

Article

Japanese View of Nature: Discursive Tradition, Its Problems and Implications for Food Studies

Haruka Ueda ^{1,2}¹ Japan Society for the Promotion of Sciences, Tokyo 102-0083, Japan; ueda.haruka@b.mbox.nagoya-u.ac.jp² Graduate School of Environmental Studies, Nagoya University, Nagoya 464-8601, Japan

Abstract: Revisiting one's view of nature is essential if one is to construct a sustainable food system. In particular, the Japanese view of nature has been widely recognised as the philosophy of coexistence between humans and nature, with some optimism and over-simplification. In this article, a wide range of literature regarding the Japanese view of nature is carefully analysed, and three discursive traditions of such views—ancient thought, Buddhism and neo-Confucianism—are discussed. Although it is true that the harmonious philosophy between humans and nature has always existed in Japan as a cultural device, some major problems—namely, the confusion of history and ideology, the composite of traditional and modern natural views within contemporary eaters and the inevitable conflict between humans (the killers) and nature (the killed)—should be resolved to ultimately activate such an aesthetic natural view in encouraging favourable eating behaviours for sustainable natural food environments.

Keywords: view of nature; coexistence between humans and nature; Japanese food cultures; sociology of food



Citation: Ueda, H. Japanese View of Nature: Discursive Tradition, Its Problems and Implications for Food Studies. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 8057. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14138057>

Academic Editor: Philip H. Howard

Received: 8 June 2022

Accepted: 30 June 2022

Published: 1 July 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

1.1. Views of Nature as an Unexplored Theme in Sustainable Food System Discourses

A sustainable food system can be achieved only if sustainability at economic, social (health and food security) and environmental dimensions are all ensured. This point was officially confirmed in the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit, under which international consensus each country shall take concrete actions in a close relation to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. A considerable body of research has long been carried out on each of the three dimensions of food systems, although the environmental stream is relatively newer than the other two (in economics and public health). The current challenge concerns how to facilitate both interdisciplinary and international collaboration to grasp and act on the totality of food systems.

This article turns a focus to one of the previously neglected but indispensable topics in deepening our reflection on food systems—views of nature. Each country's view of nature is one of the defining factors for the success of its environmental management, whereas, from the sociocultural perspective, it can also influence what healthy eating (or eating well) means to the concerned population. Furthermore, natural lives are perhaps the most important target of daily reflection for agri-food producers. Certainly, in the UN Food Systems Summit, the diversity of such views of nature was respected, with the statement that 'the discourse on food systems must not abstract from the issue of culture and values' [1] (p. 11); however, their main concern was indigenous societies and not developed countries. As I shall discuss later, the natural views are contested even in the latter societies; thus, its homogeneity cannot be taken for granted.

1.2. Japanese Food Cultures: A Prominent Example of Western Curiosity to Non-Naturalism

The relationship between humans and nature has undoubtedly been one of the critical themes in philosophy, geography, sociology and anthropology, and, recently, it has gained

an increasing importance in food studies as well. A French philosopher, Edgar Morin, might be the first to discover the emergence of ‘neo-archaic’ mentality, in which ‘nature’ was newly celebrated as a contrast to artificial food and became an original (*arche*) source of existence [2]. Such examples in France include the development of the Nouvelle Cuisine movement, gastronomic tourism and the heritisation of local and popular dishes; however, one should not dismiss, behind such contemporary phenomena, eaters’ augmented anxiety about the industrialisation, globalisation and medicalisation of food [3].

This condition has encouraged food scholars to explore various meanings of ‘nature’. In a comparative survey regarding the meaning of ‘natural’, European and American consumers exhibited more common understandings than differences, such as its positive quality, the predominance of plants over animals, the organic (*biologique*) and the absence of human intervention [4]. Another study carefully traced the process of naturalisation by agri-food industries, in which the natural is no longer unidimensional but rather a coordinated quality with multiple values, such as domestic, ecological and creative ones [5]. This empirical orientation is suggestive of the Western rational attitude to nature that would otherwise remain considered as an imaginative or irrational driver for contemporary eating. In contrast, there has been no attempt that lives up to the Western food scholars’ call to ‘examine attitudes to natural in non-industrial cultures, and in Japan, the most prominent developed country outside of the Euro-American tradition’ [4] (p. 454).

As part of the reflective orientation to the Western view of nature, some scholars have explored non-Western natural views with great curiosity. In his anthropological attempt to overcome the dualism between nature and culture, Philippe Descola proposed four ways of identifying human–nature relationships: totemism, animism, analogism and naturalism, the last of which has been dominant in the West [6]. Although Descola did not attribute any particular mode of identification to Japan, the country has been demonstrated to be one of the regions with a non-dualist philosophy between humans and nature. It is in this context that Japan has attracted Western intellectual attention as having a unique philosophy of coexistence between humans and nature [7–10]. Partly helped by a growing nationalism in contemporary Japan, these foreign perspectives have been enthusiastically accepted by domestic scholars, without regard to optimism and over-simplification within these discourses.

This influence does not exclude agri-food domains. The ‘nature-loving Japan’ discourse has been quite convenient for promoting its gastro-politics. The first movement was an interaction between Japanese and French high cuisines from the 1970s. Many French chef–evangelists (Robuchon, Bocuse, etc.) traveled to Japan and obtained inspiration from the essence of Japanese high cuisine, such as aesthetics of simplicity, freshness and seasonality, all of which matched with and even sophisticated the principles of the Nouvelle Cuisine [11,12]. The international valorisation of Japanese high cuisine has led to a drastic increase in the number of popular Japanese restaurants worldwide (6.5 times from 2006 to 2019) and in the total exports of agri-food products (over one trillion yen in 2021) [13,14].

This tendency culminated in 2013 with the project of registering *washoku* (Japanese food cultures) as an intangible cultural heritage with the United Nations of Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) [15]. Herein, ‘the respect for nature’ is defined as a foundational sprit of *washoku*, without specifying its philosophical origin, and this discourse has been reproduced and reinforced until the present time with subsequent safeguarding measures [16]. This risks an underestimation of the inherent complexity and contradiction within the Japanese view of nature, which would not be favourable for both Japanese and foreign food scholars and professionals.

Drawing on this background, in this article, I revisit the discursive traditions of the Japanese view of nature—namely, ancient thoughts, Buddhism and neo-Confucianism—by consulting a wide range of literature. This review is followed by an identification of some problems of these discourses in constructing a sustainable food system. I conclude the discussion by extracting implications for food studies in both the West and the non-west. It would not be insignificant to investigate Japan as the earliest non-Western country to

encounter the West and achieve modernisation, to be the country with the self-pride of ‘nature-loving ethnicity’ and to be the country with an ongoing *sakoku* (isolationist) policy in food studies.

2. Discursive Traditions of the ‘Japanese View of Nature’

2.1. Research on the Japanese View of Nature

Research on the Japanese view of nature after the Meiji restoration in 1868 can be largely divided into four developmental stages. The first stage came with the victory in the Russo–Japanese war (1904–1905) and the resultant nationalism across all literary areas. *Kokumin-sei Zyu-ron* (*Ten Lectures on the National Character*) became a seminal text in 1907, in which ‘to love plants and trees, to appreciate nature’ was defined as one of ten ethnic virtues of the Japanese [17]. This was followed by the popularisation of *nihonjin-ron* (Japanese cultural studies), among which two groups of literature should be noted here. The first type of scholars took an environmentalist position and argued that Japan’s unique environmental characteristics (mild climate, seasonality, frequent natural disasters, etc.) formed the people’s mentality to accommodate themselves to nature rather than to conquer it [18,19]. The second group introduced Zen, one of the Kamakura Buddhist schools, as the foundational philosophy in developing Japanese aesthetics that unify humans with nature [20–22]. With regard to eating and drinking, the former contributed to idealising the use of fresh, diverse and seasonal foods, whereas the latter brought a particular emphasis to the aesthetics of the tea ceremony.

The second developmental stage began as a post-war reflection on the unmaturing modernity in Japan and continued until approximately the 1970s. The two most important philosophies relating to the natural view are Masao Maruyama’s theory of ‘ancient layer’ in 1972 [23] and Shuichi Kato’s theory of ‘hybrid culture’ in 1974 [24]. Both theories sought to explain how various religious traditions have been accepted or modified to ultimately form Japanese philosophy and how scientific and naturalistic views of nature have not been cultivated, as detailed later.

From the late-1960s to the 1990s, this critical stance was gradually replaced with the next stage, in which literary men [25], philosophers [26] and even natural scientists [27] began to re-evaluate the previously ‘premodern’ thought of non-division between humans and nature as a positive idea of their coexistence in the face of increasing environmental destruction. Additionally, high-quality works on the Japanese view of nature by foreign scholars, such as Augustin Berque’s *Le Sauvage et l’Artifice*, began to appear [8].

The last stage until the present time is marked by the emergence of ‘meta-discursive analysis’, by which a series of previous works on the Japanese view of nature is treated not as historical facts but as discourses, with a full caution to the ideological context of each discursive production. Sadami Suzuki’s *Nihonjin no Shizenkan* (*Japanese View of Nature*), published in 2018, represents the current extent of such meta-discursive analysis [28]; nevertheless, I later propose a more pragmatic reading for the benefit of food studies.

Given the existence of this large body of literature, it is not without reason to say that the Japanese love nature or, more precisely, love to talk about nature. Interestingly, in contrast to this general trend in *nihonjin-ron*, there is a scarcity of Japanese food studies on the theme of the natural view. As a consequence, some research exhibits more materialist concerns (foodstuffs, cooking utensils, etc.) than philosophical ones, while other studies uncritically integrate a part of *nihonjin-ron*, with frequent reference to the UNESCO’s definition of *washoku*. Even Naomichi Ishige, a father of Japanese food culture studies, noted both with optimism and hesitation that ‘for solving environmental problems, it is really beneficial to link such an emotional attachment [the Japanese natural view] with sciences to form a new human behavioural ethics [. . .] but it is too much for me to handle’ [29].

Drawing on these achievements and limitations in the relevant literature, I discuss below the major discursive traditions of the Japanese natural view. Since numerous literatures have been produced on this topic both in academic and non-academic fields with

various rationales, three strategies were taken to guide the review in this article. First, the review was structured based on three religious philosophies—namely, ancient thoughts, Buddhism and neo-Confucianism—that have impacted many dimensions of Japanese intellectual and artistic fields. Second, a particular focus was placed on discourses directly related to eating and drinking, such as tea ceremony and *yojo* (health). Third, a major analysis was made only of books for which their legacies have been widely recognised by the Japanese readers, neither of undiscovered books nor peripheral articles. Therefore, each of the following discourses is not entirely new for Japanese cultural studies; however, the attempt to consistently integrate them into Japanese food philosophy would be the first of its kind.

2.2. Ancient Thought or Animism

Ancient thought here refers to an indigenous mindset that existed prior to the influence of Chinese cultures, most notably, Buddhism. In relation to the human relationship with nature, this indigenous thought can be characterised in two ways. The first feature is animism, as proposed by Descola [6], in which humans have the same interiority with nature and, thus, there is no existential human–nature distinction. However, it does not automatically mean their harmonious coexistence, because nature is, at the same time, a source of fear and awe. In ancient times, the Japanese worshipped nature as *kami* (divine spirits) as a way of negotiating with nature [26]. One can argue that the subsequent Shintoism and Buddhism, particularly the thought of innate enlightenment, were merely revised and institutionalised thought systems of this animistic view of nature [30].

The second feature is their view of nature uniquely as *onozukara* (naturalness), which is distinguished from *honshitsu* (essence) that is inherent in Chinese or Western concepts of nature. In his analysis of ancient texts, Maruyama extracted Japanese thought of *tsugi-tsugi ni nari-yuku ikioi* (impulse of continual becoming) as an ‘ancient layer’ that has continued to define the patterns of accepting or modifying foreign thoughts [23]. This ancient thought resembles the infinite temporal continuity of vegetation’s natural bloom, growth and reproduction. However, negative sides of this thought of natural flow were the weakening of human agency, the realistic rejection of transcendental philosophies and the absence of historical consciousness (called ‘eternal now’), which, ultimately, had long prevented Japan from cultivating the modern view of nature [23]. Kato observed the development of this ancient thought in *Manyōshū*, the oldest collection of poetry, from the late 8th century, in which aristocratic poets demonstrated curiosity toward nature and used it to delicately express their romance, although it was not the attachment to nature itself [31].

Poetry has continued to serve a major discursive device in stimulating Japanese sensitivity toward nature. *Kokinshū*, the first imperial anthology of Japanese poems, from the beginning of the 10th century, provided a slightly more elaborate view of nature by dedicating a volume to the four seasons, in which the poets no longer extolled human love but preferred to describe its subtle beauties. At the time of the regime change from the Heian to the Kamakura period, at the beginning of the 13th century, the anthology by the impoverished aristocrats, *Shin-Kokinshū*, added a new aesthetic of nature—such as an appreciation of withering of flowers, not the full bloom—by borrowing from the Buddhist awareness of impermanence [31]. This new aesthetic was for influencing a wide range of arts and techniques, including cooking and the tea ceremony; again, it is Buddhism that became their philosophical backbone.

2.3. Buddhism

The Japanese Buddhist attitude towards nature has experienced three developmental stages. First, Japanese Esoteric Buddhism, from the 9th century, developed the *hongaku* (innate enlightenment) philosophy, which was similar to but granted a theoretical justification to the ancient animism [26,31]. According to Kukai, the founder of the Shingon Esoteric Buddhist school in Japan, one must realise that all things have the Buddha’s nature—that is, being enlightened originally—and that there is an existential unity between humans

and nature [32]. However, in the process of the popularisation of this *hongaku* thought, its transcendental aspect was rejected, and it was transformed into the worldly belief that justifies the existence of things ‘as they are’, which ultimately led to underestimating the importance of Buddhist practices.

Second, the subsequent Kamakura schools were birthed with a mission to restore the Buddhist trainings and disciplines while inheriting the *hongaku* thought [33]. Among the various schools, Zen philosophy played a significant role in articulating everyday practices, including cooking and eating, as *gyo* (the serious training) to reach the true Dharma. Dōgen, the father of the Soto Zen school, wrote considerably about cooking and eating and established the philosophical basis of the natural view founded in the subsequent tea ceremony and *kaiseki* cuisine [34–37]. Dōgen’s philosophy of food can be characterised by the following concepts:

- i. *Hongaku* thought, in which one must realise the unity of humans with nature [36];
- ii. Attitude to ‘love mountains’ on the account that nature is the Dharma’s teacher [36];
- iii. Cooking and eating as integral parts of *gyo*, the Zen trainings [34,35];
- iv. Respect for the natural flux of time, notably, seasonal diversity of foods and fresh tastes [34];
- v. Three virtues in cooking: lightness, purity and rightness [34,35];
- vi. Six tastes: bitter, sour, sweet, salty, hot and *tanmi* (original taste) [34,35];
- vii. Aesthetics of poverty, in which a worldly desire for food is abandoned [37].

It is surprising to see that most elements that constitute current natural aesthetics in Japanese cuisine had already been presented by Dōgen in the 13rd century. In the third developmental stage, the Zen-originated aesthetics have influenced a wide range of Japanese arts and techniques, such as poetry, *noh*, ink painting, flower arranging, gardening and the tea ceremony. Sen no Rikyu, a lay monk and tea merchant of the 16th century, infused the Zen philosophy of poverty, purity and naturalness and, ultimately, aestheticised the humble popular tradition of the tea ceremony as *wabi-cha*, although the influence of Zen was more or less exaggerated in the subsequent institutionalisation of various schools of *wabi-cha* [38]. The *wabi-cha*-style tea ceremony consisted of a simple meal, such as rice, soup and no more than three dishes—which were referred to simply as *kaiseki*—and tea drinking. *kaiseki* was later popularised as *kaiseki-ryori* (cuisine) in restaurants and, in its simplified form, on family tables, ultimately becoming the major tradition of current Japanese cuisine.

Thus far, I have discussed the positive aesthetics of nature in Japanese Buddhism. However, one should not ignore that Buddhist philosophy can lead to a completely opposite view of the coexistence between humans and nature as pain, conflict and contradiction. The most representative case is Kenji Miyazawa, a novelist of children’s literature and a kind of Japanese H.C. Andersen at the beginning of 21st century [39,40]. Miyazawa is also a vegetarian inspired by the Buddhist philosophy, in which, again, all things are believed to have life or Buddha nature. In a series of his works, the complex relationships between eaters (killers) and eaten (the killed) were the main theme of reflection.

Ironically, in *The Restaurant of Many Orders*, Miyazawa reversed the human–nature hierarchy. In the story, two gentlemen went to a forest to hunt. Finding themselves hungry, they found a bizarrely named restaurant called Wildcat House and were required to follow many peculiar rules to enter the dining room, such as ‘please comb your hair and remove the mud off your shoes’ and ‘please rub your entire body with lots of salt’. In the end, these hunters realised that they were following rules not for eaters but, rather, for the eaten (by giant cats) and they grew horrified by such a fact [41]. Another work, *The Nighthawk Star*, extends Miyazawa’s reflection on this inevitable fact with painful and sorrowful insights. The nighthawk is bullied by other birds for his ugly appearance. One day, the hawk even demands that he change his name or face death otherwise. The nighthawk wishes to keep the name he was given by God; however, he suddenly realises that he, too, despite his ugly appearance kills insects to live, just as the hawk plans to kill him. The nighthawk cannot endure the pain and sorrow of such a fact and decides to stop killing insects and to fly far away, ultimately becoming a star in the night sky [42]. In this tale, Miyazawa reflects on

the painful fate of humans who kill plants and animals; however, it is made possible only in the imaginative world of his stories and not in the real world.

2.4. Neo-Confucianism

In the Edo period from the 17th century, the Buddhist-originated aesthetic view of nature was further developed by Bashō, a lay monk and poet who travelled throughout Japan and witnessed nature with his own eyes, in contrast to previous poets, who were continually based at the imperial court. One of Bashō's poems, 'stillness—sinking into the rocks, cicadas' cry' [43], was made possible only if he climbed up to the Yamadera Temple built into the steep mountainside and listened to the cicadas' cry there. Bashō's contribution was significant, because, according to Kato, 'It was through Bashō's poems that the Japanese have started to believe they love nature' [31] (p. 533).

Behind the full bloom of Buddhist natural aesthetics, the introduction of neo-Confucianism, as politically accredited ethical thought, infused Japanese intellectuals with a new way of viewing nature [26]. With the neo-Confucianist principle of *kakubutsu-chichi*, an intellectual method to realise the unity of natural laws (*ri*) and their embodied nature within humans (*xin*), the people were encouraged to gain a perfect knowledge of natural laws, which set the stage for the development of practical studies (agronomy, medicine, phytology, etc.). Ekken Kaibara's *Yōjo-Kun (Instructions for Keeping Healthy)* in 1713 is the most relevant practical study of eating and drinking. The concept of *qi* was the physical form of metaphysical *ri* and, thus, a secondary matter in the original Chinese neo-Confucianism, whereas the former was given the state of primary reflection in the developmental process of Japanese neo-Confucianism [44]. Kaibara also reduced the original dualism between *qi* and *ri* into the monism of *qi* and developed his health theory for keeping *qi* within the human body. The concrete practices consisted mainly of empiricism (based on his phytology) and temperance, the latter of which was not a complete asceticism but an encouragement of particular types of pleasure, including 'to admire the moon and flowers, love plants and trees and enjoy beautiful landscapes of four seasons'. Kaibara also inherited the appreciation of six tastes and meal sutra (*Gokan no Ge*) previously proposed by Dōgen, although the Zen teachings were slightly modified by the Confucianist ethics of loyalty and filial piety [45]. Despite the growing diversity of health theories towards the end of the Edo period, Kaibara's theory continued to serve as their benchmark [46].

The flourishing of these practical studies prepared the people for the acceptance of Western natural sciences in the Meiji period beginning in 1868. Since then, two contradictory trends have accelerated the development of the Western scientific view of nature and the psychological dependence on the traditional view of unity between humans and nature [26]. Consider the two earliest thinkers of food education, Sagen Ishizuka and Gensai Murai. Ishizuka, a doctor in the Imperial Japanese Army, wrote *Shokumotsu Yōjyōho (A Theory of Food for Health)* in 1898 and proposed an eclectic food philosophy of the traditional and modern health theories. Most notably, the dual cosmic forces of *yin* and *yang* in the Chinese principle, which were also among the backbones of Japanese traditional views of health and nature, were translated into potassium and sodium in the modern medical sciences [47]. Ishizuka was to become internationally well known as the founder of the macrobiotic movement. Murai, the writer of the 1903 bestselling book *Shokudoraku (Gourmandise)*, was much more receptive to modern nutritional sciences than Ishizuka, for his ultimate objective was to enlighten conventional family life to employ scientific thoughts on hygiene and health [48]. However, after lifelong food experiments, he eventually decided to begin a life of a hermit and eat only natural foods so as to become integrated into the magnificent setting of nature. It is quite interesting to witness a cultural pattern in which Japanese thinkers who focused on food or nature, such as Nyoichi Sakurazawa and Kinji Imanishi, after realising the limit of natural sciences, often decided to return to the animistic and religious natural world. This could be attributed to the eternal functioning of the discursive device of 'nature-loving Japanese'.

3. The Problems Inherent in the 'Japanese View of Nature'

3.1. Confusion between History and Discourse

Having clarified the discursive traditions of the Japanese view of nature, I shall turn to their inherent problems. One of the issues often problematised in recent meta-discursive studies is the confusion of historical facts with ideological discourses. These examples include the over-generalisation of 'Japanese' aesthetics based on limited literary evidence—poetry and arts enjoyed by the elites and the neglect of ideological backgrounds of those who produce such discourses, even including allegedly 'ancient' texts [28]. In relation to food cultures, one must be careful regarding the exaggerated effects of Zen on the tea ceremony in the subsequent discourses after the period of Sen no Rikyu [38].

Nevertheless, the main concern of this article is not to verify these historical facts but, rather, to question the effects of these discourses on the contemporary Japanese view of nature. This pragmatic perspective can be more formalised by Augustin Berque's theory of 'milieu' [8]. Milieu was originally conceptualised by Watsuji [18] as natural environment that forms the basis of human existence but later elaborated by Berque by specifying the process (called trajectory) of such human–milieu interaction particular to Japan. In other words, whether historical or ideological, the very existence of cultural devices that reproduce the 'nature-loving Japanese' discourse, such as poetry (*haiku*), prompt contemporary Japanese to be sensitive to natural beauty. This cultural dynamism is reinforced by the particular mentality (social representation) of the Japanese, otherwise known as 'eternal now' [18], that helps ignore the temporality and causal relationships. As a result, the minds of *Manyōshū* and Dōgen are embodied as contemporary ones.

3.2. Composite of Traditional and Modern Views of Nature in Contemporary Eaters

In advancing Berque's proposal for the self-consciousness of the Japanese mechanism of milieu, the next challenge relates to understanding the composite of traditional and modern views of nature in contemporary Japanese. Some argue that the modern natural view had already become dominant in Japan by the late-1960s [49], whereas others observe an increasing return of Japanese consumers to traditional natural worlds beginning in the 1970s [50]. Additionally, starting in the 1990s, there has been a paradoxical social phenomenon in Japan that the notion of 'humans need to adapt to nature' has become more dominant than the thought of 'humans need to manage nature', despite the growing demand for rational environmental management [51].

How far is this general social trend applied to contemporary eating? In recent empirical studies on the representation of 'eating well' among the Japanese population, it was found (i) that nutritional health comprised the most dominant content; (ii) that seasonality and freshness, as derivatives of the traditional natural view, were the qualities almost equally valorised with nutrition; however, (iii) despite such an 'aesthetic' valuation of nature, the perspective toward natural and social environments that provide food products with such natural qualities was absent [52,53]. It is implied that Japanese eaters' rational consciousness of their food environments is being constrained by the double factors of the residual effect of traditional aesthetics of nature and of the reductionist focus on nutritional health reinforced by the modern nutritional sciences. Given such Japanese mentality, it is important to acknowledge the coexistence of traditional natural aesthetics and modern nutritional values, rather than abandoning the former, as often envisaged in orthodox nutritional intervention, and to consider what social programmes are needed to effectively link the former with the latter.

3.3. Coexistence or Conflict between Humans and Nature

The last point also compels us to reconsider the human–nature relationship in practical and real lives and not in aesthetic and literary worlds. One way is to stop idealising the Japanese philosophy of human–nature unity purely as harmonious and turn one's eyes to their painful and sorrowful conflict. Miyazawa was an exception of having realised both positive and negative sides of such a natural environmental chain; however, his limitation

was that other non-natural—social, political and economic—relationships within food systems were out of consideration. Therefore, in constructing sustainable food systems, it is essential to ensure educational opportunities in which eaters can experience confronting the complexity of the human–nature relationship and systematically understanding the total (bio-psycho-social) factors that influence one’s food-related well-being [54]. This learning, just as Zen emphasised the importance of *gyo*, can be made only in one’s action-oriented world.

4. Conclusions: Implications for Food Studies

Thus far, I discussed various discursive traditions of the Japanese view of nature and their inherent problems with the ambition of deepening our reflections on a sustainable food system. Aside from the above-mentioned challenges, Japanese thinkers have also been concerned with how to extract ‘universal’ implications from this ‘particular’ view of nature [21,24], and I shall also take this track, although humbly, to articulate the contribution of this article for food studies.

One of the implications for non-Western worlds is the self-consciousness of each country’s intellectual traditions of the natural view and its manifesting patterns in contemporary eating. Through such reflections, it turned out that, if borrowed from Descola’s categorisation [6], the Japanese contemporary view of nature is the composite of ancient animism, analogism of neo-Confucianism and Western naturalism. This articulation makes it possible to situate its hybridity as a target of reflection and to keep monitoring the (un)balance of these traditions. One limitation of this article is that only Japan was discussed and no comparative analysis was made of neighbouring countries (particularly, China and Korea). It is highly relevant to explore natural views in other non-Western countries and, if needed, to relativise the Japanese view of nature.

Conversely, the major implication for Western worlds is the danger of optimism and over-simplification towards the allegedly harmonious philosophy between humans and nature in Japan and not to mention the painful side of the human–nature relationship (notably, Miyazawa). In this sense, the Japanese view of nature in its current status cannot be considered so easily as sustainable philosophy. Furthermore, although not being scrutinised in this article, this pessimism can be even reinforced by observing the history of pollution and malfunctioning of environmental management in Japan [55]. We shall continue to explore ways to take advantage of this aesthetics to activate the rational attitude to nature.

Interestingly, however, many commonalities between the West and Japan, such as nutritionism and the return to nature in contemporary eating, were observed in this article. Therefore, the emphasis should be placed on collaboration to reflect on such worldwide issues, in addition to existing socio-anthropological exploration to their differences in natural views. Among such common themes, of particular interest is the long-lasting effect of traditional natural aesthetics in the minds of Japanese eaters and its unconquerable nature by modern nutritional sciences. This case seems to support the thesis of ‘magical thinking’ as a form of rationality in contemporary eating [3,56,57].

Although acknowledging the importance of cultural relativism, methods for cultivating people’s scientific view of nature is also a common educational issue. In advancing such a sustainable food education, one remaining issue is what theory of food systems to teach—whether an ecological model in public health [58], a food system model within the sociological paradigm of food modernity [3], value chain model in economics [59] or the traditional view of food and natural environments (as highlighted in this article)—and what balance should be introduced within limited educational opportunities. Revising views of nature can spark such an interdisciplinary dialogue; therefore, it needs to be situated as one of the main issues in food studies and sustainability fields.

Funding: This research was funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (grant number 21J01732) and the Lotte Foundation (grant number LF000805).

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. The Scientific Group for the United Nations Food Systems Summit. Food Systems: Definition, Concept and Application for the UN Food Systems Summit. Available online: https://sc-fss2021.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Food_Systems_Concept_paper_Scientific_Group_Draft_Dec_20_2020.pdf (accessed on 1 June 2022).
2. Morin, E. *L'Esprit de Temps (Vol. 1): Névrose*; Grasset: Paris, France, 1975.
3. Poulain, J.P. *The Sociology of Food*; Bloomsbury: New York, NY, USA, 2017.
4. Rozin, P.; Fischler, C.; Shields-Argelès, C. European and American perspectives on the meaning of natural. *Appetite* **2012**, *59*, 448–455. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
5. Lepiller, O. Les critiques de l'alimentation industrielle et les réponses des acteurs de l'offre. *Cah. Nutr. Diététique* **2013**, *48*, 298–307. [[CrossRef](#)]
6. Descola, P. *Beyond Nature and Culture*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 2014.
7. Bruun, O.; Kalland, A. *Asian Perceptions of Nature: A Critical Approach*; Routledge: London, UK; New York, NY, USA, 1995.
8. Berque, A. Le Sauvage et l'Artifice: Les Japonais devant la Nature. In *Fudo no Nippon: Sizen to Bunka no Tsutai*; Shinoda, K., Ed.; Chikuma Shobo: Tokyo, Japan, 1999; (Original 1986).
9. Asquith, A.; Kalland, P. *Japanese Images of Nature: Cultural Perspectives*; Routledge: London, UK; New York, NY, USA, 1997.
10. Davis, B.W. Natural freedom: Human/nature nondualism in Zen and Japanese thought. In *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Philosophy*; Davis, B.W., Ed.; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2020; pp. 685–707.
11. Yamashita, S. The 'Japanese Turn' in fine dining in the United states, 1980–2020. *Gastronomia* **2020**, *20*, 45–54. [[CrossRef](#)]
12. Rao, H.; Monin, P.; Durand, R. Institutional change in Toque Ville: Nouvelle Cuisine as an identity movement in French gastronomy. *Am. J. Sociol.* **2003**, *108*, 795–843. [[CrossRef](#)]
13. Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. Kaigai ni Okeru Nihonshoku Restaurant no Kazu [Research Report on the Number of Overseas Japanese Restaurants]. Available online: <https://www.maff.go.jp/j/press/shokusan/service/attach/pdf/191213-1.pdf> (accessed on 1 June 2022).
14. Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. Norin Suisanbutu Shokuhin Yusyutugaku no Suii [Transition of Exports of Agricultural Products]. Available online: https://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/nousui/yunyuukoku_kisei_kaigi/dai15/sankou2.pdf (accessed on 1 June 2022).
15. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. Washoku; Traditional Dietary Cultures of the Japanese, Notably for the Celebration of New Year. Available online: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/washoku-traditional-dietary-cultures-of-the-japanese-notably-for-the-celebration-of-new-year-00869> (accessed on 1 May 2022).
16. Ueda, H.; Niiyama, Y. Articulating challenges in defining Japanese Washoku and French gastronomy: Comparative analysis of inscribed definitions and their safeguarding measures. *J. Food Syst. Res.* **2019**, *26*, 144–164. [[CrossRef](#)]
17. Haga, Y. *Kokumin-Sei Zyu-Ron [Ten Lectures on the National Character]*; Toyamabo: Tokyo, Japan, 1907.
18. Watsuji, T. *Fudo-Ron: Ningenteki Kosatsu [Fudo: Philosophico-Anthropological Reflections]*; Iwanami Shoten: Tokyo, Japan, 1979; (Original 1935).
19. Terada, T. Nihonjin no Shizenkan [Japanese View of Nature]. In *Tensai to Nihonjin [Natural Disasters and the Japanese]*; Yamaori, T., Ed.; Kadokawa: Tokyo, Japan, 2011; pp. 103–146, (original 1935).
20. Okakura, T. The Book of Tea. In *Cha No Hon*; Wakutani, H., Ed.; Kodansha: Tokyo, Japan, 1994; pp. 135–224, (original 1906).
21. Nishida, K. *Zen no Kenkyu [An Inquiry into the Good]*; Iwanami Shoten: Tokyo, Japan, 1993; (Original 1911).
22. Suzuki, D. Zen Buddhism and its Influence on Japanese Culture. In *Zen to Nihonbunka*; Kitagawa, M., Ed.; Iwanami Shoten: Tokyo, Japan, 1940; pp. 1–190.
23. Maruyama, M. Rekishi ishiki no koso [The ancient layer in history of Japanese philosophy]. In *Chusei to Hangyaku [Loyalty and Treason]*; Maruyama, M., Ed.; Chikuma Shobo: Tokyo, Japan, 1998; pp. 353–423, (original 1972).
24. Kato, S. *Zasshu Bunka [Japan as A Hybrid Culture]*; Chikuma Shobo: Tokyo, Japan, 1974.
25. Kawabata, Y. Japan, the Beautiful and Myself (Novel Lecture of 1968). In *Yasunari Kawabata Essay Collection*; Kawanishi, M., Ed.; Iwanami Shoten: Tokyo, Japan, 2013; pp. 94–112.
26. Minamoto, R. Nihonjin no shizenkan [Japanese view of nature]. In *Sizen to Cosmos [Nature and Cosmos]*; Omori, S., Ed.; Iwanami Shoten: Tokyo, Japan, 1988; pp. 348–374.
27. Imanishi, K. *Shizen Gaku no Teisho [A Proposal of Natural Science]*; Kodansha: Tokyo, Japan, 1986.
28. Suzuki, S. *Nihonjin no Shizenkan [Japanese View of Nature]*; Sakuhinsha: Tokyo, Japan, 2018.
29. Ishige, N. Shinpo-Shugi no Atotsugi wa Nanika [What Is After Evolutionism?]. *Rep. Grad. Univ. Adv. Stud.* **2006**, *193–200*.
30. Umehara, T. Animism reconsidered. *Bull. Int. Res. Cent. Jpn. Stud.* **1989**, *1*, 13–23.
31. Kato, S. *Nihon Bungakushi Josetsu Vol. 1 [History of Japanese Literature Vol. 1]*; Chikuma Shobo: Tokyo, Japan, 1975.
32. Kukai. Hizohoyaku [A Summary of Ten Stages of Mind Development]. In *Kukai Collection Vol. 1*; Miyasaka, Y., Ed.; Chikuma Shobo: Tokyo, Japan, 2004; pp. 14–257.
33. Sueki, F. *Nihon Shukyoshi [History of Japanese Religions]*; Iwanami Shoten: Tokyo, Japan, 2006.
34. Dōgen. Tenzo Kyokun [Instruction to the Monastery Chief Chef]. In *Tenzo Kyokun, Fushuku Hanpo*; Nakamura, S., Ishikawa, R., Nakamura, T., Eds.; Kodansha: Tokyo, Japan, 1991; pp. 18–138.
35. Dōgen. Fushuku Hanpo [The Dharma for Taking Food]. In *Tenzo Kyokun, Fushuku Hanpo*; Nakamura, S., Ishikawa, R., Nakamura, T., Eds.; Kodansha: Tokyo, Japan, 1991; pp. 140–234.

36. Dōgen. *Shobo Genzo Vol. 1* [*The True Dharma-Eye Vol. 1*]; Masutani, F., Ed.; Kodansha: Tokyo, Japan, 2004.
37. Dōgen. *Shobo Genzo Zuimonki* [*Annotations for The True Dharma-Eye*]; Watsuji, T., Ed.; Iwanami Shoten: Tokyo, Japan, 1982.
38. Kozu, A. *Chanoyu no Rekishi* [*The History of Chanoyu*]; Kadokawa: Tokyo, Japan, 2009.
39. Tsuruta, S. *Vegetarian Miyazawa Kenji*; Shobunsha: Tokyo, Japan, 1999.
40. Higaki, T. *Taberukoto no Tetsugaku* [*The Philosophy of Eating*]; Sekai Shisosha: Tokyo, Japan, 2018.
41. Miyazawa, K. The Restaurant of Many Orders. In *Miyazawa Kenji Dowashu* [*Collection of Children's Literature*]; Onizuka, R., Ed.; Sekai Bunkasha: Tokyo, Japan, 2022; pp. 7–21, (original 1924).
42. Miyazawa, K. The Nighthawk Star. In *Miyazawa Kenji Dowashu* [*Collection of Children's Literature*]; Onizuka, R., Ed.; Sekai Bunkasha: Tokyo, Japan, 2022; pp. 75–86, (original 1921).
43. Basho. *Oku no Hosomichi* [*The Narrow Road to the Deep North*]; Hagiwara, Y., Ed.; Iwanami Shoten: Tokyo, Japan, 1979.
44. Kojima, T. *Shuhigaku to Yomeigaku* [*Neo-Confucianism of Zyu Xi and Wang Yangming*]; Chikuma Shobo: Tokyo, Japan, 2013.
45. Kaibara, E. Yojo-Kun [Instructions for Keeping Healthy]. In *Yojo-Kun, Wazoku Doshi-Kun*; Ishikawa, K., Ed.; Iwanami Shoten: Tokyo, Japan, 1972; pp. 9–191.
46. Takizawa, T. *Yojo ron no Shiso* [*The Philosophy of Keeping Healthy*]; Seri Shobo: Yokohama, Japan, 2003.
47. Ishizuka, S. *Shokumotsu Yojoyoho* [*A Theory of Food for Health*]; Hakubunkan: Tokyo, Japan, 1898.
48. Murai, G. *Shokudoraku Vol. 1* [*Gourmandise Vol. 1*]; Kuroiwa, H., Ed.; Iwanami Shoten: Tokyo, Japan, 2005; (Original 1903).
49. Murakami, Y. *Nihon Kindai Kagaku no Ayumi* [*Japanese History of Modern Sciences*]; Sanshodo: Tokyo, Japan, 1967.
50. Shimazono, S. *Iyasu Chi no Keifu: Kagaku to Shukyo no Hazama* [*Tradition of Healing Knowledge: Between Sciences and Religions*]; Yoshikawa Kobunkan: Tokyo, Japan, 2003.
51. Institute of Statistical Mathematics. 'Man-Nature Relationship' in Kokuminsei Chosa [Survey on National Characters]. Available online: https://www.ism.ac.jp/kokuminsei/table/data/html/ss2/2_5/2_5_all.htm (accessed on 1 May 2022).
52. Ueda, H. What is eating well? Capability approach and empirical application with the population in Japan. *Appetite* **2022**, *170*, 105874–85. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
53. Ueda, H. The norms and practices of eating well: In conflict with contemporary food discourses in Japan. *Appetite* **2022**, *175*, 106086–97. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
54. Ueda, H. Establishing a theoretical foundation for food education in schools using Sen's capability approach. *Food Ethics* **2021**, *6*, 6. [[CrossRef](#)]
55. Miyamoto, K. *Sengo Nihon Kogai-Shiron* [*The History of Pollution in the Post-War Japan*]; Iwanami Shoten: Tokyo, Japan, 2014.
56. Rozin, P. La Magie Sympathique. In *Manger Magique, Aliments Sorciers, Croyances Comestibles*; Fischler, C., Ed.; Autrement: Paris, France, 1994; pp. 22–37.
57. Fournier, T. Pensée magique. In *Dictionnaire des Cultures Alimentaires*; Poulain, J.P., Ed.; Presses Universitaires de France: Paris, France, 2012; pp. 996–1002.
58. Contento, I.R. *Nutrition Education: Linking Research, Theory, and Practice*, 2nd ed.; Jones & Bartlett Learning: Burlington, NJ, USA, 2010.
59. Marion, B.W. *The Organization and Performance of the U.S. Food System*; Lexington Books: Lexington, KY, USA, 1986.