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# A Theosophical Paradigm in Montessori Educational Thought: A Point of Contact with Steiner Educational Thought

Yoshinori Eto (Hiroshima University)

## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to throw light on the link between Montessori educational thought and Theosophy which had an impact on Montessori during the period of her sojourn in India (1939-1946). The entire picture of the Montessori Method is reconstructed by revealing a point of contact between Montessori and Theosophy. Accordingly, a new perspective on the concepts of the Montessori Method influenced by the theosophical paradigm is illustrated. More specifically, the holistic paradigm of 'Vertical Thinking' represented by the ideas of 'the individual as the universe' and 'the transformation process of one's existence' which are peculiar to Theosophy is discussed as a useful model in understanding change in Montessori educational thought. In conjunction with the holistic paradigm, the various concepts in the Montessori Method including 'intention of social reform', 'order', 'concentration phenomenon', 'work' and 'sensitive periods' are examined as 'a prelude to the religious awakening'.

## Introduction

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) and Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) who is the focus of my research lived almost in the same era. Simultaneously, they established their original educational theories and methods which were based on their deep insights into human beings. Today, not only inside but also outside Europe, the philosophies and practices of Montessori and Steiner are diffused and draw the attention of educators. The educators who are attracted by Montessori and Steiner take both theories into consideration in their own theories and practices because they believe that the pedagogies of the two philosophers provide beneficial models by means of which the difficulties within the current educational systems may be overcome.

Both theories of Montessori and Steiner can be called the theory of 'education to freedom'. Because they are based on the idea of 'child-centred education' and this idea maximizes the potential of children's spirituality as a means of helping children develop through their 'inner power' and aims to make them independent and free-spirited human beings. Apart from such a common desire for children's education, it is known that both theories are generally evaluated as conflicting schemes, for example, 'science versus art', 'senses versus imagination' or 'intellectual education versus spiritual education'. Yet if we carefully look at the substance of their thoughts, it is evident that there are so many factors in common that we cannot situate them in the above dichotomies or simply 'Montessori versus Steiner', this dualism being similar to '*the Montessori-Froebel Controversy*' at the beginning of the 20th century. Especially after the period of Montessori's sojourn in India when her thoughts on education of children changed greatly, it seems that her ideas became close to those of Steiner, both

having being influenced by Theosophy<sup>1</sup>.

This paper looks at the change in Montessori's ideological expression and explore the relationship between the Montessori educational thought and Theosophy before and after her stay in India. Accordingly, the paper aims to reconstruct the entire picture of Montessori educational thought and, in the light of the Theosophical paradigm, it presents a new perspective on the concepts of the Montessori educational method, for example order and concentration phenomenon, that appeared in her later work. First of all, this thesis will explain *Theosophy* which influenced Montessori's thought in her later years approaching concepts similar to Steiner's.

## **1 Theosophy – The Connection between Montessori and Steiner**

### **(1) What is Theosophy?**

Theosophy, which had close ties with Steiner, had an influence on educational thoughts of Montessori in her later years. The original usage of the term 'Theosophy' dates back to the third century when Ammonias Sakkas founded 'eclectic Theosophy' in Alexandria. The tenet of Theosophy had already been expressed in the philosophies of Hermes, Plato and Pythagoras in ancient times. The theoretical genealogy of Theosophy attempts to harmonize various religions and their sects with the essence of their doctrines and argues that they all stemmed from the trunk of 'Wisdom-religion'. Although principles differ among theosophical bodies, there are elements in common such as pantheism, an allegorical way of interpretation, eclecticism which arbitrates between and integrates heterogeneous thoughts, and mysticism which believes that we reach the truth through our direct experiences. The ideas of Sakkas are succeeded by those of Origenes and Plotinos who belong to the Neoplatonism school of thought. We can find these theosophical elements in the thoughts of Jakob Böhme, in Rosenkreuzer of Christianity, in the Cabala of Judea, Sufism of Islam, Taoism, the Vedas in India, Freemasonry and Gnosticism in Europe, Esoteric Buddhism (vajrayana) of Tibet, ancient Shinto and Shingon Buddhism in Japan, all of which have a similar view of the world<sup>2</sup>. This paper applies Modern Theosophy, which also traces the descent of eclectic Theosophy, in discussing Montessori and Steiner. Modern Theosophy was established by Blavatsky(H.P. Blavatsky: 1831-1891) who had an influence on many fields from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards.

### **(2) Encounter of the Montessori Method with Theosophy**

#### **i ) Previous Work**

There are works on the relation between Montessori and Blavatsky Theosophy. EJIMA Masako(1981), *Montessori ni okeru syukyokyoiku no ningengakutekikiso* [The anthropological base of religious education in Montessori], In: Montessori Education(vol.14). YAMASAKI Yoko(1995), *Shinkyokurenmei eno Ensor no michi: Syoki Ensor no katudo wo tegakari toshite* [The way to establish the Federation of New Education by Ensor : reserch study using the initial activity of Ensor to get more helpful information.], In: Shinkyokusekai(vol.38) [New world of education], IWAMA Hiroshi (1996), *Yunesuko no genryu wo tazunete: Shinkyokurenmei to UNESCO seturutukatei*[Tracing

the origin of the UNESCO establishment: the process of establishment in Unesco and the Federation of New Education], In: Kokushikan daigaku bungakubu 30 syunen kinen ronnsyu [Commemoration thesis collections of the 30th anniversary in foundation by Department of Literature at Kokushikan university edit], Ditto(1997), *Shinkyokurenmei no genryu wo tazunete: Shinchigakukyoinkumiai to shinkyokurenmei* [Tracing the origin of the Federation of New Education: Theosophical Fraternity in Education and New Education Fellowship], In: Kokushikandaigaku jimbungakukai kiyo(vol.30) [The bulletin of humanities society, Kokushikan University], Ditto(1998), *Yunesuko no seturitu to shinkyokurenmei* [The establishment of UNESCO and New Education Fellowship], In: Kyouikushinsekai (vol. 44) [New world of education], Ditto, *Montessori to shinkyokurenmei* [Montessori and New Education Fellowship], In: *Shinkyokuundo no genryu wo tazunete:Shinchigaku kyokaikyoinohokai, shinkyokurenmei, Montessori, Tagore, Miura Shugo, Sekizo no sokuseki*(2004) [Tracing the origin of new education movement back in Theosophical Fraternity in Education, the New Education Fellowship, Montessori, Tagore, MIURA Syugo & Sekizo], IWAMA and other writers(2005), *Mirai wo hiraku kyoikusyatachi: Steiner, Krishnamurti, Montessor ...* [Educators who open the future ; Steiner, Krishnamurti, and Montessor ...], Cosmos Library. Annie Besant(1893), *An Autobiography*, London. Rita Kramer(1976), *Maria Montessori, A Biography*, Putnam. Japanese translation supervised by HIRAI Hisashi(1981), *Maria Montessori: Kodomo eno ai to syogai* [Maria Montessori: Her life and love to childre]. Shinyosya. Elizabeth G. Hainstock(1978), *The Essential Montessori- An Introduction to the Woman, the Writings, the Method, and the Movement*, New American Library. Japanese translation supervised by HIRANO Tomomi(1988), *Montessorikyoku no subete: Hito, chosaku, hoho, undo* [The Essential Montessori- An Introduction to the Woman, the Writings, the Method, and the Movement], Toshindo. Sister Christina Marie Trudeau(1984), *A Study of the Development of the Educational Views of Dr. Maria Montessori Based on an Analysis of her Work and Lectures While in India, 1939-1946*. UMI Dissertation Information Service. Japanese translation by MIYAKE Masayuki(1990), *Kosmikkukyoiku no keisei: Indo ni okeru Montessori [Formation of Cosmic education. : Montessori in India]* Enderure, etc.

According to the existing literature, there had been interchanges between Montessori and members from the Theosophy school before her stay in India. The Theosophical Society was founded by Blavatsky and Olcott(H.S.Olcott: 1832-1907) in 1875. At the time when Montessori was involved with the society, the head office was moved from New York to Madras in India. In the following section, Montessori's exchanges with the Theosophical Society which took place at the head office in India as well as the British branch are discussed. Annie Besant (Annie Besant: 1874-1933) and Beatrice Ensor(Beatrice Ensor: 1885-1974) are brought into focus because they were crucial in giving Montessori the chance to come in contact with Theosophy.

## ii) A. Besant - Theosophical Society's Second President

Besant is known as an activist who promoted the social democratic movement in Britain with George Bernard Shaw(George Bernard Shaw: 1856-1950) and others of the Fabian Society. She joined the Theosophical Society through an encounter with Blavatsky in 1889 while serving as a member of

the School Board for London. She succeeded Olcott who was the first president of the Theosophical Society and became the second president in 1916. Furthermore, in 1917, she became the first chairperson in the Indian National Congress and contributed to India's independence.

This being so, how did Besant meet Montessori? Besant and Montessori happened to have an idea in common that social reform and peace can be realized only through education. This common idea made Besant visit a Montessori school in 1918 leading her to sympathize with Montessori education. Subsequently Montessori attended Besant's lectures entitled, for example, the Montessori Method, social reform and theosophical theory of 'life' <sup>3</sup>. This chance meeting prompted Besant to move her base of activity to India and their friendship continued to grow. A school in Adyar in the southwest of India was named Besant Memorial School in her honour. When Montessori was staying in India, she designated the school for its facilities to train student (practice) teachers in accordance with the Montessori Method<sup>4</sup>.

### **iii) B. Ensor - Secretary-General of Theosophical Fraternity in Education**

Beatrice Ensor, *nee* de Normann prior to 1917, contributed substantially to leading the educational section of Theosophy and also connecting Montessori education with Theosophy under Besant (See Iwama 1996,1998,2004 and Yamasaki 1995). Ensor was appointed as the first female school inspector in the United Kingdom in her mid-twenties. Her experience made her familiar with the reality of education and the trend of new educational movements at her young age. She had already obtained admission to the Theosophical Society in her early twenties. In 1915, with George S. Arundale(1878-1945) who became the third president of the Theosophical Society, Ensor established the "Theosophical Fraternity in Education" in Letchworth in the U.K. which was rather called the Union Association of Theosophy School Teachers, and continued to contribute to its management. Arundale became the Minister for Education after serving as the president of the Central Hindu College in Benares. He and his wife, Rukmini Devi invited Montessori to India who was staying in the Netherlands at that time in 1937.

Ensor, in the same way as Besant, sympathized with the Montessori Method through her active roles in the Theosophical Fraternity in Education. Following this, she developed movements for an educational and social reform which were based on Theosophy and Montessori education. The question arises: "was there anyone who connected Ensor with Montessori education during her activism in the United Kingdom in a real sense of influence?"

Edmond Holmes (1850-1936), who was widely known as a radical reformist and school inspector in the United Kingdom, played such a role. Ensor was influenced by his work entitled "*What is and What might be: A study of education in general and elementary education in particular*" (1912) and aimed at establishing a progressive teacher's group in the Theosophical Society<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, Holmes is the very person who founded the Montessori Society for the first time in the United Kingdom in 1912. Furthermore, in the same year, a group called "*the New Ideals in Education*" was established by the Earl of Lytton as its president, setting the Montessori Society in the United Kingdom as its core. Members and practitioners of the Theosophical Fraternity in Education, the Dalton Plan and

Steiner education joined this group. It grew powerful as an influential body that aimed to develop new ideals in education<sup>6</sup>. Ensor took a major role in the New Ideals in Education. Its activities gradually expanded the body and, as a result, the bulletin entitled "*Education for the New Era*" was published in 1920 to disseminate its philosophy to the world.

Following these enlightening activities in education, Ensor further planned to establish an international organization in order to realize world peace. It took the form of the New Education Fellowship, involving the members of the British Theosophical Society, "Theosophical Education Trust (a council group for the administration of Theosophical schools)" and "*Education for the New Era*" as the major participants. Moreover, the New Education Fellowship developed and expanded, working together with new global educational movements. It became the World Education Fellowship in 1966. We can read Ensor's lines of philosophy regarding the World Education Fellowship in the slogan of the New Education Fellowship which she herself drafted. They include child-centred education, social reform through education, democracy, world citizenship, international understanding and the promulgation of world peace<sup>7</sup>. Montessori also approved of the activities of the World Education Fellowship and was invited as a lecturer several times. Montessori approved these ideas and was invited to the organization as a lecturer on several occasions. The World Education Fellowship's movement also received participation from the Institute of Education of London University. The first director of the institute, Sir Percy Nunn, who is famous for his theory 'Mneme', named the impressions that the child absorbs and stored unconsciously from birth to three years, 'Mneme'. Montessori was influenced by this concept. Moreover, the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation in the League of Nations established in 1921, (Henri-Louis Bergson was a member of the committee. Montessori adopted his concept of *Élan vital* (vital impetus) in her own theory), as well as its fringe organization, the International Bureau of Education, were also involved in the activities of the World Education Fellowship. These activities had a great influence on the creation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

As mentioned above, Montessori and Theosophy started synchronizing their philosophies and activities around the time when Montessori encountered Besant and Ensor. More specifically, Montessori and Theosophy took the following course. Firstly, the Theosophical school adopted and promulgated the Montessori Method. Secondly, Montessori accepted the Theosophical philosophy. Thirdly, the cooperative international educational movements towards the realization of world peace took place. The next chapter will focus on the acceptance of the Theosophical philosophy by Montessori as this is the main subject of this paper.

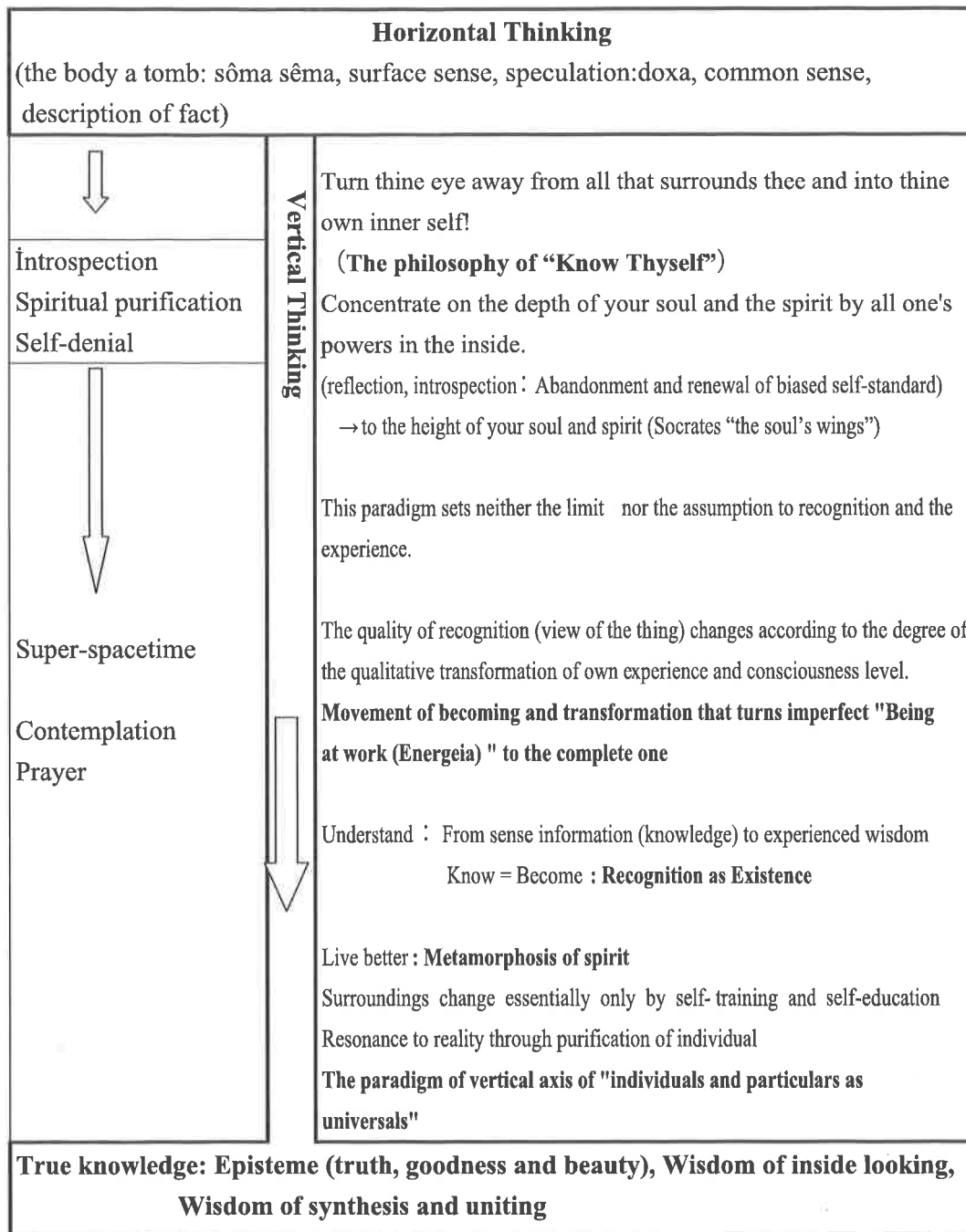
## **2. Paradigm in Common with Montessori Educational Thought and Theosophy**

How influential was Theosophy with Montessori educational thought and in what way did it change the Montessori Method? Ide and Ogasawara suggest that Montessori educational thought should not be considered simply to be an integrated 'Scientific pedagogy' as it has previously been thought but that Montessori educational thought should be considered to be a system of her life-long thought with remarkable metaphysical elements which were incorporated in her later years<sup>9</sup>. Can we discuss

Theosophy that it is in consistency with its influence upon the whole Montessori Educational Thought?

Before moving on to the influence of Theosophical thought upon Montessori, I will explain a diagram which helps us to grasp the structure of Theosophy (or Steiner's Anthroposophy) (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: From Horizontal Thinking to Vertical Thinking Paradigm (The philosophy of "Know Thyself" )



The way of thinking indicated vertically in Figure 1 represents the philosophy of “Know Thyself” which still lives on from ancient times. The vertically shown thinking means wisdom of introspection which values living a better life for personal improvement. On the other hand, the way of thinking indicated horizontally in the upper part of the figure refers to intelligence as a description of facts which is represented by natural science based on cognition and its representations. It does not deal with the value or essence of the facts. While the paradigm of ‘Horizontal Thinking’ represents elemental reductionism which considers the whole to be the union of constituent parts, the paradigm of ‘Vertical Thinking’ illustrates ‘holistic monism’ which holds that the whole is not divisible and the totality is an harmonious and symbolic oneness (Zu den Sachen selbst!).

Looking at the entire thought of Montessori including her ideas after her sojourn in India, as Ejima points out, it is evident that her thought transcended even the dimension of the Horizontal Thinking and changed into something similar to Greek philosophy (or Romanticism), that is, the structure of the Vertical Thinking. The Greek philosophical influence turns her consciousness in the following direction which drew on Fig 1: “in the depth of my heart and then to the height of my soul and spirit”. Modern Theosophy that Montessori adopted is situated in the paradigm of Greek philosophy as well as in Vertical Thinking<sup>10</sup>.

The characteristic of this worldview is appropriately explained by Battista, who supports transpersonal psychology and presents the holographic model and holistic paradigm, in the following theoretical framework.

“According to the holistic paradigm the entire universe is interconnected and hierarchically organized. Matter and energy, living and nonliving, mind, body and spirit all refer to different levels of the same unified system. We know about this universal system because of our interaction with it. Uncertainty is an inherent part of our relationship to the system because the system is a process and we are a part of the process we are attempting to know. To the extent we can reduce this uncertainty we generate information about the world process”<sup>11</sup>

In light of the holistic paradigm of ‘Vertical Thinking’, what will the Montessori educational thought show us?

### **3 Montessori Educational Thought in Light of the Theosophical Paradigm**

#### **(1) Theosophical Description in Montessori Educational Thought**

In this section, the theosophical elements seen in Montessori educational thought will be explored. In order to examine the influence of Theosophy on Montessori Education, it is necessary to compare and study her works written before and after her sojourn in India. The titles of these books are as follows: “*Education for a New World*” (India, 1946), “*To Educate the Human Potential*” (India, 1948), “*Reconstruction in Education*” (India, 1948), “*What You Should Know about Your Child*” (India,



1961), *The Secret of Childhood* (India, 1966), *The Absorbent Mind* (New York, 1967), *The Discovery of the Child* (India, 1967), *The Child in Family* (Chicago, 1970), *Education and Peace* (Chicago, 1972), *From Childhood to Adolescence* (New York, 1973).

Studying her publications, it is clear that change in Montessori Educational thought coincides with the period of her stay in India and that she refined her concepts of the world and humanity which were previously vague<sup>12</sup>. Kramer also discusses Montessori's change in her thought while staying in India. He explains that, in those days, Montessori came to accept Theosophical concepts, for example, unification with god through one's conscious advancement of spirit which is represented vertically in Figure 1, reincarnation and karma<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, Trudeau points out that cosmic education, understanding of festivals and the teaching materials and tools that deal flexibly with culture were clearly set forth in the Montessori Method following the period of Montessori's teacher training course (1945-56) at the Kodaikanal hill in India including the time of the publication of *Educate the Human Potential* (Montessori: 1948)<sup>14</sup>.

Regarding these changes, how is Montessori educational thought related to the view of the 'Vertical Thinking paradigm' described above? In order to answer this, first of all, it is necessary to grasp the basic vector of the Montessori educational thought again. Montessori criticizes the views on humanity in the paradigm of 'Horizontal Thinking' that was a dominant theory in her time, arguing that the understanding of humanity in the paradigm "depends only on experience and is superficial". In such a theory, "causes of a phenomenon are not searched for but only superficial facts and results of a phenomenon are judged"<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, Montessori adds that "a New Man sees beyond matter, hears beyond matter and transcends matter"<sup>16</sup>. It can be said that these claims by Montessori are situated in the theoretical category of 'Vertical Thinking' that intends to understand the essence of a phenomenon beyond a simplistic description of the relation of cause and effect. Indeed, she tries to 'pursue the essence of existence' in the depth of phenomena, exceeding 'superficial descriptions on causality' of phenomena. Additionally, Montessori states that "all people are part of the universe. They are connected to one another. They form an harmonious whole. Children are satisfied with the feeling that there is universal order between all the other people and themselves"<sup>17</sup>. As it is evident from these statements of Montessori, her views of the world and humanity are constructed in the context of the paradigm of Vertical Thinking which considers 'the particular to be the universal', that is, the existence of human beings is "universal and individual at the same time"<sup>18</sup>.

What position can Montessori's viewpoints take in religion? With regard to the metaphysical position which Montessori took in India, Trudeau (1984; 1990: 104-105) mentions that she pursued the theosophical direction in which human beings advance in their free spirit with awareness of the cosmic will. Neither eschatology as fatalism nor Darwinianism as determinism was sought. This means that the tendency to support Theosophy which values free individual spirit was strengthened in her. Moreover, according to Trudeau, Montessori incorporated the oriental view that God appears gradually in our minds as one opens the door to the mystery of God into her own theosophical views<sup>19</sup>.

On the other hand, Montessori looked at this theosophical viewpoint of Vertical Thinking in

association with 'the theory of original sin' in Christianity. She refused the idea that human nature is evil and that education should be determined to correct evil. Rather she supported the idea that human nature is good and can approach God. This idea is represented by the world views and religious views of Vertical Thinking. That is, Montessori believed that good in the child should not rest on the premise of corporal punishment. She believed that if we could have children follow a natural law and order, they would receive the cooperation of their own consciousness from this horizon and then they could advance themselves to *Supra Natur* and rise to the good<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, this view in Vertical Thinking convinced Montessori that her idea that 'the child cannot advance until the child is normalized' was right. Indeed, her version of Vertical Thinking, 'from order to moral advancement', has increased theoretical accuracy by incorporating the theosophical paradigm into her theory. In the following section, the theoretical direction and conventional concepts in the entire thought of Montessori are illustrated in conjunction with the theosophical paradigm.

## **(2) The Examination on the Direction and Key Concepts of Montessori Educational Thought**

### **i ) Social Reform as the Origin**

The Montessori educational thought which was based on humanism similar to that of Catholicism connoted the principle - 'social reform through education' - as an inner motivation from the outset. For example, Montessori applied Anthropological research to Criminology. She formed her own views of human beings and the world by incorporating Theosophy and her intention and vision of social reforms by education are crystallised.

In her later years, Montessori propounded the theoretical direction that an ultimate mission of new education was to find solutions to social issues such as a degenerating world where the law of the jungle prevails, together with war, poverty, hunger, epidemics, prostitution and violence, that is to say, the direction to "emancipation of all humankind" and to "aid and help"<sup>21</sup>.

For Montessori, the greatest task of education was understood as the "creation of peace". Therefore, she envisaged utopia as "a single nation united together with love for humanity (*Philia*)" established by better people who endeavoured to advance their spirits<sup>22</sup>.

In fact, her will to achieve peace was developed together with her sympathetic responses to Catholic spiritual activities and theosophical movement. These activities bore fruit in the form of international organizations that connect peace with education including the New Education Fellowship, the World Education Fellowship and UNESCO.

### **ii ) Order, Concentration Phenomenon and Normalization**

From the beginning, Montessori considered that human beings have an innate inspiration to desire order and, therefore, she tried to achieve the acquisition of order in the natural law among people through education. In her later years, this principle was reinforced and she further developed its system of theory by a chaos-fractal or Oriental view of "order of a high dimension" in which she argued that "all individuals work apart and independently... even so, they are connected mutually by

a common purpose”<sup>23</sup>. This means that if we acquire the ‘order’ of natural law through education, ultimately we can obtain ‘the wings of soul’ that was postulated by Socrates and approach spiritual ‘goodness’. From this view, we can read a scheme of Vertical Thinking in Montessori, that is, ‘the improvement of morality through order’ and ‘advancement through normalization’.

To be specific, motivated by the acquisition of order, children experience ‘a concentration phenomenon’ in which they improve themselves in the state of inner concentration through absorption, repetition and correction of their work. At the moment of the concentration phenomenon, children start responding to their inner spirits. This is the beginning of spiritual incarnation. Spiritually spontaneous activities that occur as the result of the concentration phenomenon strengthen creative imagination (fantasy) which flows out of the inner self and are appropriately connected to the body. Montessori thought that children’s minds and bodies develop well and soundly and that they become independent people only through these processes - from acquisition of order, a concentration phenomenon to spiritual incarnation (normalization) - experienced themselves in childhood. This is the route to ‘education to freedom’ that Montessori traced. Moreover, the meaning of freedom is not strictly limited to that in the context of ‘independent selection (arbitrary freedom)’ based on the child’s interest.

‘The way to freedom’ emphasised in the framework of Theosophy surpasses selective and arbitrary free wills of individuals. It is a process of acquiring ‘freedom of spirit’ for independent individuals who are connected with divinity.

### **iii ) Sensitive Periods and Sensory Education**

It is noteworthy, in relation to pedagogy, that Montessori prospectively constructed a theory of ‘a sensitive period’ through an intense observation of the child and application of contemporary views on humanity and the world.

It was especially significant that she adopted ‘the theory of the unconscious’ which was infiltrating into psychoanalysis at that time, Theosophy and Indian thought in the same way as Steiner did. Her ideas of ‘the spiritual embryo’, ‘the nebular hypothesis’ and ‘the absorbent mind’, which were developed after her stay in India, are the fruits of her combining the theory of the unconscious and sensory education. Accordingly, she established a pedagogy of her own, a pedagogy as a means to character formation.

‘The phenomenon of explosion of knowledge’ discovered by Montessori was also reinforced as a more detailed theory by adopting the Mneme theory which theorises on iconographic memory that is remarkable in infancy.

Montessori insists that it is necessary to combine physical training for muscles and intellectual activities for knowledge at the same time in order to realize ‘the spiritualization of knowledge’ in which sensory training is physically and spiritually internalised. This monistic concept of mind and body can be regarded as a trait of ‘the education of the sense’ that gives consideration to an unconscious mind.

In this context, ‘the sense’ includes ‘internal senses (inner receptivity)’ such as a weight sense

(Gewichtssinn) and a stereognostic sense (Stereognostischer Sinn), surpassing a range of 'superficial senses and perceptions' limited to the five senses and 'scientific experiences'<sup>24</sup>.

Considering the depth of the sensory education in Montessori education mentioned above, the conventional criticism that "Montessori education is biased in favour of intellectualism" is not justifiable. The fundamental principles of the Montessori Method deny the enforcement of knowledge but respect individual free wills. While the methodological structure of Montessori thought is grounded in the results of actual experiences and empirical science, its observation is always solidly founded on introspective experiences represented by Vertical Thinking.

#### **iv ) Work, Play and Fantasy**

In Montessori education, it is understood that the child does not essentially want to play but rather want to work. Accordingly, Montessori discouraged children from playing freely but encouraged them to work independently in the orderly world.

Montessori believed that children first began to feel contented with a stable sense of 'order' by means of 'work' combined with 'sensorial materials' for the children's development and nature. They, then, learnt the importance of overcoming failure (the spirit of self-denial), the spirit of independence and the relationship with their surroundings.

The Montessori Method emphasised that 'maintenance of clear consciousness' and "stable order" constantly help children develop a sound mind and body. Montessori's denial of the effectiveness of fairy tales and make-believe for children's development has been seen as a controversial point in the mainstream of general preschool education. However, her denial of children's traditional play is not necessarily contentious because of her above-mentioned point of view on education for children.

#### **Conclusion - The Key Concepts to Understanding Montessori Educational Thought and Research Views on the Future**

Focusing on the relationship between Montessori and Theosophy, this paper explored the process of change in her educational thought and her views on life as well as the whole structure of her educational theory in her later years, especially before and after the period of her sojourn in India. The following paragraphs discuss vantage points that are important in the understanding of Montessori educational thought and research prospects for the future together with a summary of the above discussion.

#### **Paradigm of the Individual as the Universe**

Although Montessori educational thought reflects scientific and empirical facts, the foundation and direction of her thought are based on the paradigm of 'Vertical Thinking' represented by, for example, a closely aligned relationship between the individual and the universal and one's transformation into a spiritually advanced self. Therefore, the existing criticism that Montessori education attaches great importance to "nurturing individuality rather than sociality" in education for children is not appropriate.

The philosopher IZUTSU Toshihiko who supports Vertical Thinking has doubts about the emphasis on education that puts importance on sociality. He questions if “it is important to understand others and make others understand the self without understanding and cultivating the self”<sup>25</sup>. In other words, he argues that it is not until the transformation and the rise of the soul and spirit of individuals are achieved that correct understanding of people and influencing others to make better surroundings are achieved. These indications identify a weak point in the theory of the importance of sociality which does not require the advancement of the individual. Montessori believes that normalization of the individual is achieved only by education and that, as an extrapolation of it, “peaceful” society is realised. Her firm belief also stems from the viewpoint of “the individual leading to the universal” to which IZUTSU also subscribes.

### **Education as a Prelude to Religious Rouse**

In light of the paradigm of Vertical Thinking, it is understood that theoretical elements in learning which are peculiar to Montessori education such as ‘order (rhythm)’, the ‘concentration phenomenon (condensed imagination)’, ‘incarnation of spirit’ are formed to avoid the separation of our spirit from the body and strengthen the connection with ‘the depth of our own spirit’. Moreover, in comprehending the Montessori Method, it is also important to understand that putting each principle into practice is considered as ‘a prelude to religion-like awakening in the future’ as well as the transforming process towards one’s union with the divine which is strived for in Theosophy.

### **Self-Education of Adult and Teacher as the Assumption of Educational Judgment**

As discussed above, it is necessary to examine ‘the child’s interest’ which is an indicator as well as the centre of Montessori education. In general, the children’s interest varies widely from ‘interest rooted in divine nature’ that leads then to ‘the appropriate development of ‘egotistical impulse’ including desire, laziness, exclusive attitude and destructive attitude. As discussed throughout the paper, according to the theosophical paradigm of Vertical Thinking that Montessori accepted in her later years, an important indicator of judgment in education should be derived presupposing ‘observation and deep insights of the morally advanced individual’. In other words, the validity of ‘the child’s interest’ has to be judged by adults and teachers who ‘strive to continue self-education through introspection’ on the basis of their ‘thorough observation of the child’ from the viewpoint of ‘Vertical Thinking’ symbolized by the belief in ‘personal improvement’.

### **Problems and Views on the Future of Montessori Educational Thought**

In this section, problems and future prospects of Montessori educational thought are discussed.

First of all, regarding the above viewpoint, the relationship between ‘the child’s interest and personal improvement’, it is necessary to deliberate further upon the handling of ‘fairy tales’ and ‘the media’ which was called into question at the symposium held in place in year. More specifically, we need to understand the essential idea through exploring what Montessori wanted to avoid by prohibiting ‘fairy tales’ and ‘the media’ in education for children.

She thought that education was a process of assisting children in religious-like awakening (personal improvement) and spiritual stabilization (foundation of peace) in the future. Accordingly, Montessori established the principle of action as an educationally effective function in which she argued that the child forms a concentrated and condensed image through work.

The formation of this inner image was meant to avoid the obstacles that create a psychopathic foundation because, adopting Psychoanalysis and Theosophy, Montessori believed that mental illness was caused by disorderly, destructive and incoherent worldly thoughts and delusions, and infusion of a uniform image from the outside world.

Based on the above views, we can understand the reason why Montessori denied any positive effects of 'make-believe, play with dolls and fairy tales' because the reason holds good for the promotion of religious-like awakening and avoidance of mental illness. Therefore, it can be said that the criterion for judging whether the child's 'interest' leads the child to his/her 'personal improvement' or not, requires the avoidance of 'the separation of spirit from body' in educational exercises.

Do 'make-believe, play with dolls and fairy tale' always separate the spirit from the body? Answering this question on a deep spiritual plane demonstrates the essence of this issue. As previously pointed out, Montessori came to find the significance of 'festivities', 'symbolic communication' and 'creativity of spirit' in education in her later years. Although change in her interpretation of the effectiveness of 'fairy tales' and 'make-believe' did not seem to occur in her writings, it is safe to say that there was the possibility of change in her attitude towards the mainstream children's play as she espoused the paradigm of 'Vertical Thinking'.

In the same way as Steiner education supports the theosophical paradigm, the idea of Montessori that "it is necessary to connect mind with body in order to acquire a sound spirit" does not contradict the theosophical principle that excellent fairy tales, anecdotes, poetry, and Nativity Play embrace the universal and symbolic images that are related to divinity and that the children internally acquire and embody the divine images through concentration, absorption, rhythm and muscular exercise.

Additionally, according to scientific studies in conjunction with 'the theory of the unconscious' to which Montessori subscribed, the virtual world (computer games, television etc.) physically and psychologically has harmful effects on the child's unconsciousness<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, while Montessori did not refer to the computer as it had yet to be developed, we suggest that the effectiveness of introducing modern technology such as computers into education at an early stage of infancy and childhood on the basis of respect for the 'child's interest', 'independent selection' and 'free will' should be examined with discretion.

Finally, Steiner education, which is beyond the scope of this paper, has been the subject of my research. Steiner also adopts the paradigm of 'Vertical Thinking'<sup>27</sup>. Montessori's and Steiner's methods continually attract worldwide attention as useful models to investigate problems in the current conventional educational systems. In order to throw light on the significance of both theories in modern times, comparative and analytical studies by researchers from both sides would be fruitful. In so doing, the Vertical Thinking represented by the idea of 'the individual as the

universe”, a concept in common with both theories, will be an important key for the future research. We would like to close this paper with an extract from Ikeda, a philosopher, who symbolically portrays the paradigm.

“The more you renounce your ego and the more unselfish you become, the more individualistic your existence becomes. This is a beautiful paradox. It is true. The more you commit yourself to your individuality, the more you resonate with the universe. The universe has a mysterious order.”<sup>28</sup>

## Notes:

- 1 Regarding her relation with Theosophy, Montessori stayed in India from 1939 to 1946 as she was invited by the Theosophical Society, while Steiner acted as secretary-general of the German Branch of the Theosophical Society from 1902 to 1913. However, Steiner challenged the Theosophical Society on its interpretation of Christ and its recognition of the truth. As a result, he seceded from the Society and subsequently established his own Anthroposophy. Both Montessori and Steiner were involved in Theosophy through the intercession of Annie Besant.
- 2 The explanation about Theosophy was mainly referenced from KAMIO (2000) pp.5-20.
- 3 Based on the interview conducted by C.M. Trudea with Sankara Menon who was Montessori’s secretary at that time (30.01.1984) (MIYAKE 1990: 53).
- 4 More than a thousand teachers who had already completed the Montessori teacher training course were active in the field of education in various parts of India when Montessori was invited to India in 1939. (Besant 1893; Kramer 1976)
- 5 See IWAMA (2004), Boyd and Rawson (1965) p.67, Boyd and Rawson (1966).
- 6 It is interesting that Percy Nunn of London University, whose ‘Mneme Theory’ influenced Montessori, participated in the educational group in which the Montessori and Theosophy factions coexisted.
- 7 Excerpts from the home page of the Information Service of Institute of Education at University of London. ‘DC/ WEF World Education Fellowship’ ; <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/services/1013.html>
- 8 According to Hainstock (1978; 1988: 28-29), Montessori Education received financial assistance between 1913 and 1915 from Thomas Alva Edison and others who were the intellectual leaders in the world at that time. Edison was involved with Theosophy while supporting Blavatsky who was the founder of Theosophy. Blavatsky encouraged Edison to give the financial aid. Additionally, it is known that Edison had a friendly relationship with Nitobe Inazo and that Edison was influenced by the spirit of ‘*Bushido* (Way of the Warrior)’ by Nitobe. NITOBE established the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC: the precursor of UNESCO) and invited famous scholars such as Albert Einstein, Henri-Louis Bergson and Marie Curie to be on the committee.
- 9 OGASAWARA (1993) pp.348-359, Ide (1992) pp.29-36
- 10 As EJIMA points out, I agree that Plato’s schema is effective in understanding Montessori educational thought philosophically. However, on examining the structure and direction of Montessori thought closely, it is clear that the theory is not based on Plato’s dualism that sets reality against the ideal. Rather, Montessori thought is similar to the monistic paradigm supported by, for example, Aristotle, Hegel and Steiner who

saw unity between one's transformation based on reality and idea. In a word, it can be said that this is the theoretical model of the self-transformation. Considering this, it is interesting that Trudeau, in light of James Bowen's writing "*A History of Western Education*" (1981), found a view in common between Montessori and Joseph Priestly in which both believed in unitarianism that comes from Hegelian philosophy.

- 11 The holistic paradigm shown here was described by Battista through a comparison between the vitalistic and mechanistic paradigms. The holistic paradigm is characterized as follows. Ontology: monism, epistemology: interaction, methodology: analogical, causality: probabilistic, analytics: constructive and dynamics: negative entropy (Battista 1985: 145; 1992: 267-268).
- 12 See Hainstock (1978; 1988: 187-191) for this literature. According to Trudeau (1984; 1990: 135), Montessori considered the child to be the creative existence from the outset. However, after her stay in India, her belief was cultivated, broadened and changed into the conviction in her theory. Klaus Luhmer also gives a similar suggestion and he points out that the fact that in her later years Montessori came into contact with Theosophy, which is deeply related to oriental thoughts, has been hardly studied systematically to this day.
- 13 Kramer (1976) p.324
- 14 Trudeau (1984); (1990) pp.122-131
- 15 Montessori (1949); (1970), p.10
- 16 Montessori (1973); (1975), p.63
- 17 Montessori (1948) p.8; (1979)
- 18 Montessori (1948) pp.8-9; (1979). These world views are similar to the cosmology of Teilhard de Chardin in Catholic Theology. EJIMA (1981) also made a point of this, referring to the writing of Shulz-Benesh. Chardin's cosmology established connections with the growing cosmology in Russia at that time. Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov, a theosophist and philosopher, who was ranked with Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky and George Vernadsky who had a relation with the Bergson school from which Montessori obtained the concept of the "creative evolution of life" were representative of the Russian cosmology (Semenova and Gacheva 1997). The following expression especially implies that Montessori was brought into a closer relationship with theosophical worldviews: "If human beings can acquire the cosmic energy that floats in the sky, all the flame of spirit, keen intelligence and the purity of conscience will be able to be organized effectively in human social life." (OGASAWARA 1975: 88).
- 19 Montessori, (1948) pp.8-10; Trudeau (1984); (1990), pp.104-105
- 20 SAKAMOTO (1970) pp.43-48
- 21 Ibid., pp.19-22
- 22 Ogasawara (1975) pp.128-131
- 23 Ibid, p.117
- 24 Marielle Seitz and Ursula Hallwasch., "*Montessori oder Waldorf?*" München (1996) p.190
- 25 IZUTSU Toshihiko., '*Zen ni okeru gengotekiimi no mondaï*' [The problem of the linguistic meaning on Zen], In: "*Ishiki to honshitu*" [Consciousness and nature], Iwanami Shoten, 2005. In: "*Bewusstsein und Wesen*", München, 2006.
- 26 Montessori education today generally supports the effectiveness of the contemporary media in education and considers the media as new technology because of respect for the child's 'interest in technology and



the media'. Therefore, Montessori schools do not restrain their students from watching television and using the computer at home during infancy and childhood, though many Montessori schools set time limits for the employment of technology and the media. See Seitz and Hallwasch (1996) for the comparison between Montessori education and Steiner education with regard to the application of technology and the media to education.

27 See ETO (2003); (2004); (2008) for the paradigm of Vertical thinking and education.

ETO Yoshinori., '*Ningenkeisei ni okeru suityokujiku no kouzo*' [The structure of "Vertical thinking" in the transformation process of one's own existence], In: History of Education Thought Society (ed.), "*Modern Education Forum*", Vol.12, 2003.

ETO Yoshinori., '*Toyotekina morarukyoiku no kanosei*' [The possibility of Oriental Moral Education], In: OCHI Mitsugu (ed.), "*Iwanami ouyorinnrigaku kogi 6 kyoiku*" [Iwanami the Lecture of Applied Ethics 6 Education], Iwanami shoten, 2004.

ETO Yoshinori., '*Ringigaku to kyoiku*' [Ethics and Education], In: "*Kyoiku to rinri*" [Education and Moral: Philosophical problems of the 21st century, vol.6 Education], Nakanishiya Shuppan,2008.

28 See IKEDA (2003) and ETO(2005).

IKEDA Akiko., '*14 sai kara no tetugaku*' [Philosophy Starts from 14 year old], Transview, 2003.

ETO Yoshinori., '*Gendai no kyoiku kaikaku to fuan*' [Modern Educational Reform and Anxiety], In: "*Fuan no arakaruto*" [A La Carte of Anxiety], The Nishinippon Shimbun, 2005.