuous.

Hiroike emphasized the importance of improving character through accumulating one's virtues by way of thinking, feeling, and acting in an ethical and moral manner; put differently, he

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<sup>3</sup> Chikuro Hiroike, *Prefaces & Tributes to the Author from A Treatise on Moral Science: A First Attempt at Establishing Moralogy as a New Science*, Tokyo: The Institute of Moralogy, 1998 [1928].

<sup>4</sup> Dewey, J. 1961, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, Macmillan, New York: NY, pp. 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> Chikuro Hiroike, *Prefaces & Tributes to the Author from A Treatise on Moral Science: A First Attempt at Establishing Moralogy as a New Science*, Tokyo: The Institute of Moralogy, 1998 [1928], p. 74.

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argues that cognitive, attitudinal, behavioral transformation toward a better self is imperative in order to improve one's character. He also reiterates the importance of collective dormitory life as a microcosm of a society where academic studies in the classrooms by learning, organizing knowledge and acquiring skills can be applied, critically reflected on, and acquired through experience. He writes that such transformation requires a profound shift of personality as a whole, involving cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and epistemological change with unremitting self-reflective activities.<sup>6</sup>

Mezirow argues that critical thinking plays a significant role in making transformational learning possible. Transformational learning is a process in which, in the depth of one's personality, one's current value and belief systems are questioned, examined, and reconstructed.<sup>7</sup> Put another way, transformational learning is not just a shift in knowledge and behavior but an epistemological change.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

As the title of this research indicates this is a pilot test. The overarching, longitudinal goal of this investigation, however, is to identify the virtues taught, latently or overtly, in the Moral Science course and to determine the extent to which the knowledge regarding these virtues affects the students' transformation of their attitudes and behaviors with the opportunity of their participation in and the experience of the voluntary activities. Specifically this research posits and explores two primary questions:

*RQ1.* How much impetus do the seven virtues give students, and how much do they transform their attitudes and behaviors?

*RQ2.* Which one of these seven virtues most strongly impacts students' attitudes and behaviors?

In order to investigate the attitudinal and behavioral transformation it is imperative to observe and obtain data from the students regarding the facts about their cognitive understanding of the seven virtues, and their attitudinal and behavioral traits concerning the seven virtues before

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<sup>6</sup> Chikuro Hiroike, *Towards Supreme Morality: An Attempt to Establish the New Science of Moralogy*. Kashiwa, Japan: The Institute of Moralogy, 1928. English translation, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Mezirow, J. "Learning to think like an adult: core concepts of transformation theory," in Mezirow, J. and Associates (eds), *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA, 2000, pp 3-34.

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participating in the voluntary activities; in other words, both a pretest before voluntary activities and a post-test after the activities regarding these virtues must be administered in order to measure properly the impact of these virtues on the students' attitudinal and behavioral transformation.

This research therefore is not intended to demonstrate that some or all of these virtues influence students to the extent that they transform their attitudes and behaviors. It focuses only on the post-test: the theoretical results of the students' attitudinal and behavioral transformation.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

Participants in this survey were those students who enrolled in the volunteer class in the fall semester of 2013 taught by Professor Shujiro Mizuno, a leading researcher of CMSE. The number of students who took part in this survey was 32 but the number of valid questionnaires is 31 (1 incomplete questionnaire was excluded). They are all freshmen with 20 female and 11 male students. The survey was conducted in the last class of the course on December 16, 2013 after finishing all the volunteer activities, and when all the students were given an opportunity to look back on what they had learned through voluntary activities.

The types of volunteer activities the students participated in during the semester were: (1) welfare facilities including nursing homes, terminal care center, juvenile asylums in Japan or a rehabilitation facility in foreign countries (Thailand and Laos), (2) educational institutions including Japanese Schools in a foreign country (Thailand), schools for handicapped children in Japan, (3) relief activities including reconstruction activities in the affected areas by the March 11, 2011 disaster.

### Survey Development

First each virtue is defined, operationalized, and turned into a questionnaire.

The first virtue we deal with is benevolence. It is defined as kindness and generosity stemming from “a compassionate heart that feels the empathy of the suffering and strives for others' happiness”<sup>8</sup>. It consists of 1) compassion for life forms such as vegetation and animals, with never trivializing and disregarding them; 2) considerateness for material resources including natural resources, and never wasting essence of material resources; 3) affection for human beings, with not

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<sup>8</sup> Kevin Ryan, Bernice Lerner, Karen E. Bohlin, Osamu Nakayama, Shujiro Mizuno, Kazunobu Horiuchi (eds.), *Happiness and Virtue beyond East and West: toward A New Global Responsibility*, Tuttle Publishing, 2011, p. 81.

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only loving family members and relatives but also loving them with impartiality towards all human beings in the world as fellow human beings; 4) appropriate self-love, with pride but not loving oneself too much in a self-centered manner; and 5) sympathy towards pains of others, with sympathizing with their pains, difficulties, and sorrow, trying to give loving hands to them so that they could solve their problems.

The second virtue is responsibility. It is defined as “an attitude in which we perceive our role and the duties tied to that role,”<sup>9</sup> a duty for which someone is held accountable to oneself, family members, neighborhood and local community, school and workplace, and one’s country. It consist of 1) responsibility to oneself, being accountable for maintaining and managing one’s health or enhancing one’s ability and skills, increasing one’s knowledge; 2) responsibility to family members, understanding and fulfilling one’s duties and roles for the family members, and taking over traditional values from generation to generation; 3) responsibility to neighborhood and local community, paying attention to the needs of the local community thus fulfilling one’s duties as a citizen; 4) responsibility in schools and workplace, with works being performed loyally, diligently, and honestly; and 5) responsibility to one’s country, with paying respect to the head of state, performing one’s duties as a citizen.

The third virtue we deal with is life with hope. The life with hope is a life full of desire with expectation of or belief in fulfillment or success, consisting of a faith in moral causality, enhancement of moral character and achievement of happiness, sense of being needed by others, balance of knowledge and virtue, and sense of being given life from Mother Nature and others including parents, ancestors, and divine beings. These ingredients of this virtue are, for the purpose of operationalization, further elaborated as: 1) Firm faith in the moral causality that due efforts can always be rewarded; 2) Enhancing moral character and achieving happiness, thus being filled with joy of one’s moral growth which then engender hope for life; 3) With a goal of or purpose in life, believing that you can help others; 4) Applying knowledge and skills acquired from family tradition, school, or workplace to the happiness of others; 5) Being aware of indebtedness for one’s life to Mother Nature and such other people as ancestors, parents, and divine beings.

The fourth virtue we deal with in this study is gratitude. Gratitude is defined as “the universal spirit to recognize and acknowledge one’s debt, an act as small as thanking someone who has given us kindness or help and as profound as appreciating the natural world for providing life.”<sup>10</sup> It is the state in feeling grateful as in gratitude to the blessings from nature, to indebtedness

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<sup>9</sup> Kevin Ryan, Bernice Lerner, Karen E. Bohlin, Osamu Nakayama, Shujiro Mizuno, Kazunobu Horiuchi (eds.), *Happiness and Virtue beyond East and West: toward A New Global Responsibility*, Tuttle Publishing, 2011, p. 197.

<sup>10</sup> Kevin Ryan, Bernice Lerner, Karen E. Bohlin, Osamu Nakayama, Shujiro Mizuno, Kazunobu Horiuchi (eds.), *Happiness and Virtue beyond East and West: toward A New Global Responsibility*, Tuttle

from family, to the benefits from society and country, to the benefits from predecessors and employers or higher-ups in a corporation, and to the benefits from educators and spiritual benefactors. These elements of the virtue gratitude are, for the purpose of operationalization as questionnaires, to be further developed as 1) Feeling gratitude to blessings from nature such as seafood and vegetables and material resources; 2) Feeling obliged for indebtedness from ancestors and family; 3) Being grateful to the benefits from country guaranteeing peace and security of the people and society as a base of our daily lives; 4) Being thankful toward predecessors who have contributed to the advancement of sciences, technologies, and knowledge of which benefits enable our daily lives, and toward employers or

higher-ups in a corporation, and 5) Feeling gratitude to blessings from teachers at schools or colleges, and from spiritual benefactors including divine beings, sages, clergies, etc.

The fifth virtue in this survey is connectedness. The connectedness in this study consists of a sense of being connected with the universe and the nature on Planet Earth, a sense of being connected with all life forms, a sense of being connected with other people in one's primary groups, a sense of being connected with people and culture of one's community, country, and the world, and a sense of being connected with past and future generations. These elements of the virtue connectedness are, for the purpose of operationalization as questionnaires, to be further developed as: 1) Being able to view one's position within nature and the universe, respecting and accepting blessings from them with gratitude; 2) Having a sense of connected with all life forms, respecting biodiversity, trying to contribute to its development and preservation; 3) Having a sense of connectedness with the members of family, local community, school, and workplace where one can cooperate with each other without feeling isolated; 4) Having a sense of connectedness with the local area where one has grown up, country, and countries all over the world, respecting and making efforts to preserve their cultures and heritages; 5) Having a sense of connectedness with the deceased ancestors or the late predecessors of the country or of the world who have contributed to the welfare of the country or the world.

The sixth virtue that we deal with in this research is that of respect. Respect is defined as an attitude of high regard, of honor, and of good opinion with the following traits: respect for life, respect for oneself, respect for others, respect for sages, divine beings, etc., and respect for the group one belongs to. Therefore, these ingredients of the virtue respect are, for the purpose of operationalization as questionnaires, to be further elaborated as: 1) Respecting all life forms with a conviction of symbiosis; 2) Having a view of life based on firm conviction, and being aware of a purpose in one's life; 3) Positively taking care of others with compassion hoping for their happiness; 4) Respecting history, culture, and customs of the family, local community, school, workplace and the country; and 5) Respecting divine beings and the world sages who preached

their teachings for the sake of human beings, one should learn lessons from these sages and practice them.

The seventh virtue in our survey is self-reflection. Self-reflection is defined as a capacity of exercising introspection and willingness to understand the basic nature of oneself in order to either improve one's moral character or to give meaning to the individual. Self-reflection also comprises the following ingredients: awareness regarding oneself and objective evaluation, self-expression, critical thinking, skill of synthesizing, and collective awareness in the group. These ingredients of the virtue self-reflection are, for the purpose of operationalization as questionnaires, to be further elaborated as: 1) Introspecting oneself calmly, one can understand and objectively evaluate things one cherishes, conviction, view of values, and personality; 2) Understanding calmly and accurately what is happening, one can express things as they are without exaggeration or underestimating; 3) Avoiding superficial understanding of things, one can understand its meaning and its implications, creating several alternative solutions; 4) Analyzing one's feelings, attitudes, new information, one can integrate those; and 5) One can objectively observe and understand calmly and accurately the cultures and values of the group one belongs to including family, local community, school, workplace. Without being self-centered as a group Based on these definitions, questionnaire items are created, and then a scale of 5 is set up: 1 as "strongly disagree," 2 as "somewhat disagree," 3 as "neither disagree nor agree," 4 as "somewhat agree," and 5 as "strongly agree."

In order to maximize the reliability of the self-report questionnaire this survey employs open-ended questions. There are five open-ended questions to elicit more nuanced answers from the subject. The first open-ended question reads: "What did you learn through voluntary activities?" The second open-ended question reads: "What kind of impact did this volunteering class give on your growth as a human?" The third question reads: "What kind of lesson or words you thought as important to you through volunteering?" The Fourth question reads: "What is the most impacted episode in the volunteering?" The last question reads: "What kind of society do you want to create?" Interview session is also employed in order to strengthen the reliability of the questionnaire responses from students.

## RESULTS

The mean score of the students' responses to the questionnaire was 3.714 out of 5. with the highest score being 4.19 and the lowest 2.87. However, the value of Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.4575$  ( $< 0.8$ ) If it's over 0.8 questionnaire items are sufficiently reliable.

Nevertheless, it seems that there is an impact of virtues upon the hypothetical



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transformation of attitudes and behaviors of the students and in some cases these are significantly high. As for the average virtue scores, Respect scored 3.839, Connectedness scored 3.836, and Gratitude scored 3.813, the mean score being 3.714. In four virtue items out of seven, i.e. Connectedness, Responsibility, Benevolence, and Respect, the score was over 4.03.

It could be said that the virtue of connectedness gave the strongest impetus to the hypothetical transformation, because two ingredients of the virtue of connectedness are significantly higher and scored over 4.03, as revealed in the results of this investigation.

To be more precise, the strongest impact given to students' attitudinal and behavioral transformation is "I now realize that I have been indebted to many people around me." (4.19) The third strongest impact item reads: "I can now recognize that people are caring and compassionate toward me." (4.13) It is worth noting that eleven students wrote "connectedness," "human relations," "cooperation," and "mutual help" in the open-ended question that asked "What did you learn through voluntary activities?" Also an interview with a male student confirms connectedness played significant roles in the reevaluation of his life experiences and self-awareness in that he is living in a network of interrelatedness.

The second strongest virtue after connectedness is that of responsibility and the item reads: "I can now make efforts to fulfill roles assigned to me in the class I attend and in my work place." (4.16). However, it may be noted that one student mentioned in the interview with me that he came to be more interested in class work since he was involved in the voluntary activity. This suggests that engaging in volunteering would make the student more responsible in his academic work.

The third strongest virtue item is benevolence, (the questionnaire item for which reads: "I now wish for peace in the society I live in.) which scored 4.06. One student wrote in the open-ended questions that she felt it very important to be more amiable toward other people because the people she met during the volunteer activity were very kind and warm-hearted. Another student wrote that he thought he should be more considerate to others.

The fourth most powerful virtue item is respect which scored 4.03 on the impact scale. Its questionnaire item reads: "I can now respect others' opinions and preferences more than before." Three students wrote in the open-ended questions that they should think about the feelings and ideas of others when they communicate with them. One student interviewed reiterated that the most important thing he learned was how to communicate with others and for that, he continued, one should respect others' opinions.

The score for the self-reflection items are lower with one being 3.74 and the other 3.65. However, five students reiterated in the open-ended questions that they came to reflect upon themselves calmly more often than before. One student also wrote that knowledge alone is not enough to grow and that experience is necessary. It may be noted that the lowest score went to one

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of the virtue items of Benevolence, i.e. “I can now love myself.”

## DISCUSSION

This research, as mentioned before, was attempted not to examine the correlation between the seven virtues and students’ attitudinal and behavioral transformation after experiencing volunteer activities, but to set up a post-test to test for transformations in the future in this longitudinal research.

There are three possible reasons for low reliability; all of them are definitional problems. Firstly, the seven virtues were not clearly isolated from each other when they were defined. At the level of virtues, Benevolence involves “affection for human beings,” and Respect also contains a very similar ingredient of virtue which is “respect for others.” Some of the virtue items of Benevolence, for instance, overlap with those of Connectedness. One of the virtue items of Benevolence, “I can now contact with others around me in a more friendly and amiable” way has some overlapping area of meaning with one of the virtue items of Connectedness, “I can now help with each other in classroom and in extracurricular activities.” (3.47)

Secondly, some virtue items are vague and concern experiences out of the daily situation, for example, Connectedness “I feel now that I am indebted to the society and the country of which I am a citizen.” There are very few college students who feel this way, unless they experience an emergency situation and have had their lives saved by a rescue team in their native country or in a foreign country. Also the virtue item of Hope, “I am now trying to make efforts to improve my moral character” seems to be very ambiguous. It needs to include concrete behaviors to elicit more meaningful responses.

Thirdly, some virtue items are too complex to get significant answer from the students. The virtue item of Connectedness, “I am now willing to help needy people by donating money or volunteering for those who are involved in a disaster with the feeling of being human and living in the same world.” The sentence is composed of two parts, the first part being “I want to help people in the world,” and the second part being “I have a sense of being human and living in the same world.” Even if students want to mark 4 or 5 on the virtue scale, if they have no such sense then they tend to mark 1 or 2.

Despite these problems of this research the good news is that it found that the mean score of the students’ responses to the questionnaire was relatively high: 3.714 out of 5. It seems that there is a certain influence of virtues upon the assumed students’ attitudinal and behavioral transformation and in some cases these are significantly high.

We have found that four virtues out of seven are relatively more powerful in terms of the

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theoretical impact upon the shift in students' attitudes and behavior after their experiencing volunteer activities. These are connectedness, responsibility, benevolence, and respect. The virtue of connectedness resulted in the highest score.

This result, however, can be explained as a cultural or social trait of Japan. Japan is a collectivistic society as opposed to America which is characterized as an individualistic society. Or it may be because it is a matter of fact that human beings flock together. Society, according to one of the definitions in sociology, is a system of interrelatedness or interdependence of human beings. It is a matter of fact, one could argue, that people form groups naturally to achieve a certain purpose, helping each other.

## IMPLICATIONS

As mentioned in the discussion section, careful redefining of virtues for more reliable operationalization is needed.

Further research is required to construct a pretest for those students who have never experienced volunteer activities. The seven virtues need to be redefined and elaborated on so that virtue items can be translated properly into a questionnaire to test the attitudinal and behavioral traits of students without volunteer experience

After administering the pretest, yet further research must be conducted using the post-test to finally measure the extent to which the seven virtues have impact on students' attitudinal and behavioral transformation. In order to maximize the validity and reliability this cycle of testing needs to be repeated continually.

## APPENDIX

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#### Questionnaire Items

##### (1) Benevolence:

1. I can now contact with others around me more friendly and amiably.
2. I can now use daily commodities, stationary, and clothes more carefully.
3. I can now sympathize with my family and friends who are in trouble.
4. I can now spend my time for the happiness and joy for others.
5. I can now love myself.
6. Now I like my parents, relatives, and friends, talking to them more often than before.
7. I now make efforts in preserving nature.
8. I now wish for peace of the society I live in.

##### (2) Responsibility:

9. I can now make efforts to play roles given to me in the class I attend and in my work place
10. When spending money I can now stop buying unnecessary things or impulse buying.
11. I am now aware of my role in my family and am living my life thinking about the happiness of my family.
12. I am now willing to try to improve my strong points and ability.

##### (3) Life with hope:

13. I am now trying to make efforts to improve my moral character.
14. I can now think that good results will follow after good deeds.
15. I have found and now understand meaning of life, something worth doing in my life, and am doing it.
16. I can now think that it is important to devote myself to contributing to the society.
17. I now behave based on the idea that due efforts can always be rewarded.

##### (4) Gratitude:

18. I am now able to feel gratitude to my parents.
19. I can now feel grateful to the predecessors and experienced people.
20. I can now feel grateful to the people who are making efforts to sustain the society I live in.
21. I can now feel grateful to the blessings of Mother Nature.
22. I can now feel grateful to those teachers who taught me at school and instructed me in the extracurricular activities.

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(5) Connectedness:

23. I can now take part in various activities with others.
24. I can now help with each other in classroom and in extracurricular activities.
25. I am now willing to help needy people by donating money or volunteering for those who are involved in the disaster with a sense of human beings living in the same world.
26. I now realize that I have been indebted to many people around me.
27. I now feel that I am not alone and that I am connected to many people.
28. I now feel that I am connected to a variety of living forms.
29. I can now recognize that people are caring and compassionate toward me.
30. I now recognize that a society is established by the efforts of various people.
31. After having done something, I now try to think about the influences of my behavior on others.
32. I feel now that I am indebted to the society and the country of which I am a citizen.

(6) Respect:

33. I can now respect others' opinions and preferences than before.
34. I am now proud of and respect my parents and family.
35. I now think that it is important to protect and preserve culture and tradition of the local community where I grew up and of the country.
36. I now think that I myself should be happy.

(7) Self-reflection:

37. After meeting someone, I can now reflect upon myself calmly and look back if my deeds were good or bad.
38. I now no longer simply accept whatever others say but think about anything very carefully.