

Japanese Confucianism and Korea: from pre-history to 1592

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Abstract

This article is the first in a planned series of three which will chart the influence of Korea on Japanese Confucianism through *longue durée* history – from the beginnings of the formation of the first states in Japan under Korean influence in the mid-first millennium CE, until the end of Japan’s modern imperium over Korea post-1945. The series will develop chronologically. This first article will focus on the pre-modern and medieval periods (pre-history to 1592CE), the second article on the early modern period (1592-1868), and the third and last on the modern period, including the colonial and postcolonial periods in Korea (1868-1948). This article thus begins with the formation of the early Japanese states in pre-history, and I have chosen to end it in 1592, the year that Japan, under Hideyoshi Toyotomi, invaded Korea, beginning a seven year long trilateral military conflict between Hideyoshi’s Japan, Chosŏn Korea, and Ming China, now known as the Great East Asian War of 1592-98. The first half of this article examines the particular formulations of Confucianism that arose in Early Japan (7th-11 century), the second half looks at Confucianism in Medieval Japan (12th-16th century).

Keywords: Confucianism, Chosŏn Korea, Early/Medieval Japan, Buddhism, Shintō

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Pre-Modern Japan: Confucianism as Power

The beginnings of Confucianism in Japan were closely intertwined with the beginnings of a Japanese state. The formation of a single dominant state in central Japan occurred through the fifth to the seventh centuries, concurrently with a new wave of importation and institutionalization of political and religious culture from mainland Asia – notably Korea. In Japan, the impact of most importantly Buddhism, but also Confucianism, and other religious ideas associated with Daoism, accelerated dramatically during the seventh century under Korean influence. These religious, cultural, educational and administrative paradigms provided many of the sociological tools necessary for the construction of a more complex centralized state capable of projecting and holding power over a large area (Ooms 2009; Como 2008).¹ The link between the importation of Confucianism and relations with Korean states is explicitly articulated in contemporaneous source documents, demonstrating the roles of both Korea and Confucianism in the story-telling and mythmaking of state formation.

On the sixth day of the eighth month in the autumn of the fifteenth year [284 c.e.] a Prince from [the Korean state of] Paekche called Araki came before the court and presented two fine horses to the [Japanese] emperor... This Araki was very good at reading the [Confucian] classics... Hearing this, the emperor asked Araki, “Do you possess a fine Confucian professor [in Paekche]?” Araki replied, “There is one called Wani, he is excellent”. Arata Wake and Kamunaki Wake were dispatched to Paekche to get Wani. In spring in the second month of the sixteenth year Wani arrived. Prince Uji no Waki Iratsuko took him as his teacher. He learnt various classics from Wani. There were none of them he could not master. Wani became the first keeper of the imperial books.²

As the above quote from the *Nihon Shoki*, one of the two main textual sources for the history of early Japanese state formation illustrates, the formulation of Confucianism in Japan and the formation of the Japanese state were concurrent and symbiotic processes both wrapped up in the same Korean interaction. Confucianism was not a prepackaged formula that arrived in a pre-prepared and already formed Japan. Confucianism in Japan was rather part of the processes that formed the early Japanese state itself, and conversely, these processes of state formation also helped to shape the particular early Japanese manifestation of Confucianism.

The conceptualization of a state, notably the logic behind delineations of outer and inner, and the interaction of this logic with larger questions relating to the place of humans in the natural world, was crucially affected by Confucian paradigms. Confucian universalism in particular had a big influence on the early codification of principles of governance in early-Japan. The formation of the early Japanese state occurred through a process of interaction with Korean kingdoms in the mid first millennium CE. These interactions were military,

¹ Ooms, Herman, *Imperial Politics and Symbolics in Ancient Japan: The Tenmu Dynasty, 650-800* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009); Como, Michael I, *Shōtoku: Ethnicity, Ritual, and Violence in the Japanese Buddhist Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). Even the core symbols of the Japanese Emperors, the sword and mirror, were brought across to Japan as part of the transmission of Confucianism (NKBT 1: 248-9).

² *Nihon Shoki* in NKBT 67: 370-3. “Confucian professors” was transcribed into the Japanese of the time as “people who can read and write”. A similar passage occurs in the *Kojiki* (712 AD), which also mentions that Wani transmitted a ten-volume set of *Confucius Analects* (NKBT 1: 248-9).

political, cultural and religious in nature. They were related to the emergence of enduring state identities, state violence (war), and early codification of principles of governance which, while certainly not being law in the modern sense, had enduring effects on the later development of state institutions including law. Positive Confucian influence on this codification of systems of governance needs to be resolved with the violence inherent in the consolidation of the early state. Thinking about the history of the early Japanese state thereby invites reflection upon the contradictions inherent in the utility of Confucian universalism to statecraft at a broader level – not just in Early Japan, but of course also in Early Korea, in later periods, and in other parts of the world.

Korean-originated Confucian influence in early Japanese statecraft manifested itself in two opposing directions. On the one hand, Confucian ideas were used to provide frameworks for mediation and consensus building in Japanese society, and between Japanese and foreign peoples. On the other hand, Confucian ideas were used to assist in recognizing a hierarchy between different societies which justified Japanese state violence against so-called “barbarians”.

Scholars of Chinese, Korean and Japanese intellectual history often emphasize Confucianism’s message of shared human values and respect for the other. Scholars in Japan have repeatedly cited *Shotoku’s Seventeen Article Constitution* (also called *the Seventeen Injunctions*) as a strong example of this.³ *Shōtoku’s Seventeen Article Constitution* is a list of principles of governance which tradition claims was written in 604 by the imperial regent, Prince Shotoku.⁴ In the centuries thereafter Prince Shotoku was discursively transformed into a kind of saint.⁵ Various Buddhist traditions claimed him as a bodhisattva, and he has been revered by those of all political colors since. His “*Constitution*” has been one of the most heavily referenced treatises in Japanese political history, right into the twenty first century.⁶ This is partly because of its flexible nature: hortatory rather than regulatory, consensus driven, religiously pluralist. *Shotoku’s Seventeen Article Constitution* is correctly cited both as representative of the Buddhist nature of the early Japanese state, and also as one of the most clearly Confucian influenced texts in early Japanese history. This is indicative of the intellectually and religiously pluralist nature of this text, but also more generally of Japanese and Korean political culture at this time.

The contemporaneous Chinese imperial state, the Tang, itself had one of the most ethnically, religiously and sexually pluralist elite cultures of any Chinese imperial state. Tang China influenced Japan directly, but Tang influence was also very strong on the Korean peninsula, particularly in Silla, which was the dominant power in southern Korea during the seventh century, and itself highly influential on Japan.⁷ From the sixth century the Silla state identified itself with Buddhism, as did its northern Korean neighbor Koguryo. This meant that all the major continental states in touch with Japan in the seventh and eighth centuries,

³ One of the most famous valorizations of the idea of harmony in Japanese culture came from Watsuji Tetsurō (1889-1960), an important mid-twentieth century Japanese philosopher and ethicist. The revision of approach can be traced generationally through the work of his students, including Sagara Tōru (1921-2000). For a thought provoking discussion of the idea of harmony in Japanese history and historiography see Kurozumi Makoto, *Fukusūsei no Nihon shisō* (Tokyo: Perikansha, 2006), 494-496.

⁴ This claim is most significantly recorded in the *Nihon Shoki*. The consensus in current historical writing is that Prince Shotoku was probably an invention of seventh century historical writers, constructed from a mix of real historical figures, most notably Prince Umayado.

⁵ Como, *Shōtoku: Ethnicity, Ritual, and Violence in Japanese Buddhist Tradition*.

⁶ For instance, the current Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzō Abe, has referred to it as part of his campaign to promote revision of the current post-WWII Japanese Constitution.

⁷ McBride, Richard D, *State and Society in Middle and Late Silla* (Cambridge, MA: Korea Institute, Harvard University, 2010), 3.

Sui and Tang China, Silla, Koguryo and Bohai all identified with a non-Confucian tradition – usually Buddhism.⁸

The main claim made by modern commentators about *Shotoku's Seventeen Article Constitution*, however, has been that it represents a “Japanese” idea of “harmony”. How exclusivist the “Japaneseness” of this harmony is imagined to be has usually depended on the political color of the scholar and the moment in modern Japanese history they have worked within. Imperialist and nationalist scholarship in the mid-twentieth century valorized this as an exclusionary “Japanese value”. Post-WWII Japanese scholarship challenged these readings by emphasizing the comparatively universalist perspective and clear Confucian influence on *Shotoku's Seventeen Article Constitution*.⁹ Intriguingly, this later more politically correct scholarship thereby did not actually challenge the valorization of early Japanese state codes inherent in the earlier nationalist readings, but simply relocated the valorized ideas to a trans-national Asian rather than exclusionary national Japanese discourse. “Asianizing” a previously “nationalist” narrative of early state formation or codification allowed that process to be discussed with the same positive value judgment as before. What is undeniable is that the references to harmony come from clearly Confucian sources.

The very first sentence of the first of the seventeen injunctions of this text is a line from the Confucian classic *The Book of Rites* which also appears in *Confucius Analects*, “Harmony is to be valued, and contentiousness avoided”.¹⁰ The injunction continues, “When those above are harmonious and those below are conciliatory and there is concord in the discussion of all matters, the disposition of affairs comes about naturally”.¹¹ This injunction is quintessentially Confucian in the sense that it advises for a form of rule in which the use of force is unnecessary. Traditional understandings of Confucianism, both in Shotoku’s time, and in ours, are primarily based on conceptions of Confucian values that came into being in Han dynasty China (206 BCE – 220 CE). Han dynasty China classically defined Confucian values as humanitarian and conciliatory in opposition to the rule- and force-based political values of the Chinese Legalist tradition of thinkers like Han Fei (280-233 BCE). The former was associated with the long running Han dynasty, the latter with the brutal and short Qin dynasty (221-207 BCE) that it replaced. This classical interpretation of the Confucian tradition sees it as recommending governance through ritual which conciliates, as opposed to the Legalist tradition which sought to govern through rules backed up with coercive violence. This injunction, therefore, begins *Shotoku's Seventeen Article Constitution* by clearly identifying it with the Confucian (conciliatory) rather than the Legalist (coercive) tradition and style of governance in East Asia. In other words, *Shotoku's Seventeen Article Constitution* not only adopts Confucian terminology and quotes Confucian texts, but also uses these following standard Confucian political discourse patterns dating from the Han which claim for themselves a relatively conciliatory, harmonizing character.

This preference for rites as a preferred method of rule is also emphasized in the fourth injunction which, after quoting from another Confucian work, the *Classic of Filial Piety*, “rites must be the basis of rule”, goes on to conclude that, “if the common people have rites, then the state will govern itself”.¹² The emphasis on the centrality of the cultivation of mediating relationships is again represented in injunction nine, which after opening with a quote from *Confucius Analects*, “Trust is the basis of justice”, goes on to conclude, “if there is trust between sovereign and vassal then nothing cannot be achieved, if there is no trust

⁸ On the importance of the Bohai state’s relationship with Japan in the development of Japanese approaches to Chinese civilization see Borgen, Robert, *Sugawara No Michizane and the Early Heian Court* (Cambridge, Mass: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1986), 230-1.

⁹ Kurozumi, *Fukusūsei no Nihon jukyō*.

¹⁰ NST 2, 12-13.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² NST 2, 15.

then all will be destroyed”.¹³ A similar emphasis on conciliatory human relations, this time between rulers and commoners, is presented in Injunction Sixteen which opens with the quote from *Confucius Analects*, “the common people should be employed according to the season”. This reference to the seasons is a warning to rulers not to demand corvée labor from the peasants in times of agricultural labor intensity such as harvest, because this would interfere with the peasant’s livelihood.¹⁴ All these injunctions share a characteristic of warning members of the ruling elite to emphasize conciliation and harmony in their relationships with others, including being aware of others’ needs – even the needs of peasants. For the rulers this implied that they should moderate their use of coercion and force in their exercise of power. All of these injunctions clearly take Confucian textual sources as their bases, and make points which could indeed be characterized as representing basic Confucian approaches to social governance.¹⁵ Confucian influence thereby, on the one hand, emphasized conciliation and cooperation and militated against the use of force and violence in governance. This conciliatory character had a relatively egalitarian nature in that even the interests of the peasantry were considered worth taking into account.

This Confucian universalism, however, had another side. The rather moderating and civilizing aspect of Confucian influence narrated above went hand in hand with a Confucian world view which demarcated between different human societies in a clear hierarchy. By establishing a single universalist cultural idea of “civilization” upon which human societies could be comparatively judged, Confucianism recognized the possibility to grade human societies in a hierarchy with a central civilized state at the top, and barbaric peripheries at the bottom. This allowed the Confucian idea of “civilization” to be deployed in justifying the conquest of peripheral “barbarian” peoples and states. Such justifications of conquest can be found all through the classic Confucian texts. In the context of the Japanese archipelago, the Yamato state of Prince Shotoku saw itself as the civilizing centre. Its wars of conquest against other peoples in the archipelago, and indeed the taking and trading of these peoples as slaves, was justified using the same paradigms and language as in the Confucian classics. Non-Japanese, at this time meaning any peoples on the archipelago not willing to submit to the authority of the Yamato sovereign, were referred to in *Nihon Shoki* as “barbarians” using the same phrasing employed in the Chinese Confucian Classic *The Book of Rites*.¹⁶ Early Japanese state documents also mimic Confucian tradition in narrating the world in terms of a unipolar imperial order of civilization. They narrate the conduct of state ceremonies involving subjugated “barbarian” peoples and surrounding states along the lines of this logic.¹⁷ In this sense, Confucian universalism was used in Japan to justify ideas of cultural superiority and military domination.

¹³ NST 2, 17-18.

¹⁴ NST 2, 21-22.

¹⁵ It is also important to note, however, that these points about relationships and trust, although presented primarily through Confucian terminology related to the sovereign-vassal relationship, are also backed up by reference to Buddhist ideas. For instance, in injunction fourteen, Buddhist ideas of trust are quoted to back up the points made in other injunctions (NST 2: 21). The position of Buddhism in Japanese society is also asserted in the second injunction which emphasizes the place of the Buddhist clergy and the role of Buddhist dharma as the underpinnings of all states (NST 2: 13). This is indeed the section of the Seventeen Article Constitution often quoted to demonstrate that Early Japan by this stage was to some degree a “Buddhist state”.

¹⁶ A repetition of the phrasing from the *Liji* (Book 3, section 3, para 14 in Legge’s translation) occurs in Book 5 of the continued *Nihon Shoki* (NKBT 67: 248-9). Other examples linking military expeditions against *emishi* “barbarians” and culture can be found throughout, including in Book 26 (NKBT 68: 330-1). This last example is actually an interesting combination of both use of force and mediation between the state forces and the “barbarians”.

¹⁷ Naoki, Kōjirō, ed, *Shoku Nihongi*. Tōyō Bunko 489 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1988), 27; Ooms, *Imperial Politics and Symbolics in Ancient Japan*, 168.

Interestingly from the perspective of post-colonial history writing, the rewriting of Japanese history since WWII, including its highly critical approach to Japanese nationalism and militarism, has not led to much soul searching in regard to this role of the Confucian tradition. That is because most of the critique of early Japanese nationalist and imperialist historiography has been done from the perspective of the post-colonial nation states – notably Korea. Post-WWII perspectives on early Japanese history thereby emphasize the role of Korean states, the interaction of Japan with Korea, and Korean influence on Japan, and this is seen as sufficient revision of the old nationalist historical outlook. But these new historical perspectives do not pay much attention to the people who fall between the boundaries of the modern nation states and their pre-modern forerunners – “barbarians”, not belonging to pre-modern Korean, Japanese or any other states. Post-colonial history has not required too much criticism of the Confucian world order in relation to pre-modern Korea and Japan, because pre-modern Japanese texts recognized and acknowledged Korean kingdoms by name. “Barbarians”, or *emishi* as they were most commonly referred to in Japanese sources of this period, was a signifier which identified only someone not part of a recognized kingly state, not Japan *or* Korea.

Most historians agree that the words used to identify Japanese and non-Japanese in the early history of the archipelago, rather than relating to racial or ethnic identity, were primarily politically formed categories. *Emishi* or “barbarian” in its pre-modern usage cannot be identified as a signifier of non-Japaneseness, because many non-Japanese, notably subjects of Korean kingdoms, were not labelled “barbarian” at this time. Conversely, “barbarian” did not signify non-Japanese in a modern ethnic sense either, because there are many examples in the historical sources where Japanese, through a change in political affiliation, quickly “became” *emishi*, or vice-versa. *Emishi* barbarian and Japanese identity could be exchanged. Or to state this more precisely: the signifiers “barbarian” or “Japanese” could be swapped around fairly much on the whim of the post hoc political writer. *Emishi* could quickly become Japanese, and vice-versa. The “civilized” and “barbarian” tags were quickly interchangeable, and thereby clearly not related to characteristics parallel to modern ideas of ethnos or race. Those submitting to the authority of a kingly court, be it Yamato, Silla, Paekche or other, were civilized. Those not subjugated by one of these courts were barbarian. In the context of the Japanese archipelago this meant anyone not submitting to the Yamato court was characterized as what would later be interpreted to mean non-Japanese. Culture and civilization in the Confucian sense, therefore, and indeed the idea of harmony, were thereby rooted in a brutal politics of submission that on the one hand transcended (or did not imagine) ethnicity, but on the other institutionalized and legitimized as never before set relations of clan, class and state power and the violence inherent therein.¹⁸

The post-colonial sensibilities that have dominated the rewriting of Korean and Japanese history, from both perspectives, have encouraged scholars to acknowledge the interaction between Korean and Japanese kingdoms in the processes of early Japanese state formation. Confucianism’s role in encouraging “respect for the other” has been recognized, because that functioned in terms of state interactions – including with Korea. But its employment to justify the enslavement, integration and even annihilation of the other has attracted less attention – because those “barbarian” others are not identified with the modern nation states whose ideologies, budgets, and underlying cultural power continue to ineluctably influence the direction of academic research today.

¹⁸ On the role of ideas of culture and civilization in official “Japanese” court depictions of their campaign against the *emishi* “barbarians” see Friday, Karl F, “Pushing Beyond the Pale: The Yamato Conquest of the Emishi and Northern Japan.” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 23 (1) (1997), 3-4. On domination and subordination in the Japan of this period see Mizoguchi, Kōji, *An Archaeological History of Japan : 30,000 B.C. to A.D. 700* (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 29.

Post-war social history in Japan has made clear that the pre-modern societies in Japan were made up of many people who fell between state boundaries, or simply sat outside them. The classic example given by Amino Yoshihiko is of “people of the sea”, or people who made their living primarily on the sea and often moved around. Historians like Amino have provided plenty of data and narrative about the people of Japan who did not fit with pre-modern state identities.¹⁹ But intellectual historians and particularly those studying Confucianism have been slow to think about how the history of these peoples can be resolved with the rise of Confucian inspired state structures and political discourses through Japanese history.

One reason why this dichotomy remained unresolved in early Japan was that the Japanese Confucianism of this period, in comparison with Confucianism in most other periods in Japan, Korea, or indeed China, was particularly instrumentalist and elitist, while at the same time being comparatively unreligious and unintellectual. Its exclusivist ties to the state, and its confined practical role within the state structures limited its ability to diffuse through general culture, and made its very existence vulnerable to political change. This changed dramatically in the medieval period, when the fall of the Japanese imperial state and rise of the first samurai-led shogunate government ushered in a completely new social context for the practice and propagation of Confucianism in Japan.

Medieval Japan: Confucianism as Buddhism

Whereas Confucianism in Early Japan manifested itself primarily through bureaucratic educational activities of the state academy, Confucianism in medieval Japan (C12th-C16th) manifested itself through a vibrant literary culture associated with Zen monasticism. Five Mountains Zen Culture, or *Gozan* Zen culture, is the name given to a wide-ranging movement associated with the rise of Zen Buddhist monasticism and practice in medieval Japan. Much important traditional Japanese art, literature and poetry is associated with this movement, which was based in, but not limited to, the new Zen monasteries which were established and patronized by the new Japanese samurai-led shogunal states between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.²⁰ Medieval Japanese Confucianism’s positioning in the new vibrant cultural milieu of Five Mountains Zen culture gave it a comparatively more socially integrated, creative and transnational character. The Five Mountains Zen culture it was associated with represented a new force of continental cultural influence and individual Buddhist practice in Japan.

In Song dynasty China - from where Zen was imported into Japan - art, literature, religion and culture in general were particularly prized not only in the state sphere, but also in the growing commercial world. Religiously, the Song was a particularly creative and competitive society. In Song China Zen Buddhists had to compete with, among others, a rising new movement of popular Confucianism, now often called Neo-Confucianism, which harshly criticized Zen while also integrating Zen elements into its own world view. Zen Buddhists often reacted by similarly integrating elements of this Confucian culture into their own schematics. Zen Buddhists during this period thereby often responded to attacks by other sects or religions by emphasizing the doctrine of “The Combination of the Three Religions”,

¹⁹ See for instance the series edited by Amino, Yoshihiko: Mori Kōichi, *Umi to rettō bunka* (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1992); or for a general treatment of this problem Amino, Yoshihiko, “*Nihon*” to *Wa Nani Ka* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2000), 25-39.

²⁰ Collcutt, Martin, *Five Mountains: The Rinzai Zen Monastic Institution in Medieval Japan* (Cambridge, Mass: The Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1981), 57, 101, 125.

suggesting that Zen represented a perfected synthesis of Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian teachings. This Zen reaction sought to appropriate and integrate other religious teachings.²¹ The Confucianism of Zen priests in the medieval period was thus directly influenced by the newest Confucian theories originated in the Song dynasty. This form of Confucianism, called “Song Confucianism”, “Zhu Xi Learning” or most commonly in English “Neo-Confucianism”, is still the dominant interpretation of Confucianism today. Developed by a number of thinkers before and during the early Song, and systematized by Zhu Xi (1120-1200) in the twelfth century, this form of Confucianism developed a metaphysics that systematically linked Confucian ethics and political thought to an explanation of the natural world influenced by Chan Buddhist and Daoist Yin Yang theory. By being based in this very modern (by 13th century standards) Confucian discourse, Japanese Medieval Confucianism already had a hugely more complex and theoretical base to develop upon than its earlier predecessor.²²

The fact that there was a regular flow of Zen monks moving between Japan and China through the 13th and 14th centuries, and that Japan under the Kamakura shogunate (1185-1333), and particularly under the Muromachi shogunate (1336-1573), carried out an active trade with China, meant continuous Chinese contact and influence. Recent Confucian commentaries and treatises kept arriving in Japan from China through the medieval period, representing a continuing influence on Japanese Confucianism. The increasing institutionalization of Neo-Confucianism as the basis of state examinations in China from the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) and thereafter, together with a similar institutionalization in Korea from the end of the fourteenth century, meant that the development of both Chinese and Korean Confucian discourse continued along a path that could be paralleled in Japan. Neo-Confucianism represented a stable interpretative base, institutionalized on the continent and peninsula through the examinations system.²³ This created the capacity for Japanese Confucianism to have a more transnational character, in the sense that it could stay linked to the development of Confucian discourse in China and Korea, a development which was occurring within the same systematized discourse pattern of Neo-Confucian theory across all three countries. The Medieval period did not see Neo-Confucianism popularized in Japan, nor even clearly systematized, but it was the period in which Neo-Confucian conceptions began to make their way into Japanese thinking.

Japanese reacted to the systematized and theoretical discourse of Neo-Confucianism even in the medieval period by actively printing the commentaries of Zhu Xi and others and, crucially, through writing their own commentaries on classic Confucian texts. The fact that Confucian study occurred primarily in a context of literary study, literary production and religious practice in the Zen monasteries contributed to its more creative character and the willingness of practitioners to write their own interpretations. The fact that Confucian study occurred in this kind of creative environment - integrated into Buddhist monastic life, which in turn was itself often integrated into other social structures, like village life, or samurai household life, meant that Confucianism was also more socially integrated.²⁴

This meant that Confucianism was approached and regarded in much less instrumentalist terms than in early Japan. Confucianism was still often studied to equip scholar monks to carry out the diplomatic roles that were charged to them by various shogunal rulers dealing with China and Korea. But Confucianism was not institutionally

²¹ Bodiford, William, in Anderl, Christoph (ed.), *Zen Buddhist Rhetoric in China, Korea, and Japan* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 287.

²² Yao Xinzong, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 97.

²³ Elman, Benjamin A., *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

²⁴ Bodiford, William M., *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 108-121.

positioned or perceived exclusively in those terms. In fact, it is fairly clear that, at least from a Zen Buddhist standpoint, Confucian teachings were truly related to the quest for enlightenment. Gidō Shūshin (1325-1388), for instance, one of the most important Zen monastic leaders, explained Confucianism as a kind of social manifestation of Buddhism's individual message.

If at first, through the transmission of Confucian action, you are made to know the benevolent way of humanity, then later, through the teaching of Buddhist religion, you will be awakened to the existence of Heavenly truth in your own nature. What could be better than this?²⁵

This comparatively deeper social integration and intellectual penetration of Confucianism through Buddhism had consequences not only for these two religions, but also extended to influencing the substructure of Shinto thought and practice. Mark Teeuwen has argued that the concept of Shinto came into being during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries under the influence of metaphysical readings of Yinyang thought imported from China at this time. Teeuwen attributes this influence to a number of Daoist texts.²⁶ In China at this time, however, Yinyang thought and the *Book of Changes (Yijing)* had been most powerfully harnessed in the metaphysical system of Zhu Xi – that is, Neo-Confucianism, the system that underpinned Gozan Zen Confucianism. Wajima Yoshio has shown how Shintō thinkers appropriated the “Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist, Three Teachings doctrines”, that we saw earlier were so closely associated with the Five Mountains Zen tradition, to manufacture their own “Buddhist, Confucian, Shinto, Three teachings doctrine” - a doctrine which was central to late fifteenth century Shinto self-conceptualization.²⁷

In other words, the birth of what Teeuwen calls “the concept of Shinto” (as an articulated religious tradition), appears to have occurred under the influence of the metaphysical Song Confucianism favored and spread by the Gozan priests, and indeed through their particular conceptualization of that Confucianism within the “three teachings doctrine”. Or, as William Bodiford has concisely argued, “there is little doubt that the new Song interpretation of the *Yijing* as cosmology (instead of as a book of divination) helped Japanese conceptualize *shintō* in cosmological terms”.²⁸ In other words, the birth of Shinto as a concept (in Teeuwen's sense), occurred as a direct result of the influence of Song Confucianism, mediated through Japanese Gozan Zen. Confucianism enabled the creation of Shinto as we know it.

Ultimately, the story of Medieval Japanese Confucianism is the story of the superiority of cultural forms over state ones. Even though operating under the umbrella of Buddhist culture and practiced predominantly by monks in Buddhist monasteries, the links of Medieval Confucianism with cultural production and other cultural forms – Buddhism itself, but also very importantly literature – began to suggest that it had the capacity for a much wider impact than as only the exclusive learning of mid-level bureaucrats. Of course, in a society of incredibly limited literacy, it goes without saying that Confucianism in Medieval Japan was still the preserve of a tiny elite. But it was an elite that valued Confucianism across a wider spectrum, that reproduced, developed and propagated it, and

²⁵ Quoted in Minamoto, Ryōen, *Shisō* (Tokyo: Taishūkan Shoten, 1995), 99.

²⁶ Teeuwen, Mark, “From Jindō to Shinto: A Concept Takes Shape.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 29 (3/4) (2002), 252-4.

²⁷ Wajima, Yoshio, *Chūsei No Jugaku* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1965), 159-162.

²⁸ Anderl, *Zen Buddhist Rhetoric in China, Korea, and Japan*, 287.

that through its own relatively integrated social engagement allowed Confucianism to embed in several aspects of Japanese culture.

Importantly, this embedding ultimately led to forms of Confucianism which integrated the remnants of the imperial Confucian institutions, eventually breathing life back into them and leading to a political reengagement with Confucianism. Already in the early fifteenth century, what may have been the first Japanese language commentary on a Neo-Confucian text was authored by the court noble Ichijō Kanera (1402-1481) when he commentated the *Greater Learning* (*daxue*). The Kiyohara clan, notably under the leadership of Kiyohara Nobutaka (1475-1550), served as Confucian teachers around the court and also began to embrace Neo-Confucian interpretations. This was partly instigated by the need of nobles like the Kiyohara to sell their services on an emerging intellectual market where the primary consumers were members of the samurai elite. The emergence of this market went hand in hand with the increase in samurai literacy which began at the end of the fifteenth century and expanded through the sixteenth century to accelerate exponentially after the establishment of the Tokugawa Shogunate in the seventeenth. The medieval samurai establishment, through the Muromachi Shogunate, also ran the only Confucian Academy in Japan to attract national attention during this period: the Ashikaga School.

The Confucianism of the medieval period thus began the process of a much larger scale engagement of Confucianism by large sections of Japanese society. Led increasingly by the warlord leaders of the rising new settlement of early-modern Japan instead of the imperial aristocracy, this new engagement would usher in the golden age of Confucianism under Japan's Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1868), the regime that laid the foundations of modern Japan.²⁹

As the next article in this series will discuss further, samurai engagement with Confucianism was turbo-charged at the end of the 1500s when Japan invaded Korea. As samurai overran almost all of the Korean peninsula in 1592 and 1593, they took large numbers of elite Korean prisoners and hostages, thousands of whom were brought back to Japan. Just as with the sixth century Confucian teacher Wani from Paekche mentioned in the *Nihon Shoki* and touched on earlier in this article, so too some of the most prized human possessions brought back as booty from Japan's sixteenth century war in Korea were Confucian teachers. As Abe Yoshio argued forcefully nearly half a century ago, the rapid rise in influence and penetration of Confucianism in early seventeenth century Japan can be partially attributed to the influence of some of these prisoners in Japan.³⁰

²⁹ Many scholars have argued that Fujiwara Seika, the alleged originator of Tokugawa Confucianism, actually represents a continuation of the Zen Confucian tradition, see for instance, Minamoto, *Shisō*, 127-8.

³⁰ Yoshio Abe, *Nihon Shushigaku to Chōsen* [Japanese Neo-Confucianism and Korea] (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1965).

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