

Intellectual Biography - Japan

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Introduction

Prior to the establishment and legitimization of the Tokugawa government in 1600, an era known as the *sengoku* period engulfed Japan for nearly an entire century in which war and turmoil promoted behavior that violated the fundamental principles of humanity. Upon his analysis of the bureaucratic system of government that prevailed during the reigns of the first four shoguns, Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1680-1709), sought to establish an autocratic rule that would not heavily rely on the duties of elite shogunal officials. Samurai and shogunal officials, prior to Tsunayoshi, regarded brutality as honor and thought having high spirits resembled good conduct, Tsunayoshi's goal was to effectuate a benevolent government for the well being of his people that was rooted in Confucianism.

Not only will this paper provide background information pertaining to the formation of the Tokugawa shogunate, but it will also assess the dissemination of Confucian thought to Japan and the variants it adopted after it was studied and interpreted by various scholars in the seventeenth century. Ultimately, the goal of this paper is to explain how the Confucian interpretations and beliefs of Kumazawa Banzan (1619-1691) influenced the political and social decision-making of the fifth shogun of the Tokugawa government, Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1680-1709). Heavily influenced by the teachings of the Wang Yang Ming school (Oyomei) and under his discipleship of Nakae Toju (1608-1648), Banzan advocated reforms that later came to be reflected in the policies of Tokugawa Tsunayoshi, whose goal was to promote *jinsei* (benevolent government) through the implementation of Confucian thought to ensure that the Japanese people were elevated to a new code of ethical and moral behavior that was rooted in the main principles of Confucianism, in order to overcome

and eliminate facets of the *sengoku* period that had lingered during the preceding shoguns' governments.

Methodology

Modernization theorists of Japanese intellectual history occasionally make the mistake of overgeneralizing Confucian thought and schools, which, as Japanese scholars have been aware of, doesn't embrace the unique diversity of the Confucian establishment in Japan. Twentieth century Western historians such as Maruyama Masao have misconceptions of the institutionalization of Confucianism, believing that it was system that was fully developed and implemented concurrently with the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate. Japanese historians and scholars are skeptical of the assumptions made by Western historians who essentially generalized a significant amount of Confucianism into the category of Neo-Confucianism, a term that was coined in the 1930s by Westerners Derk Bodde and Alfred Forke.¹

However, upon its arrival in Japan, Confucianism slowly diffused to Zen Buddhists, Shinto theologians, scholars of the court, and a fragment of the cultural elite. The diversity of the various spheres this thought spread to attributed to the different schools of thought that would draw upon different Confucian ideas throughout the reign of the Tokugawas.² Unlike Maruyama Masao's understanding that the Confucian system was unified during the Tokugawa period, which appropriately satisfies the "de Bary" group's interpretation of intellectual history,³ Kurozumi enhances our understanding of the concept of vitalism and its syncretism with the sense of

¹ Herman Ooms and Kurozumi Makoto, "The Nature of Early Tokugawa Confucianism," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 20 (1994): 332-333.

² *Ibid.*, 332.

³ Samuel Hideo Yamashita, "Reading the New Tokugawa Intellectual Histories" *Journal for Japanese Studies* 22.1 (1996): 15-16.

compassion that Buddhism promoted, which defined early Confucianism under Tokugawa rule. Kurozumi's and Ooms's inspection of the essence of early Tokugawa Confucianism reveals five different modes: Confucianism, Sung Learning, Chu Hsu Learning, Ch'eng Chu Learning, and "New" Confucianism, suggesting the plurality of the tradition of Chinese learning.⁴ He also evinces how idealist moral and cosmic principles should be viewed as a phenomenon that pervaded the earliest Tokugawa writings of thinkers like Razan, Toju, and Seika. During these early developments, the government's ideological structure was constructed through the implementation of ideas and ethics that merged with other elements, such as Buddhism's sense of compassion, in order to create a system of Confucianism that would distinguish itself from Chinese and Korean institutions. The overwhelming embrace of various forms of Confucianism by the population was surprising to many scholars who never would have imagined the influence of this foreign teaching.

Historiography

Perhaps one of Tokugawa Tsunayoshi's most disputed legislations was an edict he ratified called "The Acts of Compassion for Living Things," with the intent of promoting *jinsei* within the country. As a boy, Tsunayoshi was trained as a Confucian scholar as opposed to a classic warrior, which was the standard for young boys during the early part of the seventeenth century. Not only did Tsunayoshi lack a military upbringing, but he also did not complete the apprenticeship that all shoguns-to-be experienced prior to his rule. Therefore, Tsunayoshi received criticism from many Tokugawa authorities before his succession of the government. In regards to his edict for "The Compassion of Living Things" and the punishments it imposed, such as beheadings and crucifixions, historians like Donald Shively labeled Tsunayoshi as a tyrant. Samurai scholars such as Asahi Shigeaki (1674-1718), who wrote in his diary and cited several occasions in which samurai in Edo received capital punishment for killing dogs.⁵ Playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon also exploited this issue in his play *Sagami Nyudo Sembiki no Inu* which was released after the death of Tsunayoshi. Nevertheless, Beatrice Bodart-Bailey provides substantial evidence that supports

Tsunayoshi's legislation, emphasizing that the samurai class were responsible for producing the literature on this issue, which presents a significant bias against the policies of Tsunayoshi.

The status group affected most by the "Act of the Compassion for Living Things" was the samurai class because they owned the majority of the dogs living in Edo. Samurai were also responsible for assembling and maintaining kennels for about forty thousand dogs.⁶ Despite their claims of numerous capital punishment sentences, Bodart Bailey notes: "the thirty-odd years of Tsunayoshi's government furnish surprisingly few examples of punishment inflicted for harming an animal" (179). Bodart-Bailey also draws upon the observations of Engelbert Kaempfer, a Dutch scholar who visited Edo between 1690 and 1692, who noted that all violations of shogunal law were commonly punished with death and without regard to the seriousness of the crime.⁷ Kaempfer's observations, despite his outsider status, seem to be more reliable than those of the samurai who were extremely biased against all of Tsunayoshi's policies as they essentially undermined the duties of the military class. Tsunayoshi's edict asserted that his goal was not to punish his people in cruel ways, but to promote a benevolent society that "indicated a shift toward an autocratic mode of government, which is often perceived as a necessary step in the development of a modern nation" (Bodart-Bailey, 189). Despite the fact that the military aristocracy was not satisfied with their new role in society, Tsunayoshi's legislations benefited the overall majority of the commoner population through the promotion of *jinsei*, stabilizing the Tokugawa government at the end of the seventeenth century.

The Arrival of Confucianism into Japan

The arrival of *Sung Neo-Confucianism* (Chu Hsi Confucianism) to Japan in the twelfth century introduced a rivaling school of thought to the *Zen Buddhist* institution would eventually influence early Tokugawa leaders and would later be implemented into practice by Tsunayoshi in the late-seventeenth century. Ironically, Buddhists were responsible for bringing books and first-hand knowledge of Neo-Confucianism from China in the fourteenth century which, contributed to a unique form of religious pluralism and intellectual sophistication that Tokugawa shoguns would eventually adopt certain

⁴ Ooms and Makoto, "Early Tokugawa Confucianism," 332-334.

⁵ Beatrice Bodart-Bailey, "The Laws of Compassion" *Monumenta Nipponica* 40.2 (1985): 177.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

aspects of Buddhist, Confucian, and Shinto ideas in their administrations. John Whitney Hall states:

In this period, Buddhist and Shinto thought shared the view that the individual's committed pursuit of his or her allotted social function would ensure his or her autonomy and thus would serve as a means of spiritual salvation. To a certain extent this notion coincided with the premises of Chu Hsi's thought, which helps explain its successful diffusion and the acceptance among Zen and Shinto thinkers of the essential unity of their teachings with those of Chu Hsi's thought.⁸

Confucianism spread as a result to the syncretic notion that it embodied and was supported by *sengoku* daimyo who exhibited a significant amount of interest in studying Confucian classics.⁹ The importance of stressing the lengthy process of assimilation of Confucianism is important for intellectual historians to understand. Thus, allowing them to embrace the diversity of the intriguing and complicated process of implementing Confucian thought in the early reign of the Tokugawa government.

Although Confucianism did not have a noticeable presence in society until the late fifteenth century, many Zen Buddhist monks were influenced by Confucian texts, which is evident in the historical writings of the Nambokucho period (1333-1392). Rinzaï monasteries supported the advent of Confucianism and were responsible not only for its promotion within Buddhist schools, but also for its diffusion in society leading into the sixteenth century.¹⁰ Zen monks actively engaged in the studies of Confucian thought (mainly Chu-Hsi's) upon its arrival into Buddhist schools in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries due to the similarities it shared with Buddhist and Shinto teachings. According to Hall, "Its [Neo-Confucianism] practical character as a system of thought that stressed the precise moral evaluation of political acts and human behavior further encouraged its diffusion to all reaches of society, a trend that accelerated in the middle of the sixteenth century."¹¹ This trend

⁸ John Whitney Hall, ed., "Thought and Religion," in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 416.

⁹ Ibid., 398.

¹⁰ Beatrice Bodart-Bailey, "The Persecution of Confucianism in Early Tokugawa Japan," *Monumenta Nipponica* 48.3 (1993): 303-304.

¹¹ Hall, ed., "Thought and Religion," 398.

would eventually encounter opposition from figures who were originally responsible for Confucianism's dissemination within the country.

Many loyalists to the Buddhist faith altered their opinions toward Confucianism to the extent of discrediting its books and teachings. However, a movement of Zen monks who embraced Confucian teachings decided to distinguish themselves from Buddhist monasteries that no longer condoned the philosophical groundings of Confucianism. The split between the Zen Buddhists and the Neo-Confucianists occurred by the late sixteenth century as Confucian scholars emerged from the Zen schools where they were trained as priests. Two influential Confucian schools that were established prior to this transition were the Tosa School (The Southern School), which was founded by Zen Priest Nanson Baiken, and the Satsuma School that claimed Keian Genju, a Zen Priest, as its founder.¹² As the late fifteenth century and most of the sixteenth century experienced times of uncertainty and turmoil, the common people embraced Confucian ideas that provided spiritual and intellectual guidance. The house structure that developed at the end of the sixteenth century provided stability in people's lives; and therefore, shifted emphasis towards yearning for intellectual guidance. However, when the Tokugawa family obtained and legitimized their control over the country in 1600, the government made Buddhism the state religion because it was the native religion of the warrior class and supported the supremacy of the Tokugawa authority.

Banzan's Confucianism

The *Bakufu* exerted every power it could to suppress Confucian thought until high-ranking members of the Tokugawa family Yoshinao, (1610-1650) and his nephew Mitsukuni, (1661-1700), put Confucian thought into practice. Beatrice Bodart-Bailey quotes: "Like other Confucians, such as Yamaga Soko, Kumazawa Banzan, and later Tsunayoshi, he [Yoshinao] believed that the samurai should justify their existence by serving as a model of morality to the people...he insisted strictly on frugality...he believed that it was his duty as ruler to lift the moral standards of his subjects."¹³ Although they did not hold the title of shogun, their actions encouraged nonconformist Buddhist monks such as Fujiwara Seika (1561-1619), Hayashi Razan

¹² Hall, ed., "Thought and Religion," 388.

¹³ Beatrice Bodart-Bailey, *The Dog Shogun: The Personality and Policies of Tokugawa Tsunayoshi*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 57.

(1583-1657), Hori Kyoan (1585-1642), Yamaga Soko (1622-1685), and Yamakazi Ansai (1618-1682) to pursue and delve into Confucian thoughts and ideas.¹⁴ Although these two daimyo were successful in ignoring the *bakufu*'s orders and exempt from punishment in their promotion of Confucian ideas, Ikeda Mitsumasa (1609-1682), lord of the Okayama domain, did not have the same fate despite the fact that he was the son of an adopted daughter of the second shogun Hidetada.

While searching for government guidance on how to effectively rule his domain through the application of Confucianism, in 1647, Mitsumasa employed Kumazawa Banzan, the grandson of Kumazawa Morihisa. His master was Fukushima Masanori, a powerful figure feared by early Tokugawa authorities because of his power within the Toyotomi family that contested Ieyasu's original takeover.¹⁵ While his father was a ronin, Banzan was influenced by samurai practices as he was raised by his grandfather. After Banzan served as a page for Mitsumasa from 1634-1637, he attempted to enlist in the Tokugawa army; however, he was denied acceptance because he was too young and for engaging in the *gempuku* ceremony on his own. It is at this point in Banzan's life when he acknowledged that he no longer wanted to pursue military arts and embarked on an intellectual path in pursuit of a liberal education.

In 1640, his father encouraged Banzan to read "The Four Books of Confucius with Commentaries by Various Masters" which deeply motivated him to delve into the study of the classics. He moved to Kyoto a few months later and witnessed a life-changing event that determined his destiny. While staying at a hotel in Kyoto, he observed a retainer who arrived at the hotel that became devastated upon acknowledging that he had misplaced two hundred pieces of gold entrusted to him by his master. While on the verge of contemplating suicide, a knock on his door revealed the horse driver who dropped the retainer off with the bag of gold in his hand. In jubilation, the retainer offered the driver compensation, which was respectfully declined. The horse driver, a poor peasant, attributed his actions to the influence of a fellow townsman named Nakae Toju, whom Banzan eagerly desired to meet as he was astonished how such a figure could influence poor peasants. Despite a failed first attempt to meet

with Toju in Ogawamura, Toju persisted to meet with Toju in 1642 with success. Studying under Toju for almost a year, Banzan studied Confucian classics such as *Kokyo* (Filial Piety), *Daigaku* (Great Learning), and *Chuyo* (Doctrine of the Mean).¹⁶ In these texts, Toju emphasizes the importance of reforming the samurai class in terms of promoting civil administration and exemplifying ethical conduct. Barry Steben quotes: "We have seen how he [Toju] used religio-philosophical concepts...with old interpretations developed by Sung and Ming philosophers such as Chu Hsi and Wang Yang-Ming, to construct a complete Confucian faith for the Japanese samurai in their new calling as civil administrators and moral exemplars."¹⁷ As Banzan contemplated concepts such as these, introspection would provoke his own thoughts on the topic of reforming the samurai class, which would eventually arouse the attention of the Bakufu. The lectures he listened to and the texts he read gave Banzan a completely new understanding of Neo-Confucianism under the Wang Yang Ming School's interpretation, which would ultimately provide him with a substantial amount of knowledge that would be sought out by his former master Ikeda Mitsumasa, who's service he would re-enter in 1647.

Upon the establishment of Mitsumasa's school called Hanabatake in Okayama, Banzan's fame became well known amongst high-ranking officials, daimyo, and even the senior councilor who requested Banzan's advice pertaining to questions concerning Confucianism.¹⁸ Mitsumasa highly regarded Banzan's promotion of Nakae Toju's Shingaku (Learning of the Mind and Heart) that sought to epitomize the samurai class and promulgate Confucian teaching to all social classes.¹⁹ "He [Banzan] believed that the existence of the military aristocracy could only be justified if they became paragons of virtue and served as models for the commoners to emulate" (Bodart-Bailey, 61). Opposing the traditional practice of samurai controlling most aspects of commoner life because of their birthright, Banzan's idea of returning unemployed samurai to rural areas challenged the class system. Banzan also advocated the reduction of daimyo requirements to engage in *sankin kotai*,

¹⁶ Ibid., 234.

¹⁷ Barry Stephen, "Nakae Toju and the Birth of Wang Yang-Ming Learning in Japan," *Monumenta Serica* 46 (1998): 262.

¹⁸ Fisher, *Kumazawa Banzan*, 60

¹⁹ William Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck, and Arthur E. Tiedemann, eds., "Japanese Education," in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 112.

¹⁴ Ibid., 59.

¹⁵ Galen M. Fisher, *Kumazawa Banzan: His Life and Ideas* (Tokyo: The Asiatic Society of Japan, 1938), 228.

and thought the Bakufu should supply fiscal relief to samurai and daimyo while transforming the warrior class into samurai farmers.²⁰ These ideas discuss the importance on expressing filial piety and stressed that if an individual could grasp the criteria of time, place, and status, they could perform their social function while maintaining spiritual autonomy.²¹ Banzan and Mitsumasa also worked together to establish tenarai schools that provided moral education to farmers and their sons that was rooted in Confucianism. In his work *Zotei Banzan zenshu*, Banzan stated: "With the world, one should put education first and await the desire for rites and ceremonies... Through school ordinances, one should first teach the knowledge that discriminates between right and wrong and good and evil and stimulate righteousness that knows shame."²² However, these schools jeopardized the warrior's monopoly to govern the commoners, which eventually led to their closings and brought Banzan under attack from critics.²³ Banzan also proposed a reduction of the commoner's tax that would enhance their population and mobilize their efforts to support the government. Ultimately, these actions suggested by Banzan undermined the military aristocracy and received many criticisms from the Bakufu. Despite the controversy, Mitsumasa's implementation of Banzan's reforms in his domain reflected *jinsei* and the promotion of ethical learning amongst the samurai class, which foreshadowed the rule of Tokugawa Tsunayoshi who would assume power almost thirty years later.

Promotion of *jinsei* and moral education under Tsunayoshi's rule

When Tsunayoshi assumed power in 1680, his ultimate goal was to assert an agenda that would not only stimulate a benevolent society, but also to replace the official supremacy system with one that revolved around shogunal supremacy. On one ground, Tsunayoshi was an instrumental factor in changing the state's dominating militaristic motivations gradually into a civil-minded bureaucracy entrenched in ethical and humanitarians ideas.²⁴ In accomplishing this immense task, he chose to abdicate Sakai Tadakiyo, the *tairo* (great councilor) of the previous shogun Ietsuna's

government, from his elite position due to the corruption he caused in the previous administration. By eliminating the grand councilor, Tsunayoshi assumed more power as the entire administration became more responsive to his commands. Tsunayoshi also seized the domains of more than thirty-three daimyo in his effort to consolidate his administration.²⁵ Tsunayoshi's autocratic approach "desperately wanted to create a loyal, learned, and effective bureaucracy, one in which the spirit of Confucianism might give tangible form."²⁶ By eliminating potential threats to his benevolent rule, Tsunayoshi established a precedent of *bun* (civil) policy in his government, which would endure throughout the eighteenth century.

Perhaps one of the more influential scholars that influenced Tsunayoshi's thoughts on the practice of *jinsei* besides Banzan was Chu Shun-shui, a Chinese refugee scholar who arrived in Edo in 1665 and was summoned by the shogun to introduce him to the ancient Chinese classics. Chu's utilitarian approach to Confucianism embodied similar characteristics of Confucian thought pertaining to *jinsei* and education that the shogun embraced as well. The Chinese scholar believed Confucianism displayed through the practice of *jinsei* (benevolence) in government that would provide for the needs of all of the people. He and the shogun also agreed that the samurai class desperately needed education in Confucian thought and texts. The Chu-shun school of thought believed that individuals must play a humble role in everyday life in which the followers of this thought must embody practical Confucianism with the result being merit for daily life. Chu warned Tsunayoshi to pay close attention to the peasant population and that it should not go unnoticed since a benevolent government must meet the needs of every social class in order attain support of the administration. The shogun dearly embraced the teachings of Chu Shun-shui by using his philosophy to improve ethical standards and stabilize the government through benevolent rule.²⁷

From the beginning of his childhood, Tsunayoshi understood the importance of education as he engaged in Chinese texts and stories of sagehood. According to the *tokugawa jikki* (Official history) of the shoguns, Tsunayoshi stated:

²⁰ Ibid., 114.

²¹ Hall, ed., "Thought and Religion," 116

²² de Bary, et. al, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 119.

²³ Bodart-Bailey, "The Persecution of Confucianism," 310.

²⁴ Albert Craig and Donald Shively, *Personality in Japanese History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), 86.

²⁵ Conrad D. Totman, *Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 106.

²⁶ Hall, ed., "Thought and Religion," 428

²⁷ Bodart-Bailey, *The Dog Shogun*, 218-219.

I've loved the martial arts since I was a boy, and I've had heavy responsibilities since my youth, so I've had no time to read. I've never put any effort into the literary arts. This is one thing I'm ashamed of. Please hire good tutors so that I may embark on the path of the sages.²⁸

Tsunayoshi's acknowledgment of the importance of delving into ancient texts at an early age was a sign that he would become an influential leader someday. After his succession, the shogun began lecturing to his administration in the role of a Confucian minister. He frequently summoned daimyo and other important leaders month after month to hear his lectures. Tsunayoshi is best known for his series of lectures titled *The Book of Changes* that amounted to about two hundred forty sessions of lectures, earning him the nickname "The Book Shogun."²⁹ Tsunayoshi engaged Confucian scholars in lectures and also performed *noh* dances, which he believed would be beneficial in terms of promoting peace throughout the country. He based this reasoning on the Confucian concept that the ruler should regulate the country through rites and music.³⁰ Tsunayoshi believed that educating his nation in the civil arts would ultimately establish and promote a peaceful society.

Occasionally, he would call on Ogyu Sorai and Shimura Sanaemon to engage him in lectures and discussions on Confucian thought. His appointment of Kitamura, an innovative *kokugaku* scholar, to be the titleholder of scholar of Japanese poetry was significant in essence because he was embracing the diversity of the various schools of Confucian thought. He also enjoyed listening to Buddhist and Confucian priests and scholars of Japanese literature engage in dialogue with one another. After listening to these conversations or debates in some circumstances, he would establish public lectures through a correspondent to deliver lectures to the commoners in nearby domains. These contributions made by Tsunayoshi demonstrated that he was

determined to extend moral education to all social classes by any means. Tsunayoshi instituted policies around 1700 that allowed education and ethical concern to disseminate to all classes.³¹ His engagement in discussions, lectures, and debates exhibited his commitment to providing some form of education to citizens of all classes in Japan.

Conclusion

If Kumazawa Banzan was able to evaluate Tokugawa Tsunayoshi's rule during the Genroku era, he would have more than likely been satisfied with the actions of policies of the Dog Shogun who advocated a benevolent society while also stimulating moral education that permeated every social class. Banzan would probably have been surprised to see the extent of the adoption of his ideas and thoughts by a government that mandated his exile toward the end of his life because previous administrators deemed his ideas as too radical. Concerning the ratification of the "Laws of Compassion for Living Things" by Tsunayoshi, Banzan would have been a good compliment to Tsunayoshi because Banzan believed that not only animals should be treated with kindness, but also nature because he thought that the condition of the forest contributed to political fortunes and misfortunes.³² In terms of Tsunayoshi's establishment of a government that advanced *bun* (civil) policy, Banzan would have endorsed this foundation as he encouraged his followers to partake in scholarly aspirations pertaining to the morality of Confucian ideas with the ambition of creating a benevolent society. Ultimately, the rule of Tokugawa Tsunayoshi would have been regarded in a delightful sense of Kumazawa Banzan whose influences slowly precipitated the rise of a modern Japanese state.

Baxter, James C. and Joshua A. Fogel. *Writing histories in Japan: texts and their transformations from ancient times through the Meiji era*. Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2007.

³¹ Ibid., 117.

³² de Bary, et. al, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 117.

²⁸ James C. Baxter and Joshua A. Fogel, *Writing histories in Japan: texts and their transformations from ancient times through the Meiji era* (Kyoto: International Research Center for Japanese Studies, 2007), 178.

²⁹ Craig and Shively, *Personality*, 116.

³⁰ Ibid., 120.

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