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# Pre-Modern Japanese Proto-nationalism: A Study of Japanese Confucianism's Intellectual History

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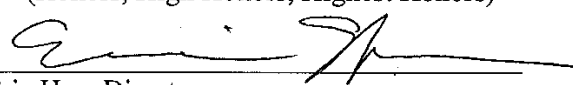
Pre-Modern Japanese Proto-nationalism:  
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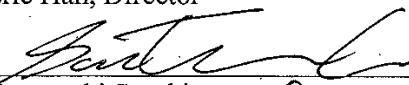
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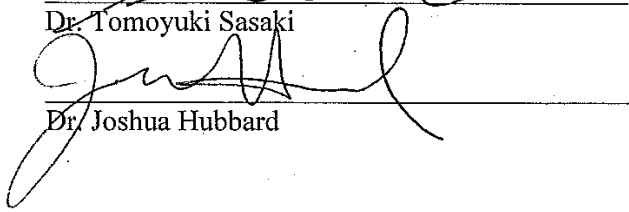
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**Pre-Modern Japanese Proto-nationalism:  
A Study of Japanese Confucianism's Intellectual History**

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## Chapter I: Introduction

Modern Japanese nationalism, from the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, seems distinctively non-egalitarian compared to the western counterparts. Unlike civic nationalism, Japanese nationalism has promoted inequality both domestically and internationally. The Japanese constitution from 1889 to 1947 limited the public's participation in the political system. Japan's nationalistic foreign policies induced a series of wars, through which Japan challenged colonial powers and tried to establish its own hegemony over neighboring states.

Japanese nationalism was a product of the nineteenth century confrontation with the west, but was not a simple replication of the western concept of nation. The strong impression of Japanese nationalism and its radical version of imperialistic militarism seemed a resonance of European influences.<sup>1</sup> Matsumoto Sannosuke, nevertheless, contrasts Japanese nationalism to western nationalism as theorized by Hans Kohn. Kohn describes western nationalism as “qualitatively akin to the love of humanity or of the whole earth” and nurtured by the European Christian identity.<sup>2</sup> Japanese nationalism, as Matsumoto argues however, was formed through contact with the international world operated by the western states, and Japanese nationalism rigidly distinguished Japan from such international society. Japanese nationalism thus did not share western nationalism's universalism and egalitarianism across nation-states.<sup>3</sup> This characteristic explains

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<sup>1</sup> See: Stein Ugelvik Larsen, *Fascism outside Europe: The European Impulse against Domestic Conditions in the Diffusion of Global Fascism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Matsumoto Sannosuke, “The Significance of Nationalism in Modern Japanese Thought: Some Theoretical Problems,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 31, No. 1 (Nov., 1971), 51.

<sup>3</sup> Matsumoto, 51.

Japanese nationalism's non-egalitarian characteristics. Matsumoto further indicates that Japanese nationalism involves the pattern of political integration in Japan. While western nationalism was characterized by its commitment to democratic consent and respect of free and independent individuals, Japan's political integration emphasized collective interest rather than individual liberty.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the Japanese state in the nineteenth century counted on broad emotional appeal to the national consciousness of a shared identity despite individual's liberty. The distinctive features of collective national identity and shared obedience towards the Japanese Emperor's imperial sovereignty served as the pivots of Japanese nationalism.<sup>5</sup> The final characterization of Japanese nationalism that Matsumoto raises is the unique idea of Japan's national mission. Japanese nationalism, as not symbolized by an individualistic affection for humanity, did not carry the principles of "liberty," "equality," and "fraternity" but bore the continuous aim of preserving *kokutai*, the emperor-centric national polity.<sup>6</sup> Japanese nationalism had been serving the purposes of self-perpetuation and self-expansion of a Japanese nation-state, instead of exercising universal values according to the principle of humanity. Japanese nationalism thus is an indigenous reaction encouraged by earlier sentiments of national identity and awareness of obligatory affiliation in society.

This thesis argues that an intellectual paradigm of proto-nationalistic ideologies since the seventeenth century made modern Japanese nationalism distinctive. Proto-nationalism in pre-modern Japan, as I define it, was an ideological framework of Japanese identity and cultural uniqueness held by aristocratic intellectuals in seventeenth-

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<sup>4</sup> Matsumoto, 52.

<sup>5</sup> Matsumoto, 52.

<sup>6</sup> Matsumoto, 53.

to nineteenth-century Japan. Proto-nationalist intellectuals, in their writings and correspondences, addressed their awareness of the Japanese state's political structure and involvement in foreign affairs. These intellectuals with political consciousness and pragmatic deliberation offered policy recommendations that accorded with their contemporary Japan's political and socio-cultural circumstances. Pre-modern Japan's proto-nationalism, therefore, indicated a coherent identity of the Japanese state.

Confucianism, introduced from China and further reinterpreted and debated in Japan, facilitated the development of Japan's pre-modern proto-nationalistic ideologies. The architects of Japanese proto-nationalism were at first Confucian scholars and later their critics, since Confucian theory and rhetoric could serve as either affirmative or contrapuntal references. Confucianism's facilitation of proto-nationalism took effect through various patterns, as Confucianism was a multifunction and multilayered intellectual system. Kiri Paramore's research on Japanese Confucianism inspires my methodology of investigating Japan's proto-nationalistic ideologies. Paramore notes that Confucianism in Japan carried many utilities across intellectual disciplines. Confucianism offered philosophical moral principles; it outlined a stable governance as a paradigm of political science; it indoctrinated research methods of philology and instructed verbal eloquence; and it reinforced the importance of religious piety.<sup>7</sup> Japanese proto-nationalism shaped by Confucian scholars and their critics, therefore, had influenced disciplines of moral philosophy, public affairs, education, and religion in pre-modern Japan as well.

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<sup>7</sup> Kiri Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 3-4.

Japanese Confucianism, with Chinese intellectual origins, consistently evolved on both the Chinese mainland and the Japanese islands. Confucius, the paradigm's name sake, established Confucianism as a school of morality in the public sphere. He witnessed the last moment of China's Spring-and-Autumn period in the fifth century B.C.E, when unsettling feudal states rivaled each other without consideration of political morality.<sup>8</sup> Confucius expressed his nostalgia for the political stability and social harmony in the era of "early sage kings" and their feudal state, dating from as early as China in the twenty-fourth century B.C.E.<sup>9</sup> Their righteous governance prospered until the beginning of the Zhou Dynasty, and started to decline after the reign of King Wen, King Wu, and the Duke of Zhou in the eleventh century B.C.E. Diminishing moral awareness and emerging rivalry between feudal states at that time symbolized the gradual degradation of stability.<sup>10</sup> With the desire to revive justified rule of "early sage kings," Confucius practiced philology and designated the "Six Classics" as references for political principles and ritual practices.<sup>11</sup> Confucianism's virtues of humanness, righteousness, and propriety, etc. were established upon Confucius' retrospection of ancient documents, which accorded with the sage kings' advocacy and examples.

Confucianism's ideal domestic and international worlds were always hierarchical. The Confucian social hierarchy was stratified based on one's literacy in Confucian knowledge and moral virtue.<sup>12</sup> A dichotomy between *hua*, civilized regimes, and *yi*, uncivilized or barbarian communities characterized Confucian international society.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel K. Gardner, *Confucian a Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 14.

<sup>9</sup> Gardner, *Confucian a Very Short Introduction*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Gardner, *Confucian a Very Short Introduction*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Gardner, *Confucian a Very Short Introduction*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 46.

<sup>13</sup> Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism*, 48.



Confucianism, as a political philosophy, evaluated the level of civilization based on the implementation of Confucian doctrine. *Hua*, which originally meant the Chinese regime, held comparative superiority in physical and intellectual assets. The civilized regime, therefore, deserved the respect and obedience from barbarian communities for its accomplishments according to Confucian standards.

Confucianism was a product in ancient feudal China but was utilized by classical China's centralized regimes as political philosophy and individual moral principles. The Chinese Han dynasty institutionalized Confucianism as the official political doctrine since the third century B.C.E., because Confucianism emphasized social stability and harmony.<sup>14</sup> China's centralized bureaucracy employed literate Confucian scholars to handle administrative tasks, considering their capability in examining documents and discoursing arguments. The Han-dynasty leadership decreed to establish official institution of Confucian education, which were funded by the state to indoctrinate Confucian scholars and recruit junior-level civil servants.<sup>15</sup> The official investment in Confucianism continued not only as an administrative convention, but also as an educational means. The seventh-century Tang-Dynasty Confucian scholar-bureaucrats further elaborated and consolidated Confucianism as a paradigm of political philosophy.<sup>16</sup> This classical version of Confucianism arrived in Japan before the sixth century via Korea as the intermediary, when Japanese diplomatic mission returned from the Tang dynasty.<sup>17</sup> Returning Japanese delegations introduced the Confucian bureaucratic and educational system, imitating Tang China's lawful governance and

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<sup>14</sup> Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism*, 20-21.

<sup>15</sup> Gardner, *Confucian a Very Short Introduction*, 27.

<sup>16</sup> Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism*, 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism*, 6-7.

efficient administration. This helped Japan's state-building, because Japan was as feudally divided as ancient China by the sixth century, when Confucian institutions were introduced and established.<sup>18</sup>

Chinese Confucianism merged with Buddhism and Taoism and evolved into what had been referred as Neo-Confucianism in the eleventh-century. Neo-Confucianism prospered in Medieval-Chinese Song dynasty.<sup>19</sup> Introduction of Neo-Confucianism to Japan occurred around the sixteenth century, as this branch of Confucianism's interpretation arrived from the Chinese Ming-Dynasty.<sup>20</sup> The Ming dynasty had driven the Mongols out of mainland China, and reactivated Sino-Japanese civilian trade relations and intellectual exchange, which had been closed due to hostility between the Mongols and Japanese.<sup>21</sup> Neo-Confucianism denounced the fundamentalist approach of earlier Confucian sects, which Neo-Confucians regarded as inhumane and dogmatic.<sup>22</sup>

While China had been mostly centralized from its ancient to pre-modern era, feudalism had been the fundamental political characteristic of Japanese political history from the twelfth to the nineteenth century. Pre-modern Japan's domestic politics were similar to that of the era of Confucius, wherein the central authority of Bakufu and regional autonomous factions coexisted. The Bakufu, or Shogunate, literally meant the headquarters of *Sei-i Taishogun* ("barbarian-quelling generalissimo"), abbreviated as the Shogun. The title of Shogun and the institution of Bakufu originated in the late-twelfth century, when Minamoto no Yoritomo founded the Kamakura Bakufu as Japan's first

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<sup>18</sup> Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism*, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Gardner, *Confucian a Very Short Introduction*, 68.

<sup>20</sup> Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> John Dardess, *Ming China, 1368-1644: a Concise History of a Resilient Empire* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 23.

<sup>22</sup> Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism*, 44.

feudal military government.<sup>23</sup> Though the Japanese Emperor, *Tennō*, was the country's titular leader, the Shogun, with his title appointed by the Emperor, obtained agency to exercise the country's central political authority on behalf of the Emperor.<sup>24</sup> The Bakufu was usually referred by the location of its central administration, for instance, the cities of Kamakura (1185-1333 C.E.), Ashikaga (1336-1573 C.E.), and Edo (1603-1867 C.E.). The Tokugawa Bakufu, also known by its residence in Edo, was also known by the name of the Shogun's clan. These Bakufus throughout Japan's pre-modern history, with their centralized political authority, coexisted with local samurai war bands. For the Tokugawa bakufu, *daimyos*, regional warlords, held privileges of political and economic autonomy, while the Bakufu had the responsibility to maintain social stability and mediate conflict between belligerent *daimyos*.<sup>25</sup> Some Shoguns assured peace with overwhelming and deterring military strength, while others utilized political manipulation and maintained a balance of power. The Japanese age of warring states, or *Sengoku*, between the mid-fifteenth and early-seventeenth centuries witnessed constant conflicts between *daimyos*, regional warlords, after the Ashikaga Bakufu's central institution collapsed and lost its peace-keeping ability.<sup>26</sup> *Sengoku*, shared the same name and political circumstances with Confucius' era of political disintegration and feudal chaos. And for that reason, Confucianism seemed a good fit for Japan's circumstances. Military conquerors, like Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, defeated rivals and established alliances with coercion and bribery, and ultimately put an end to the warring states period.<sup>27</sup> Tokugawa

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<sup>23</sup> Jeffery Mass, *Yoritomo and the Founding of the First Bakufu: the Origins of Dual Government in Japan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1999), 1-5.

<sup>24</sup> Mass, *Yoritomo and the Founding of the First Bakufu*, 1-5.

<sup>25</sup> Kenneth Grossberg, *Japan's Renaissance: the Politics of the Muromachi Bakufu* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, 1981), 5-8.

<sup>26</sup> Grossberg, *Japan's Renaissance*, 5-8.

<sup>27</sup> Conrad Totman, *Politics in the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 3.

Ieyasu, Tokugawa regime's founder, following the achievement of predecessors, founded his Bakufu at Edo in the early-seventeenth century, and his son and grandson, Hidetada and Iemitsu, held Japan's central political authority throughout the first half of the seventeenth century. The Tokugawa Bakufu, however, only exercised limited power because of seventeenth-century Japan's political fragmentation.

Confucianism shaped an intellectual hierarchy between pre-modern Japan and China based on their levels of civilization. John Fairbanks defines the China-established and -led international network in East Asia as the Imperial Chinese Tributary System. Asian countries including Japan, Korea, Ryukyu, and Vietnam, nominally as China's tributary states, maintained extensive trade but loose diplomatic relations with China in the Tributary System.<sup>28</sup> The Confucian notion of *hua-yi* dichotomy was the tributary system's cornerstone, since the gap in the level of civilization justified neighboring states' submission to China's prosperity. China, being the most advanced civilization, had the responsibility to civilize its less enlightened tributary states with generous endowment of merchandise and intellectual achievement. The tributary system and its "loose set of expectations and precedents" was systematically institutionalized in the fourteenth-century Ming dynasty.<sup>29</sup> While commodities and capital circulated in this network, ideologies and information from China proliferated to neighboring nations as well. While Japan had not always been a participant in the tributary system, Japanese Confucian scholars still understood China as *hua*, a civilized regime.

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<sup>28</sup> John King Fairbank, *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 1-4.

<sup>29</sup> Fairbank, *The Chinese World Order*, 50-54.

One vital political incident in China nurtured the Japanese pre-modern proto-nationalistic ideologies in the seventeenth century. China's Ming dynasty ran into its destiny of breakdown under domestic insurrection and foreign threat. The Ming was China's last monarchical dynasty governed by an ethnically Han-Chinese royalty, and lasted from 1368 to 1644. At its end, people were suffering from starvation and bureaucratic exploitation because of a severe climate and institutional corruption. Chinese peasants rose up against the regime.<sup>30</sup> Manchus residing north of China founded a dynasty they named the Qing under the leadership of the Aisin Gioro family in 1636; and this was an imitation of Han-Chinese's political institutions.<sup>31</sup> Manchus in northeastern China had been ideologically perceived as nomadic barbarians according to Confucianism's *hua-yi* dichotomy, but were invited by the Ming regime to enter Ming's territory and assist the suppression of domestic resurrections.<sup>32</sup> Manchus did not leave mainland China after they expelled the rebels from the Ming capital of Beijing. Rather, they occupied Beijing and expanded the formal governance of Qing to China proper in 1644. The Manchu-governed Qing dynasty gradually conquered all territories under the administration of the Ming Dynasty, and unified China after eliminating the Ming rump state by the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the Manchu-led Qing Dynasty from the "uncivilized" northeast substituted the Ming which had been led by Han-Chinese sovereigns.

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<sup>30</sup> John Dardess, *Ming China, 1368-1644*, 89.

<sup>31</sup> William Rowe, *China's Last Empire: the Great Qing* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 20-24.

<sup>32</sup> Rowe, *China's Last Empire*, 25-27.

<sup>33</sup> Rowe, *China's Last Empire*, 35-36.

The Tokugawa Bakufu, along with its Confucian advisors and bureaucrats, perceived the seventeenth-century dynastic transition in China as not merely an ordinary regime change, but a disgraceful nomadic destruction of the most advanced civilization and the home of Confucianism. Subsequently, Tokugawa-Japan discarded the mainland as its long-standing model of economic development, political institutions, and educational models.<sup>34</sup> It is noteworthy that Japan had been consistently and unilaterally acquiring intellectual and commercial products through the Chinese tributary network since the sixth century. But Japan disdained the Manchu regime's legitimacy because of the Confucian perception of the Manchus as inferior barbarians.<sup>35</sup> Though resenting the Manchu's savagery, Confucian scholars in seventeenth-century Japan responded in different ways to the regime change on the continent and reshuffling of the international system. The Hayashi clan were the hereditary Neo-Confucian advisors of the Tokugawa Bakufu administration, instructing both domestic and foreign affairs.<sup>36</sup> They mourned the fall of Ming Dynasty, and sincerely wished for the restoration of the original tributary system from which Japan benefited both monetarily and intellectually. They saw the Manchu conquest as a reversal of the *hua-yi* polarity between the civilized and barbarian societies. From the perspective of the iconoclastic Yamaga Sokô, a classical Confucian scholar who did not affiliate himself with the Bakufu, Ming China's downfall was an opportunity for Japan to establish an alternative East-Asian international system that substituted of the Sinocentric tributary order. He thus made the case for Japan's inherent superiority.

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<sup>34</sup> Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism*, 24.

<sup>35</sup> Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism*, 24.

<sup>36</sup> Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism*, 42-43.

Confucianism was the pivot of Japanese proto-nationalism's birth and subsequent evolution. Affection for Confucianism distinguished this stage of proto-nationalism's development. Japanese scholars, from both the Hayashi family's Neo-Confucian/*shushigaku* and Yamaga Sokô's classical Confucian/*kogaku* camps, consulted Confucian classics as a moral guide when creating the notion of proto-nationalism as their response towards diplomatic incidents around Japan. In the eighteenth-century, Japanese Confucian intellectuals indigenized Confucianism as a political science to modify Japan's domestic government structure; they encouraged the political perfection of society towards peace and prosperity. Though these scholars, foremost the renowned Ogyû Sorai, did not address Japanese identity directly, their scholarship set the stage for later proto-nationalist imaginings. The *kokugaku* ("national learning school") and *mitogaku* ("Mito school") critics of Confucianism utilized Confucianism's intellectual legacy of proto-nationalism, but turned against Confucianism itself by attacking Japanese society's reliance on ideologies and items with Chinese origins, and embraced Japan's domestic intellectual achievements. The next stage of pre-modern Japanese proto-nationalism was therefore constituted upon the criticism of Confucianism's Chinese nature. The late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century *kokugaku* and *mitogaku* scholars ironically inherited the methodology of Confucian philology when searching for references in Japanese classics to substantiate their anti-Confucian arguments. Japan-centric scholars fiercely attacked Ogyû Sorai's favor for Confucianism as a Chinese intellectual paradigm. The Confucian emphasis on religious piety was revitalized by the *kokugaku* intellectuals, but to serve the Japanese indigenous belief of Shintoism. Confucianism in

Japan, through the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, constituted and facilitated the progress of proto-nationalism with its both affirmative and contrapuntal functions.



## **Chapter II: Tokugawa-Japanese Confucianism in International Relations**

When Tokugawa Japan witnessed the continental emergency and barbarians' triumph in the East Asian area, the Japanese state's collective identity and sovereignty inevitably came into the consideration of its Confucian scholars. These were men who served in the Tokugawa administration or were concerned with Japan's security. Their Confucianism expressed intellectual responses to the dynastic transition in China and fluctuation in contemporaneous international relations; they thus contributed to a form of proto-nationalism in pre-modern Japan.

### **Confucianism in early-Edo Japan**

The seventeenth-century Japanese Confucianism was divided into *shushigaku* ("Zhu Xi-school" Neo-Confucianism from eleventh-century Song-China) and *kogaku* (classical Confucianism from sixth-century Tang-China). The Tokugawa Bakufu embraced Neo-Confucianism as the state's official ideology in administration and education. The intellectual authority of the Hayashi clan symbolized the official sponsorship and orthodoxy of Neo-Confucianism in early-Edo Japan; while Yamaga Sokô and other *kogaku* scholars denounced Neo-Confucianism as heresy and encouraged the reinvigoration of more classical Confucian ideologies. Neo-Confucianism was heavily influenced by the Buddhist ideology of self-perfection and the methodology of introspection, but without the Buddhist belief of an external heaven apart from the earthly world. On the other hand, *kogaku*'s traditional Confucianism concentrated on the macro-scale rectification of society. Both *shushi-gaku* and *gogaku*, nevertheless, acknowledged

the necessity of hierarchical obedience and social stratification, in order to achieve an orderly world. These were consistent features of Confucian scholarship since its inception.

Edo Japan was a pseudo-unified, pre-modern feudal state, which the Tokugawa Bakufu centrally administered. *Daimyos*, military clans across country, nominally submitted to the Tokugawa with annual tribute missions but enjoyed local administrative autonomy. Consolidating political centralization after the Tokugawa family's unification of Japan required ideological justification by Confucian doctrines. The Confucian ideology of hierarchical obedience consolidated the Tokugawa Shogun's authoritative governance. Though local military clans remained autonomous, these Edo-Japanese daimyos submitted to the national authority of the Tokugawa Shogun, who mediated conflicts among clans and coordinated nationwide administrative policies and military operations.<sup>37</sup> Further, the Tokugawa Bakufu utilized the Confucian doctrines of loyalty and piety to downplay the Shogun's arrogation of political authority from the Emperor.<sup>38</sup> The Tokugawa Shogun justified his political dominance by proclaiming loyalty to the Emperor, who was nominally country's supreme ruler and religious leader of Shinto. According to the logic of political hierarchy, loyalty to the Shogun could also be considered loyalty to the Emperor.

Confucian education offered the Japanese aristocracy and samurai society both intellectual and moral prestige over commoners. Edo Japanese used Japanese as their vernacular language but employed Chinese writing in their intellectual sphere, a cultural tradition since the sixth century when Confucianism first arrived to Japan. Since the

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<sup>37</sup> Mass, *Yoritomo and the Founding of the First Bakufu*, 1-5.

<sup>38</sup> Totman, *Politics in the Tokugawa Bakufu*, 41-43.

Tokugawa Bakufu promoted Confucianism as the official political doctrine and kept using Chinese as the administrative working language, intellectual literacy in Edo Japan was distinguished by the capability of comprehending Chinese language. Further, as Edo-Japanese Neo-Confucian indoctrination symbolized individual's ethical morality, Confucian education elevated Tokugawa-Japanese aristocrats, samurais and certain merchant-class individuals, who could afford to attend Confucian institutions, above much less affluent commoners based on virtue.<sup>39</sup> Japanese Confucian scholars with intellectual advancement were recruited to the Bakufu to engage in state administration and public education. The access to political careers offered Tokugawa-era Japanese Confucian scholars the opportunity to shape the identity of the Japanese state among the intellectual society.<sup>40</sup>

The patronage of Confucianism was prevalent in Tokugawa Japan, as Japan imitated the Chinese model of funding Confucianism as both administrative and educational policy. The majority of Confucian educational institutions were radiated around the nation's capital in Edo and financially funded by the Tokugawa Bakufu. The Japanese authority had been funding Confucianism since its arrival in the sixth century, but governmental investment increased when the Tokugawa Bakufu adopted Neo-Confucian ideology as the state's official doctrine. The Tokugawa Bakufu revitalized the function of Confucian institutes as career academies that trained administrative personnel, more than expanding literacy and cultivating individual virtue.<sup>41</sup> Confucian scholars who mastered administrative affairs entered the Tokugawa Bakufu's

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<sup>39</sup> Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism*, 94-96.

<sup>40</sup> Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism*, 78-82.

<sup>41</sup> Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism*, 69-70.

administration and received not only financial compensation but more importantly reputations for their accomplishment in public affairs. More and more Confucian scholars thus were attracted to Japan's central and regional bureaucracies, where they exercised agency to draft government policies and shape public opinion.<sup>42</sup> During their career as civil servants, several Confucian scholars, like members of the Hayashi family and Yamaga Sokô, indoctrinated the Tokugawa leadership and public with their belief in Japanese state's collective identity and potential superiority among Japan's neighboring regimes.

### **Hayashi Gahô & Hôkô and *Kai hentai***

The Hayashi clan was prominent in Tokugawa Japan's public education and intellectual society for their achievement and authority in Neo-Confucian philosophy, which was endorsed by the Bakufu as the official and orthodox ideology of the state. Their school's founder, Hayashi Razan constructed the Yushima Seido ("Hall of the Sages"), which later became Japan's supreme educational institution when Hayashi Razan was appointed as the advisor and tutor to the first four Shoguns of the Tokugawa Bakufu. Razan contributed to Japanese legislation regarding administrative affairs, economic policies, and official rituals in early-Edo period, thus earning the Bakufu's trust in the Hayashi clan's loyalty and competence.

When Hayashi Razan passed away, his son, Hayashi Gahô, succeeded Tokugawa Shogun's appointment as its scholarly advisor. During Gahô's service, Tokugawa Japan was alerted to the Manchu invasion of China, as unofficial trade between Japan and

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<sup>42</sup> Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism*, 78-82.

China was interrupted due to continental turmoil. Hayashi Gahô collected intelligence reports gathered from merchant vessels arriving at Nagasaki port regarding the Manchu invasion of the Ming Dynasty. He then addressed his opinion on continental political incidents, thus influencing the Bakufu's diplomatic and cultural perspective on Manchu-governed China. When Gahô passed away, his son Hôkô took the responsibility of intelligence-gathering and analysis. Information acquired from merchant ships arrived in Japan during Gahô and Hôkô's careers were recorded in a text called *Kai hentai*, which means the "mutation of the *hua-yi* dichotomy." *Kai hentai* mainly discussed intelligence about continental affairs, particularly the resistance of the Han-Chinese rump states: Southern Ming (1644-1662 C.E.) and the Kingdom of Tungning (1662-1682 C.E.).

*Kai Hentai* reflected Japanese Confucian scholars' view of the Manchu invasion of China; further it conveyed the Tokugawa Bakufu's official attitude on the Chinese dynastic transition. Though the Tokugawa Bakufu issued seclusion decrees, prohibiting international trade with foreign powers, except China and Netherlands, Tokugawa Japan still paid significant attention to the continental affairs and changes in the regional diplomatic environment. The Tokugawa Bakufu demanded that all foreign intelligence be edited and delivered to the central administration for investigation by Confucian scholars who served as bureaucrats and advisors.

Hayashi Hôkô defined the Manchu conquest and subsequent governance of China as barbarian, because he believed that the conquerors destroyed an established political and social system, and damaged physical and intellectual properties. Hôkô wrote in the introduction of *Kai Hentai* that:

Emperor Chongzhen (of the Ming dynasty) was deceased and gone to Heaven;  
the territory of Chinese mainland fell under the control of barbarians; the

remnants of the Han-Chinese regime seek shelter in the southwest corner of the continent, while the barbarian nomads rode across the Central Kingdom. These are indications of the mutation of civilized society into the barbarian.<sup>43</sup>

Hôkô expressed horror at this “barbarian” invasion and conquest of China. Hôkô believed that China had degraded from a civilized to a barbarian state, since the old regime was driven to the hinterland and barbarians had the privilege to rule the vast territory.

Nevertheless, Hayashi Hôkô failed to recognize the sinification of the Manchu regime, since the Qing-Dynasty China basically inherited all political institutions and social norms from the previous regime established by the Han-Chinese.<sup>44</sup> The Qing dynasty, though it committed massacres during its military conquest, emphasized pacifying the public and restoring social and economic order once it consolidated its regime.<sup>45</sup> Manchu conquerors recruited Han-Chinese scholars to serve in the Qing regime and maintained Confucianism as the official political philosophy and administrative principle. The hierarchical political structure of Qing dynasty was almost identical to that of the Ming, with only minor additional agencies that handled ethnic and religious affairs of the multi-national regime.<sup>46</sup> However, The Tokugawa Bakufu regarded Hôkô’s narrative of Qing China’s lack of civilization as plausible, considering the Hayashi clan’s prominent reputation and credibility in Tokugawa political and intellectual society.

Japanese Confucian scholars thus came to regard the Manchu invasion as the reverse of the *hua-yi* dichotomy, both degrading the Chinese civilization and implying a comparatively elevated status for Japan in the tributary system. Hayashi Hôkô gave a

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<sup>43</sup> Hayashi Gahō and Hayashi Hôkô, *Kai Hentai*.

<sup>44</sup> John King Fairbank, *Ch’ing Administration: Three Studies by John K. Fairbank and Ssŭ-yü Têng* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1968), 43-44.

<sup>45</sup> Fairbank, *Ch’ing Administration: Three Studies by John K. Fairbank and Ssŭ-yü Têng*, 43-44.

<sup>46</sup> Fairbank, *Ch’ing Administration: Three Studies by John K. Fairbank and Ssŭ-yü Têng*, 76-80.

more detailed narrative than his father about the Manchu invasion of Ming China and Han-Chinese's resistance against the barbarians. Hôkô first discussed the establishment of Qing dynasty after the death of Ming dynasty's Emperor Chongzhen:

The fifteenth year of Emperor Chongzhen (of Chinese Ming dynasty) was the equivalent nineteenth year of the era name Ken'ei (of Japanese Emperor Go-Mizunoo). In this year, Li Zicheng rebelled against the Ming regime, and his insurgents entered the Ming capital of Beijing in the March of the seventeenth year of Chongzhen. Emperor Chongzhen committed suicide on the nineteenth of April. Li Zicheng usurped the regime with the dynasty name of Dashun...(In the spring of the second year of the era name Shoho in Japan) General Wu San'gui defeated Li Zicheng with the barbarians' military support, and retook Beijing. General Wu Sangui chased the remnants of Li Zicheng's army to the province of Shanxi. Meanwhile, the *Dalu* (barbarians) had the control of the capital of Beijing. (The Manchu) changed the era name to Shunzhi, and established the dynasty of Qing. In May, the barbarians took control of the alternative capital of Nanjing...<sup>47</sup>

Hôkô distinctively used the term *Dalu* (barbarians) to refer to the Manchu who occupied the capital of Beijing and expanded their territories. He then continued with the narration of the establishment of Ming rump state by an individual called Zheng Zhilong:

Zheng Zhilong had traveled to Japan in his youth, and he sold shoes at the town of Hirado of Hizen province (in Kyushu) for several years...Zheng had married a Japanese woman and had offspring with her. Later in the first year of Emperor Chongzhen, he returned to his home country while his wife stayed in Hirado. At the time, piracy activity was overwhelming around the Chinese southern coast,

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<sup>47</sup> Hayashi Gahô and Hayashi Hôkô, *Kai Hentai*.

and Zheng participated as a pirate as well. Then Zheng submitted to the Emperor Chongzhen for his crime, but he was pardoned and joined the Ming dynasty's armed forces. Zheng fought the piracy on the coast and was famous for his leadership and military achievement. Zheng was commissioned as the General of Fujian, becoming a renowned celebrity from a commoner. Therefore, he was grateful to the Ming dynasty and willing to reciprocate Emperor Chongzhen's recognition. Therefore, he designated the provincial center Fuzhou as the capital, planning to repel the Manchu barbarians and restore the Ming dynasty.<sup>48</sup>

Hôkô narrated the remnants of Ming-China with contempt. He did not see Zheng Zhilong as a noble delegate of a civilized regime, since Zheng neither had a prestigious background, nor was proficiently educated in a Confucian manner.<sup>49</sup> One reason for the ambivalence of Tokugawa Japan's official correspondence is that it was theoretically and logistically too complicated for the Bakufu's Confucian advisors to evaluate the hierarchy between Tokugawa Japan and Ming remnants.

The Tokugawa Bakufu, though admiring the earlier Ming dynasty's prestige, noticed the weakness of Ming's rump state. The regime capital resided in the trivial provincial capital of Fuzhou, much less esteemed than the original capital in Beijing. Further, nominating a former pirate as a general suggested the Southern-Ming regime's lack of human resources due to consistent military failures. It would be, therefore, inappropriate and unacceptable under Confucian principles for the Bakufu to recognize the failing Southern-Ming state through a lens previously applied to the illustrious Ming-China. The Southern-Ming regime did not attain sufficient financial capacity to afford a

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<sup>48</sup> Hayashi Gahō and Hayashi Hôkô, *Kai Hentai*.

<sup>49</sup> Hayashi Gahō and Hayashi Hôkô, *Kai Hentai*.



formal diplomatic legation; thus, they only counted on individual messengers to communicate with Tokugawa Japan. Ming's rump states relied on pirates to communicate with foreign regimes. Hayashi Hôkô recorded a private, or to an extent semi-official, communication between Zheng Zhilong's regime and Tokugawa Japan:

Zheng Zhilong, though he had the ambition to revive the Ming dynasty, had insufficient military strength and considered asking Japan's military assistance.

Thus, he dispatched Cui Zhi to Nagasaki with necessary documents and asked for Japan's response. Cui Zhi was an officer under Zheng's command.<sup>50</sup>

The Southern-Ming state's lack of military strength and diplomatic grandeur discouraged Hôkô's effort to help Ming's rump states seeking Japan's support or even direct military intervention, since Japan's investment could be fruitless and potentially induce Qing-China's retribution.

Hôkô, in his description of the fall of Beijing, encouraged the Tokugawa Bakufu to recognize the Manchu leadership as "barbarian", but his policy recommendation was in contradiction.<sup>51</sup> Hôkô praised the Southern-Ming regime's cause of reviving the Ming-dynasty China as the center of civilization, despite that Qing-China actually adopted Chinese civilization and preserved the previous dynasty's civilized political institutions and social structure. Hôkô addressed his sympathy towards the Han-Chinese resistance against Manchus' barbarian invasion: "(Ming-Chinese) generals and soldiers gallantly sacrificed their lives to protect the Emperor and preserve the regime."<sup>52</sup> Hôkô, based on practical deliberation however, did see the demand for military assistance as overly burdensome, as the Tokugawa Bakufu would not be able to mobilize a capable expedition

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<sup>50</sup> Hayashi Gahō and Hayashi Hôkô, *Kai Hentai*.

<sup>51</sup> Hayashi Gahō and Hayashi Hôkô, *Kai Hentai*.

<sup>52</sup> Hayashi Gahō and Hayashi Hôkô, *Kai Hentai*.

force and aggregate a fund to support the Southern Ming regime's counter-attack. Hôkô articulated his nominal appreciation of the Southern Ming's cause of resistance but suggested that it would be impossible for Japan to offer assistance in reality. Hôkô recorded the Japanese reply to Southern Ming's demand of troops and funds:

Japan had not had a proper tributary relation with the Chinese Ming dynasty for more than a hundred years, and there had been no Japanese who had traveled to China. Though Chinese merchant ships arrived and conducted trade at Nagasaki every year, these activities were *de facto* illegal. Please address these replies to the person (from Southern Ming) and urge him to return as soon as possible.<sup>53</sup>

Hôkô used Japan's current non-involvement in the Tributary system, from which Japan had significantly benefitted in previous years, as the justification of Japan's implicit refusal through the expulsion of the Southern-Ming representative. Tokugawa Japan, therefore, never dispatched military support or offered financial assistance to the Southern Ming's military resistance against the Manchus.

Hayashi Gahô and Hôkô compiled *Kai Hentai* as Confucian scholars' collection of intelligence analysis of the political circumstances on the continent. The volume also assessed the Japanese state's position in relation to other regimes, and reflected an early notion of Japan as a collective entity in a dynamic international world. Hayashi Hôkô, who prioritized the security and prosperity of Japan with his political deliberation, advanced pragmatic foreign policies to the Bakufu he served.

### **Yamaga Sokô and *Chûchô Jijitsu***

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<sup>53</sup> Hayashi Gahô and Hayashi Hôkô, *Kai Hentai*.

Yamaga Sokô became an apprentice of Hayashi Razan at the age of nine. Sokô, after entering his adulthood however, disliked the orthodox paradigm of Neo-Confucianism ratified by the Tokugawa Bakufu. Sokô rather suggested the return to ancient sages' teachings, like the *Analecets* by Confucius and works by the Duke of Zhou. Yamaga Sokô argued that individuals should embrace the virtues of piety, loyalty, and honesty according to classical Confucian indoctrination. Meanwhile he believed that a respectful Japanese samurai is a qualified Confucian with both literacy and morality. Sokô also disdained his colleagues' reinterpretation of Confucianism, particularly the Neo-Confucianism in the Song Dynasty. Since the Neo-Confucianism advocated by the Hayashi clan was acknowledged as the official ideology of Tokugawa education, Yamaga Sokô was alienated from most Confucian scholars who were ideologically allied with the Hayashi clan. He was later even exiled from the capital in 1666. Nevertheless, Sokô's discussion of Japan's fundamental superiority carried historical significance for encouraging notions of Japanese pride.

Yamaga Sokô recognized the notion of *hua-yi* dichotomy, but he further argued that a regime could either upgrade in the hierarchy with civilized achievements or degrade with civilization's collapse. Though China had always been the center of civilization in the region, Japan also had the potential to acquire such a status. The term of "China" (中朝 in Chinese characters and Japanese kanji), *Chûchô* in Japanese and *Zhongchao* in Chinese, in East Asian languages not only carries the geographical notion of the "Middle Kingdom" but also represents the civilized status of the "Central Realm" (*Chûchô*) in the Confucian hierarchy of civilization. The geographical "China," therefore, would be fixed permanently to the continent, but the cultural "China" as *Chûchô*

theoretically could be transferred between different regimes, based on their comparative levels of civilization. If the Chinese state became conquered by a group of barbarian invaders and lost control over its civilization, then that was no longer qualified as the *Chûchô*, the “Central Realm.” That was because barbarians did not know how to preserve and utilize the civilization to its maximum benefit. Sokô thus argued that Japan, though previously a “peripheral realm” (外朝, *Gaichô* as the Japanese terminology), in the Confucian hierarchy of civilization, held the opportunity but also obligation to inherit the center of civilization after Chinese civilization’s downfall due to the Manchu invasion. The Japanese state thus was eligible to carry the title of “Central Realm” as well as *Chûchô*. Such an intellectual maneuver would isolate the state of China into a more inferior “peripheral realm” as *Gaichô*. Yamaga Sokô utilized the Manchu occupation of the continent as the opportunity to advance Japan’s innate superiority, from the perspective of geography, religion, politics, and military accomplishment.

Sokô’s *Chûchô Jijitsu* (“facts about the ‘Central Realm’”) was a historical illustration of ancient Japan written in classical Chinese prose, as classical Chinese was the language of Confucianism and the symbol of literacy. Sokô neglected to acknowledge the fact that Confucianism was a system of foreign ideology from China and the whole Japanese intellectual community depended on a foreign language to convey the idea of Japanese identity; rather he considered Japanese Confucianism as a domestic intellectual school that had been naturalized.

Confucianism, in both China and Japan, prioritized the legitimacy of governance when discussing political affairs. Yamaga Sokô therefore started the historical account with Japan’s political history to justify Japan’s political legitimacy. He emphasized that

the Emperor's lineage was never disrupted in Japan, while dynastic change in China proved the continental political system's instability. The theological foundation of Shintoism determined the Emperor's divine right of governance. Sokô began his historical narration with a brief introduction of Japanese superiority:

The *Chûchô* (meaning Japan) has a geography is far superior to all other countries. Its intellectuals and celebrities are the most talented in the universe. The divine mandate by the god, the stability and longevity through justice governance, the fabulous intellectual accomplishments, and glorious military achievements. These all indicate the heavenliness of *Chûchô* (Japan).<sup>54</sup>

It is important to notice that, though educated as a Confucian scholar and writing in a Confucian manner, Yamaga Sokô reoriented Tokugawa Japanese scholars' concentration on Confucianism to the study of early Japanese classics and the traditional religion of Shintoism. Sokô, therefore, contributed to the later constitution of a new Japanese intellectual movement, *kokugaku*, literally meaning "national learning." Though he was exiled by the Tokugawa Bakufu for his anti-orthodox comments, *kokugaku* in the eighteenth century inherited Sorai's intellectual legacy. Those writers (as will be examined in chapter three) inherited Sokô's intellectual legacy of investigating ancient Japanese history long after Sokô and his *kogaku*, meaning Japanese classical studies, had disappeared from the world.

Yamaga Sokô argued that the Japanese archipelago's geographical advantages helped deter foreign invasions and maintain economic self-sufficiency. No alien power had ever conquered Japan, and the Mongol invasions in the late thirteenth century failed

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<sup>54</sup> Yamaga Sokô, *Chûchô Jijitsu*.

as two strong typhoons struck the Mongol fleet and caused heavy casualties.<sup>55</sup> Japan did not share a vast border, therefore having no necessity to build fortification against barbarian invasions. Sokô also noticed Japan's geographical advantages for economic development. Japan's major population resided on arable plains between coastline and inland mountain ranges, enjoying the natural irrigation and a transportation network provided by the inland waterway system.<sup>56</sup> Thus, he argued that Japan produced merchandise as good as Chinese equivalents, for which Japanese had eagerly desired to acquire.

Sokô recognized that the terminology of "China" could carry multiple implications, and he offered his justification of Japan's superiority from a natural scientific perspective:

In general, heaven has a center, earth has a center. There is the center of physical geography, and also the center of human geography. Therefore, the *Gaichô* (mainland China) has claimed the geographical center of the world; the birth place of Buddha was believed to be the medium of heaven and earth; and Jesus Christ said he was the ideological center granted by the heavenly god. I humbly believe that, only when four seasons coexist, and land becomes arable for agricultural production and social activities, then certain place can be regarded as the *Chûchô*, the Central Realm. Among all nations, only the *Gaichô* (mainland China) and the *Chûchô* (Japan) are qualified for this requirement. However, since China (Japan) has [lost] the mandate from heaven. Our Realm should be praised as the center of universe.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Yamaga Sokô, *Chûchô Jijitsu*.

<sup>56</sup> Yamaga Sokô, *Chûchô Jijitsu*.

<sup>57</sup> Yamaga Sokô, *Chûchô Jijitsu*.

It was interesting to notice Sokô's acknowledgement of geographical advantage of mainland China as well, though he believed that Japan still won in this round of competition because of its additional religious privileges. Further, the reference to both Buddhism and Christianity in his justification reflected Sokô's pre-modern worldview that included the presence of the west.

Yamaga Sokô concluded his justification of Japan's geographical superiority by discussing how Japan exploited its geographical advantage:

Our Realm has been inherently the geographical center of the universe, and [ancient mythical] Emperor Jimmu governed this territory with distribution and reorganization of lands. The location of the capital of Heian was perfectly chosen at the center of our territory, and it represented the virtues, upon which *Chûchô* was established.<sup>58</sup>

This argument might seem coherent and thus persuasive to Yamaga Sokô's contemporary Japanese, most of whom had not been properly indoctrinated with Japanese history. But, as Sokô probably knew but intentionally neglected, the urban planning of city of Heian was a precise imitation of the capital of Chinese Tang dynasty, Chang'an.

The notion of military achievement is essential to Yamaga Sokô's argument. Japan had acquired much higher reputation in military accomplishments than China, as Japan had successfully defended against nomadic Mongols' invasions and had conquered the Korean Peninsula twice. China, on the other hand, was frequently under the threat of northern barbarians. As a consequence, Japan's imperial lineage had been stable while China frequently experienced dynastic changes, as Sokô indicated:

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<sup>58</sup> Yamaga Sokô, *Chûchô Jijitsu*.

The *Chûchô*'s imperial rule has been stable and unchanged through uncountable years. This is unimaginable for other nations. Other nations have been frequently invaded by foreigners and nomads. During the two-hundred and fifty years of the Spring-and-Autumn period (of China), there had been twenty-five incidents of kings murdered by their servants, and the case of rebellions and revolts was innumerable. Only this Realm has been stable for two-million year since its establishment. The governance of the imperial house has lasted for more than two-thousand and three-hundred years.<sup>59</sup>

Yamaga Sokô concluded that Japan should be entitled as the *Chûchô* for the reasons he listed, and Japan should erect a new cultural sphere/regional order oriented by its own leadership. Sokô criticized his intellectual colleagues for admiring Chinese culture, including the imported system of Confucianism. He encouraged his fellow Japanese to recognize the national superiority that people had failed to realize for a long period of time. Sokô argued that:

When people have viewed the endless ocean, they fail to recognize the size of sea. Those people who live in borderless plain, fail to recognize the magnitude of territory. Thus, familiarity of context hinders ones' perception. However, is the context only geographical? You foolish people lived in the intellectual *Chûchô*, but fail to recognize its beauty. You only have preference for ideological classics from the *Gaichô* (China), admiring their celebrities. This is heartbreaking! This is disappointing! Do you merely like foreign objects? Are you merely curious about foreign elements?<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Yamaga Sokô, *Chûchô Jijitsu*.

<sup>60</sup> Yamaga Sokô, *Chûchô Jijitsu*.



If Sokô had had the opportunity to respond to the contemporary Qing Dynasty's effort to reinstate the tributary system, he would disdain the initiative because a barbarian-led tributary network would degraded the whole system. Yamaga Sokô implicitly recommended the establishment an alternative cultural sphere, since Confucian-nurtured Japan, as *Chûchô*, was qualified for the center of civilization. Such alternative would not only elevate Japan's status among other neighboring states, but also reconcile the barbarian threat to Japan.

### **Japanese Confucian proto-nationalism**

One of the most essential elements of seventeenth-century Japan's international relations was its diplomatic and trade relations with China. Such relations changed due to the rise of the Qing Dynasty, leading to new interpretations of Japan's position in a Confucian ideology-derived hierarchy of civilization. The two main streams of response from Japan, exemplified by Hayashi Hôkô and Yamaga Sokô, demonstrated diverse attitudes towards the future of Japan. These might be related to the different concerns of their intended audiences. The Hayashi family represented the intellectual society endorsed by the Tokugawa Bakufu, which desired to restore and maintain the status quo. Hayashi Gahô and Hôkô, therefore, offered prudential and pragmatic policy recommendations that accorded with the Tokugawa Bakufu's desire. Though the Hayashi scholars never explicitly suggested the Bakufu substitute China's leadership in the East Asian Cultural Sphere, their commentary suggested a proto-nationalistic Japanese identity shared within Japan's intellectual society under this diplomatic emergency. Yamaga Sokô promoted a more explicit and radical rhetoric of the Japanese state's

superiority. Under such circumstances, Japanese Confucian scholars within both *shushi-gaku* and *kogaku* developed notions of Japan's pre-modern proto-nationalism, with the goals of serving Japan as a collective state and protecting Japan from external threats. They provided a sense of pride and unity, and considered the interests of Japan as a whole. Interestingly, this type of Japanese proto-nationalism had its origin in Tokugawa-Japan's Confucianism, in defiance of its foreign origins. But these intellectuals in seventeenth- to eighteenth-century Japan were simply turning inward; their writings were direct responses to the significant changes in the surrounding international environment.

### Chapter III: Ogyū Sorai's Japanese Confucianism and Tokugawa-Japanese Politics

Seventeenth-century Japan witnessed the emerging crises on the Chinese mainland and experienced a dynamic international environment with the presence of western powers. The Neo-Confucian Hayashi clan and classically-oriented Yamaga Sokō invoked Confucian philosophy and philology to promote a diplomatic policy that elevated Japan's interests. The Hayashi clan represented the Tokugawa Bakufu's temperance and pragmatism in political and diplomatic affairs, and Yamaga Sokō proposed a more radical and progressive awareness of Japanese identity and superiority. Both offered the intellectual antecedents to a proto-nationalistic sentiment.

Edo Japan, on the other hand, remained as a feudal (*hōken*) state with the Tokugawa Bakufu's pseudo-central authority. Another voice arose the Confucian intellectuals took this political structure as his point of departure.<sup>61</sup> Ogyū Sorai (1666-1728 C.E.) compared Japan's political structure with that of China through philology. Sorai believed that a state's rites, meaning political structure and customs, must accord with its socio-cultural contexts. Tokugawa Japan and ancient China shared similarities in their social circumstances, as each was a feudal regime. Sorai, therefore, advocated that the earliest Confucianism in ancient China, rather than classical Confucianism or Neo-Confucianism from more politically-centralized (*gunken*) dynasties, conformed best to Tokugawa Japan's political demands and socio-cultural circumstances.<sup>62</sup> The ancient-Chinese Confucian doctrines, which Sorai referred to as the "way of early sage kings," were the creation of Chinese ancient political leaders before the tenth-century B.C.E. These were essential to Sorai's mission to improve "feudal" Japan's domestic politics.

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<sup>61</sup> Conrad Totman, *Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 286.

<sup>62</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 286.

Sorai's investigation and reinterpretation of ancient Confucian classics, and his recommendation for Japan's optimal political system, reflected his intellectual concern regarding the state of Japan's political coherence and identity.

Ogyū Sorai, the second son of an Edo samurai, was the most prominent Confucian scholar in mid-Tokugawa Japan. Sorai's father served as the personal physician of Tokugawa Tsunayoshi, the fifth Shogun of the Tokugawa Bakufu. Sorai had studied the official Neo-Confucianism, like Yamaga Sokō, as a disciple of the Hayashi intellectual faction; Sorai, nevertheless, never associated himself with Neo-Confucianism in the rest of his life.<sup>63</sup> Neither did Sorai acknowledge Yamaga Sokō's intellectual credibility.<sup>64</sup> Sorai, once he completed his Confucian education, began his educational career at the age of twenty-four by establishing a private institution of Confucian classics. With the aim to discuss Tokugawa Japan's optimal political system, he frequently engaged in debates with disciples of the *shushi-gaku* Hayashi clan and Yamaga's *kogaku* school. Sorai was thus abhorred by scholars from both intellectual cohorts for his severe criticism of both factions. Sorai's teaching experience did not last long, since he could not refuse the opportunity to enter the Tokugawa Bakufu's bureaucracy and serve as a scholarly advisor under Yanagisawa Yoshiyasu, one of Shogun Tsunayoshi's senior councilors.<sup>65</sup> Sorai's position in the bureaucracy also kept him safe from other Confucian intellectuals' denunciation. The Shogun's protection of Sorai's non-mainstream thoughts, however, vanished when Tsunayoshi died, and Sorai's employer, Yoshiyasu, lost his privileged status and could no longer shelter Sorai. He thus left the bureaucracy in 1709

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<sup>63</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 283.

<sup>64</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 284.

<sup>65</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 284.

at the age of thirty-three under the pressure of his intellectual adversaries, and he thoroughly disassociated himself from Neo-Confucianism and withdrew from the intellectual apprenticeship of the Hayashi clan.<sup>66</sup>

Ogyū Sorai's concern for Tokugawa Japan's feudal politics persisted even though he no longer served the Bakufu. Sorai's political theory was oriented around the preservation of Tokugawa Bakufu's feudal governance. Though Sorai disapproved of Neo-Confucianism, he never discredited Confucianism's value as a philosophy and a paradigm of political science in Tokugawa Japan. Sorai diverged from the Neo-Confucian mainstream in this way.. He confronted both the Hayashi clan and Yamaga Sokō's faction and argued that their theories were unsubstantiated, even heterodox by his standard, because of their reliance on inauthentic and inappropriate references. The Hayashi scholars were indoctrinated with Song-dynasty Neo-Confucianism, and Yamaga Sokō consulted classical-Confucian doctrines of Han and Tang-dynasty China, from which institutionalized Confucianism first arrived in Japan. The Han, Tang and Song dynasties had all been highly centralized politically. These versions of Confucianism consulted by the Hayashi and Yamaga Sokō, therefore, deliberated politics in the context of centralized regimes, instead of feudal systems like Tokugawa Japan. Sorai thus regarded their Confucian documents as inappropriate as intellectual references, since their content did not match Tokugawa Japan's feudal-political circumstances.<sup>67</sup> Because Sorai found both classical Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism at the time ineffective as a branch of political science, he turned to the more archaic Confucian classics which originated China's feudal era.

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<sup>66</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 284.

<sup>67</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 286.

Sorai thus believed that only the ancient version of Confucianism from the Chinese feudal era could help consolidate Tokugawa Japan's politics. He emphasized Confucian philology, meaning the precise examination of documents to identify intellectual evidence, as his methodology of investigation. Edo-Japanese Confucian scholars thus categorized Sorai's school of philology as *kobunjigaku*, "the study of ancient language," alongside Sorai's intellectual competitors from *shushigaku* and *kogaku*.<sup>68</sup> Sorai sought Japan's optimal political structure by investigating what he identified as the ancient, thus reliable, Confucian classics: the "Six Classics." These ancient Confucian documents from China's Spring-and-Autumn and Warring-States period (circa fifth-century B.C.E.) served as Sorai's vital references, based on which he contemplated administrative alternatives for Japan's domestic politics in the transition between the seventeenth- and eighteenth century. Utilizing a different set of Confucian classics as his intellectual references, Ogyū Sorai constructed a political paradigm that served Tokugawa Japan's state interests.

Sorai's standards for evaluating documents' credibility was strict to an extreme. Sorai, though a genuine believer of Confucianism, remained cautious in investigating the credibility of even Confucius' own *Analects*, which almost all Confucian scholars held as the ultimate in intellectual orthodoxy.<sup>69</sup> Sorai was suspicious about the *Analects*, because the document was a posthumous collection of Confucius' ideas, edited by Confucius' followers. The editors, surely less astute than Confucius as Sorai believed, were likely to inaccurately recall or interpret the master's instructions.<sup>70</sup> Sorai raised the case of Itō

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<sup>68</sup> John A. Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works: the Bendō and Benmei* (Honolulu, HI: Association for Asian Studies, 2006), 12.

<sup>69</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 8.

<sup>70</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 9.

Jinsai as the example of Confucian scholars who falsely interpreted and carelessly trusted Confucius's *Analects*:

In recent years, there was Mr. Ito (Jinsai), another eminent and brilliant scholar...However, Mr. Ito interpreted the *Analects* in terms of the *Mencius*; also, he read works of ancient literature in terms of modern literature. (Thus,) he simply remained a part of the school of Masters Cheng and Master Zhu (of Song-China Neo-Confucianism). In addition, Jinsai publicly distinguished the way of the early kings and that of Confucius as two (different) ways. Jinsai also retreated from the Six Classics and took his ideas exclusively from the *Analects*.<sup>71</sup>

In contrast, Ogyū Sorai held that ancient Confucianism's "Six Classics" as fundamentally vital to his investigation of the "way of early sage kings." This was because Confucius himself had credited these documents as reliable intellectual products by ancient sages.

Sorai continued:

Confucius was born at the end of the Zhou dynasty, and he had a difficult time pursuing a position in public service. Therefore, Confucius retreated from politics with his students to study the way of early sage kings. Confucius and his students discussed and defined the way, and later Confucian scholars recorded and distributed the way. The Six Classics were the collection of the way.<sup>72</sup>

"Fundamentalist" may not be the most accurate term to characterize Sorai, but he trusted the earliest Confucian classics as the most credible sources.

Ogyū Sorai believed that Tokugawa Japan's contemporary rites should function like those of ancient China. Sorai absolutely embraced China's cultural superiority, recognizing the importation of the written language and intellectual knowledge from

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<sup>71</sup> Ogyū Sorai, *Benmei*.

<sup>72</sup> Sorai, *Benmei*.

China, unlike Yamaga Sokô, who wrote in Chinese but refused to recognize Japan's dependence on Chinese as the source of its written language. Sorai's China-centric intuition differentiated him from Sokô and the later Japan-centric *kokugaku* ("national learning") scholars who will be discussed in the fourth chapter. But like Sokô, Sorai was concerned with what the Edo Japanese perceived as the long-lasting perpetuity and stability of Japan. Sokô considered Japan's existence and prosperity in a complex international environment; Sorai, on the other hand, expressed opinions about the suitable form of governance in Japan, considering domestic socio-economic factors.

Since Sorai preferred to apply his Confucian knowledge to the realm of domestic politics instead of international relations, he wrote in political philosophy and suggested a model for Japan. Sorai analyzed what he perceived as the "authentic" Confucian political philosophy in three volumes, titled *Bendô*, *Benmei*, and *Rongocho* ("Discussing the Way", "Discussing the Name", and "Discussing the *Analects*"). These documents were narratives of Sorai's Confucian philosophy and corresponding political doctrines. Sorai, unlike other Confucian scholars who discussed the "way" regarding its significance in individuals' morality, specified the "way" as the guideline of civic administration and state politics. Most of his argumentation thus regarded Confucianism as a political philosophy. The notions of "sages" and "Six Classics," along with the "way," composed the three essential features of Sorai's political theory. Sorai characterized ancient morally-justified Chinese political leaders as "sages," who inspired Confucius and other early Confucian scholars to pursue righteous governance in their contemporary period of feudal fragmentation and political instability. While Confucius' later disciples, like Mencius, supposed that all individuals have the human agency to explore and implement



the “way,” Sorai refuted them by arguing that only the early “sages” were capable of determining the “way” of political society. Sorai argued:

The way is a generalizing term. It is the integration of rituals, ceremonial music, legal codes, and political system established by early sage kings.<sup>73</sup>

Because these early king “sages” retained their philosophy in the collection of “Six Classics,” Sorai believed that political righteousness in the era of early “sages” could be reinvigorated in the similar environment of feudal Tokugawa Japan, and such revival was accessible only by reinvestigating ancient Confucian documents. In Sorai’s philological synthesis: the “sages” created the “way” according to the doctrines within the “Six Classics.”

As Sorai emphasized the term “way” in the title of his intellectual masterpiece *Bendô*, the “way” was the most significant pivot of his political philosophy. *Bendô* started with Sorai discussing the perpetuity and continuity of the “way.” Sorai suggested that though the term “way” had been frequently discussed by Confucian scholars throughout different periods, scholarly dialogue yielded different definitions instead of forming a consensus. This was because Confucian scholars judged the “way” with different standards based on their contemporary socio-cultural circumstances—whether feudal or centralized. Confucian scholars, including Confucius’ direct descendants, reinterpreted either Confucius’ or “early sage kings” ideology of the “way” according to changing socio-cultural customs. These erroneous reinterpretations led to misunderstandings of Confucian political doctrines and the emergence of what Sorai regarded as unauthentic Confucian “heterodoxies” adopted by his intellectual adversaries.

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<sup>73</sup> Ogyū Sorai, *Bendô*.

And Confucian intellectual society in China not only failed to end the cyclical dynastic change and subsequent social chaos, but also encountered internal intellectual confrontation that disintegrated intellectual society. While educated social elites failed to unite and collaborate, the Chinese public suffered from antagonism between opposing classes and communities.<sup>74</sup> In Sorai's perspective, a long-lasting and stability-guaranteeing "way" should be the "way of early sage kings."

Sorai gave credit to Confucius for synthesizing the way:

Confucius' way is the way of early sage kings. The way of early sage kings was established for the purpose of pacifying the public...it is a set of rules and cannot be briefly summarized. Since the way is a complicated paradigm...Confucianism indoctrinates people with the understanding of the way.<sup>75</sup>

Sorai's argument was contrary to what argued by the officially-endorsed Japanese Neo-Confucian scholars, who recognized that the "way" was a pre-existing social convention that naturally existed in the society rather than an intentional artifice fabricated even by most wise "sage kings."<sup>76</sup> Neo-Confucianism indicated the "way" as a notion shaped by society in collective without individual interference, since Neo-Confucianism believed what existed was thus reasonable.<sup>77</sup> Neo-Confucian scholars, for instance Itō Jinsai, advocated this understanding of the "way." Jinsai discussed how the "way" was a set of social values and principles formed during social experiences. Once naturally shaped, this set of social values and behavioral principles became publicly recognized by the intellectual elites and commoners. Jinsai argued:

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<sup>74</sup> Sorai, *Bendō*.

<sup>75</sup> Sorai, *Bendō*.

<sup>76</sup> Sorai, *Bendō*.

<sup>77</sup> Sorai, *Bendō*.

Anything that does not oppose social righteousness should be categorized as part of social convention, and social convention is the way...the public hold their consensus in the social convention.<sup>78</sup>

Sorai rejected Jinsai's social approach and reiterated the sage-oriented origin of the "way." Sorai refuted Jinsai's argument:

Jinsai's interpretation reflects his lack of knowledge of the way. The way was established by the early sages. How can social convention recognized by the public be regarded as the way?<sup>79</sup>

Sorai argued that early sage kings created political establishments and social norms, as rites, including rituals, ceremonies, rules of punishment and administration, to stabilize and perpetuate the feudal system. An ideal Confucian society functioned according such pre-established mechanism of rites instructed by the "sages", and society-oriented notions could hardly be considered as the "way."<sup>80</sup> Beside theoretical confrontation with Japanese Neo-Confucian scholars, Sorai criticized the religious interpretation that denied the secular creation of the "way." He rejected the interpretation of the "way" as a product of heaven and earth in particular to confront the Neo-Confucian interpretation, since Buddhist and Daoist religions influenced Chinese Confucians when they constituted this Confucian sect. Sorai argued that the "early sage kings," as human beings, finalized the contents of the established "way" through laborious construction.<sup>81</sup> Further, Neo-Confucianism's methodologies of introspection and meditation to achieve an individual-level "way" were also sharply criticized by Sorai. Some scholars affiliated

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<sup>78</sup> Itō Jinsai, *Gomō jigi* ("meaning of Mencius").

<sup>79</sup> Sorai, *Bendō*.

<sup>80</sup> Sorai, *Bendō*.

<sup>81</sup> Sorai, *Bendō*.

with Neo-Confucianism participated in meditative introspection that facilitated their understanding of their inner selves. Sorai regarded such practice as a waste of time and effort because the true “way” had already been founded by the ancient sages and was presented in written documents. He argued that only accordance with the sages’ established rules and rituals would enhance ones’ morality and values.<sup>82</sup> Sorai’s complete disregard of an abstract “way” gained from meditation suggested his philological insistence on written guidance recorded in ancient classics.

Sorai’s “fundamentalist” Confucianism politicized the Confucian philosophy, as he defined Confucian studies as a public affair instead of private devotion. In contrast, Neo-Confucian scholars respected individuals’ inner-sphere and capability of introspection. Neo-Confucianism expected followers to apply realizations acquired from introspection to a broader public sphere. Thus, the public and private spheres were intermingled in the Neo-Confucian conception.<sup>83</sup> On the contrary, Sorai’s school strictly separated the private and public spheres from each other and demanded individuals’ absolute submission to public politics. And Sorai prioritized Confucian political philosophy in the public sphere. The public sphere was organized into a highly hierarchical social structure, which was designed according to the early “sages” principles and the “way” that they established.<sup>84</sup> Though Sorai never explicitly discussed it, this social stratification perfectly served Tokugawa Japan’s feudal society by elevating the aristocratic leadership and intellectual society. Sorai, therefore, by transforming the

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<sup>82</sup> Sorai, *Bendô*.

<sup>83</sup> Sorai, *Bendô*.

<sup>84</sup> Sorai, *Bendô*.

“way” from individual’s moral guidance to a state’s development, restricted Confucianism to a political perspective.

### **Indigenization and Politicization of Confucianism**

Ogyū Sorai was credited by Kiri Paramore as the most influential Confucian scholar in the Japanese intellectual history for his indigenization and politicization of Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan.<sup>85</sup> Sorai’s interpretation of Confucian ideology and the “Six Classics” also separated Japanese Confucian studies from mainland Chinese influence, because only Sorai’s Japanese Confucianism held the notion of the “way of early sages” and the documents of the “Six Classics” as sole references and rejected any other Confucian document’s authenticity. Sorai’s Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan, with its own central principle and intellectual guidance, was a unique intellectual paradigm. Japanese Confucianism after Ogyū Sorai, though with the name of “Confucianism” and a philological methodology inherited from the Chinese mainland, evolved into a domestic Japanese intellectual paradigm resistant to reinterpretation and criticism. This intellectual turn anticipated the future development of Japan’s indigenous proto-nationalistic paradigms of *Kokugaku* and *Mitogaku* (“Mito studies,” also to be discussed in the fourth chapter), which utilized Japanese Confucianism to promulgate Japan-centric ideologies in the nineteenth century. Regarding Sorai’s effort to politicize Confucianism, he exerted effort in adapting Confucianism to Tokugawa Japan’s socio-political environment through two novel but deceitful approaches: defusing the tension between the “way” and “kingship” (political authority) and redefining the group of “sages.”

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<sup>85</sup> Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism*, 86.

Tokugawa Japan's Neo-Confucianism recognized a close relationship between the "way" and "kingship." The "kingship" of the ruler was inevitably in conflict with the "way" of the ruled public, as Japanese Neo-Confucian scholars perceived, because of class hierarchy. Tokugawa Neo-Confucians adopted *Mencius* (the collection of Mencius' intellectual correspondences) to address this problem. Mencius, the second most significant Chinese Confucian master after Confucius, believed that it would be optimal but practically difficult to integrate the "way" and "kingship" into what he called the *Wang Dao* (king's way), which indicated political prosperity and perpetuity.<sup>86</sup> The public composed by common individuals, as Mencius believed, practiced the authority to determine the regime's continuity, or could overthrow it. From the contemporary perspective in the twenty-first century, Mencius' Confucianism indicated the early origin of popular or, to a certain extent, democratic politics in East Asia. Mencius believed that whoever was in power actually held no agency to determine power-transition between regimes and dynasties. Dynastic and regime change were rather driven by the popular preferences of the masses. When a king-in-power failed to rule in a moral and benevolent manner, a challenger endorsed by the public ought to replace his predecessor, therefore constituting a dynastic change.<sup>87</sup> The change, nevertheless, almost always involved violent bloodshed and disturbed social peace. When asked what should happen if the "way" and "kingship" opposed each other, or if the "kingship" betrayed the righteous "way" of governance, Mencius gave a revolutionary response: the public held the opportunity for revolt against the administration in power to resurrect a moral and benevolent government. This government, to be exact, would still be a monarchy headed

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<sup>86</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 21.

<sup>87</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 21.

by a new dynasty rather than a democratic republic.<sup>88</sup> Mencius commented on the civil rebellion against the King Zhou of the Shang dynasty in this way, as his justification of people's revolt against oppressive tyrants:

A king who violated the virtues of benevolence and morality is merely a common man. I only heard a man called Zhou was killed (for his faults), but have not learnt anything about the criminal murdering of a king.<sup>89</sup>

Mencius' theory exonerated public revolt and violence against authority. From Sorai's perspective, Mencius' argumentation of integrating the "way" and "kingship" and justification of righteous rebellion would be very threatening towards a society's peace. If the Japanese civilian public were indoctrinated with the Confucian ideology of public revolt against what they perceived as an immoral and unbenevolent leadership, then Japan, currently enjoying stability under the Tokugawa Bakufu's feudal administration, would likely enter chaotic dynastic cycles like the Chinese mainland. Besides the possibility of popular insurrections, the feudal society of Tokugawa Japan as well might face the threat of *daimyo* revolts, for which rebels could justify using Mencius' popular definition of the "way."

Sorai responded by redefining the terms. He firstly defined the "way" as "the way of early sage kings," therefore removing justifications for the public to revolt according to their own notion of the "way." Sorai, not daring to absolutely reject Mencius' intellectual authority, revised Mencius' integration of the "way" with "kingship". From Sorai's perspective, the "way" was constituted during the "kingship" of "early sage kings." These "early sage kings" established the system of morality and benevolence,

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<sup>88</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 25-26.

<sup>89</sup> Mencius, *Mencius*.

which theoretically existed eternally. Ogyū Sorai, therefore, removed the threatening potential of integrating the “way” and “kingship” into a righteous “king’s way,” by arguing for a “way of early sage kings”. Seeing the “way” as pre-established by the “early sage kings” millennia ago, only those “sage kings” had the agency to further develop and interpret the notion of the “way.” As Sorai’s manipulation of ideology suggested, the “early sage kings” who founded these political rites could not return from death to offer reinterpretations. Sorai undermined any effort by which domestic opposition might utilize the notion of the “way” to justify any revolt against the existing regime.<sup>90</sup> Sorai’s political philosophy, therefore, sought to maintain Tokugawa-Japanese state’s political integrity and stability.

Sorai further diffused the political threat from other sects of Confucianism by narrowing the definition of the “way” to the political context only. Confucius defined the “way” as a general philosophical guidance of one’s behavior and speech; Sorai narrowed the definition of the “way” into a set of political principles.<sup>91</sup> Sorai reimagined Confucius’ dialogues over moral issues as political discourses. Thus, Confucius’ commentary on the “way” was limited by Sorai to the extent of political philosophy, which again emphasized domestic stability and pacification of the public.<sup>92</sup>

The other strategy that Sorai used to politicize Confucianism in the context of Tokugawa Japan was redefining the group of the “sages” to justify rulers’ political agency. Neo-Confucian scholars conventionally utilized the term “sages” to describe people who achieved moral superiority with internal introspection and self-perfection on

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<sup>90</sup> Sorai, *Bendō*.

<sup>91</sup> Sorai, *Bendō*.

<sup>92</sup> Sorai, *Bendō*.



the individual level. However, Ogyū Sorai redefined the term, as he limited the use and interpretation of the term to political leadership. Sorai only used “sages” to describe ancient Chinese rulers, though both classical Confucian and Neo-Confucian scholars would regard individuals with perfect moral principles as “sages.” Sorai argued that the sages were credited for their policy accomplishments, not their private introspective philosophy:

The sage is the title for early sage kings...This title represented tremendous accomplishments that are rare throughout the history...However, the intellectual society has been obsessed with the Neo-Confucianism’s notion of internal cultivation prior to external implementation. Therefore, the scholars have neglected the Confucian way as the way of early sage kings. Their misinterpretation of the way is pathetic.<sup>93</sup>

An extensively controversial feature of Sorai’s definition of the “sages” was that Sorai excluded Confucius, the founder of Confucianism, from the sage community, because Confucius was a civilian intellectual rather than an aristocratic ruler. Sorai defined the “sage” as one who established new set of traditions, values, and rules when dynastic changes occurred. These qualifications could only be achieved by individuals with political power and opportunity. Sorai acknowledged Confucius’ reconstruction of virtuous ideological and ritual systems, but Confucius did not establish these apparatuses. Confucius recovered these ancient rites throughout his philological investigation of the “Six Classics.” Sorai argued that Confucius was only able to illustrate these systems. Sorai believed that Confucius unfortunately missed the opportunity to be one of the “sages”:

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<sup>93</sup> Sorai, *Bendō*.

Confucius was born in an inappropriate time, therefore not having the opportunity to carry the responsibility of establishing (tradition, policy, or rule)...Confucius traveled around in pursuit of the way of early sage kings, categorized and corrected. Finally, a grand collection was created by Confucius as the form of the Six Classics.<sup>94</sup>

Confucius could not re-construct moral and political rites of Confucianism without the “early sage kings” establishing their dynasties and assuring social stability; but these dynasties became the opportunity for Confucius to revisit the ancient classics and acquire inspirations. Only political leaders, kings, monarchs could be entitled the “sages” within Sorai’s criteria.

Ogyū Sorai emphasized that the “way of early sage kings” was acquired from the studies of the “Six Classics” crafted by the “sages” themselves, including *Classic of Poetry, Book of Documents, Book of Rites, and Book of Changes (Shi Jing, Shang Shu, Li Ji, Yi Jing)*. There are only five extant volumes because of the loss of the *Book of Music*.<sup>95</sup> Sorai elevated “pacifying the people” as the most necessary feature of the “way” of early “sages,” because pacification of the public would facilitate social stability and generate physical and intellectual nourishment.

The religious piety in supernatural powers was a prerequisite in Sorai’s notion of the “sages.” Though Sorai described the “way” as an artificial notion created by the “sages,” instead of a divine-generated element condensed through a natural progress, Sorai believed that the “sages” constructed the “way” according to a heavenly respectful

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<sup>94</sup> Sorai, *Bendō*.

<sup>95</sup> Sorai, *Bendō*.

manner. Sorai quoted Confucius' *Analects*, the document that Sorai regarded as politically inappropriate and intellectually not credible:

The sage kings followed the heaven's mandate when governing their population. Therefore, they were able to achieve stability and order. So, respecting the heaven is important.<sup>96</sup>

Heaven or earth, therefore, was not directly involved in the creation of the "way", but the mandate from the heaven or earth was necessary to facilitate the "sages'" construction. The "sages" must behave respectfully to both heaven and the earth in order to acquire such a supernatural mandate. Sorai's reinterpretation of early Chinese Confucian classics derived a lot from his private perceptions. Like Han-dynasty Confucian scholar Dong Zhongshu, Sorai embraced the ideology of the mandate of heaven.<sup>97</sup> Human beings, even Sorai's "sages," could not voluntarily advance their morality to be qualified as the "sages," but need assistance from a supernatural power. Thus, being religiously pious was a mandatory requirement for the "sages."

In Sorai's view, the "sages" who established the "way" served multiple functions in a Confucian society: they were moral examples; they established righteous political systems; and furthermore, they were mandated by a supernatural force to mediate between heavenly and civilian affairs. From these aspects, one can recognize the relevance of his interpretation to the political context of Tokugawa Japan: though never explicitly addressed, Sorai saw the Tokugawa Shogun as having the potential of being the "sage" of the feudal Tokugawa Japan.

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<sup>96</sup> Sorai, *Bendô*.

<sup>97</sup> Gardner, *Confucian a Very Short Introduction*, 28.

When Japan entered the middle of Tokugawa Period, social stability had been consolidated along with economic growth and intellectual cultivation, but the state was still politically fragmented under a feudal system. Ogyū Sorai was aware of the state's political circumstances, and he was concerned about the danger of insurrections, by which the public or militarily powerful *daimyos* might undermine the state's stability. Sorai also worried about the presence of what he regarded as heterodox Confucianism that tempted rebellion against the Tokugawa regime. Sorai, with his concerns for the Japanese state, concentrated on a domestic political philosophy to preserve Japan's state interests. Sorai utilized his intellectual analyses, sometimes even intentional revisions, of early Chinese Confucian classics to establish a set of political rites that facilitated the notion of the "way of early sage kings" in Tokugawa Japan.

Sorai's reinterpretations of Confucianism aimed to consolidate the Tokugawa Bakufu's regime and pacify the public. Because of Sorai's previous service under the Shogun's senior councilors, he was inclined to empower the Bakufu's administration. Sorai, therefore, revitalized the notion of the "sages," who established new moral and righteous political systems, to justify the Tokugawa Shoguns' authority. Though Sorai never explicitly discussed his political philosophy in the context of Tokugawa Bakufu, he implied that the Tokugawa Shogun were the "sages" as defined in *Bendô*. The civil obedience towards the Tokugawa Shogun thus became necessary, because Confucian morality demanded individuals' submission to the "sage kings." His ideas thus consolidated the Shogun's governing legitimacy over a collective national body of Japan. Sorai's effort to indigenize Confucianism in the context of Tokugawa Japan, with the "way of early sage kings" as the only political doctrine and the "Six Classics" as the only

authentic political references, reconstituted Japanese Confucianism as an independent intellectual paradigm. Japanese Confucianism since Ogyū Sorai's reinterpretation entered a track of indigenous development without continental intellectual interference. Sorai never explicitly discussed the notion of a collective national identity nor raised a conceptualization of anything that might be termed proto-nationalism; but Sorai's ideological contributions laid the intellectual foundation for the rise of nineteenth-century *kokugaku* and *mitogaku* schools, which fostered the formal institutionalization of Japanese nationalism in the late-nineteenth century. Paradigms of *Kokugaku* and *Mitogaku* and their political philosophies coincidentally shared Sorai's emphasis on religious piety.<sup>98</sup>

Ogyū wanted to defend his view of eighteenth-century Tokugawa Japan as a feudal society just like ancient China, from which he drew his intellectual Confucian inspiration. Maruyama Masao, in *Studies of the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, regarded Sorai's intellectual essence as a reactionary response toward economic and social transformation in the early eighteenth-century Japan.<sup>99</sup> Maruyama noted that Tokugawa-Japan's growing commercial economy gradually substituted the natural economy "mediated by land and realized within a very restricted circle" within the community-based feudal master-servant relationship. Eighteenth-century political stability facilitated the commercialization of agricultural and manufacturing industries. Wealth, instead of hierarchical status, enfranchised social influence. Merchants, who were at the bottom of Tokugawa social hierarchy but with capital accumulation, attained

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<sup>98</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 363-364.

<sup>99</sup> Murayama Masao, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 67.

social mobility to acquire respect. Eighteenth-century Japanese became aware of their involvement in a broader social context because of the commercialization of production.<sup>100</sup> But Sorai disdained such liberation from the social hierarchy as stipulated by Confucian doctrine. His fundamentalist methodology of *kobunjigaku* urged the return to Confucian political rites and the rigid social stratification in a Confucian feudal society. Maruyama credited Sorai for his rediscovery and emphasis of politics, since Sorai decoupled the political system from a Confucian moral paradigm. Sorai held a utilitarian and pragmatic perspective towards Confucianism as a political philosophy, more than a set of moral doctrines. But more importantly, Maruyama argued that Sorai's work opened an "intellectual beachhead for an attack on Confucianism."<sup>101</sup> Though Sorai indigenized Confucianism, his admiration of Confucianism as an intellectual system imported from China infuriated hostile, Japan-centric intellectuals. Confucianism was not necessarily always utilized as an affirmative reference by proto-nationalist scholars, but sometimes became the target of attack from Japanese proto-nationalists for its fundamental association with China. After Sorai openly advertised his politicization of Confucianism with the publication of his books, Japanese scholars, particularly in the paradigms of *kokugaku* and *mitogaku*, began their criticism of Confucianism. Nevertheless, these scholars continued practicing Confucianism's methodology of philological research and analysis, implying that Confucianism continued to serve both corroborative and contrapuntal functions in their argumentation.

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<sup>100</sup> Murayama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 68.

<sup>101</sup> Murayama, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan*, 69.

#### Chapter IV: Towards Anti-Confucianism: *kokugaku* and *mitogaku*

While Ogyū Sorai was fascinated with the ancient Confucian classics and the “way of early sage kings,” other Japanese intellectuals did not appreciate Sorai’s affection for China and Chinese culture. Japan, since the beginning of the Tokugawa era, had no official diplomatic relations with China, and Japan had directly confronted China during Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s invasion of Korea, a century before Sorai developed his intellectual positions.<sup>102</sup> Tokugawa-Japanese intellectuals were therefore ambivalent about Japan’s attitude towards China. Yamasaki Ansai (1619–82), a Buddhist monk and later Neo-Confucian scholar, asked his students that, if Confucius and Mencius led an army to invade Japan, how should Japan should respond? While young Neo-Confucian scholars were hesitant to answer, Ansai gave his response: Japan should organize and resist Confucius and Mencius’ aggression, because this is a righteous decision based on what Confucius and Mencius have always proposed.<sup>103</sup> When facing the ideological conflict between cultural affiliation to China and Japan’s national security and integrity, Ansai’s response symbolized the ideology of some intellectuals who used to be Confucian scholars but turned against Confucianism for its Chinese origins and conflict with Japan’s cultural values. These scholars thus anticipated the intellectual factions of *kokugaku*, the national learning school, and *mitogaku*, the Mito school—both of which recognized Japan’s proto-nationalistic identity. Sorai’s Confucian ideology, though openly rejected and avoided, still showed surprising influence; his Confucian methodology of philology continued to prosper in Tokugawa Japan’s intellectual society.

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<sup>102</sup> Totman, *Politics in the Tokugawa Bakufu*, 5.

<sup>103</sup> Hirazumi Kiyoshi, *The Story of Japan*, 76.

## *Kokugaku*

The philological methodology of Sorai's *kobunjigaku* focused on Chinese Confucian classics. Surprisingly, it also influenced *kokugaku* ("national learning"), or the nativist, approach towards political philosophy and theology. *Kokugaku* scholars sympathized with Sorai's precise examination of language's accuracy and authenticity. Kada no Azumamaro (1669-1736) made significant contributions to the ideology and methodology of *kokugaku*. Azumamaro served as a Shinto priest at the Fushimi-Inari Shrine in the city of Kyoto. He recognized the value of Sorai's philology, as Sorai believed in the interconnection and interdependency between written text, interpretation, and religio-philosophical understanding. Azumamaro, however unlike Sorai, had no pious sentiment towards the Chinese classics. Rather he believed that the urgent objective was to comprehensively understand Japanese classics through the same method, rather than interpreting the foreign documents of Confucianism. Azunomamaro noted that:

There are few explanations for the old Japanese words...If the old words are not understood, the old meanings will not be clear. If the ancient meanings (*kogi*) are not clear, the ancient learning (*kogaku*) will not revive. The way of the former kings is disappearing; the ideas of the wise men of antiquity have almost been abandoned. The loss will not be a slight one if we fail not to teach philology.<sup>104</sup>

It is interesting to notice that the object of Azumamaro's philology was old Japanese texts, and he referred to the Japanese personages in this literature as "former kings" and "wise men of antiquity," which were terms Sorai used to describe ancient Chinese

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<sup>104</sup> Kada no Azunomamaro, "Petition for the Establishment of a School of National Learning," *Sources of Japanese Tradition*.



figures. Azumamaro submitted a petition to the eighth Shogun of the Tokugawa Bakufu, Yoshimune, asking for governmental funding for Japanese philological research. Azumamaro further volunteered his service to devote acquaintance in rhetoric and philology to the Japanese nativist learning. Azumamaro urged the establishment of a nativist learning institution, because “the rise or the fall of Japanese learning depends on whether or not my plan is accepted.”<sup>105</sup> Azumamaro suggested that a unique Japanese way of governance and social progress could be revived by examining the old Japanese classics, through the methodology of Sorai’s *kobunjigaku*. Azumamaro insinuated that only the “way” of the “sages” acquired from Japanese classics could represent the Japanese spirit.<sup>106</sup>

The late-seventeenth-century interplay between Sorai’s *kobunjigaku* and Azumamaro’s *kokugaku* was perpetuated by the disciples of both schools into the eighteenth century. Dazai Shundai (1680-1747) from Sorai’s school published an explication of Sorai’s *Bendo*, while Kamo no Mabuchi (1697-1769), who supported the nativist learning approach, organized a counter-attack with his *Kokuiko (Study of the Idea of a Nation)*.

Shundai, inheriting Sorai’s argument of “the way of the sages,” suggested that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shintoism are integrally interrelated, but Confucianism was by nature and theory superior to the other two.<sup>107</sup> He further argued that Shintoism conformed with the *Book of Changes* as part of the Confucian classics. Shintoism was thus integral to “the way of the sages” and could not exist as an independent ideology

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<sup>105</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai’s Philosophical Master Works*, 65.

<sup>106</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai’s Philosophical Master Works*, 65.

<sup>107</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai’s Philosophical Master Works*, 65.

from Confucianism. Shundai denounced Buddhism's uselessness, because Buddhism lacked concerns about individuals' participation in politics and discarded human sentiments and passions. By contrast, Confucianism and its "way of the sages" had consistently facilitated order and stability in Japanese society. Shundai then concluded that Confucianism was the superior and most important among all ideological paradigms available in Tokugawa Japan.<sup>108</sup> Since Confucianism and "the way of the sages" originated in continental China, its notion of the "way" always had Chinese characteristics, and the naturally Chinese way could not be nurtured separately in Japan. Shundai thus suggested that *kokugaku* scholars intentionally fabricated the nativist learning school's definition of the Japanese way. If the nativist learning scholars depended on the Chinese writing system to convey their beliefs, as Shundai suggested, they should not be contemptuous of China's cultural influence on Japan.<sup>109</sup>

The nativist learning school perceived Dazai Shundai's conclusion of Japan's reliance on Chinese culture as an intellectual provocation, and they responded with Mabuchi's *Kokuiko* ("the discussion of the national spirit"). Mabuchi did not believe that Japan's utilization of Chinese as the written language was inevitable, though he admitted that Japan had borrowed the written language from China and applied it to intellectual discourse and political administration.<sup>110</sup> He speculated that there had been an indigenous writing system in Japan's antiquity before the introduction of written Chinese; nevertheless, the existence of an antique system of Japanese writing remained in the realm of Mabuchi's speculation.<sup>111</sup> But, based on this notion, Mabuchi opposed the

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<sup>108</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 65-66.

<sup>109</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 65-66.

<sup>110</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 66.

<sup>111</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 67.

continuing use of written Chinese as the language of intellectual and political deliberation in Japan. He advocated using the syllabic alphabet derived from vernacular Japanese. Mabuchi's rebuttal to Shundai went beyond the issue of the use of Chinese language. Regarding Shundai's argument that "the way of the sages" (of political rites and moral philosophy) was established in ancient China, Mabuchi answered with empirical evidence based on an analysis of foreign visitors to Japan. By observing Dutch merchants and missionaries in Nagasaki, Mabuchi affirmed that Dutch people held their unique way of living, while China for sure never exerted influence on shaping the Dutch way in the Netherlands.<sup>112</sup> Mabuchi and other Tokugawa Japanese scholars, unlike their Chinese counterparts, held a multi-polar worldview. The cultural sphere that Japan and China belonged to was merely one cultural pole among other coexisting civilizations. Tokugawa Japanese viewed westerners, who represented distinctive cultures, as people from unfamiliar yet independent civilizations, while the Chinese mentality was usually to presume cultural superiority over western visitors and assume the universality of Chinese thought.<sup>113</sup> Mabuchi asserted the Shinto divinity of "the heart of heaven and earth" in creating the way of governing; in contrast, he implied that Sorai's way amounted to human diligence rather than supernatural composition.<sup>114</sup>

Regarding the way's utility, Mabuchi argued that Sorai's "way of the sages" could not rescue Chinese from chaos caused by dynastic cycles, because relying on "such specious ideas" was not sufficient to maintain a country's prosperity and prevent it from declining.<sup>115</sup> Mabuchi returned to contemporary Japanese politics and concluded his

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<sup>112</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 67.

<sup>113</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 366.

<sup>114</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 67.

<sup>115</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 67.

*Kokuiko* by accusing Confucianism of causing domestic instability in Japan. Mabuchi recognized that many Japanese scholars were obsessed with Chinese learning and expected to find a resolution of domestic issues through Confucianism. Therefore, Mabuchi condemned Confucianism from China for disturbing Japan's domestic stability: "no sooner were they (Confucian ideologies) introduced then rebellions and calamities began."<sup>116</sup> Mabuchi's statement was somehow accurate, as Japanese political fragmentation intensified after the introduction of Confucianism in the fifth to sixth centuries; Confucianism, however, did significantly facilitate Japan's political centralization in the seventh-century.<sup>117</sup> Mabuchi argued that Japanese collectively form a nation of honesty and virtue, while China is a country of "wicked-heartedness, [and] no amount of profound instruction could keep the innate evil from overwhelming it."<sup>118</sup> Confucianism, for whose political utility Chinese and Sorai school scholars admired, had no practical function in Japan. Kamo no Mabuchi, like Yamaga Sokô, advanced the notion of Japanese superiority over China. But Mabuchi gave a more extensive argument, criticizing not only continuous instability on the continent but also Chinese nation's immorality, while praising Japanese's virtuous qualities.

Kamo no Mabuchi came to the attention of a youthful scholar living at Matsusaka in the mid-eighteenth century, and this scholar offered Mabuchi accommodation when Mabuchi was on his way to the Ise Shrine in 1763. This young man, whom Mabuchi indoctrinated during his stay, was Motoori Norinaga, later the most distinguished scholar in the *kokugaku* school. Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) was significant among Japanese

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<sup>116</sup> Kamo no Mabuchi, *Kokuiko*.

<sup>117</sup> Bruce Batten, "Foreign Threat and Domestic Reform," *Monumenta Nipponica*, 41:2 (1986), 202.

<sup>118</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 67.

*kokugaku* intellectuals because he utilized Confucian philology to determine that the *Kojiki* was the oldest surviving Japanese document and therefore carried the religious and intellectual identity of Japanese nation.<sup>119</sup>

Norinaga's intellectual works reflected influence from eighteenth-century Japanese socio-economic changes. Norinaga was born in a merchant family, which acquired wealth but was nominally at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The Motoori family's economic ability enabled Norinaga to receive education in a Confucian fashion and became a scholar with social prestige.<sup>120</sup> Though he emerged as a Confucian intellectual, Norinaga concluded in 1757 that Confucianism had little use to him privately, nor was Confucianism useful to Tokugawa Japan. Norinaga argued that Confucianism dealt with "ruling a country, pacifying the whole world under heaven, and keeping people content." But the "way of the sages" had no use in Japan because there was "no country to rule and no people to gratify" when Japan remained as a state with local administrative autonomy.<sup>121</sup> Unlike Sorai's politicization of Confucianism as a guide for governance, Norinaga thoroughly denounced Confucianism's political utility. Norinaga's criticism of Confucianism was in fact largely criticism of Sorai's interpretation. This characteristic of intellectual debate indicated that *kokugaku* scholars' consistent and marked hostility towards Confucianism was really opposition to Ogyū Sorai throughout the mid- and late-Tokugawa period.

Norinaga, like Azumamaro and Mabuchi, argued that the virtuous "Japanese heart" had been corrupted by the "Chinese heart" imbedded in Confucianism, and the

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<sup>119</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 370.

<sup>120</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 370-371.

<sup>121</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 371.

extinction of the “Japanese heart” estranged the Japanese people from traditional Shinto religion and the divine Japanese Emperor.<sup>122</sup> Norinaga considered one of human beings’ most essential qualities a sense of wondrous inexplicability. He argued that “there are things in the world that are beyond the comprehension of ordinary men.”<sup>123</sup> Though Confucianism from China had been praised in the Japanese intellectual society with high esteem, it failed to help Japanese understand their true hearts embedded in Japanese traditions. Norinaga’s way, most fundamentally, was the way of the gods, as he wrote:

When we inquire into the nature of the way, we see that it is not the natural way of heaven and earth, nor is it the artificial, man-made way. The way is the way conferred by and received from Amaterasu Omikami, initiated by the ancestral deities Izanagi and Izanami, and according with the bright deity Takami Musubi.<sup>124</sup>

Norinaga therefore dismissed Sorai’s man-made way in favor of the Japanese religious-based social order, which supposedly originated in the ancient deities and was manifested by the Japanese Emperors as their secular representatives. Norinaga interconnected politics and religion, like Sorai had practiced. But he insisted that the deities responsible for the way were Japanese, rather than Chinese ancient sages.<sup>125</sup> Norinaga criticized Sorai’s “way of the sages” for its obsession with governing the realm and pacifying the people and its lack of concern for individual existence and personal enjoyment, which were key components of a religious experience Norinaga endorsed.

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<sup>122</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 372.

<sup>123</sup> Motoori Norinaga, *Naobi no mitama* (“Rectifying Deity”).

<sup>124</sup> Motoori Norinaga, *Naobi no mitama*.

<sup>125</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 372.

Historian John Tucker noticed that Norinaga's world consisted of merchants, priests, and urban residents, and his worldview was more influenced by the Shinto theology.<sup>126</sup> Norinaga recognized the Emperor as the sovereign, and only acknowledged that Tokugawa Shogun assisted in imperial governance. This stood in contrast to Sorai, who saw the Shogun as the leader with ultimate political authority. Tucker thus concluded that at a significant level, Norinaga's opposition to Sorai's *kobunjigaku* and espousal of ancient Japanese studies can be construed as a reflection of Norinaga's implicit opposition to samurai domination and his attempts at defining a more civil, aristocratic order.<sup>127</sup>

Norinaga extended the unique virtue of the "Japanese heart" beyond Mabuchi's interpretation, as Norinaga located a primal mover and identified the way of the gods. This primal mover was the god Takami Musubi, who created "all things and affairs in the world" with "his miraculous power."<sup>128</sup> Norinaga further argued that not only the primal mover contributed to the foundation of all early components of Japan, but Japan was favored by the gods and thus perfected to become superior to all other nations. Norinaga wrote:

This grand imperial country is the home to the august and awesome divine ancestress, the great goddess Amaterasu, and this is the primary reason why our country is superior to all others. There is not a country in the world that does not enjoy the blessings of this goddess.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 70.

<sup>127</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 71.

<sup>128</sup> Kamo no Mabuchi, *Kokuiko*.

<sup>129</sup> Motoori Norinaga, *Naobi no mitama*.

Norinaga suggested that the silent but effectual will of the gods was determinative of “all acts, events, and other phenomena, good and bad, ‘without exception’.”<sup>130</sup> Therefore, historian Conrad Totman recognized in his analysis of Norinaga that, “like determinists everywhere, however, he left leeway for modest human intervention, and that leeway permitted his very tentative engagement in current affairs.”<sup>131</sup> It is interesting to note that Norinaga, though addressing his ideology in a philosophical manner, was fundamentally advocating a political national superiority in response to Tokugawa Japan’s political and diplomatic circumstances. Norinaga, much like Yamaga Sokô, suggested a Chinese-style international hierarchy, but with Japan as the center. Norinaga was convinced that Japan’s divine privilege granted by the gods, while guaranteeing Japan’s prosperity, encouraged the spread of Japanese superiority to other nations.

Norinaga aimed his teaching towards the general public, not only because of his lineage from a merchant household, but also due to his belief that learning would contribute to social well-being. This belief also encouraged Norinaga to prepare documents, like the simplified version of the *Kojiki* for the purpose of public instruction.<sup>132</sup> He saw himself essentially as a reverent servant to the gods, shaping “current affairs” through public education, not by political decrees.<sup>133</sup> Norinaga, though did not expand the realm of education to the base of farmers and workers, but broke the monopoly of political philosophy among politicians, bureaucrats, and scholars by expanding philosophical and theological education to commoners’ households that could afford literacy. Norinaga, though holding a notion of national identity, was comparatively

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<sup>130</sup> Motoori Norinaga, *Naobi no mitama*.

<sup>131</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 376.

<sup>132</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai’s Philosophical Master Works*, 69.

<sup>133</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai’s Philosophical Master Works*, 69.



conservative in regard to the issue of political reform due to his ideological constraints.<sup>134</sup>

Norinaga dissuaded any attempt to cancel or rectify anything which had been established and been difficult to change. As Totman suggested, “a strict determinist might argue that when one acts radically, one is simply being the vehicle of gods’ radical will.”<sup>135</sup>

Norinaga, however, refused to unleash the will of the gods in the radical manner of political change through the restoration of the Japanese Emperor as both religious leader and political authority.

Motoori Norinaga in his own lifetime was largely disengaged from Japanese politics, because he believed that political engagement was contrary to his philosophical idealism. Norinaga was content to counsel obedience and moderation through public education.<sup>136</sup> But Norinaga’s intellectual legacy was significant. He offered an interpretation of Japanese identity that explicitly identified the gods as the source of Japan’s unique virtue. The long-lasting lineage of the Japanese emperors was the living embodiment of that divine inheritance. The Emperors and their court aristocrats held the responsibility to cherish the Japanese nation by ruling in the way of the gods, instead of the “way of the sages” incorporated from Chinese Confucianism, which corrupted Japan’s virtuousness. Japanese were obliged to behave obediently under the Emperors’ governance. Based upon predecessors like Mabuchi, Norinaga identified his vision of a “once-perfect and still-perfectable” realm as uniquely Japanese and juxtaposed this regime to denounce Confucian influence that seeped in from the Chinese continent.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 374.

<sup>135</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 374.

<sup>136</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 375.

<sup>137</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 374.

Norinaga's argument was revolutionary for the development of Japanese proto-nationalism and was provocative considering his pro-Emperor position; but Norinaga had not yet suggested to restore direct rule to the Japanese Emperors. Norinaga identified Japanese virtuousness as bound to the Japanese deities and their representatives on earth, Japan's imperial lineage, and he warned that this ideal scenario was vulnerable to foreign ideological malignancy. Regarding Tokugawa Japan's contemporary political environment, Norinaga explicitly specified that Tokugawa Shoguns were but trustees of that godly virtue. If there came a time when the alien malignancy manifested in the form of "foreigners making demands and backing them with military force," Totman believed that Norinaga's intellectual problem would become an immediate political issue.<sup>138</sup> The burden of responding to that foreign threat, however, would rest on the Bakufu instead of intellectuals like Norinaga. And when that hypothetical circumstance did approach, the need for protecting the Japanese divine virtue and its imperial representative became vital. But it took another half of a century for the first case when Japanese nationalism would be facilitated by actual political or military incursions.

### ***Mitogaku***

The patriotic intellectual school of *mitogaku* emerged in the Mito domain and called for Japan's future development according to a distinctive Japanese identity. Mito domain was a *shinpan* also *gosanke* domain in Tokugawa Japan, meaning the leaders of Mito domain shared a direct familial bond with the Tokugawa Shogun.<sup>139</sup> Scholars and civil servants serving the Mito domain frequently had privileged opportunities to serve in

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<sup>138</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 376.

<sup>139</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 398.

the central government in Edo and to facilitate the Tokugawa Bakufu's administration and foreign policies.<sup>140</sup> Historians have noticed the presence of Sorai's ideas within forms of *mitogaku* in the mid-nineteenth century, and one late-Tokugawa scholar affiliated with *mitogaku* who saliently rearticulated Sorai's political philosophy was Yokoi Shōnan (1809-1869).

Shōnan began his intellectual career in *mitogaku* as an early advocator of notions such as reverence for the imperial throne and expulsion of foreigners, but he later rejected xenophobic rhetoric and articulated the opposite political doctrine, that of opening to the west. Shōnan urged the opening of the country to strengthen the realm and guarantee national security. His notion resonated with Sorai's argument a century before. Shōnan shared a similar utilitarian perspective on political philosophy and advocated for ancient Chinese political initiatives. When criticizing popular and orthodox Neo-Confucianism in Japan, Shōnan argued that the Neo-Confucian notion of "the investigation of things" should be understood in terms of "the utility of ideas" to the general public.<sup>141</sup> Shōnan appealed to the governing techniques of Chinese rulers Yao and Shun. And more interestingly, he also used George Washington's legacy in American political history as a reference of political restoration.<sup>142</sup> Shōnan believed that if ancient Chinese sage kings and General Washington were alive in Japan during his contemporary period, they would adopt firearms and western technology against western intrusion to effectively defend the country. This was because the acquisition of western technology would bring political utility, which was endorsed by Sorai's interpretation of Confucian political philosophy.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 505.

<sup>141</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 84-85.

<sup>142</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 85.

<sup>143</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 85.

Ultimately, Shōnan advocated opening Japan to western contact, based on his understanding of a return to the political stability of ancient China. Shōnan concluded:

In clarifying the Way of Yao and Shun and Confucius, we must exhaust the skills of western technology. Why stop with enriching the nation? Why stop with strengthening the army? Our task will be in spreading the great principles of the sages to the four seas.<sup>144</sup>

Unfortunately, Shōnan's attempts to integrate themes from Sorai's Confucian interpretation were not further elaborated. His emphasis of the benefits of the "way of the sages" and calls for opening the country and taking advantage of western learning were not further developed by *mitogaku* scholars.

John Tucker noticed that after Yokoi Shōnan, Japanese intellectuals ceased utilizing Sorai's intellectual works as references:

In the final decades of the Tokugawa, faithful advocates of Sorai's *kobunjigaku* ideas, especially as expounded in the *Bendo* and *Benmei*, had all but vanished. ...successful critiques from scholars associated with *shingaku*, the *Kaitokudo*, and *kokugaku*, not to mention those offered by more orthodox advocates of Neo-Confucianism, had ridiculed the obscure aspects of *kobunjigaku*, laying bare, in what were distinctively negative terms, the political, legalistic, and utilitarian tendencies in Sorai's thinking. By Shōnan's time, Sorai's influence, even if understood most generally, had all but completely disappeared.<sup>145</sup>

Nevertheless, some traces of Sorai's intellectual paradigm can be detected in the research and argumentation methodology of later *mitogaku* scholars, especially the

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<sup>144</sup> H. D. Harootunian, *Toward Restoration* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 378-379.

<sup>145</sup> Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai's Philosophical Master Works*, 85.

immensely influential work *Shinron* (“new theses”) by Aizawa Seishisai (1782-1843). But these traces were indeed muted through an implicit style of expression, because of the unwillingness to be explicitly associated with a paradigm of philosophy that otherwise had been widely targeted for criticism. When foreign military forces approached Tokugawa Japan, Aizawa Seishisai found such situations particularly threatening. In the 1790s Aizawa was impatiently concerned with Russians in the north and studied the situation strenuously. Aizawa recalled in his elderly years about his youthful sentiment at that time:

(In 1792) when I was at the tender age of eleven, the Russian barbarians arrived in northern Ezo. When Master Yukoku told me about their fearsome, cunning nature, my blood began to boil and I resolved then and there to drive them away. I build an eastern statue of (the Russian emissary) Laxman and derived great pleasure by lashing it with my riding whip. From then on I vowed to devote myself to learning (of foreign threats).<sup>146</sup>

Aizawa completed a manuscript, *Chishima ibun*, in 1801 to inform his countrymen about the Russians and the lands north of Japan. He outlined an alleged legacy of ancient Japanese conquests that had long ago brought the Kurils Islands and continental northeast Asia under the rule of Japanese Emperor. Aizawa wrote:

According to Honda Toshiaki, Kamchatka was formerly part of Ezo, and as such, should be under Matsumane control. But we have been ignorant of this for more than a hundred years since that territory was stolen from us.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Aizawa Seishisai, “Tsuzuki Hakuei ni kotauru no sho,” *Seishisai bunko*.

<sup>147</sup> Aizawa Seishisai, “Chishima ibun,” (“strange news of the thousand islands”) *Seishisai bunko*.

Aizawa, with references to information and misinformation from early Japanese explorers described how the Russians utilized cunning strategy to gain control of the territory. Aizawa noticed Russian success in constructing a great and prosperous empire by snatching land from ignorant countries like Japan, and he was alarmed by this trend practiced by westerners.

The 1825 Tokugawa Bakufu's hardened restrictions against foreign vessels, and this move reinvigorated Aizawa's concerns of the western threat. Aizawa seized this incident as an opportunity to prepare his narrative in *Shinron*. *Shinron* was Aizawa's statement to encourage the Mito domain and the Bakufu to initiate a reform to revitalize Japan. Aizawa believed Tokugawa Japan's society should cope with its prevailing problems, and he addressed his concern and reasoning in *Shinron*:

Our Divine Realm is where the sun emerges. It is the source of the primordial vital force sustaining all life and order. Our Emperors, decedents of the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, have acceded to the Imperial Throne in each and every generation, a unique fact that will never change. Our Divine Realm rightly constitutes the head and shoulders of the world and controls all nations...But recently the loathsome western barbarians, unmindful of their base position as the lower extremities of the world, have been scurrying impudently across the Four Seas, trampling other nation under foot.<sup>148</sup>

Subsequently Aizawa explained the special character of the Japanese nation, along with Japan's godly origin, the vicissitudes of the imperial house, and how "great heroes" have emerged at critical moments to save the country in the essay's main body. Aizawa urged

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<sup>148</sup> Aizawa Seishisai, *Shinron*.

for a “great hero” at the time, in which Japan fell under the threat of the “western barbarians.”<sup>149</sup>

Aizawa pointed out Japan’s underlying issues and means of coping. Like scholars from the *kokugaku* school, Aizawa condemned foreign ideology that corrupted the Japanese society, but he also targeted obsolete domestic conceptions that hindered Japan’s development as well. Since ideological naivety prohibited Japanese from effectively coping with foreign threats. Aizawa believed the most significant issue was the urban samurai’s lack of martial training, so they were incapable of defending Japan in case of military conflict with foreigners.<sup>150</sup> Aizawa attributed this issue to the Japanese economy characterized by luxury and inequality, and he believed that only by addressing these issues would a foundation be established for repelling the foreign threat.<sup>151</sup> Aizawa then specifically explained the means: internal reforms to invigorate Japan, measures of coastal defense and military strengthening, and for long-term security, reviving the basic virtues of the imperial land through restoration of proper customs, proper understandings, and proper relationships.<sup>152</sup> Aizawai concluded that what would be necessary would be:

“Elucidating ‘what is essential to Japan’ (*kokutai*), being informed on world affairs, understanding fully the barbarians’ nature, strengthening national defense, and establishing a long-range policy—these represent the best form of loyalty and filial devotion, the best method of recompensing Imperial Ancestors and Heavenly Deities, and the best way for Bakufu and daimyo to rescue their people and dispense benevolent rule for eternity.”<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Aizawa, *Shinron*.

<sup>150</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 460.

<sup>151</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 460.

<sup>152</sup> Totman, *Early Modern Japan*, 46.

<sup>153</sup> Aizawa, *Shinron*.

Aizawa referred to the *Book of Changes* to conclude:

“‘The Way does not implement itself; that requires the Man of Talent and Virtue.’ To solve difficult problems as these arise and to devise methods of dealing with changed situation—these task await the appearance of the Great Hero.”<sup>154</sup>

The long intellectual history of Confucianism in Japan influenced Aizawa's writings. It is noteworthy that some of Aizawa's rhetoric were consistent with Confucian ideology and were congruent with Sorai's interpretations. But, as has been mentioned in the previous section, Aizawa's references to Sorai were implicit, in order to avoid being perceived as being connected to a frequently criticized school in the Tokugawa intellectual community. Aizawa raised the notions of an orderly and stable society and of loyalty and filial devotion, typical Confucian notions advanced in both China and Japan, though he did not explicitly indicate its Confucian origin. Aizawa also referred to the *Book of Changes* in the conclusion of his essay, and this text was one of the six Confucian classics endorsed by Ogyu Sorai's *kobunjigaku*. Further as we have previously discussed, Sorai's intellectual legacy, the research methodology of Sorai's *kobunjigaku*, was apparent in Aizawa's argumentation in both *Chishima ibun* and *Shinron*. While Sorai encouraged the close examination of ancient Chinese-Confucian classics for references to justify intellectual arguments, Aizawa returned to earlier Japanese documents for references to justify his *mitogaku* ideology of modernizing and strengthening Japan against foreign threats.

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<sup>154</sup> Aizawa, *Shinron*.



Confucianism in the Tokugawa Japan, as Kiri Paramore argued, was an integration of multi-disciplinary studies, and I would like to reiterate that Japanese Confucianism's contribution to the creation and development of proto-nationalism in Japan was not always affirmative. Confucianism, while being the target of *kokugaku* criticism, contrapuntally facilitated the maturation of a sense of national affiliation and national superiority in Japan. Though no longer a popular intellectual school, or, to an extreme extent, driven to extinction, Confucianism and its Tokugawa-Japanese interpretation advanced by Ogyû Sorai influenced the scholarship of *mitogaku*. Confucianism's philology in the Japanese *bakumatsu* period continued its function as a research methodology, though no longer popular as a system of political philosophy.

## Chapter V: Conclusion

Japanese nationalism since the late-nineteenth century was particular because of its non-egalitarian character. It is possible that this derived in part from the intellectual foundations of Japanese proto-nationalism. And Japanese versions of Confucianism facilitated the development of those proto-nationalistic ideologies in pre-modern Japan. Tokugawa Japan's Confucian intellectuals, like the Neo-Confucian Hayashi scholars, the classically-oriented Yamaga Sokô, and the more "fundamentalist" Ogyû Sorai, were aware of the Japanese state's diplomatic and socio-political contexts. These Confucian scholars, with their active political consciousness, offered policy recommendations to benefit the state of Japan. Hayashi Gahô and Hôkô discriminatively viewed the neighboring state of Qing China as barbarian, and Yamaga Sokô advocated for an international system based on Japan's socio-cultural superiority over other states. Ogyû Sorai politicized the paradigm of Confucianism to justify the consolidation of Tokugawa Japan's feudal hierarchy. Modern Japanese nationalism inherited the Confucian non-egalitarian domestic hierarchy and international superiority from pre-modern proto-nationalism.

In terms of fostering proto-nationalistic sentiments, Confucianism served not only an affirmative function but also a contrapuntal target of attack. *Kokugaku* ("national learning school") scholars, like Kamo no Mabuchi and Motoori Norinaga, discredited Confucianism as a contaminating foreign threat. Kamo no Mabuchi condemned Chinese Confucianism for inflicting political instability on Japan. Motoori Norinaga praised the nobility of Japanese culture in domestic literature and religion. Mabuchi and Norinaga

both noticed that Japan, among other states in the world, could prosper according to its unique “way” and collective identity, without China’s ideological influence. The *kokugaku* scholars endorsed an ideal Japanese state oriented around its socio-cultural values, such as the Shinto religion and classical literature composed in the Japanese language. Scholars of *mitogaku* (“Mito school”), the other faction of pre-modern Japanese proto-nationalism, criticized Confucianism as well. *Mitogaku* scholars, like Yokoi Shōnan and Aizawa Seishisai, concentrated on Tokugawa Japan’s national security against emerging foreign threats. Shōnan utilized Ogyū Sorai’s Confucian rhetoric to justify Japan’s political reform; using a notion of foreign ideology to discourage the defense against foreign intrusion, however, seemed illogical to other Japan-centric intellectuals. Confucianism, therefore, ceased its explicit appearance in the Tokugawa Japanese intellectual society. Aizawa Seishisai rejected Japanese Confucianism as a political philosophy for being obsolete in terms of administrative relevance and utility. Seishisai, nevertheless, consulted Confucian classics of religion and morality, like *the Book of Changes*, which is less politically sensitive in comparison to Confucian writings on political philosophy. He continued using the Confucian methodology of philological investigation to justify his argument regarding Tokugawa Japan’s national crises.

Pre-modern Japan’s proto-nationalistic sentiments were institutionalized and mobilized by intellectuals and military leaders who participated in the pro-Emperor, anti-Bakufu Meiji Restoration. Intellectuals and samurais from Southwest Japan insurrected against the Tokugawa Bakufu, for the central authority’s impotence to guarantee Japan’s national security from western intrusions. *Sonnō jōi*, meaning to “revere the Emperor, expel the barbarians”, was the slogan of this coup d’état. Participants acknowledged the

*kokugaku* notion of a Japanese state headed by the Emperor, who also held the supreme theological authority in the state religion of Shintoism. The incursion of western powers, who perceived by the late-Tokugawa Japanese intellectuals as “barbarians” in the Confucian rhetoric, threatened Japan’s political essence of *kokutai* discussed by Aizawa Seishisai from the *mitogaku*. The Tokugawa Bakufu surrendered its political authority to the supporters of the Emperor after the Boshin War (1868-1869 C.E.) between the belligerent sides, and the Meiji Emperor (1852-1912 C.E.) restored his direct governance of the Japanese state from the new capital of Tokyo.<sup>155</sup> Japan after the Meiji Restoration continued using the Confucian notion of social hierarchy when distinguishing unequal social classes. The Meiji Emperor and his supporters issued the the Charter Oath of 1868 as a strategy to consolidate his rule.<sup>156</sup> One article in the Oath said, “all classes, high and low, shall unite in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state.”<sup>157</sup> The Meiji Emperor and his government prioritized the goal of pacifying the public, which was one aspect of Ogyû Sorai’s pre-modern proto-nationalistic political ideology as well. The Meiji Constitution of 1889 codified the Emperor’s absolute political authority, emphasizing the Emperor’s political power as well as his authority in Shinto religious affairs.<sup>158</sup> The Constitution resonated with *kokugaku*’s advocacy to revive Japan’s indigenous Shinto religion and establish social order and rites according to Japan’s socio-cultural conventions. These effort at regime consolidation echoed pre-modern Confucian intellectuals’ similar political awareness of coherence between policies and country’s socio-cultural contexts.

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<sup>155</sup> Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 77.

<sup>156</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 59.

<sup>157</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 77.

<sup>158</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 64.

Meiji-Japanese politicians, including Itō Hirobumi (1841-1909 C.E.), institutionalized proto-nationalistic recognition of the Japanese state into a systematic, western-style national identity. Itō and Meiji Japan's national government demanded the modern Japanese's socio-political obligations as to "advance public good and promote common interests; always respect the Constitution and observe the law; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State."<sup>159</sup> Modern Japanese politicians elaborated the *mitogaku* concern for Japan's national security into the slogan of *fukoku kyōhei* ("rich country, strong army"), which expressed the Meiji government's goals.<sup>160</sup> Military service became a civic responsibility of the modern Japanese through mandatory conscription. Expansion in armed forces served modern Japan's territorial ambitions over Taiwan and Korea, where Japan established colonial rule from the late-nineteenth century.<sup>161</sup> Meiji-Japanese politicians employed the preexisting notion of *kokugaku*'s proto-nationalistic superiority over neighboring states to justify their conquest and colonization. They were acquainted with Confucianism's conviction in the civilized-uncivilized (*hua-yi*) dichotomy as well. They, therefore, believed that Japan should share its reforming accomplishments with neighboring and less-civilized states, which had fell behind in the course of modernization. Military expansion inevitably caused casualties among the "Emperor's army" to whom, according to the Shinto ritual conventions, the Japanese state erected the Yasukuni Shrine and officially honored their patriotic sacrifices.<sup>162</sup> The Shinto sentiment proclaimed by the *kokugaku* scholars not only consolidated the Emperor's authority, but also unified Japanese society.

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<sup>159</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 104.

<sup>160</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 135-136.

<sup>161</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 74.

<sup>162</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 66-67.

The Meiji-Japanese state further engineered nationalist to serve the country's modernization and development. The modern Japanese government, though assembling western-like administrative agencies, asserted indigenous Shinto rhetoric and a Confucianism-derived state identity in its policies. In *the Imperial Rescript on Education*, Motoda Eifu, a Confucian scholar in the government and on behalf of the Meiji Emperor, decreed the sovereign's expectation of citizens. The proclamation explicitly mentioned Confucian rhetoric, like filial piety and loyalty, but without identifying their Confucian, or even Chinese, intellectual origin.<sup>163</sup> The Meiji-Japanese government officially sponsored local educational institutions and gratitude communities across the state, encouraging citizens' literary education and moral cultivation.<sup>164</sup> Once again, state sponsorship of education had been a long-standing custom in the Confucian political philosophy. The legal requirement of compulsory education reinforced Meiji Japan's effort to emphasize nationalism.

Modern Japanese nationalism seems unique in comparison to western counterparts; and this is because of the history of Confucianism and Confucian-derived proto-nationalism in the Tokugawa era. This thesis aims to revise the historical interpretation of Japanese nationalism, which has neglected its indigenous features and its separate course of development prior to the entrance of western ideologies in the two millennia before the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, we cannot conclude that Japanese nationalism is or was an indigenous intellectual creation, because the national paradigm itself was nurtured by Confucianism, a foreign, but later indigenously crafted, intellectual

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<sup>163</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 135.

<sup>164</sup> Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, 136.

apparatus. The direction of intellectual influence was from Chinese Confucianism to Japan, prior to the nineteenth century; but then occurred in the contrary direction afterward, as notions derived from Japan's Meiji Restoration and modernization inspired revolution and reform in modern Chinese history. The ideological exchange between China and Japan has been a persistent element of East Asian international relations and will remain important in the present and future.

Finally, the shadow of Confucianism and Japanese proto-nationalism deriving from *kokugaku* and *mitogaku* still prevail in Japan today. The Japanese government promulgated the era name for the next Emperor on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, while I was finalizing my draft of this thesis. Because Japan's current Emperor Akihito has decided to abdicate for the Crown Prince Naruhito's coronation, the Japanese government planned to announce the new era name, *nengō*, for the new Emperor at the beginning of April. The long-lasting tradition of picking an era name is to consult Confucian classics of the *Book of Documents* and *Book of Changes* and select Chinese characters from these texts. Emperor Akihito's era name, *Heisei*, came from to Chinese classics: the *Records of the Grand Historian* and the *Book of Documents*. The incumbent Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, who is perceived to incline towards nationalism, nevertheless, stated the government's intention to consult Japanese classics for the new era name. The government announced the new era name as *Reiwa*, whose characters derived from the *Man'yōshū* ("Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves"), the oldest collection of classical Japanese poetry. *Reiwa*, it is claimed, is the first era name from Japanese intellectual origins. If Sorai, Norinaga, and Aizawa had the opportunity to witness this announcement, all of them would probably be surprised, but for different reasons. Sorai

would appreciate that Japan today still values Confucian philological methodology, through which the era name was selected. He would also feel happy that today's Japanese continue the use of kanji, Chinese characters, in their daily lives. Norinaga would be glad as well, since Japanese society has recognized the value of Japanese domestic intellectual achievements in literature and history. Norinaga would also appreciate Japan's desire to break intellectual dependence on Chinese culture. And Aizawa might be shocked by the fact that while twenty-first-century Japanese nationalists have discontinued the practice of consulting Chinese classics, they still implicitly continue the Confucian philology in searching for the Japanese state's most sacred name.

This thesis has examined Japanese Confucianism's impact on forming proto-nationalist notions in pre-modern Japan, with implications for the modern form of nationalism. The Confucian influence has not been erased. The controversy over the new era name's intellectual origin continues while I prepare for the thesis's defense; many Japanese have noticed that even what nationalist politicians and intellectuals proclaim as Japan's own intellectual achievement had been written in Chinese characters. Present-day Japanese nationalists, though rejecting Confucian sources, still praise a somewhat foreign language to coronate the nation's divine sovereign.



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