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Confucianism From China to Japan:
The Unseen Impact of Transnational Movement of Ideas

By

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Section One: Introduction

1.1 A Preface on the Characters of Confucian Thoughts and Studies

Originating as a guiding system of thoughts to both conceptualize and articulate the *totality* of the world during the Spring and Autumn period (771 to 476 BC) of Ancient China, Confucianism has left remarkable impacts to entire East Asia. The term “totality” here holds a metaphysical meaning of the Confucian perception of the entirety – a three-world system that formulates, encompasses, and directs the heaven (*ten* 天, the world above this-world), the material world (regulated by propriety *rei* 礼 and principle *ri* 理), and the spiritual realm (of human consciousness where values like benevolence *jin* 仁 is faithfully advocated). With this triplet structure of cosmogony, the Confucian totality differs from the Western theological and philosophical concept of the singular “absolute” of reason and intuition¹ in that it is both infinite and definite, absolute and enigmatic, a priori and a posteriori – forming a grand antimony that is both the omnipotent interpretation of everything and, at the same time, its fiercest refutation.

Mutual opposition and cross-manifestation compose the central character of the Confucian mode of thoughts. On this point, Han Fei (280 to 233 BC), the Master of the post-branded Legalist School (*houka* 法家)² during the Warring States period, recorded a succinct folktale that

¹ This is a crude presentation of the Kantian “totality” considering a thorough comparison of similar concepts between European and Chinese traditions will occupy much more than a paper. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

² A derivative school of Confucianism later became contentious and branded as the Legalism, underscoring pragmatism and realist approach to ruling. Chinese academia tends to make Legalism a separate but highly intellectually integrated school in relation to the Confucianism – they share the same intellectual concepts but pursue different approaches.

provided a vivid narrative of this structure:

“Once there was a man of Chu³ selling shields and halberds. In praising his shields, he said, ‘My shields are so solid that nothing can penetrate them.’ Again, in praising his halberds, he said, ‘My halberds are so sharp that they can penetrate anything.’ In response to his words somebody asked, ‘How about using your halberds to pierce through your shields?’ To this, the man could not give any reply. Indeed, impenetrable shields and absolutely penetrative halberds cannot stand together at the same time. Now, both Yao and Shun⁴ cannot be praised at the same time, just as the halberds and the shields are mutually incompatible.”⁵

In this folktale, Han Fei put two extremes that came from the same source on juxtaposition – the shield and the halberd, in their hyperbole forms, being sold by the same person – to expose the essential character of a paradox using a rhetoric question. Like many ancient Chinese classics, Han Fei did not elevate the essence of this story to a philosophical level⁶, but plainly ended it with an explicit sign of impasse. For Han Fei and the audience, what the man could have

³ One of the states (kingdoms) during the Warring States period.

⁴ Two of the Five Ancient Kings, a Chinese mythological, philosophical, and religious concept that was widely used by the thinkers during the Warring States period and was frequently referenced in Confucian texts.

⁵ 韓非 (Hanfei), and W. K Liao (trans.). “36 Criticisms of The Ancients, Series One.” 韓非子 *Hanfeizi. The Works of Han Feizi*. Electronic edition. Past masters. Charlottesville, Va.: InteLex Corporation, 1993. (Web)

⁶ This writing character is also shared by many of the Hellenic classics on philosophy, especially those pieces written by Xenophon.

tried to reply in that situation was worthy of considering but did not necessarily deserve analysis beyond its superficial meaning. It is, instead, the *function* that this piece of folktale served in Han Fei's complete argument that warrants our attention. The folktale is not merely an evocative show of wit, but an example to demonstrate a *paradigm* of standardization for Han Fei to execute his evaluation on the two Ancient Kings Yao and Shun. Like the shield and the halberd that were appraised and sold by the same merchant, the acts of the two Kings were recorded and evaluated by the same person, Han Fei, to which he wrote: "if one considers Shun worthy, he disproves the clear-sightedness of Yao; if he considers Yao saintly, he disproves the moral influence of Shun."⁷

Han Fei's articulation of the shield and halberd story is merely an epitome of the writing style and logic mode of the Confucian system of thoughts. We need not look further to spot similar formalities in other Confucian texts. For instance, the fundamental concept of "Heaven" was first given a metaphoric but functional articulation for divination purposes in the *I-Ching*, *The Book of Changes*, as:

"Vast is the 'great and originating (power)' indicated by Qian! All things owe to it their beginning: - it contains all the meaning belonging to (the name) *heaven*. The clouds move and the rain is distributed; the various things appear in their developed forms... The method of Qian is to change and transform, so that everything obtains its correct nature as appointed (by the mind of *Heaven*); and (thereafter the

⁷ Hanfei, 韓非子 \ *Hanfeizi* \ *The Works of Han Feizi.*, trans. W. K Liao, Electronic edition., Past masters (Charlottesville, Va.: IntelLex Corporation, 1993).

conditions of) great harmony are preserved in union. The result is 'what is advantageous, and correct and firm.'"⁸

In this text, a new concept of Qian⁹ is introduced as an “indicator,” or a culmination and manifestation of both the visible and invisible characters and functions of the Confucian heaven (*ten*). Starting with clouds and rains of the physical world as an incision point, the *Book* quickly transcended the reality into metaphysical “transformation” and “change,” and eventually to the grand target of reaching worldly “harmony” – a spiritual concept of mutual understanding and conformity. However, such a metaphorical and abstract depiction of heaven achieved little as a means of explaining the targeted concept. What was “Qian”? What was its relation to heaven? Was the translation of heaven into “*ten*” (lit: sky) a *contextually accurate* translation? Who had the authority to decide contentious matters like these? Beyond descriptive statements which of many were paraphrases of the original classic texts using contemporary languages made by countless Confucian intellectuals who had been active since the Warring States period, analyses on the texts of the ancient Chinese Classics offer little without entering the murky water of subjective interpretations¹⁰.

⁸ Legge, James (trans.). 易經 *Yi Jing (I-Ching) The Book of Changes*. Electronic edition. Past masters. (Charlottesville, Va.: InteLex Corporation, 1993).

⁹ In the most recent comprehensive assessment of the I-Ching, Shaughnessy translated the term “Qian” (乾) as “vigorous,” based on the context in which the term appeared in other parts of the book. However, even Shaughnessy himself admitted that the content is “difficult” and open to wide interpretations, thus making an accurate translation impossible. Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Unearthing the Changes: Recently Discovered Manuscripts of the Yi Jing (I Ching) and Related Texts*, Translations from the Asian Classics (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

¹⁰ Wai-Ming Ng’s study on I-Ching’s propagation during the medieval Japan also discussed the

Confucianism has thus become a collection of meta-philosophization in which new thoughts have been constantly added to the old ones either in consensus or contention, without objectively or empirically evaluating those that were already established. Layer after layer, Confucian scholars, being both the generator, observer, and adjudicator of the world, established a unique epistemological perspective to which they gradually *distanced* themselves from the knowledge at the core while slowly expanding the Confucian intellectual cluster. This process of expansion has been subtle and enduring. Even the famous intellectuals in the Song Dynasty, like Cheng Hao (1032-1085), Cheng Yi (1033 -1107), and Zhu Xi (1130-1200), whose ideas laid the foundation for remarkable changes to the Confucian thoughts were no exceptions to this process. By performing literary critique of the works of the previous scholars, these Song thinkers expressed their thoughts – post-branded as school of “Principle” (*rigaku* 理学) – in the seeming form of refutations and corrections, but were in fact alternative interpretations under the same Confucian framework formed in the antiquity, creating an epistemological illusion of objectivity and novelty. Thus, Confucianism, as a system of thoughts, can be seen transcended into an *ultimate paradigm* of human understanding. It internalized both agreement and refutation into its epistemological framework and formed a tautology in which to criticize a thought of the past requires the scholar’s compliance with the fundamentals that the very past thought was based upon – an inevitable condition to all scholars as long as they are subject to the Confucian system.

interpretive difficulty it brought to Zen Buddhist monks, who studied the book in secret. See his “The History of ‘I CHING’ In Medieval Japan,” *Journal of Asian History* 31, no. 1 (1997): 25–46.

However, the tautological character of the Confucian thoughts did not diminish its historical significance. On the contrary, the works left by Zhu Xi and others of the *Rigaku* school were highly revealing and informative when scholars situated them in the greater historical contexts and freed their geographical, temporal, and material constraints. Samuel H. Yamashita discerned this point in his historiographical assessment on the Tokugawa intellectual history. As he pointed out, a new direction of research in the field emerged and moved from “recovering the past” through the classic texts towards exploring narratives beyond them, casting new lights on the “limit” and “nature” of historical knowledge¹¹. The fruit of this new direction was a complex historiography that combined textual interpretation¹², contextual narration, and reconstructions of individual intentions. Together, historians such as Tetsuo Najita and Herman Ooms were able to uncover and provide explanations to phenomena above the individual level and beyond the classic texts in the already extensively studied history of Tokugawa Japan.

The conception of this paper is greatly inspired by this novel approach of moving above and beyond (while not abandoning) the established foundation of the texts and entering the realm of ideas with synthetic utilization of theoretical and material resources that are freed from their

¹¹ Samuel Hideo Yamashita, “Reading the New Tokugawa Intellectual Histories,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 22, no. 1 (1996). p. 47-48.

¹² It is worth mentioning that the textual-based philological research method is still actively practiced by scholars nowadays, especially those who live in states that fall into the old Chinese sphere of influence (China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and some parts of the Southeast Asia). For further information, see the *儒學與東亞文明研究叢書* (*Studies on Confucianism and East Asia Civilization*) collection published by the Himalaya Foundation, Taipei. 2001 (in Chinese); and annotations and interpretive essays included in the *日本思想大系* (*Intellectual Works of Japan*) collection published by Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1973 (in Japanese).

narrowly confined space and time. As discussed above, Confucian works have a lengthy history of utilizing enigmatic and archaic languages to articulate ideas that were temporally and linguistically sensitive, barring authoritative or conclusive understandings of the prior-existed contents from scholars of the later time. Yet, channels for the inclusion of new ideas and alternative interpretations remained open to motivated Confucian intellectuals in the society, resulting in an exclusive, mostly one-way path of knowledge production. This unique character of the Confucian thoughts sparked, surprisingly, a subtle presence of societal significance when the geographical boundary, temporal compartment, and textual expressions were transcended. As Tetsuo Najita had foreshadowed back in 1978, this abstract interaction of “normative structures” and “historical time” was inseparable from the culture of a society.¹³ Above individuals is the society; beyond texts is that of the culture; across geographical boundaries, we find transnational influence; and the key player of all resides in the human consciousness, often unnoticeable.

Confucianism, under this new perspective, is not merely a paradigm that deeply intertwines with the society, serving as an indicator of culture, a norm for behaviors, a root of institutional power, and a cohesive nexus of ideas to be lived with. With the contributions from countless scholars across more than two thousand years, it contains ideas that are beyond their moral and ethical roles, holding an aggregated functional value to the society¹⁴, and the impacts and

¹³ Tetsuo. Najita, “The Conceptual Portrayal of Tokugawa Intellectual History.” *Japanese Thought in the Tokugawa Period, 1600-1868: Methods and Metaphors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). p. 4.

¹⁴ Cui, Dahua. *儒学概论 (General Introduction on Confucian Studies)*. First Edition. 哲学史家文库 (Collections of works by historians of philosophy). Beijing: 人民出版社 (People’s

characteristics this value generated when the Chinese Confucian thoughts spread across the East China Sea to the Tokugawa Japan, is the primary subject this essay intends to explore.

1.2 Formulating the Question: Methods and Historiography

It is a conventional understanding among scholars that Chinese thinkers heavily influenced Tokugawa Confucianism. However, the articulation of such influence through a textual comparison between the two nations is arguably static. Scholars (of both Confucianism and intellectual history) with their sophisticated knowledge of the ancient texts tend to rely on hermeneutics, delineating characteristics from interpretations of the texts.¹⁵ While this approach is certainly revealing, it carries a subtle assumption of treating characteristics of thoughts as an explicit product that can be defined and branded, without giving enough attention to the fluid and heuristic nature that human thoughts possess. For example, Ogyu Sorai's thought was classified as a historicist approach to Confucianism for his zeal on reproducing the Confucian wisdom of ancient China. Similarly, Ito Jinsai, because of his exclusive emphasis on "ki" (気, lit: air), the flexible medium that powered the material world, was branded an opponent to Zhu Xi's "principle" and "air" dualistic world view.¹⁶ As a result of this direct characteristic-to-meaning

Publishing House), 2001. p. 2.

¹⁵ This method presently is utilized in its finest form by Chun-chieh Huang (Junjie Huang) and his students in Taiwan. See Junjie Huang, *New Horizon of the Studies on East Asian Confucianism -- A Discussion on Confucian Hermeneutics* (Taipei: Himalaya Foundation, 2001).

¹⁶ See James McMullen, "Reinterpreting the Analects: History and utility in the thought of Ogyu Sorai." *Critical Readings in the Intellectual History of Early Modern Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2012). p. 388-390 for a critical discussion of Sorai's historicism as an example; See Zhu Qianzhi,

method of interpretation, narratives about the causal relationships between ideas and historical reality become ossified (but not disappeared), making it incapable of analyzing delicate intellectual changes such as the impact of an intellectual transformation¹⁷.

Consequently, to accurately examine and depict intellectual activities, an exploration beyond the limit of textual analysis is warranted. However, existing scholarships left a highly diversified record of works, often drawing theoretical support from disparate sources and focusing on discourses rooted in distinct themes but provided no clear paradigm to follow. For example, Tetsuo Najita constructed his study *Visions of Virtue* on the Tokugawa merchant, citing the methodological influence of Quentin Skinner's contextual reading and searching for the true historical "intention" of ideas beyond the textual meaning,¹⁸ while Harry Harootunian "deconstructed" the texts in his work *Things Seen and Unseen* to disclose and explore "the conditions of textual production" of the Nativist works¹⁹. Scholars of the later time, such as Herman Ooms and Junjie Huang, both referenced Michael Polanyi's highly influential

朱謙之文集 (*Collection of Works from Zhu Qianzhi*), ed. Huang Xiannian, Di 1 ban. (Fuzhou: Fujian jiao yu chu ban she, 2002). p. 80-81 for an example of classification based on textual meanings.

¹⁷ John Berthrong also shared similar point in "Confucian Piety and the Religious Dimension of Japanese Confucianism," *Philosophy East and West* 48, no. 1 (1998): 46–79.

¹⁸ See Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 3–53. Tetsuo Najita, in his *Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan: The Kaitokudō Merchant Academy of Osaka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) explicitly referenced Skinner's method on p. 28.

¹⁹ Harry D. Harootunian, *Things Seen and Unseen: Discourse and Ideology in Tokugawa Nativism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). p. 12-13.

theorization on the “tacit component” and “focal-subsidary dichotomy of human awareness”²⁰ in their discussions on historiography, yet showing different attitudes toward the theory’s actual application in that Ooms proceeded to use it to assess the nature/existence of a “Tokugawa ideology” delineated by the texts,²¹ while Huang proposed a localized alternative, putting weight on the metaphysical explorations of certain Chinese philosophical concepts that might be hidden behind the texts.²²

Obviously, these examples can hardly be generalized into anything methodologically significant, but they convey a valuable message: that the intellectual realm behind the static historical materials is not one-dimensional. In this realm, ideas are scattered and extensively copious, providing the possibility for historians to flexibly assess and connect pieces of information, some of which are easy to overlook in their original forms. This flexibility allows a wide range of perspectives, apparent or tacit, to approach subjects as delicate as ideas – a feature that this paper needs.

At the same time, overcoming the textual limit is just one aspect of the methodological preparation. As a system of thoughts that have been widely permeated, modified, and localized to fit Japan’s conditions – not only for the polity in general but also communities and individuals, it

²⁰ Michael Polanyi and Amartya Sen, *The Tacit Dimension*, University of Chicago Press ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

²¹ See “Chapter One” of Herman. Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology: Early Constructs, 1570-1680* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 1998).

²² Junjie Huang, Minghui Li, and Rubin. Yang, *中國經典詮釋傳統 (Some Traditions on Interpreting the Chinese Classics)*., Chu ban., vol. v.1, 3 vols. (Taipei Shi: Xi ma la ya yan jiu fa zhan ji jin hui, 2002). p. 305-336.

is also necessary to formulate studies focusing above the individual level and analyze the impact of Confucianism from the perspective of social structure. This approach, first hailed by Robert Bellah in his study on *Tokugawa Religion*, installed a value-function assessment to Confucianism with “values,” such as loyalty and order, influencing social behaviors/practices such as scholarships or education. For Bellah, values provide rationales to the social structure through institutionalization and thus function collectively as a religion.²³ At the same time, when existing values can no longer satisfy people’s doubts about the social structure, rationalizations or revolts take place, functioning as a stabilizer and relief valve. Confucianism, in Bellah’s study, was precisely one of the rationalizing forces people sought when conditions of the social structure became unstable.²⁴ Thus, from Bellah’s perspective, the history of Confucianism in Japan is a history of social institutions.

Bellah’s work, though focuses on the societal aspect of Confucianism, is highly notable because it depicts a mutual reaction between values that people pursued back then and the influence it brought to people’s behaviors. In other words, Confucianism did not only help stabilize the Japanese society but also provide a channel of reform institutionally²⁵. However, this study left two points off the table: Confucianism was not a native religion of Japan, and ideas were, again, not static. Consequently, I believe there is an alternative dimension to the

²³ Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion; the Values of Pre-Industrial Japan*. (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957). p. 19.

²⁴ Robert N. Bellah, *Ibid.* p. 59-60.

²⁵ Bellah. *Ibid.* p. 56.

Tokugawa intellectual world. As a system of thoughts imported from China, Confucianism not only got transformed but also generated reactions and impacts of its own as a response to the transformation. This is a subtle and often overlooked aspect of intellectual transition and transformation between China and Japan and from the individual thinkers to the general society.

1.3 Formulating the Question: On the Subtle Impact of Transformation

This paper, considering the above framework, attempts to explore the reactionary aspect of the intellectual transformation of Tokugawa Confucianism and its impact to a gradual shift of social structure towards the Chinese model – from vertical and rigid hierarchy to a horizontal and flexible one – an implicit impact of studying the Chinese Confucian thoughts.²⁶ Derived from this leveling of social status was an unintentional emancipation of intellectual awareness that, in the long run, had its influence on society afterward. As the ultimate paradigm of everything (totality), Confucianism is like a planet in a metaphorical sense. When it comes closer to another planet, it affects some aspects of that second planet; and concomitantly, the second planet will also react to such a strong presence, being attracted closer and closer to the first. However, to thoroughly demonstrate this tendency requires a comprehensive examination of the intellectual foundations of both Japan and China – a task that is too large to be fully expanded in this short paper. Consequently, I would like to use this opportunity to conceptualize and articulate the general character and dynamic of this intellectual transformation and the subsequent

²⁶ I shall elaborate on these social structures in Section 2 and Section 3, but in general these notions have been widely recognized by scholars. For example, Robert Bellah, *Ibid.* p. 55.

emancipation it generated. I will also discuss Ogyu Sorai's thoughts and their contextual influences on the emergence of Osaka merchant thinkers at an academy called Kaitokudo (懷徳堂) during the Tokugawa era as a case study to demonstrate the said impacts. In order to achieve this goal, there are three clusters of questions that need to be answered to ensure logical consistency.

First, any topics about Confucianism will be groundless without an analysis of China, the origin of Confucianism. Hence, in section one, I ask the question, what were the characteristics of Chinese Confucianism? This part will not be a comprehensive examination of the Chinese Confucianism with all its nuanced historical contexts and features. Instead, I will focus on two characters that are most relevant to this study – inclusiveness and adjustability. Second, I proceed to describe the context by asking how Chinese Confucianism had influenced Tokugawa Japan by showing the intellectual connection, and how Tokugawa intellectuals responded to the Chinese ideas. To approach these questions, I will focus on the intellectual impact and the subsequent adjustment of understanding to Confucian concepts that Ogyu Sorai, a symbolic figure during this process, experienced. Lastly, I take a short journey to examine how Osaka merchant thinkers at the Kaitokudo reacted to such impacts in their thoughts. Specifically, the central question I'm asking is not why merchant scholars of the Kaitokudo decided to pursue knowledge – an assessment that has been superbly delineated by Tetsuo Najita²⁷; rather, I add an additional claim to this phenomena: the merchants' fervent on pursuing knowledge as a means of increasing their

²⁷ Najita pursued this subtle tendency to deliver his argument about merchant's intellectual influence and social status. See Najita, *Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan*, Ibid.

social status was a reactionary response to the subtle influence of Sorai's adjusted version of Chinese Confucian system. Also, for the sake of coherence, it should be noted that the intellectual and societal convergences proposed here are not a part of the grand theory of convergence frequently studied by sociologists, though it may be argued as such. To summarize all the conceptualizations discussed above, I believe that a subtle, even unintended, trend of intellectual emancipation and convergence was brought into Tokugawa Japan through the transition and transformation of Chinese Confucian ideas, hidden under ideas expressed by thinkers like Ogyu Sorai at the time. The result of these intellectual activities then proceeded to have an impact to the emergence of Kaitokudo.

Section 2: Chinese Confucianism

Chinese Confucianism is a system of thoughts with a manifold of themes in constant development and alteration over more than two thousand years since the Spring and Autumn period of Ancient China, resulting in plentiful of characteristics. However, for simplicity, this sub-section will primarily discuss two characteristics of the Chinese Confucianism that are most connected with the Tokugawa Confucianism – (1) its *inclusiveness* as one unitary paradigm and (2) its intellectual *adjustability* often utilized by later scholars and thinkers, resulting in the consequent modification and alteration towards the so-called Neo-Confucianism or the *Rigaku* school.

2.1 Characteristics and Impacts of Chinese Confucianism (1)

During Confucianism's lengthy history, numerous thinkers and scholars contributed various types of meanings into this system and formed different "schools" (*ka*.家) where the intellectual leader of each school became the absolute symbol addressed as "master" (*shi*.子). Later, masters who significantly influenced in the society with proper sanctions from the Emperor were further sanctified with dedicated personal temples ranging all over East Asia. Confucianism, thus, has a complicated nature that combines social influences (on both political and ritual aspects), intellectual inquiries (of various camps of thoughts), and religiosity (of being the explanation of all worldly things and the intellectual leader being the sage that could interpret it) into one.

Past scholarships have not been in conformity regarding this complexity. On the one hand, Chinese and Japanese scholars, under the same writing system, utilize a trichotomy designation, separating Confucian system of thoughts into Confucian Schools (*juka* 儒家), Confucian Studies (*jugaku* 儒学), and Confucian Doctrine (*jukyo* 儒教). The "Confucian Schools" are specifically referring to the words and deeds of the Confucian thinkers and schools they represented; the Confucian Studies, although they can be connected to individuals, primarily concern the political and philosophical thoughts preserved in the writings of Confucian thinkers; and the Confucian Doctrine, as its name indicates, underscores a sense of orthodoxy and treats Confucianism as a universally applied belief and practice – a type of social ritual.²⁸ On the other hand, Western scholars, in conformity with the naming principle of other system of thoughts such as

²⁸ Matsumura Akira. *大辞林 Daijirin Dictionary*. Shinsō dai 3-han (3rd edition). Tōkyō: Sanseidō, 2006. Online. It is worth noting that Jukyo can also refer to the religious aspect of Confucianism which include religious artifacts, constructions, and practices.

Catholicism and Protestantism, perceived Confucian thoughts as one intellectual system. This resulted in the use of the term “Confucianism” and relies on contexts of specific discussions to distinguish the three aspects of the thoughts, making them sub-categories under Confucianism instead of independent subjects.²⁹ This difference in typology between the Chinese and the European scholarly traditions generated a fundamental divergence in methodology: scholars of the Chinese tradition perform *deconstruction* on the Confucian thoughts, separating various intellectual modes and themes from the grand system, while the European scholars form a more cohesive cluster of discourses under the unitary subject, Confucianism, that results in an ever-presence *interconnectedness* surrounding all three aspects.

Linguistic comparison aside, the central issue here, as reflected in the divergence of the methodology, is the unitary character of the Chinese Confucianism presenting high *inclusiveness* and *interconnectedness* among its nuanced features, let it be religious, political, or intellectual. This statement is counter-intuitive, so to further demonstrate such a characteristic, Cui Dahua’s work on the Chinese Confucianism can serve as a succinct and quite useful example. In the book, Cui, following the trichotomy designation, puts his focus solely on the “Studies” aspect of the Confucian thoughts. To Cui, a part of the Confucian studies, has a theme that can be summarized as “the study of heaven and men” (天人之学). However, as the investigation proceeds, it appears this so-called “study of heaven and men” is more than separate intellectual inquiries of the

²⁹ Mary Evelyn Tucker also discussed this in “Religious Dimensions of Confucianism: Cosmology and Cultivation,” *Philosophy East and West* 48, no. 1 (1998): 5–45. p. 13.

characteristics of heaven and the nature of men.³⁰ It also contains a sense of inclusiveness that draws heaven and men into one. To further elucidate Cui's point, an examination of the text is warranted. In the *Book of Zhou*, heaven and men were stipulated as connected by ambiguous signs of omens, which usually concretized in a sensible format with assumed causality, though might be posteriorly attributed. For example, the Zhou people (1046 BC – 771 BC) were said to ascribe the demise of the Yin dynasty (ca.1600 BC – 1046 BC) and their successful overturn of it to both the leader's personal prowess as well as to the heaven's assistance. To which the *Book* recorded:

“The king (of Yin) ... the last of their race... proceeded in such a way as at last to keep the wise in obscurity and the vicious in office. The poor people in such a case... made their moan to Heaven... The fact (of Yin's demise) simply was that, for want of the virtue of reverence, the decree in its favour prematurely fell to the ground.”³¹

This last king of the Yin dynasty, under the name Di Xin (1105 BC – 1046 BC), was written as a vicious and violent man who was in content of the heaven and also believed to be in favor extravagant luxury and sexual indulgence to a degree that such behaviors cost the country greatly in terms of both financial capacity and influence to vassal tribes³², thus angered the heaven and

³⁰ Cui Dahua. *儒学概论 (General Introduction on Confucian Studies)*. Ibid. p. 281.

³¹ James Legge et al., *Book of Documents, The Chinese Classics* (Hongkong, The author; London, Trübner, 1861). P.426; 430.

³² Sima Qian et al., *史記:130 卷 (Records of the Historian: 130 Volumes)*, 880-03 Qin Ding Shi Ji (Shanghai: Tong wen shu ju shi yin, 1884). Vol. 3. p. 9-10.

led to its overturn by king Wan of Zhou, who like the book recorded to be precisely the opposite of Di Xin:

“It was... the king Wan, who was able to illustrate his virtue and be careful in the use of punishments... It was thus he laid the first beginnings of the sway of our small portion of the Empire... The fame of him ascended up to the High God, and God approved. Heaven gave a great charge to king Wan, to exterminate the great dynasty of Yin, and receive its great appointment, so that the various States belonging to it and their people were brought to an orderly condition.”³³

In these two short passages, two trends are discernable. The first one is a “Chinese model” of historical writing that the Japanese scholars have noticed since the Tokugawa period. After the collapse of the recorded dynasty, the task of compiling the history of the last ruler of the dynasty fell to the succeeded power, causing a very apparent trend of intentional and unintentional defamation and criticism of the last ruler. This historiographic practice, in combination with various types of censorship and destruction of records when the kingdom was under siege, then renders historical records inaccurate and brings about a sense of myth-building that deviated from positivism.³⁴ For instance, in the records above, Di Xin was presented in the form of pure

³³ James Legge et al., *Ibid*, p. 383, P.385.

³⁴ John S. Brownlee, *Japanese Historians and the National Myths, 1600-1945: The Age of the Gods and Emperor Jinmu* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997). p. 33-34. Also see J. Victor Koschmann, *The Mito Ideology: Discourse, Reform, and Insurrection in Late Tokugawa Japan, 1790-1864* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). p. 34-37 for a discussion about writing a History of Japan that diverged from the Chinese historiographical tradition,

evil that differentiated him from normal “men” and made him the destined person to destroy the kingdom.

Now, in light of this myth-building process, the second and more important trend is the circular relationship that includes the worship (reverence) of a supernatural entity, the importance of political virtue, and the educational undertone for the expected audience of future rulers. The politics of men were built, influenced by, and invisibly managed under the judgement of heaven. In order to be a great leader, one must respect heaven, and the one who respects heaven is considered to be acting virtuously and was thus put in charge as destined by heaven to be the great leader. Kings such as Di Xin, who did not act virtuously, lost their favor from heaven and were perceived as the human exemplification of disgrace. This cycle of history, if we may call it as such based on the *Book of Documents*, carried meanings that were both a reinforcement of religious devotion to the omnipotent heaven and a political message regarding the art of ruling. Later, a Han dynasty Confucian scholar, Dong Zhongshu (179-104 BC), in his classic work *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn Annals* analyzed and transformed this trend into being part of the Confucian concept of the Way or “Dao” (道), which connotes both the method and the path to ultimate harmony:

“The Way is the Kingly Way. [It means that] the king is the beginning of humankind.

When the king is upright, the primal qi will be harmonious and compliant, wind and rain will be timely, lucky stars will appear, and the yellow dragon will descend.

highlighting divine lineage by scholars of the Mito Domain.

When the king is not upright, then above there will be alterations in the heavens, and baleful qi will simultaneously appear.”³⁵

At this stage, Confucian thoughts in their original texts have been utilized in a way by ancient scholars to be substantially inclusive and interconnected. Further, because of scholars such as Dong Zhongshu, the meaning of the original text was transcended into a higher level of interpretation. In other words, an additional layer, “the Way,” was instilled through the interpretation and sublimation made by later scholars on the foundation of the classic works that already showed a degree of inclusiveness to various concepts, thus leading the Confucian thoughts toward a broadly applicable paradigm.

2.2 Characteristics and Impacts of Chinese Confucianism (2)

To elevate this intellectual usefulness into an ultimate paradigm, the Confucian system of thoughts has to also be accessible for new interpretations to be generated and changes to be made. This leads us to the second characteristic of Confucianism – the constant thematic *adjustments* and societal adaptation that penetrated the structure of society. These were initiated by scholars, or in a more political sense – the literati class.

The intellectual adjustment of thought is a peculiar subject to study for the very nature of an “adjustment” can be analyzed in two different ways. An adjustment, in its normal usage, may

³⁵ Dong Zhongshu, Sarah A. Queen, and John S. Major, *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn*, Translations from the Asian Classics (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). p. 93.

entail the existence of an external player who actively initiated the change. However, this player, typically a person, holds an external relationship to the adjustment itself as well as an ambivalent relation to the target of the adjustment – he can either be *in* the same system that the target is situated or be *outside* of it, sometimes above the target's system – resulting in a dualism. On the one hand, changes made within the system are internalized and have the potentials to contribute to the advancement of the target. On the other hand, an outside or external adjustment resembles the nature of an intervention and points to a prospect of radicalness and reform to the fundamental level. To put this conceptualization into the context of this study, the Confucianism is the target of the adjustment situated in the complex system of the Chinese society, and the initiators were scholars within the massive literati class.

However, the above theorization requires some critical qualifications. The very first issue is to prove that the adjustment is indeed a pattern suitable to describe Confucianism. In other words, the question here is how we can prove that the changes that happened within the framework of the Confucian thoughts were no more than alternative explanations instead of reformations to the fundamental level. This task demands both a heavy and methodical literary analysis tracing back to the very beginning of the Confucian Classics and an incisive examination of the societies of ancient China, which would require another lengthy study to be fully explored. To give fair treatment to both possibilities, the reformation approach is certainly not devoid of credibility, especially considering that the history of Confucian intellectual studies can be seen as a diffusive field concerning different “Schools” and intellectual leaders that each held a theoretical position that offered at least some differences at the fundamental level –

echoing the deconstructionist's methodology discussed previously. On the opposite end of this diffusive perspective is the aggregative approach that takes Confucianism as one overarching system of thoughts with distinguishable characteristics in its terminology, metaphysical objective, and praxis in society, all shared in a close-to-universal manner with variations on a particular basis. Contentions surrounding this academic "division" were fierce. However, looking back from today's position, these debates were actually pointing to the fundamental understanding about the definitive attributes of the Confucianism and its historical contexts³⁶ – a concept admitted by scholars like Wing-Tsit Chan and Wm. de Bary to be ambiguous in nature³⁷.

In light of the complexity of these contentions, it would be an appropriate move for this study to actively take the aggregative approach, treating the Confucianism as an overarching system of thoughts that, on top of the intrinsic characteristic of inclusiveness, has also experienced constant thematic adjustments. The reason for taking this approach, without claiming it to be necessarily superior to the diffusive approach, is due to the nature of examining cross-national intellectual transformation and reaction. The scale of this objective intuitively requires an approach that can be more easily generalized, thus making the aggregated approach

³⁶ See Peter Kees. Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008) for historical contexts of Neo-Confucianism or arguably Confucianism in the grand framework. P. 65-71; 78-82.

³⁷ Wing-Tsit Chan, "Neo-Confucianism: New Ideas in Old Terminology," *Philosophy East and West* 17, no. 1/4 (1967): 15–35; Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, "A New Direction in Confucian Scholarship: Approaches to Examining the Differences between Neo-Confucianism and Tao-Hsüeh," *Philosophy East and West* 42, no. 3 (1992): 455–74; Wm. Theodore de Bary, "The Uses of Neo-Confucianism: A Response to Professor Tillman," *Philosophy East and West* 43, no. 3 (1993): 541–55; and Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, "The Uses of Neo-Confucianism, Revisited: A Reply to Professor de Bary," *Philosophy East and West* 44, no. 1 (1994): 135–42.

an ideal one. As discussed above, delineating such adjustments is a complicated task that would result in a lengthy analysis of the Confucian classics and scholarly works that themselves could compile into a book. Fortunately, existing studies from Max Weber examining Confucianism's social cause and the impact on rationalization and the potential development of a European-style Puritan-influenced Capitalism have already probed the subject. Here, I provide a brief recapitulation and then extend the discussion to our target, the thematic adjustment.

As someone living in an era that the globe was rapidly connected and interweaved, Max Weber was an exceptionally shrewd observer of worldly matters. In his case study on the *Confucianism and Taoism*, Weber provided a systematic evaluation of the social structure of the ancient China, focusing on the potentiality of both intellectual and bureaucratic rationalizations of the Chinese religions – Confucianism and Taoism – and compare the social impacts generated by them with the European protestant intellectual movements, which he argued in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* to have a causal relation with the emergence of the bourgeoisie Capitalism. As C.K. Yang's superbly constructed "Introduction" of the *Confucianism and Taoism* delineated, Weber organized his study in a strict positive format, starting with a series of qualifications on three major aspects – "economic, political, and social"³⁸ – of the ancient Chinese society aiming to level the ground and excluding confounding variables in the historical contexts for his grand inter-continental societal comparison. Then, he followed with a highly perceptive and logically sounding assessment of the Chinese Confucianism and its

³⁸ C.K. Yang, "Introduction," *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*. (New York: Free Press, 1968). p. xix.

relation to both the institutional and structural aspects of the society with frequent contrasts made directly with Calvinism. Although an assessment on Taoism as a potential alternative explanation out of the Confucian model was also provided, Weber dismissed its significance in the rationalization process.³⁹ Weber's conclusion, in highly predigested words, is that the failure for China in particular to develop a European style Capitalism is primarily the impact of an immensely strong "traditionalist" tendency⁴⁰ among the literati class who controlled administrative posts in all institutions,⁴¹ compounded with the loss of proper incentive for institutional rationalization due to the lengthy peace⁴² and a massive officialdom under patrimonialism that constantly rationalized itself based within the Confucian ideals of harmony⁴³ and rejection of functional specialization (the educational ideal of a gentleman)⁴⁴.

There are two concepts in Weber's thesis that relate to this study the most – his examination of the literati class as part of the ancient Chinese social structure and his characterization of the traditionalism that derived from the Confucian thoughts. The Chinese literati were a "unitary"⁴⁵ class of educated officials, scholars, and students who successfully passed the civil examination

³⁹ Max Weber, *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism*. (New York: Free Press, 1968).

⁴⁰ Weber, *Ibid.* p. 248.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 116-117.

⁴² *Ibid.* p. 103.

⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 227-228.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 159-161.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 112.

and thus obtained significant social prestige, privileges, and to an extent, a “cultural qualification⁴⁶” that separated them from the commoners. This social stratum was formed as a balancing structure under China’s patrimonial rule to prevent the feudal style ruling by descents, which would lead to a “closed estate.”⁴⁷ However, the prestige it bestowed later became a burden for capitalist rationalization. The accompanying civil examination, essentially a Confucian test, while contributed to the penetration of the Confucian thoughts in the society, solidified the consequent “traditionalism” tendency into an institutional function. However, the functionalist approach that was taken for this examination of the literati class exposed only a part of the nuanced Chinese social structure and its impact. The social mobility and the horizontal structure of the social stratum were mostly omitted by Weber presumably for the work’s cohesion. In fact, the effectiveness of the civil examination in absorbing “new blood” (mobility) into the literati class from commoners who were financially adequate and intellectually fitted with minimal restrictions on occupations or stratum (horizontal, though certain groups such as prostitutes were considered too “degenerate” to be qualified⁴⁸) was beyond exceptional. Since the utility of the civil examination that reached its peak in the Song dynasty, over half of the officialdom was composed of distinguished Confucian students who had no forebearers ever

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 120.

⁴⁷ Weber, Ibid. p. 116; 146.

⁴⁸ See Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) for a comprehensive study on this topic.

holding an official position.⁴⁹ Now, to prove their worthiness as a part of the literati class, these Confucian students, scholars, and later bureaucrats had to continually perform literary critique and analysis to Confucian classic literatures in order to make their name be known to the emperor among tens of thousands of similar individuals in the officialdom.⁵⁰ This created the necessary condition for the Confucian thoughts to be constantly adjusted under a relatively flexible and “equal-among-commoners” social system that was secured by the civil examination.

In a similar manner, Weber’s characterization of what he called a “traditionalism” life-orientation also opened a new path of analysis on Confucianism. Traditionalism, though can be related to the term’s original meaning in Catholic political movement, is utilized as a functional expression of the characteristics of the Confucian thoughts in Weber’s thesis, which include a “this-worldly⁵¹” intellectual boundary, an ideal type of “men” that was regulated by propriety, and the ultimate pursuit of the Way, reducing tension⁵² and ensuring the eternal harmony and stability of the society. Further, Weber took the functional and structural approach and qualified these characteristics to be a repressive force that deemphasized emotion and radical renovation, making Confucianism fall into traditionalist circle in which it was constantly rationalizing itself

⁴⁹ E. A. Kracke, “Family Vs. Merit in Chinese Civil Service Examinations Under the Empire,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 10, no. 2 (1947): 103–23.

⁵⁰ This practice was vividly demonstrated and proved by numerous edicts and memorials sent between emperors and officials. An example can be found in the First Historical Archives of China, *雍正朝漢文朱批奏摺彙編* (*Collection of Memorials in Han Character Commented by Yongzheng Emperor*), 1st Edition. ([Nanjing]: Jiangsu gu ji chu ban she, 1989).

⁵¹ Weber, *Ibid.* p. 144-145.

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 227-228.

through adjustments made by the literati scholars – a “rational adjustment to the world” instead of Puritan’s “rational mastery of the world.”⁵³ However, what was overlooked by this functional analysis is the intellectual aspect of the Confucian characteristics. The literati class did not confine itself merely because of the Confucian’s highly and fervently upheld guidance of the only Way – an end unto itself. Instead, scholars of the literati class had to work within the framework of the Confucian thoughts, utilizing tools provide in the Confucian literature to argue for the best method to find the Way – both as a means and as the end. It was the combination of the Confucian thought’s paradigmatic nature – its inclusiveness and interconnectedness providing all explanations to every worldly and beyond worldly matters – and the intellectual necessity to constantly adjust it to fit the vicissitude of the social reality that made Confucian a durable, or in a sense, the ultimate paradigm that can hardly be circumvented.

Section 3: From China to Tokugawa Japan

At this point, we have discussed two of the most essential characteristics of the Chinese Confucian system of thoughts – its inclusiveness and its constant adjustability – that make the Confucian nexus a dominant paradigm that can be utilized both internally and externally, spiritually and politically for power-holders (the literati class) and commoners to refine their ethical practices and pursue the Way leading to the ultimate harmony. Concomitantly, we have also seen how the social device of ancient China, specifically the civil examination as a social

⁵³ Weber, *Ibid*, p. 132; 248.

stratum equalizer, was both shaped around and contributed to the Confucian thoughts' influence. Naturally, this highly paradigmatic system of thoughts was disseminated, following the projectile of the Han Chinese cultural influences, to quasi-vassal states on Korean and Indochinese Peninsulas, and further to the oversea islands of Japan through official cultural emissaries, unofficial Buddhist missionaries, and also pirate smuggling of books.⁵⁴ In this section, I focus on the Tokugawa Japan, which was widely recognized by scholars as the only period during which an active field of discourse on the Confucianism was formed.⁵⁵ I will also discuss how Ogyu Sorai, who arguably marked an intellectual turn of Tokugawa Confucianism, reacted when he was interpreting and adjusting the powerful Confucian paradigm.⁵⁶

3.1 Laying the Context – Entering Tokugawa Japan

Conventionally, the Tokugawa period has been seen as “a period of transition to the modern Japan” (thus earning its attribution as being “early-modern”). The remnant of the legendary Warring era (*sengoku* 戦国, 1467-1615) and the ephemeral rule of the overlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi left the subsequently raised Tokugawa Shogun (将軍), Ieyasu, a political structure that was both centralized in power, with the shogunate at the center, and dispersive in its

⁵⁴ Osamu Ōba, *江戸時代における中国文化受容の研究 (The Propagation and Reception of Chinese Culture During the Edo Period)*. (Kyōto-shi: Dōhōsha, 1984). p. 3-17; 21-23.

⁵⁵ Works from Chinese scholars like Zhu Qianzhi (朱謙之), Japanese scholars like Watanabe Hiroshi (渡辺浩), and U.S. scholars like Herman Ooms, had all upheld this notion respectively.

⁵⁶ Singling out two characteristics out of the *massive* Confucian system is understandably ahistorical. However, the goal in this section is not to reconstruct a History of Confucianism.

administration, with vassal lords (*daimyo* 大名), categorized and ranked by kinships, loyalty, and merits, stationing in more than two hundred domains (*han* 藩⁵⁷) across the Japanese archipelago. Each *han* held a limited degree of managerial and economic freedom that was sufficient enough for the domanical lords to establish a decent control over their subjects and push for infrastructural development like domain schools, but concurrently under close monitor of the shogunate. Paralleled to this political structure was a rigid, vertical social class system that generally consisted of an upper ruling class – the samurai, and a lower class – the commoners. The commoners were further separated into three classes based on their means of production: the peasant, the artisan, and the merchant. As a direct descendant of the Sengoku period, this social structure was adapted as *a functional result* of the military demand in the context of the previous period of war. The samurai class, being the main actor of this chaotic era, enjoyed substantially better treatments in terms of both social status and material benefits in exchange for their contributions to the war and loyalty to their lords. This resulted in a system that lacked “both horizontal (remain loyal to the specific lord of a specific region) and vertical mobility (status elevation almost impossible).⁵⁸ With the establishment of the Bakufu (幕府) at Edo and the

⁵⁷ The classifier “Han” (藩) was, in fact, a post-attributed institutional name borrowed from the Chinese Confucian political concept to describe similar entities in the ancient China. The published code in the feudal Japan, the “ryo” (令) and the “hato” (法度), contained no such designation, thus making it an foreign-imported term. The word itself in Chinese can be traced back to the *Commentary of Zuo* (春秋左氏伝), another classic of the ancient China. See Chinese traditional dictionaries such as the *Kangxi Dictionary* (康熙字典) for further information.

⁵⁸ Robert N. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion; the Values of Pre-Industrial Japan*. (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1957). p. 25, 55.; Victor B. Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800-1830*, Studies in Comparative World History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). p. 445, and Joseph Strayer, “Introduction.” *Studies in the Institutional History of*

rapid extinction of the Toyotomi House after the Battle of Sekigahara (関ヶ原) in 1600, the country was unified, and the power consolidated to Ieyasu. What came after was over two-hundred years of peace.⁵⁹

However, a “peaceful period” is merely a reference to measure the effectiveness of the political mechanism of a society to maintain stability. In an antinomic sense, it granted the valuable opportunity for a future with burgeoning creation of cultural products but, at the same time, exposed the intellectual and material void that cultural creativity cannot fulfill by itself.⁶⁰ At the individual level, the sudden relief from the pressure to survive that was required during the warring period, yielded a surplus of time – a rare leisure – for both the samurai warriors and the commoners to initiate more ontological contemplation and inquire more on existential questions regarding the environment they were living in.⁶¹ At the same time, in a political sense,

Early Modern Japan (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968).

⁵⁹ See Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Time to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) p.9-19 and John Whitney Hall, *Japan from Prehistory to Modern Times*, Delacorte World History (New York: Dell, 1971) p.160-177 for overviews of the Tokugawa Japan. Harold Bolitho, *Treasures among Men; the Fudai Daimyo in Tokugawa Japan*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974) and Douglas R. Howland’s article “Samurai Status, Class, and Bureaucracy: A Historiographical Essay,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 2 (2001): 353–80. also provide a comprehensive introduction and analysis to the Tokugawa feudal administration.

⁶⁰ For the materialist aspect, see works from Herbert P. Bix, *Peasant Protest in Japan, 1590-1884* (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 1986) and Stephen Vlastos, *Peasant Protests and Uprisings in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) for information on the defects and unrest in the commoner-class of the Tokugawa social structure, especially peasant uprising.

⁶¹ These trends can be generalized as, borrowing the vocabulary of George Sansom, the “condition” of peace. George Bailey Sansom, *Japan: A Short Cultural History*, Revised edition. (North Clarendon, Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2015). John Whitney Hall (1971) used the term “the Great Peace” (*tai-hei* or 太平) for this period. Ibid. p.161. Watanabe Hiroshi, on the other

a functional vacuum pressed the samurai class forcefully⁶². Without a war to fight, their existence as warriors (the lord's assets for war) and their function as a delegation of power (the lord's assets for ruling) required immediate legitimization and rationalization. The popularization of the Tokugawa Confucianism was thus conditioned by the need for a self and internal rationalization that should both justify the samurai's function in the peaceful society and provide a sense of cultural connotation to the daily practices. As Tokugawa Ieyasu explicitly stipulated when he drafted the *Buke shohatto* (武家諸法度) in 1615, "the samurai class should learn classic literature and practice its warring skills wholeheartedly."⁶³

3.2 Tokugawa Confucianism – Marking the Transition

Despite Ieyasu's visionary proclamation at the apex of his power, Confucianism did not

hand, named this period "Pax Tokugawa" or "*go seihitsu* (御静謐)" and pointed out that apparently not only high intellectual topics were widely discussed but also mundane quarrels on trivial matters. The vacuity emerged from the long peace led to "demoralization, pretense, and vanity." Hiroshi Watanabe and David. Noble, *A History of Japanese Political Thought, 1600-1901*, 1st English ed., vol. no. 30, LTCB International Library Selection; (Tokyo: International House of Japan, 2012). p .34-38. (p. 41-46 in the original Japanese version).

⁶² Bito Masahide points out that the Samurai class was not only devoid of its function, but also alienated from the means of production due to forced relocation to castle towns. Bito Masahide, "Confucian Thought during the Tokugawa Period," *Senri Ethnological Studies = Senri Ethnological Studies*, no. 11 (March 1984): 127–38. p. 129.

⁶³ Shirō Ishii, ed., "Buke shohatto (武家諸法度)," *近世武家思想 (Samurai Thoughts of the Early Modern Japan)* (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1974). Also, Ieyasu's intended classic literatures include both Chinese and Japanese works but he favored the more "hardcore" Chinese classics. See Itazaka Bokusai, *慶長年中卜齋記 (Bokusai's Diary during Keicho era)*, 我自刊我本 (甫喜山景雄, 1882.) Print. p. 20. Referenced from Kurozumi Makoto, "儒学と近世日本社会 (Confucian Study and Society of the Early Modern Japan)" *Iwanami kōza Nihon tsūshi (岩波講座日本通史)*, 4th ed., vol. 13, 25 vols. (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1994). p. 259.

become a dominant and doctrinal system of thoughts. In the early years of the Tokugawa bakufu, Confucian thoughts attracted substantial attention at all levels of the society owing to perceptive thinkers like Fujiwara Seika, who was known to be amiable and inclusive to different thoughts due to his past as a Zen Buddhist monk, and Hayashi Razan, who ceaselessly promoted Confucian values to the bakufu. However, as an intellectual tradition, it failed to gather enough support from both the popular and the bakufu to develop into a doctrine that could shake either the popular foundation of Buddhism or the commonly upheld reverence to the Shinto gods.⁶⁴

In an intellectual comparison of the three, Tokugawa Confucianism was not even that significant, understated by Nakamura Hajime as “not influential enough to change society and can only be distinguished in their incipient stage.”⁶⁵ Further, even the status of Confucianism as an ideology among the early Tokugawa samurai leaderships was questionable – it was neither a privileged cultural tradition nor intellectually preserved in its original Chinese mode of thought.⁶⁶ This flexible and subliminal nature, delineated by Kurozumi Makoto,⁶⁷ was in

⁶⁴ Peter Nosco, *Confucianism and Tokugawa Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984). p.7-11

⁶⁵ Hajime Nakamura, *History of Japanese Thought: 592-1868: Japanese Philosophy before Western Culture Entered Japan*, The Kegan Paul Japan Library (London: Kegan Paul, 2002). p. 152.

⁶⁶ Buddhism at the time also played a role in limiting Confucianism’s influence discussed in Beatrice M. Bodart-Bailey, *The Dog Shogun: The Personality and Policies of Tokugawa Tsunayoshi* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006). p. 52.

⁶⁷ Kurozumi Makoto, *近世日本社会と儒教 (Society of the Early-Modern Japan and Confucianism)*, Shohan. (Tōkyō: Perikansha, 2003). p. 18-20. Also, in his “The Nature of Early Tokugawa Confucianism” trans. Herman Ooms, *Journal of Japanese Studies* 20, no. 2 (1994): 331–75. p. 339-340.

contradiction with the widespread assumption of a monolithic Confucian orthodoxy that dominated the society in Maruyama Masao's analysis.⁶⁸ Building on top of this contention, Herman Ooms, in his eloquently written book further corroborated this “non-official, non-consensus” notion of Confucianism, and categorized its early rise as a historical contingency *subtly* delineated through “discursive activity and practice” rather than a state ideology “commissioned” from the top.⁶⁹ At the same time, the transition of Confucianism from China to Japan also generated a psychological sense of cultural pride among Japanese scholars such as Kumazawa Banzan and Ogyu Sorai, who, though had taken different approaches, strived to expound a form of Japanese originality out of the Chinese tradition.⁷⁰ Under these narratives, we may pinpoint three characteristics to the early stage of Sino-Japanese intellectual transition during the Edo period: (1) oriented around the Chinese Confucian thoughts; (2) utilized functionally to the society; (3) reacted diffusively by the intellectuals.

When discussing the transition of Confucianism, a consensus among scholars was to attribute the Neo-Confucian trend led by Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi, and Zhu Xi during the Song dynasty (960-1279) to be the original model that Tokugawa scholars, especially Hayashi Razan

⁶⁸ Maruyama Masao, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan* ([Princeton, N.J.]: Princeton University Press, 1974). p. 17.

⁶⁹ Herman. Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology: Early Constructs, 1570-1680* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 1998). p. 289-290.

⁷⁰ Kate Wildman Nakai, “The Naturalization of Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan: The Problem of Sinocentrism,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 40, no. 1 (1980): 157–99. Although Nakai did not mention in her article, Banzan's approach was essentially a praxis of the *Yōmeigaku* School of Mind (inner driven), versus Sorai's *Kenen* School of the Ancient Texts (textual driven).

and his descendants, adapted into their intellectual world.⁷¹ However, contrary to the intuitive assumption of it being a complete materialist transformation from the classic Confucian thoughts, Neo-Confucianism or the “School of Principle” as it was called in literal Chinese was not a separate system of thoughts alienated to the Confucian nexus in its entirety. As Cheng Yi once criticized, past scholarship after the death of the Sages were “unnecessarily extravagance” in rhetoric with the sole purpose of “seeking enjoyments of other people [as self-contentment]”⁷², so he was committed to propagating the true wisdom of the Confucian thoughts to people⁷³— an endeavor that was followed by Zhu Xi as well⁷⁴. In other words, what Zhu Xi aimed to achieve in his influential works was a purposeful restitution of the Classic Confucianism and, in nature, a *thematic adjustment* to update the paradigmatic Confucian thoughts of the ancient to be more useful for the literati of contemporary society. To achieve this goal, Zhu Xi performed a simplification to the complex and obscure description of cosmogony and divinations that were stipulated in the ancient classic *I-Ching*. He reorganized the archaic abstractions of heavenly matters and rebranded them into an absolute but more workable concept of Principle (*ri* 理) – the

⁷¹ Maruyama Masao, *Ibid*, p. xxviii, 16,17.

⁷² From Cheng Yi. “為太中作試漢州學生策問(A Prompt Made for Taizhong to Test Licentiates at Han Zhou).” *二程文集 (Collection of Works from the Cheng Brothers)*, vol. 9. (Beijing: Beijing Ai ru sheng shu zi hua ji shu yan jiu zhong xin, 2009), referenced from Peter Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*. p. 78.

⁷³ Cheng Yi, *Ibid*, vol. 11.

⁷⁴ See Zhu Xi. “大學章句序(Preface to The Great Learning).” *四書章句集註 (Collection of Commentaries on the Four Classics)*. sec. 5, 6.

rule, function, and attribute of all things.⁷⁵ Thus, to investigate the Principle of things is to practice in accordance with the Way leading to the harmonious end (*kakubutsu* 格物, *kyuri* 窮理). Since everything has a principle, and everything is regulated by its stipulated function, Zhu Xi successfully executed an internal adjustment and added a strong sense of order and value to the Confucian system of thoughts without superseding it. This character made Zhu Xi's thoughts suitable in theory for the need of the samurai class in Japan, which, as discussed in the previous section, required immediate rationalization and legitimization due to the sudden peace.

However, Confucianism was, at its core, a system of education and instruction carved for the Chinese literati class and licentiates to redefine ethical notions and prepare such class members for the public civil examination. It was static, doctrinal, and purposeful, forming a so-called “Mandarin orthodoxy,”⁷⁶ while the samurai class, with its unchallenged authority gained from the war, favored primarily the functional aspect of the Confucian system to stabilize and rationalize the vertical-structured feudal military state. Such a comparative narrative between the literati and the samurai leadership was insinuated in Watanabe Hiroshi's superbly constructed diagram, in which the literati class and the samurai class were both privileged but differed on

⁷⁵ For a specific description and analysis of this philosophical transformation, see Zhu Xi. “On the Substance of the Way (道體).” *Reflections on Things at Hand* (近思錄). Vol. 1. sec. 1; also, Zhu Xi and Allen John Wittenborn, *Further Reflections on Things at Hand: A Reader* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991). p. 15-24.

⁷⁶ William Theodore De Bary, *Neo-Confucian Orthodoxy and the Learning of the Mind-and-Heart* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981). p. 190. Also, in Mary Evelyn Tucker, “Religious Aspects of Japanese Neo-Confucianism: The Thought of Nakae Tōju and Kaibara Ekken,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 15, no. 1 (1988): 55–69.

their functions and purposes.⁷⁷ Under this functional lens, Confucianists were rendered as a non-privileged community—“marginal and parasitical” to the social system – with an imperative need for recognition from the ruling class.⁷⁸ However, they also enjoyed an unparalleled degree of institutional freedom with various intellectual schools (and physical schools) established across the country resulting in the diffusive nature of Tokugawa Confucianism.

The above narrative, though very convincing among contemporary scholars, overlooked an essential aspect of the causation chain during the Sino-Japanese intellectual transition – the subtle reactionary impact generated by the Song Confucian thoughts, namely the Zhu Xi “Neo-Confucian” trend. The institutional freedom and the diffusion of intellectual schools during the Tokugawa era were not merely a flat, static outcome of the social and political environments distilling into a particular functional need, but also led to the formation of a whole field of intellectual discourse. Tokugawa Intellectuals, by studying the Chinese (Zhu Xi) thoughts, received an unintended and very subconscious impact – a passive sense of intellectual emancipation that existed horizontally across classes which was initially enjoyed by the Chinese literati through the civil examination. If we return to Zhu Xi’s so-called “principle turn,” a question naturally raised is how do we qualify or categorize the Principle? For Zhu Xi, it was manifold, existing in every single being and defining both its function and its property, but it was

⁷⁷ Watanabe Hiroshi, *東アジアの王権と思想 (Sovereign Power and Thoughts in the East Asia)*, Shohan. (Tōkyō: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1997). p. 80. Also touched upon by K. Peter Takayama, “Rationalization of State and Society: A Weberian View of Early Japan,” *Sociology of Religion* 59, no. 1 (1998): 65–88.

⁷⁸ Kurozumi Makoto, “The Nature of Early Tokugawa Confucianism.” *Ibid.* p. 341.

also metaphysically unitary, being the great absolute and ultimate Taiji (Tai'chi).⁷⁹ It was universal but not homogeneous.⁸⁰ In other words, the human was born under the same mechanism with the same “composition” of nature (*sei* 性), but their principles were uniquely attributed and could only be altered *later* by the movable Energy (*ki* 氣). In essence, Zhu Xi conceptualized a static core of human nature that is universally contained in every person but is also unique to each one. As a person, such differences are inevitable, so they should be recognized and accepted without holding discontent – an affirmation of maintaining the order of the world. More importantly, the notion of a socially constructed classification between people with different natures did not explicitly exist in Zhu Xi's theory, weakening the consciousness of segregation among educated commoners in the Chinese society and echoing the function of the civil examination system. For Tokugawa Japan, which had a social system far more rigid than China with even less mobility in every direction, this sparkle of subconscious motion was magnified into an emancipation of intellectual awareness, stimulating thoughts from educated people regardless of class who suddenly felt the imperative need to justify their existence and position in relation to a rigid society. Through this introspective process, an increase of intellectual activities would gradually emerge at all levels of the society, pushing the society

⁷⁹ Zhu Xi wrote: “The Great Ultimate is the greatest, unparalleled ultimate Principle. It carries the message from heaven but has no sensual or physical presence. It has already been stipulated before you can even sense it.” *Reflections on Things at Hand* (近思錄). Vol. 1. sec. 1.

⁸⁰ Zhu Xi wrote: “through the alteration of Yin, Yang is produced constantly, thus generate infinite forms of mankind, all with its own Principle and Energy (*ki* 氣) [forming unique human nature], thus the Tai'chi is in everyone.” Ibid. Note, this is also the basis of Zhu Xi's dualism.

towards a form that *seemingly* resembled that of China, though it never actually reached that end. It was a subtle convergence that was not necessarily materialized, physically revealed, or even consciously recognized. A key figure of this subtle transformation was Ogyu Sorai.

3.3 Ogyu Sorai – Marking the Transformation

To call Ogyu Sorai (1666-1728) a key figure in the history of Tokugawa intellectuals would be an understatement. Early post-war scholars of the field and one of the pioneering Japanologists in China, Zhu Qianzhi, attributed him to be the pivotal figure, whose intellectual quality and diversity were “outstanding among all Japanese Confucianists,”⁸¹ and laid out the foundation for the development of materialism in Japan by opposing the Principle-Nature dualism of the Neo-Confucian thoughts which Zhu considered to be essentially feudalist idealism⁸². Differentiated in theoretical approaches, Maruyama Masao in his analysis of the Tokugawa intellectual development under the Hegelian view of the rise and fall of the world, elucidated a sense of rejection and reform to the society that was subtly implied in Sorai’s collection of works in responding to the Genroku era (1688-1704), when the bakufu became deeply troubled by economic and social hardships.⁸³ Hence, in the eyes of later scholars, Sorai’s

⁸¹ Zhu Qianzhi, *日本の古学及陽明学 (Kogaku and Yomeigaku in Japan)*, Di 1 ban. (Shanghai: Shanghai ren min chu ban she, 1962). p. 133.

⁸² Zhu Qianzhi, *朱謙之文集 (Collection of Works of Zhu Qianzhi)*, ed. Huang Xiannian, Di 1 ban. (Fuzhou: Fujian jiao yu chu ban she, 2002) vol.9. p. 78; 83-85.

⁸³ Maruyama Masao, *Studies in the Intellectual History of Tokugawa Japan* ([Princeton, N.J.]: Princeton University Press, 1974). p. 236-241 passim.

thoughts also contained a dimension that foreshadowed the nascent Japanese modernization.⁸⁴

However, the character of Sorai's thoughts that concern this inquiry the most is not as simple as that he was a beneficiary of the subtle and unintended liberation of thoughts brought to the Tokugawa intellectual community by Zhu Xi's new interpretation and adjustment to Confucianism, thus opening up an environment for Sorai to make novel and audacious arguments, which would have taken a different form should the original rigid, vertical social structure persist entirely unshaken. More importantly, Sorai did not consider himself to be a practitioner of Song Confucianism. In fact, he chose an intellectual approach that held the Song Confucianists led by the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi in refutation. So, the critical question is how did Sorai, who opposed the thoughts of the School of Principle, and thus unknowingly circumvented the subtle motion of the horizontal inclusivity, nevertheless become an intellectual symbol of reform and change?

From the perspective of this inquiry, Sorai's reform is a combination of a structural reversion and an epistemological alteration together stimulated by Zhu Xi's thoughts and conventionally presented as a "reform". In other words, tracing back to the interconnected and inclusive nature of the Confucianism, Sorai's opposition to the "Principle School" and his proposition of returning to the fundamentals of Confucian thoughts were, in essence, an epistemological twist

⁸⁴ The connotation to modernization in Sorai's works was under the influence of Maruyama's widely known reflection on Japan's violent modernization problem. Nagata Hiroshi, who also wrote about Japan's intellectual history at the height of Japan's militarization (1938) considered Sorai's work unimpressive – a quite interesting difference I noticed in Nagata Hiroshi's *日本哲学思想史* (*History of Japanese Philosophical Thoughts*). (Tokyo: Hōsei Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 1967) and Maruyama's *Studies* (1952).

to the alternative interpretation and adjustment made by Zhu Xi and a reversion to the ultimate wisdom of the Confucianism illusioned by Sorai to be held by the ancient Sage Kings, thus concretized into the “Way of the Ancient Kings (*senō no dō*⁸⁵)”. Sorai vividly depicted this position as:

“The honorable Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi were great men of the time but had no ability to understand the language of the ancient. We can discern this fact from their avoidance of the Six Classics but in favor of the *Doctrine of the Mean* and *Mencius*, which are easier to read. They then proceeded to argue with others about the true meaning of the Way based on these two works – not only did they interpret these ancient texts using the language of the contemporary, causing ambiguous abstractions, but also displaced the concepts from the actual material, leading to mere jargons about righteousness and principles. The teachings of the Ancient Kings and Confucius were thus lost during this process.”⁸⁶

Building upon this skepticism to the Song Confucianists’ interpretation, Sorai rejected Zhu Xi’s thoughts on the grounds of his ignorance to philology, causing misreading, distortion, and

⁸⁵ Conventionally, the pronunciation is “*senō no michi*,” but I found this quite strange considering Sorai’s goal was to philologically retrieve the wisdom of the Ancient Chinese Kings, thus would intuitively use *onyomi* – “*dō*”, rather than *kunyomi* – “*michi*”.

⁸⁶ Ogyū Sorai, *Bendō*. From *Ogyū Sorai zenshū* (荻生徂徠全集 *The Complete Collection of Ogyū Sorai*), ed. Kanshi Imanaka and Tatsuya Naramoto (Tōkyō: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1973). Vol.1. p. 413.

then being conjectured into “specious theories (*rikutsu* 理窟)”⁸⁷ that falsely created a sense of optimism to the ability and boundary of human intelligence. Sorai detested this arrogance of the Song Confucianists (*so-ju no mōsetsu* 宋儒の妄説). For him, laying beyond the human intellectual realm is that of the Sages (*jinchi no oyobazaru tokoro* 人智の及ばざる所),⁸⁸ and it is futile to peek the knowledge of the Sages as they received it directly from heaven – the ultimate and absolute.⁸⁹

Hence, contrary to Zhu Xi’s epistemological simplification of the incomprehensible nature of the world into manageable and attainable principles, Sorai proposed a separation, drawing a clear line between heaven and the ordinary realm. For Zhu Xi, the ultimate principle exists in every being and receives momentum from energy (*ki* 氣) to generate nature. Sorai, however, reattributed this mechanism of nature to heaven’s designation (*tenmei* 天命). Thus nature was not only fixed but also detached from the physical reality – rendering it incomprehensible. The only medium positing in between was the Ancient Kings, whose great wisdom and virtue allowed them to be the selected few to comprehend the knowledge of heaven. These reverent figures then created history and ruled the ordinary world with their Ways constructed for people to follow.⁹⁰

Sorai conceptualized this structure as: “the Way taught by Confucius was the Way of the Ancient

⁸⁷ Ogyū Sorai. *Tōmonsho*. Ibid. Vol.6. p. 203.

⁸⁸ *Tōmonsho*. Ibid. Vol.6. p. 182. This notion of the ultimate and absolute reverence to the Ancient Sages appeared frequently in Sorai’s theses, such as *Bendō* and *Benmei*.

⁸⁹ *Tōmonsho*. Ibid. p. 181.

⁹⁰ Sorai wrote: “the Way of the Ancient Kings was constructed by them. It is not the Way of heaven and earth (nature).” *Bendō*. Ibid. p. 414.

Kings. The Way of the Ancient Kings was the Way to rule the state in peace and stability.”⁹¹

Under this structure, the separation is completed. The heavenly matter was sanctified to be unapproachable to the ordinary people who were not capable of the great virtue and wisdom (they were considered to be of small virtues⁹²). What was left for people to grasp was history, where the Ancient Kings resided. The Kings were the rulers of ancient China, making their Way a political one, consisting solid performances and regulations (*waza* 技 or *jutsu* 術) of the rite, music, law, and governing matters (*rei gaku kei sei* 礼楽刑政).⁹³

From this series of intellectual alterations, the core of the Confucian thoughts, in Sorai’s view, was thus (de)metamorphized from heavenly concerns about nature to practical matters of the ruling, which concerned the people. The Ancient Kings constructed the Way to pacify the world, which flourished primarily with people. People’s natures, though varied by heavenly designs, all required the nourishment of benevolence (*jin* 仁) to live in peace; thus, Sorai wrote, “the Way of the Ancient Kings is manifold, but only Benevolence was essential to all of them.”⁹⁴ To act benevolently is to nourish the people. “Peasants, artisans, and merchants, all depend on each other to live. None of them can survive alone in society... only benevolence can maintain the unity of this group.”⁹⁵ The Sages of the Ancient achieved this unity, and the ruler of the later

⁹¹ *Bendō*. Vol.1. p.413. Also, in *Tōmonsho*. Ibid. p. 208.

⁹² *Bendō*. p. 416. Also, *Benmei*. Ibid. Vol. 1. p. 459.

⁹³ *Bendō*. Ibid. p. 413, and *Benmei*. Ibid. p. 423.

⁹⁴ *Bendō*. Ibid. p. 419.

⁹⁵ *Bendō*. Ibid. p. 415. *Benmei*. p. 425.

days maintained it through benevolence, thus all were holding the great virtue. The commoners, on the other hand, by practicing their duties designated by heaven, held the small virtue.⁹⁶

Consequently, from these thoughts, Sorai presented a prototypical sense of specialization among people of various classes. Since every class depended on each other, it would be senseless for the ruler to disadvantage a certain class based on the rigid hierarchy severely. However, Sorai, due to his strong Sino-leaning historicism, separated the gentlemen and the commoners by the measure of their virtue – thus making Sorai’s vision of society carry an even stronger affinity to the Chinese society. In other words, although Sorai disagreed with Zhu Xi’s thoughts, his proposition, constructed through the grand paradigm of Confucianism, carried a similar *subtle influence* of horizontal inclusivity. At the same time, by rejecting Zhu Xi’s thoughts and return to the ancient Chinese structure of society, both of which were not Japanese, Sorai presented a change significant enough in both epistemological and structural aspects to be considered as a reform.

Section 4: “Kaitoku” – The Merchant’s Response

“The gentlemen think of virtue (*kaitoku* 懷德); the mundane think of their bond to the land. The gentlemen think of the sanctions of law; the mundane think of favors which they may obtain from others. These behaviors are in accordance with

⁹⁶ *Benmei*. Ibid. p. 549. Also see Kurozumi Makoto, “儒学と近世日本社会 (Confucian Study and Society of the Early Modern Japan)” *Iwanami kōza Nihon tsūshi* (岩波講座日本通史), 4th ed., vol. 13, 25 vols. Ibid. p. 288.

nature.⁹⁷”

Sorai quoted the above sentence from the *Analects* to articulate his view of a moral demarcation, which the ultimate nature designated for society. In the original texts, Confucius believed that society in general consists of two kinds of people with different moral capacities – those who have possession of virtue and those who are preoccupied with sublunary matters. Despite the subtle tone of superiority that the juxtaposition might imply, this classification should not be misunderstood as a sign of social stratification. For Confucius and for Sorai, who believed in the words of the Ancient Sages, these characters are nature-attributed and fixed – a priori – not to be confused with the class differentiations that had a active social connotation. However, the qualification of these concepts – the gentlemen and the mundane – was social and not free of alterations based on the real circumstances of the society. For China, the civil examination served as the only means of measurement for everyone to reference upon, forming, in general like Confucius depicted, a social structure that consisted of the literati gentlemen and the mundane commoners. Through this alteration, the original intent of Confucius was thus bent to serve the needs of society with education occupying a more functional role than mere spiritual fulfillment. Japan, however, had a different situation. Its rigidly designed class system allowed neither space nor demand for a civil examination system like China to “objectively” determine a person’s

⁹⁷ *Ken'en Juppitsu* No.3. Ibid. Vol.1. p. 523. Sorai quoted this sentence from the *Analects* of the Confucius. The translation here is a combination of Legge’s version and mine. See 孔子 Confucius (Kong Fuzi) and James Legge, “Li Ren 里仁,” *論語 \ Lun Yu \ The Analects of Confucius.*, Electronic edition., Past masters (Charlottesville, Va.: InteLex Corporation, 1993).

moral degree. This vacuum then fused with the subtle liberation of thoughts brought to the commoners through the teachings of the Song School of Principle and all the Japanese thinkers who were under the influence of the Chinese thoughts, such as Itō Jinsai and Ogyu Sorai, resulting in a new type of intellectual vacuity, specifically, of the commoners.

Within this vacuum, the subtle liberation of thoughts that were exuded unintentionally from the Chinese Confucian thoughts during its propagation in the Tokugawa Japan was further amplified and disseminated, generating a need for the commoners to justify their existence and inner moral value in relation to the society. This trend posited the merchant class in a peculiar situation. On the one hand, being at the bottom of the four-class hierarchy but politically and socially the most active one,⁹⁸ the merchant's need for a self-justification was stronger than the other. On the other hand, their financial power and relationship to the samurai aristocracy allowed them to react to their troubling situation with pragmatic and immediate solutions, leading to the establishment of several academies to teach Confucian thoughts. The Kaitokudo (懷徳堂) in the so-called “merchant city” of Osaka was the most renowned one.

4.1 Kaitokudo – Founding of a Merchant Academy

“Cultivate yourself through devoted study; pacify others with eloquent statements⁹⁹”.

⁹⁸ Crawcour, E. S. "Changes in Japanese Commerce in the Tokugawa Period." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 22, no. 4 (1963): 387-400.

⁹⁹ Nakai Chikuzan. “Nūtoku Monlen 入徳門聯 (Entrance Couplet of Kaitokudō).” From picture published on the website 懷徳堂記念会, “入徳門聯,” accessed September 9, 2019. Original plaque stored by 大阪大学懷徳堂文庫. Also in, Yuasa Kunihiro, “All Contents of the Kaitokudo Data Base,” *Memoirs of the Graduate School of Letters, Osaka University* 42 (March

Though more than twenty years after the founding of the Kaitokudo, this couplet from Nakai Chikuzan was still the most vivid representation of the core intellectual spirit of the Kaitokudo. As merchant scholars, they wanted to be first scholars and then wealthy merchants (学者の金持 not 金持の学者¹⁰⁰), but the two did not exclude one another.

As a bakufu certified private academy (*hankan hanmin* 半官半民¹⁰¹) founded by a group of five successful merchants (the *godōshi* 五同士) of the Osaka and with the broadly erudite Confucianist Miyake Sekian (1665-1730) as its founding master of lecture, the Kaitokudo in its almost 150 years of operation (1724-1869) nurtured some of the most novel and open-minded thinkers, such as Tominaga Nakamoto and Yamagata Bantō, during the middle and late Tokugawa period – firmly marking its position as the symbol of the Osaka intellectual community with a reputation significant enough to be referred by scholars as the Osaka School of Confucianism following the famous bakufu-founded school of Shoheiko in Edo.¹⁰²

Since receiving its certitude from the bakufu under Shogun Yoshimune in 1926 largely owing to the ceaseless effort of Nakai Shūan, the director of administrative matters (*azukari nin* 預り人), Kaitokudo had enjoyed exceptional administrative autonomy, maintaining a status

2002): 1–320. p. 64.

¹⁰⁰ Miyamoto Mataji, *Ōsaka chōninron* (Kyōto: Mineruva Shobō, 1960). p. 211

¹⁰¹ Yuasa Kunihiro, *Kaitokudō kenkyū* 懐徳堂研究 (Tōkyō: Kyūko Shoin, 2007). p. 3.

¹⁰² Zhu Qianzhi, *Riben de Zhuzi xue* 日本的朱子学, Di 1 ban., Zhe xue shi jia wen ku = (Beijing: Ren min chu ban she, 2000), and Miyamoto Mataji, *Chōnin shakai no gakugei to Kaitokudō* 町人社会の学芸と懐徳堂 (Tōkyō: Bunken Shuppan, 1982). p. 11-12.

similar to a “chartered domain” (*hairyōchi* 拝領地) and various tax exemptions. These privileges allowed the Kaitokudō to exercise a strict separation between inner space, which undermined the hierarchical status and restriction on thoughts, and the outer space, where all public norms persisted.¹⁰³ However, Kaitokudo was, in the end, a merchant Confucianist academy established during an intellectually blossomed period, when the Sorai School and various localized Zhu Xi thoughts propagated by thinkers like Kaibara Ekiken and Nishikawa Joken were all in their prosper years,¹⁰⁴ with a subtle intent to solve the merchant class’s imperative need for a justification of its social existence through intellectual enrichment¹⁰⁵. The combination of these circumstances posed such a powerful influence that the Osaka merchants had to respond with determinations and intellectual strength of similar intensity, to which, accompanied by the merchant’s pragmatic character, a strong sense of intellectual inclusivity and “equalitarianism” was upheld by Miyake Sekian, the first master of lecture, and then transformed into the post-branded eclecticism and the universalistic pursuit of “managing the nation and saving the people” (*keisei saimin* 經世濟民).

¹⁰³ Tetsuo. Najita, *Visions of Virtue in Tokugawa Japan: The Kaitokudō Merchant Academy of Osaka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). p. 70-73.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 32-52 passim. Also, p.76.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Derrah, “Education in the Margins Private Academies in the Tokugawa Period,” *近畿大学総合社会学部紀要 = Applied Sociology Research Review Kinki University* 6, no. 1 (October 2017): 65–73.

4.2 Kaitokudo – Eclecticism and *Keisei Saimin*

First of all, the term eclecticism, used widely by scholars to describe the general intellectual trend of the Osaka Confucian thinkers, requires elaboration as it flattened people’s thoughts into a simple qualifier. Eclecticism and the Chinese tradition of “going with the mean” (中庸) were two concepts that share close meanings – both require the actors to relativize their position in relation to the subject they are examining on but differ slightly on their epistemological approaches. Eclecticism involves the act of relativizing the entire field of discourse and choosing the middle path in an aggregative and inclusive manner. On the other hand, “going with the mean” is concise and direct – the Way is the single path that the actors choose disinterestedly – it can be both introspective and extrospective. For Kaitokudo, this small difference played a more significant role.

The Way Kaitokudo took, from the perspective of the later scholars, was not “the Way of the mean.” It was a pragmatic reflection of the various thoughts that were prospering at the time, thus being eclectic. Miyake Sekian, the first master of lecture of the academy, was known to be a scholar of many thoughts with broad adaptability, studying both the Zhu Xi thought and the *shingaku* (thoughts of Lu Xiangshan and Wang Yangming) during the day and practicing medicine at night, earning him a sobriquet – the “*nue gakumon* (鵄学問),” which was a Japanese mythological bird with its body composed of different parts of other animals.¹⁰⁶ With his

¹⁰⁶ Miyamoto Mataji, *Ōsaka chōninron*. Ibid. p. 211-212. Also in Yotaro Sakudo 作道洋太郎, “The Characteristics and the Genealogy of Osaka Chonin-Gaku (The Scholarship of the Osaka Merchant Class) during the Tokugawa Period : The Rediscovery of the Kaitokudo Studies,” 大阪大学史紀要, no. 1 (May 1981): 50–59. p. 52.

teaching serving as a guiding mark, the academy developed a style that appeared in public as opposition and revision to the thought of the Sorai school, but underneath was not restricted to a particular Confucian school of thought as the doctrine. However, simply describing the intellectual style of the Kaitokudo as eclecticism would not be an adequate explanation for the *keisei saimin* spirit, which was universal, pragmatic, and powerful, upheld faithfully by the merchant students. Nakai Shūan, the director of administrative matters, played a critical role in the development of these characters by securing the autonomy both intellectually and politically of the academy and forged, along with Miyake, a spirit of mutual trust among attendees within the lecture hall instead of the strict social rule of hierarchy. As Najita succinctly described, “the law is drawn upon through hierarchy to protect horizontality within the academy as a sanctuary of learning.”¹⁰⁷

With the institution established and the direction of teaching laid, the Kaitokudo was on course to be both a pragmatic solution for the ontological crisis the merchants encountered in relation to the weakened social structure, and unintendedly, a means to consolidate the Confucian scholars – the *jusha* – whose legitimacy of existence depended on others recognition, into a morally meaningful and socially elevated community. The universalist and equalitarian characters set and preserved in the early period of the Kaitokudo was initially presented in the form of a challenging response to Ogyu Sorai’s notion of fixed human nature, which had different moral capacities but no method to alter.¹⁰⁸ However, as the academy gradually made its

¹⁰⁷ Najita. Ibid. p. 78-79.

¹⁰⁸ Tao Demin, *Kaitokudō Shushigaku no kenkyū*, Shohan. (Suita-shi: Ōsaka Daigaku

name among the intellectuals, it subtly consolidated the intellectual field and introduced influential discourses and scholarships based on, essentially a foreign thought, ringing alarms among the *kokugaku* intellectuals who were trying to mitigate precisely the “excessive” influence of cultures and thoughts alien to Japan.

Section 5: Ending Remarks

As a recapitulation, the inquiry of this paper took the shape of a comparative study between China and Japan at a theoretical level. Inspired by studies on the intellectual history of Tokugawa Confucianism, many of which have revised, even subverted the traditional understanding towards the social, religious, and political aspects of early-modern Japan. With these scholarships in mind, I formulated my question at a transnational level, focusing on the intellectual transition and transformation between China and Japan. Through this inquiry, I found that Chinese Confucian thoughts, especially those from Zhu Xi’s intellectual camp, held a subtle character of intellectual emancipation generated by China’s unique social structure. This character, after Zhu Xi’s Confucian thoughts arrived in Japan, stimulated unintendedly among people regardless of their specific social class, the desire to re-evaluate their moral and social status in a society that was ossified in the rigid, four-tier class structure. This subtle impact of intellectual transition then met with a Japanese society that just entered an era of peace, rendering the militant ruling class – the samurai – paralyzed. At the same time, the peace offered

Shuppankai, n.d.). p. 187.

the commoners, for the first time after an extensive period of war, the leisure of free time without the imperative need to fight for their lives. The combination of these two conditions then amplified the subtle emancipation of intellectual awareness, resulting in a discursive field of Confucianism that filled with extraordinary thinkers like Ogyu Sorai and the scholars of Kaitokudo. The emergence of Kaitokudo, however, was not merely a result of this intellectual trend, but also an attempt to solve the social incompatibility the merchant class had been troubled by since the beginning of the Tokugawa era.

However, it would be ignorant to claim the inquiry presented here to be a proven fact. The shortcoming resides precisely in the “proving” part. Although the materials collected for this paper supported the theorization of emancipation, proving this hypothesis would require testing it on every Tokugawa Confucian thinker who was active after the propagation of Zhu Xi’s thoughts. This process of validation is virtually impossible to conduct because of the sheer amount of primary sources needed to be assessed textually, contextually, and beyond. It is thus no mystery about the sporadic production of scholarships on Tokugawa intellectual history. Consequently, this inquiry, as it stands at the current stage, remains imperfect.

Despite the difficulty of execution, it is worthwhile to look into some historiographical notes for the future. What was the future of East Asia Confucian Studies and Intellectual History? This is a question raised frequently by both Chinese and Japanese scholars in their research collections or monographs. The problem, as Professor Koyasu Nobukuni sees it, is in the qualification. If we posit our vantage point on geography, East Asia is a highly ambiguous concept with no concrete geographical boundary until being categorized by the Western World

and is thus in nature biased. To discuss a specific intellectual trend within the region and coin it to be one of the thoughts of East Asia would inevitably run into obstacles and challenges raised by the numerous and diverse cultural, political, and social communities located in the region. At the same time, the articulation of an “East Asia” would evoke feelings of atrocity and suffering that permeated the region during the last War, adding a political dimension to the issue. However, even the concept of East Asia itself has a troubled history. The ancient dynasties on the land of today’s China, being the absolute dominating powers of the region, had their culture disseminated across the whole region. At first, they looked advanced and thus worthy of learning and practicing, but later, a repelling sentiment would emerge, and nations on the receiving end would take all kinds of measures to leave this Sino-centric circle of cultural domination. The concept of “East Asia” was thus created by Japanese partially under the same pressure of leaving the Chinese cultural circle.¹⁰⁹ Professor Koyasu’s view is post-modern and certainly on-point. The research on Confucianism in East Asia would no doubt benefit from such a new perspective, which he coined as a “discourse turn,” focusing on the contexts behind the texts but on top of the contexts that were limited only to the texts.

On the other hand, Professor Junjie Huang in Taiwan proposed a milder approach. For him, the meaning provided and exuded through the texts is still highly relevant and informative for our understanding of the Confucian thoughts and its historical significance. Consequently, Huang proposes to focus on the texts and around the texts, examining the fluence of ideas and their

¹⁰⁹ Koyasu Nobukuni, *Dong Ya ru xue: pi pan yu fang fa*, trans. Weifen. Chen, Chu ban. (Taipei Shi: Taiwan da xue chu ban zhong xin, 2004). Preface and p. 1-18.

social implications at their respective locality – leading to cross-country and inter-person comparisons and tracing a certain mutual or diverging concepts that were demonstrated in the two target entities. At the grand scale, these transformations and localizations formed a “Confucian intellectual unity” that sui generis can be categorized as East Asia Confucianism.¹¹⁰

Ideas are such a peculiar subject to study that it is tough to summarize, single out, and concretize a clear trend that historians could simply say this was what actually happened. Herman Ooms warned about the distortion of historical narratives of both contemporary historians when doing studies and the ancient historians who were writing the history that was used in today’s world as a primary reference. At the same time, temporality remains to be in deformation to ideas. How ideas transformed from one entity in history to another in relation to the specific time was a question that can only be answered using a highly generalized and macro-level chronology, thus raising more questions than it answers¹¹¹. Thus, within this short inquiry of an intellectual trend that was grand in scale, I can only hope that the subtle connections between ideas during their transition and transformation have been articulated in a sensible way.

¹¹⁰ Junjie Huang, *Dong Ya ru xue: jing dian yu quan shi de bian zheng*, Chu ban., vol. 68, Dong Ya wen ming yan jiu cong shu ; (Taibei Shi: Tuo li Taiwa da xue chu ban zhong xin, 2007). p. 47-56.

¹¹¹ Herman. Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology: Early Constructs, 1570-1680* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 1998). p. 3-17.

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