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The Filial Piety Mountain: Kanno Hachirō and The Three Teachings

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This article examines the writings of Kanno Hachirō (1813–1888), a mid-scale farmer from Fukushima, and argues that the binary between “religion” (*shūkyō*) and “morality” (*dōtoku*) is of limited usefulness in comprehending his worldview. Hachirō wrote extensively on the virtue of filial piety (*kō*) and claimed that it represented the highest ideal of Confucianism, Shinto, and Buddhism. He expressed this through a diagram of what he called the Filial Piety Mountain (*kōkōzan*), in which he depicted Confucianism, Shinto, and Buddhism as three paths leading toward the summit. Utilizing recent scholarship that has illuminated the modern origin of the category of “religion,” this article highlights the absence of the dichotomy between “religion” and “morality” in Hachirō’s writings and his conception of the Filial Piety Mountain. Just as an uncritical imposition of the category of “religion” on premodern sources can result in distortions, approaching Hachirō’s writings through the modern lens of “morality” or “conventional morality” (*tsūzoku dōtoku*) that is apart from “religion” can lead to an overly compartmentalized view of his thought. The article suggests an alternative approach through Ann Swidler’s model of “cultural repertoire.”

Keywords: Filial piety, *tsūzoku dōtoku*, *shūkyō*, cultural repertoire, Filial Piety Mountain (*kōkōzan*), farmer, nineteenth century

Introduction

Recent scholarship by Jason Josephson and Trent Maxey has illuminated the development of the category of “religion” in modern Japan and at the same time has highlighted the absence of that category in premodern Japan.¹ This body of new scholarship not only reminds scholars to practice caution when applying the category of religion to premodern materials, but also suggests that more work is needed to analyze emic concepts such as “teaching” (*oshie* 教え, *kyō* 教) and “way/path” (*michi*, *dō* 道), which preceded but were eventually subsumed under the category of religion. In particular, more research is necessary to illuminate how villagers and townspeople in premodern Japan understood these concepts, beyond the circles of religious professionals and intellectuals. This article contributes to this objective

1 Josephson 2012 and Maxey 2014.

by examining the writings of Kanno Hachirō 菅野八郎 (1813–1888), a farmer of moderate means from Fukushima 福島 whose life spanned much of the nineteenth century, and by investigating his understanding of Japan’s “three teachings,” Confucianism, Shinto, and Buddhism, as “paths” leading toward a mastery of filial piety (*kō* 孝).²

Kanno Hachirō was a literate farmer and a prolific writer.³ He wrote extensively about virtues he regarded as essential to a farmer’s life, such as frugality, diligence, and obedience, but his greatest preoccupation was filial piety. Scholars such as Yasumaru Yoshio and Shōji Kichinosuke have characterized Hachirō as a quintessential pursuer of “conventional morality” (*tsūzoku dōtoku* 通俗道德), a set of moral ideals shared among farmers in Tokugawa Japan.⁴ On the other hand, a group of scholars led by Suda Tsutomu has more recently highlighted how Hachirō in some instances sought to deviate from the norms of the Tokugawa status system and rise beyond his status as a farmer.⁵ Furthermore, Hachirō also gets occasional mention in English-language scholarship as the purported leader of a major uprising that occurred in Keiō 慶応 2 (1866) in Fukushima.⁶

I build upon this body of scholarship to reexamine Hachirō’s writings in light of Josephson and Maxey’s insights on the modern origin of the category of religion. More specifically, I focus on Hachirō’s conception of what he called the “Filial Piety Mountain” (*kōkōzan* 孝行山 or *kōzan* 孝山). According to Hachirō, the objective of human life was to climb to this mountain’s summit, a realm of prosperity governed by the “way of filial piety” (*kōdō* 孝道). Confucianism, Shinto, and Buddhism represented three major paths leading up to it. Hachirō evidently regarded filial piety both as the highest ideal and also as a path to be perfected simultaneously.

Hachirō’s discussion of the Filial Piety Mountain problematizes the binary between “religion” and “morality” often presupposed when discussing Tokugawa Japan. Fifty years ago, Robert Bellah noted the religious undertones of Tokugawa morality, arguing that religion “supplied a context of ultimate meaning to the central value system.”⁷ More recently, scholars have illuminated the ways in which preachers from a variety of traditions, including Buddhism, Shingaku 心学 (the “Learning of the Mind”), Shinto and new religions, gave sermons to local communities promoting the importance of moral ideals from their respective doctrinal standpoints.⁸ While these observations highlight the porous boundary between “religion” and “conventional morality,” scholars continue to take for granted the applicability of the religion-morality binary itself.

2 The history of the “three teachings” discourse in Japan dates back at least to the medieval period. Paramore 2016, pp. 38–39.

3 On the rise of literacy in farming communities, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Rubinger 2007, pp. 2, 78–79, 113. Writings left by literate farmers promise perspectives not confined to sectarian narratives. See Ambros and Williams 2001 and Hardacre 2002 for examples of religious studies scholars making use of these local documents. Also see the scathing critique of Edo society, including temples and shrines, by a samurai writing as Buyō Inshi 武陽隱士 in *Bunka* 文化 13 (1816). This is another example of a “nonreligious” text offering a non-sectarian perspective. Teeuwen et al. 2014.

4 Yasumaru 1974 and Shōji 1979.

5 Suda 2010a. Also see Fukawa 2000 for another example of recent Japanese scholarship on Hachirō.

6 For brief accounts of Hachirō’s involvement in the 1866 uprising, see Bowen 1980, p. 78 and Vlastos 1986, pp. 136–37, 164.

7 Bellah 1957, p. 39.

8 For comprehensive discussions of popular education in the late Tokugawa period, see Takahashi 1978. Also see Hardacre 1986, pp. 38–39; Hardacre 2016, pp. 301–305; Paramore 2016, pp. 72–73; and Sawada 1993, p. 12.

In examining Hachirō's writings, it becomes quickly evident that this dichotomy is of limited usefulness. Hachirō had an integrated understanding of filial piety, Confucianism, Shinto, and Buddhism, conceiving of them all as means through which to achieve prosperity. This not only corroborates Josephson and Maxey's arguments concerning the irrelevance of "religion" as a separate category in premodern Japan, but also questions the relevance of the modern category of "morality" or "conventional morality" for farmers like Hachirō.⁹ According to Isomae Jun'ichi, in modern Japan, "religion" was entrusted to the sphere of the individual's interior freedom, while the 'secular' sphere of morality was determined to be a national, and thus public, issue."¹⁰ This distinction is starkly absent in Hachirō's writings.

To use Hachirō's own language, filial piety, Confucianism, Shinto, and Buddhism were all "paths" that helped people lead fulfilling lives. Here it is useful to think of the "path" as an element of the "cultural repertoire" shared by people in Tokugawa Japan. Ann Swidler conceptualizes culture as such a repertoire, consisting of myriad images, stories, examples, knowledge, skills, and habits that can be articulated or performed by historical actors in different ways. Individual actors strategize the pieces to draw from the existing repertoire depending on what attitudes, arguments, and moods they wish to convey.¹¹ This model helps us more accurately to grasp the ways in which Hachirō invoked the imagery of the "path" to express his vision of a flourishing farmer. The path encompassed elements that modern Japanese society classified separately as "religion" and "morality" as Isomae suggests, but such a demarcation was foreign to Hachirō. Many have already noted that the "separation between kami and buddhas" (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離) in Meiji Japan irrevocably altered the Japanese religious landscape, but equally significant was the "separation between religion and morality," which required a radical reformulation of conceptual fields.

This article will first contextualize Hachirō's thought through critical examinations of his biography and representative writings. It will then analyze his depiction of the "Filial Piety Mountain" and his discussion of the multiple "paths" toward the summit. The article concludes by referring briefly to Hachirō's activities in Meiji Japan and his evaluation of the era of "civilization and enlightenment."

1. Kanno Hachirō: An Engaged Farmer

Kanno Hachirō lived from 1813 to 1888, and, in many respects, his life reflected the tumultuous nature of his times. As a farmer, Hachirō maintained his economic base in the village of Kanaharada 金原田 in Fukushima (present-day Hobara 保原 in Date 伊達, located to the northeast of Fukushima City). At the time of Hachirō's birth, Kanaharada belonged to the Matsumae 松前 domain, but from Bunsei 文政 5 to Ansei 安政 3 (1822–1856), it was placed under the direct supervision of the Edo bakufu (*tenryō* 天領), before being redesignated as part of the Matsumae domain from Ansei 3 to Meiji 3 (1856–1870).¹² Shōji characterizes Hachirō as a mid-scale farmer (*chūnō* 中農), who had the possibility of either rising to wealth or falling to poverty. Hachirō's family engaged in a combination of

9 Josephson 2012, pp. 233–34.

10 Isomae 2007, p. 93. Also see Maxey 2014, p. 156.

11 Swidler 2001, pp. 7, 31, 38 and Company 2003, pp. 317–18.

12 Suda 2010b, pp. 9–11.

traditional agriculture and sericulture, the latter being one of the primary sources of income for the region.¹³

Not much is known about Hachirō's early years, but it is clear from his own later writings that his father, Wazō 和藏, played a central role in his upbringing. This is evident in Hachirō's composition titled *Kanno jikki* 菅野実記 (Faithful records of the Kanno family), most likely written between Ansei 3 and 5 (1856–1858). Hachirō devotes a significant portion of this document to highlighting the accomplishments of Wazō.¹⁴ Wazō was a student of a local Wang Yangming scholar by the name of Kumazaka Sadakuni 熊坂定邦 (1739–1803), also known as Kumazaka Taishū 台州. Sadakuni spoke critically of elites and intellectuals, denouncing Confucian scholars as lacking in virtue and Buddhist priests as disrespecting the Buddha. He also stressed that governmental policies should be people-focused. As he articulated it in one of his treatises, “a ruler is established by the populace and his demise is also brought about by the populace.”¹⁵ It is not certain to what extent Sadakuni's teachings of philosophical independence influenced Wazō, but Wazō ended up becoming a leader in his community and, despite his low economic status, was elected by his peers as headman (*nanushi* 名主) of the village of Kanaharada in Bunsei 11 (1828). Hachirō inherited the Kanno household in Tenpō 8 (1837) after his father's death.

An important turning point for Hachirō, both in terms of his personal endeavors and philosophical development, occurred when Commodore Perry arrived in Kaei 嘉永 6 (1853), demanding the bakufu open Japan's ports. The news of Perry's arrival soon reached Kanaharada and motivated Hachirō to action. In the fifth month of Kaei 7 (1854), Hachirō composed an essay titled *Ame no yo no yumebanashi* あめの夜の夢咄 (A dreamy talk on a rainy night), in which he wrote of a series of “spiritual dreams” (*reimu* 霊夢). In the first month of the same year, a mysterious old man with white hair appeared to him in a dream, identified himself as a messenger spirit of Tokugawa Ieyasu, and warned him of a foreign threat approaching Japan. The messenger spirit furthermore revealed to Hachirō “ten protective strategies” (*bōhō jukkajō* 防方十ヶ条) that needed to be implemented to defend Japan, and urged him to share this knowledge with the leaders of the country.¹⁶ After experiencing several of these dreams, Hachirō travelled to Edo in the second month of the same year in order to warn bakufu officials of this threat.¹⁷ He first attempted to speak directly to Elder Abe Masahiro 阿部正弘 (1819–1857), but was eventually instructed by Finance Magistrate (*kanjō bugyō* 勘定奉行) Tamura Kenshō 田村顕彰 (dates unknown) to submit a letter outlining his views, which he did before returning to Kanaharada. Hachirō remained hopeful that the bakufu would one day summon him back to Edo to deliberate his strategies against the foreign threat, but this was not to be.¹⁸

Hachirō's concerns for the welfare of his country did not wane. In Ansei 2 (1855), he contacted his brother-in-law, Dazai Seiemon 太宰清右衛門 (1828–1864), a merchant who had acquired samurai status in Mito on account of his substantial donations to the domain. Hachirō sent an essay to Seiemon denouncing the bakufu in Edo for its incompetence,

13 For more on Hachirō's economic base, see Shōji 1979, pp. 213–15, 241–44.

14 Kanno 2010b.

15 Shōji 1979, pp. 139–72, 212 (the quote is on p. 212).

16 Hachirō does not reveal the specifics of the protective strategies, stressing the need for secrecy.

17 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, pp. 90–93.

18 Suda 2010b, p. 20.

offering his services to the Mito lord, Tokugawa Nariaki 徳川斉昭 (1800–1860), whom he held in high esteem.¹⁹ This came to nothing, but his connection to Seiemon did implicate him in the greater political developments of the late 1850s. With the beginning of the Ansei Purge (Ansei no Taigoku 安政の大獄) in Ansei 5 (1858), Great Elder Ii Naosuke 井伊直弼 (1815–1860) rounded up, and imprisoned or executed thinkers and activists opposed to the bakufu’s signing of a series of trade treaties with foreign powers. Ii targeted many Mito activists with staunch anti-foreign agendas. Seiemon himself managed to avoid arrest, but bakufu officials soon discovered the essay Hachirō had sent to Seiemon, and arrested Hachirō in the eleventh month of Ansei 5 (1858). The bakufu detained and interrogated him in Edo, and eventually sentenced him to exile in Hachijō Island, south of the Izu Peninsula.²⁰

From the seventh month of Man’en 万延 1 (1860) to the ninth month of Genji 元治1 (1864), Hachirō lived on Hachijō. During these years, he came into contact with individuals from diverse backgrounds, such as the Shinto priest Umetsuji Norikiyo 梅辻規清 (1798–1861), the poet Kaneyama Kinjūrō 金山金十郎 (dates unknown), and the samurai Kondō Tomizō 近藤富蔵 (1805–1887), all of whom had been exiled to Hachijō for a variety of reasons.²¹ Umetsuji Norikiyo had a particularly close association with Hachirō. Also known as Kamo no Norikiyo, Umetsuji came from a family related to the Kamigamo 上賀茂 Shrine in Kyoto. Heavily influenced by Neo-Confucianism, Norikiyo viewed the universe as governed by complementary yin-yang forces.²² He had proselytized actively to the masses before being exiled to Hachijō for propagating “heterodox” teachings, and claiming, for example, that purification rituals performed by other Shinto priests were meaningless, and that personal cultivation was the only means of purifying one’s mind.²³ Hachirō references Norikiyo in some of his writings while exiled on Hachijō as a teacher figure, or simply as an “elderly man” (*rōō* 老翁), and also later adopted Norikiyo’s basic yin-yang paradigm to critique Meiji society as a dark era governed by yin forces.²⁴ Hachirō was eventually released from his Hachijō exile in the ninth month of Genji 1 (1864), due to an amnesty extended to farmers implicated in the Ansei Purge.²⁵ The years spent on Hachijō were crucial to the development of Hachirō’s thought, as it was there that he came up with his conception of the Filial Piety Mountain.

On his return home to Kanaharada, Hachirō found the local community in a state of disarray. According to his own account, theft, rape, and gambling abounded. He attributed the disorder to “evil governance” (*akusei* 悪政) by the bakufu intendant (*daikan* 代官)—most likely he referred to the intendant based in Kōri 桑折, close to Kanaharada—and the greed of wealthy merchants whose businesses prospered by bribing officials.²⁶ He responded by organizing what he called the *Seishinkō* 誠信講, literally, “the sincerity and trust

19 Hayata 2010, p. 79; Shōji 1979, pp. 215–16.

20 Suda 2010b, pp. 22–30.

21 Sugi 2010, p. 132. Kaneyama Kinjūrō had been exiled for his father’s usurious activities, and Kondō Tomizō for murdering his neighbors. Umetsuji Norikiyo had been exiled for spreading heterodox teachings, as discussed below.

22 Sano 2010, pp. 166–73.

23 Hardacre 2016, pp. 320–21.

24 Sano 2010, pp. 166–73.

25 Suda 2010b, pp. 29–31, 36–37.

26 Hayata 2010, pp. 87–88.

association.” This was a gathering of local farmers who practiced fencing in order to protect themselves from miscreants.²⁷ Hachirō thus became an active agent in his community.

In the sixth month of Keiō 2 (1866), less than two years after Hachirō’s return, a major uprising broke out in Fukushima. The primary reason was a new tax imposed on local sericulture by the intendant’s office, with the support of merchants who sought to exert tighter control over farmers by serving as collectors of the said tax. On the fifteenth day of the sixth month, thousands of local farmers responded by rising up and destroying the houses of merchants who had colluded with government officials to pass the new tax. The farmers demanded the repeal of the tax as well as a reduction in the price of goods. The uprising ceased after the intendant agreed to accept the demands. The intendant, however, arrested Hachirō for organizing the uprising. Hachirō denied the charge and claimed that men of ill will had spread false rumors of his involvement.²⁸ Hachirō was interrogated but was soon released.²⁹ The nature of his involvement remains unclear, but it is certain that there was at least a local perception that Hachirō was the organizer. The news of the uprising reached Edo, and a *kawaraban* 瓦版 news leaflet there reported it as a case of “world renewal” (*yonaoshi* 世直し) led by a certain Hachirō from Kanaharada.³⁰

Hachirō’s activity in the Meiji period mostly remains unknown. Nonetheless, we have seen enough to appreciate that Hachirō’s endeavors had both local and countrywide dimensions, the former driven by pressing issues within the immediate communities and the latter stimulated largely by Japan’s contact with the West. In his analysis of the making of the Meiji Restoration, George Wilson presented a “fourfold narrative,” outlining the diverging motives of four groups of actors in the bakumatsu period, including Western envoys, bakufu loyalists, popular (religious) revivalists, and imperial loyalists. Intriguingly, Hachirō does not fit neatly in any of these explicit groupings, yet he was no doubt a part of the complex network of historical actors that foregrounded the Meiji Restoration.³¹ What guided Hachirō in his variegated endeavors was, as we shall see, his commitment to filial piety.

2. Hachirō and Filial Piety

Hachirō’s earliest compositions that deal explicitly with filial piety and other related virtues date from 1854. It is not entirely clear why it was around this time that the theme of filial piety became manifest in Hachirō’s writings. It was possibly inspired by the arrival of the West or his interest in the Mito school. In any case, the aforementioned *Ame no yo no yumebanashi*, which Hachirō wrote in 1854, reveals that filial piety was now integral to

27 The name implies that “sincerity” and “trust” were the basic principles of this association, but it is not clear whether there was explicit moral content to its activities. Nor is it clear whether there was an economic dimension to this association, as was typically the case with local *kō* associations.

28 Suda 2010b, pp. 53–54.

29 Scholars such as Suda Tsutomu and Mizumura Akito are skeptical about Hachirō’s role in organizing the uprising. They argue that Hachirō remained deferential to authority throughout his life and did not favor violent means of resolving issues (Suda 2010b, pp. 52–53, and Mizumura 2010, pp. 235–36). Shōji Kichinosuke and Haga Noboru, however, maintain that Hachirō was the leader of the uprising (Shōji 1979, pp. 210–11, and Haga 1984, p. 88). I agree with Suda and Mizumura’s assessment of Hachirō’s deference to authority; even if he was involved in the uprising, his objective would have been to rectify concrete economic injustices, not to deny the legitimacy of the bakufu itself.

30 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, p. 384.

31 Wilson 1992, pp. 43–75.

Hachirō's self-awareness as a Tokugawa subject. He composed this essay in the fifth month of the year, after having approached the bakufu in Edo with the new knowledge imparted to him by the messenger spirit of Tokugawa Ieyasu. In *Ame no yo no yumebanashi*, Hachirō describes his interactions with bakufu officials in Edo, and inserts a copy of the letter he submitted to the bakufu before returning to Kanaharada. Hachirō begins this letter with an inventory of the guiding principles of his life:

[F]irstly, to exhaust filial piety for the sake of parents (*oya ni kō o tsukushi* 親に孝を尽し); to embody loyalty, for those with masters to serve; to carry out the family business diligently and meet obligations to the bakufu by paying taxes and offering other necessary services flawlessly; never to deceive others even slightly or use flattery; to have a good grasp of what is appropriate and inappropriate and what is good and evil; to help the weak and rebuke the strong; not to entertain selfish and corrupt thoughts even slightly; to [act with] honesty; and to give up one's life willingly for righteousness, sincerity, and trust.³²

Hachirō enumerates here virtues he deems suited to appearing before the bakufu, the supreme authority in the land, as a man ideally qualified to present his opinion. It is significant that Hachirō refers first to filial piety.

Hachirō has more to say about filial piety in *Kanno shi senzo yori mōshitsutae narabi ni Hachirō yuigon* 菅野氏先祖より申伝并二八郎遺言 (Messages from Kanno family ancestors and Hachirō's will). Hachirō left several wills at different points in his life, and this particular one is dated the ninth month of Kaei 7 (1854). He starts the will with a reference to the benevolent spirit of Tokugawa Ieyasu, who ensures peace in the world and guarantees abundant fulfillment for all people (*tenka taihei ni osamari, banmin hōraku no miyo* 天下泰平ニ治リ、万民豊樂之御代). The Kanno ancestors—he insists—demand that family descendants repay their debt to Ieyasu by being filial to their parents, remaining loyal to their masters, engaging in their occupations diligently, and paying taxes dutifully, among other things. Hachirō stresses the importance of such moral acts as fundamental obligations for all who benefitted from the peaceful governance of the Tokugawa shogunate. Furthermore, he gives the following seven injunctions as vital constituents of the practice of filial piety:

- (1) Do not disobey the words of your parents.
- (2) Do not gamble, as it often leads to a depletion of the family wealth.
- (3) Do not indulge in sexual pleasures, as this is the beginning of myriad diseases.
- (4) Do not drink excessively, as this is a major cause of disease.
- (5) Do not go out at night, as it causes your parents to worry, and also is a cause of disease.
- (6) Do not get angry at your subordinates, as it disrupts peace in the family.
- (7) Do not overeat or indulge in an unhealthy diet, as such habits lead to disease.

32 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, pp. 92–93.

Hachirō clearly conceptualized the practice of filial piety as intersecting with ideals such as frugality and diligence, and involving an observance of prohibitions against specific actions that hindered familial prosperity. He furthermore claimed that by adhering to filial piety, people can attain the status of the heavenly Tathagata (*gokuraku nyorai no kurai* 極樂如來の位) regardless of their economic or educational background. On the other hand, the kami and buddhas will provide no help to those who pray to them if they neglect to respect their own parents.³³

In a short, title-less document from Ansei 3 (1857), Hachirō laments that many farmers fail to practice filial piety, and waste their wealth on unproductive things such as theatrical and circus entertainment, gambling, prostitutes, alcohol, expensive food, and lavish clothing. He observes that these habits can eventually force farmers into debt and put at risk lands inherited from parents and ancestors. He also warns those who hope to get out of debt through sericulture that the kami of silkworm, *sanjin* 蚕神, does not favor lazy farmers.³⁴ Moreover, the kami of prosperity, *fukujin* 福神, detests overspending and idleness while the kami of poverty, *binbōgami* 貧乏神, is particularly fond of indolent individuals. Unproductive farmers, Hachirō claims, wake up late in the morning, and all they do is complain to their wives about their miserable state. Such individuals are a disgrace to their ancestors and violate the principle of filial piety, the basis of the “path of humanity” (*ningendō* 人間道). Those who stray from this path are no different from mere beasts (*chikushō* 畜生). People should remember the saying, “When one wishes to do filial deeds on behalf of one’s parents, the parents are no longer there” (*kōkō o shitaki jibun wa oya ga nashi* 孝行をしたき時は親がなし).³⁵ Hachirō here highlights a variety of virtues such as diligence and frugality, but ultimately ties them all together within the framework of filial piety.

In Bunkyū 文久 3 (1863), Hachirō composed for young children and their parents in his extended family a guide to ethical behavior, titled *Shōni hayamichi annai* 小兒早道案内 (A children’s guide to the quick path). He begins by once again pointing to filial piety as the fundamental ideal for all farmers and their children, and gives a set of specific instructions, such as waking up early in the morning, greeting and obeying one’s parents, not drinking, not gambling, not going out at night, and not deceiving others. By following these rules, he claims, one’s heart will naturally become pure and one’s life prosperous. He uses Buddhist language and symbolism to elaborate on the importance of filial piety. The Pure Land of Amida is not to be located in the far west, but is to be perceived through the heart; embodying filial piety is the first step in seeking this paradise within. On the other hand, saké, women, and gambling lead people to the “Three Paths of Evil” (*san’akudō* 三悪道), which Hachirō describes as the paths of beasts, hungry ghosts (*gaki* 餓鬼), and hell (*jigoku* 地獄). He then connects this discussion to the value of learning. Even if people are well educated, so long as they fail to uphold filial piety, they are “great criminals of the realm” (*tenka no daizainin* 天下之大罪人).³⁶ The goal of all learning first and foremost is to foster individuals who value and put in to practice the ideal of filial piety. Embodying filial piety is the “quick path” to success.

33 Kanno 2000, pp. 336–39.

34 As mentioned above, since the mid-eighteenth century, the agriculture in Hachirō’s region had revolved around the production of silk, textile, and silkworm eggs (Shōji 1979, pp. 241–42).

35 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, pp. 101–103.

36 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, pp. 105–106.

Hachirō, like many others of his social class in Tokugawa Japan, actively pursued the perfection of filial piety. The ideal of filial piety permeated almost every segment of Tokugawa society, and was interpreted by a variety of thinkers. Nakae Tōju 中江藤樹 (1608–1648), for example, offered an abstract interpretation and claimed that the objective of human life was to become one with the universe through the embodiment of filial piety; Tejima Toan 手島堵庵 (1718–1786) offered more concrete interpretations by stressing the centrality of specific filial actions that accorded with social and familial duties, resonating more closely with Hachirō's accounts above.³⁷ The fact that Hachirō's writings emphasize filial piety is not surprising or unique in and of itself. What is noteworthy, however, is that he offers a particularly intriguing perspective by elaborating on the relationship between filial piety and the teachings of Confucianism, Shinto, and Buddhism through his depiction of the aforementioned Filial Piety Mountain.

3. The Filial Piety Mountain

Hachirō articulates his conception of Filial Piety Mountain in a didactic text written for his family, titled *Hachirō jukkajō* 八郎十カ条 (Hachirō's ten principles). In it, he addresses many of the same themes discussed above but also utilizes the striking image of the Filial Piety Mountain (figure 1) to showcase his understanding of the “three teachings” as avenues through which to embody filial piety. He composed this in Bunkyū 2 (1862) while exiled on Hachijō Island and dedicated a significant portion of the text to comment on the accompanying diagram of the Filial Piety Mountain.³⁸

As Hachirō describes it, the top of the mountain is the realm of kami, buddhas, and sages or “a vast plain called peaceful mind” (*anshin to iu kōdai no heichi* 安心と言広大の平地).³⁹ He inserts the legend “way of filial piety” (*kōdō*) conspicuously just above the mountaintop, adjacent to which are “when governing the realm under heaven” (*tenka o osamuru mo* 天下ヲ治ルモ), “when governing the country” (*kokka o osamuru mo* 国家ヲ治ルモ), and “when governing the self” (*mi o osamuru mo* 身ヲ治ルモ). This *kōdō* is the ultimate principle of the sacred mountain summit as well as the basis for social order and personal cultivation. Hachirō claims that those able to reach the pinnacle of filial piety are extremely rare.⁴⁰

The middle portion of the mountain is the human realm (*ningenkai* 人間界), but, as Hachirō insists, most humans actually occupy the very foot of the mountain, the beastly realm (*chikushōkai* 畜生界).⁴¹ The beastly realm is populated by those who exhibit “great neglect of filial piety” (*daifukō* 大不孝), and is occupied by various evils such as greed (*yoku* 欲) and covetousness (*nusumi gokoro* 盗み心), and beasts such as ogres (*oni* 鬼) and monsters (*bakemono* 化物). Those who dwell in the beastly realm are tormented by bribery, debt,

37 Bellah 1957, pp. 79–80; Nosco 1984, pp. 12–13; Sawada 1993, pp. 88–90; Paramore 2016, p. 41. Also see Kurachi 1996, pp. 289–94, for a discussion of the spread of Confucian learning as a kind of “cultural wisdom” (*kyōyō* 教養) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, primarily within the samurai class. For a discussion on the tenuous relationship between filial piety and loyalty in Tokugawa Japan, see McMullen 1987.

38 Readers are referred to figure 1 here.

39 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, p. 113.

40 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, p. 113.

41 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, pp. 114–15.



Figure 1. Hachirō's illustration of the Filial Piety Mountain
(photo by the author, Fukushima Prefectural Archives).

murder, betrayal, arson, deceit, gambling, and other evils. Hachirō cannot bear to see people ruin their lives (*inochi o horobosu* 命を亡す) in the beastly realm with endless suffering.⁴²

Luckily, however, divine beings such as Confucian sages, kami, and buddhas have pitied the plight of humans and, throughout history, have encouraged them to climb back to the human realm and on to the summit by laying paths called Confucianism, Shinto, and Buddhism.⁴³ These three main paths extend from the human realm to the heavenly summit. Hachirō comments that people have largely ignored this divine help, partly because the ascent of the mountain requires perseverance.⁴⁴ In fact, just as there are paths leading to the summit, so there also are paths descending from the human realm to the beastly realm, those of illusion (*mayoi* 迷), mountain goblins (*tengu* 天狗), and evil (*ma* 魔). Malevolent beings are constantly luring people into these paths. Hachirō lists beautiful women, exquisite saké, and other temptations of the flesh as reasons why people often take the downward paths.⁴⁵

Hachirō proceeds to describe in detail each of the three paths that lead from the human realm to the summit, highlighting the difficulties entailed in each. First is the path of Confucianism, the best of the three paths, and which runs up the middle of the mountain:

42 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, pp. 114–15.

43 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, p. 115.

44 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, pp. 113–14.

45 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, pp. 114–15.

People can benefit greatly by treading the path of Confucianism. This path is straight, and on this path, people first go through a great gate called learning and obtain a marvelous medicine for the eyes called the Wisdom Clarity Scroll (*ganbyō no myōyaku chimeikan* 眼病の妙薬知明卷).⁴⁶... As they proceed along this path, their insight becomes ever clearer, and with great insight, they become able to penetrate any darkness. As they climb the mountain gradually and approach the summit, they will acquire yet another item, this time a wonderful pair of eyeglasses, the Sage Wisdom Teaching (*seikenkyō* 聖賢教).⁴⁷ There are plenty of these eyeglasses available. As people reach the summit and look around through the eyeglasses, they will notice that there is nothing they cannot comprehend or see under heaven. On top of that, they will find a medicine of immortality at the summit and will live with a peaceful mind.... However, in order to tread this path, one must be well educated and must be able to rely on nothing but one's own strength. Otherwise, this path will prove to be quite difficult. Therefore, all we can do [as farmers without education or willpower] is to gaze upon the mountain summit from afar.⁴⁸

Hachirō first acknowledges the benefits of Confucianism, focusing particularly on the notion of learning. He uses the imagery of light and darkness and the metaphors of medicine and eyeglasses to highlight the wisdom people can gain by following Confucianism. Those lucky few who ever reach the summit can become omniscient and immortal sages themselves. Yet, Hachirō concludes that the Confucian path is not suitable for farmers like himself as it requires a significant commitment to learning and self-discipline. His assumption is that farmers do not have the time, the resources or the will power to dedicate themselves to learning. Self-deprecating language appears frequently in his writings, particularly when discussing farmers' social role in relation to that of the samurai class.⁴⁹ Here he uses the same language to explicate why Confucianism, despite all its advantages, is not a path designed for farmers.

Next is the path of Shinto, depicted on the right-hand side of the mountain:

For those treading the path of Shinto, their guide will be an honest old man (*shōjiki jiji* 正直祖父) who walks slowly and rather unstably. They may eventually reach the summit, yet they will be equipped neither with the medicine for the eyes nor the eyeglasses [of Confucianism], and therefore, they will remain unable to see through the ten directions under heaven. For this reason, those who are intelligent and can rely on their own power refuse to take this path, choosing instead to climb the mountain through learning [Confucianism]. Of course, there are also those on the Shinto path who cannot reach the summit because, day after day, they complacently engage in purification rites (*misogi* 禊) and wish-granting prayers (*kitō kinen* 祈とふ 祈ねん).⁵⁰

46 There is a pun intended between *kan* 卷 (scroll) and *gan* 丸 (pill). The character for *gan* 丸 is often used in names of medicine.

47 There is another pun here between *kyō* 教 (teaching) and *kyō* 鏡 (mirror, eyeglasses).

48 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, pp. 115–16.

49 For more on Hachirō's self-deprecating attitude in relation to his identity as a farmer, see Suda 2010b, pp. 28–29, and Hayata 2010, pp. 81–83.

50 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, p. 116.

Hachirō writes rather dismissively of this path. Although he attributes the positive virtue of honesty to Shinto, he suggests that it will not bring the kind of insight one acquires along the Confucian path.⁵¹ Neither Shinto purification rites nor prayers for worldly benefits are conducive to mastering the way of filial piety. He characterizes Shinto as a slow and unreliable path that many prefer not to take. It is not clear what specific form of Shinto Hachirō has in mind here, as his depiction is vague. The stark absence of any kind of ethnocentric or nationalist discourse in his description of Shinto is not surprising. Neither does he endorse Shinto as the “indigenous” path suitable for the Japanese.⁵²

Finally, Hachirō discusses Buddhism, the path on the left side of the mountain:

Those treading the path of the expedient means of Buddhism can expect a winding road up to the summit. It does not necessitate learning, so even women, children, the blind, and the physically challenged can climb the mountain with ease of mind. However, they can never be sure when they will reach the summit. The path requires a tremendous amount of time and is, therefore, cumbersome. Most likely, people can only get to the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss (*gokuraku jōdo* 極樂淨土) or thereabout. Furthermore, Buddhist monks these days, although they may try to serve as guides, do not practice what they preach, and all they do is talk. Even though they are supposed to be guides toward the summit, they behave more like guides to the beastly realm. They themselves are moving downward to the beastly realm, with one arm pulled by saké and the other by women. While they descend, they tell others, ‘Go that way, upward.’ People thus cannot trust them, and they lose their way.⁵³

Hachirō first recognizes the universal nature of Buddhist salvation, open to all people regardless of gender, intelligence, and physical capacity. But he quickly turns critical, for the path of Buddhism is not straight and requires an unreasonable amount of time, allowing many to go no further than the Pure Land (*gokuraku jōdo*), a midway destination well below the summit. Furthermore, Buddhist monks are unable to guide people because they themselves are incapable of climbing the mountain and are indeed descending to the beastly realm. His descriptions of Buddhist monks here fit the classic (but often critiqued) notion of “degenerate Buddhism” (*daraku Bukkyō* 墮落仏教).

Of the three paths outlined above, Hachirō clearly favors Confucianism. This is perhaps to be expected given the ubiquitous influence of Confucian discourse in Tokugawa society, and the fact that his father had been a student of a local Confucian scholar. Yet, he suggests that Confucianism is not suitable for farmers because of the amount of learning—therefore, the investment of time and wealth—required. Shinto and Buddhism are more accessible, but they take too long and are each in their own way deficient. In short, he concludes that for farmers like him none of these three paths lead to the summit of the Filial Piety Mountain.

51 On the connection between honesty and Shinto, see Scheid 2002, pp. 318–19.

52 Kuroda 1981. For a more updated and nuanced analysis on the construction of Shinto and its multiple facets in modern Japan, see Breen and Teeuwen 2010, pp. 18–22.

53 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, pp. 116–17.

Hachirō then informs the reader that there is an alternative passage to the summit called the Quick Path (*hayamichi* 早道). It is depicted in the diagram on the left side of Confucianism and, according to Hachirō, most directly embodies filial piety:

Next, there is a small passage called the Quick Path, which allows people to reach the summit extremely quickly, in no time. Even those who have no learning at all can climb very quickly. This is because, on this path, people obey their parents' words, stay by their parents' side day and night, and tread the path together with their parents. The father leads the way and pulls the children's hands, encouraging them to work and work and instructing them not to spend money, not to oversleep in the morning, not to go out at night, not to catch flu, not to get injured, not to get wet by rain, not to commit wicked acts, not to drink excessively, not to get angry, not to get into arguments, not to gamble, not to buy prostitutes, and not to commit adultery—all so that the children can keep climbing the path diligently. The mother pushes the children from behind, wholeheartedly encouraging them to climb and climb. Therefore, by following the parents' words carefully, one will be at the summit in no time, residing in the same realm as kami, buddhas, and sages.⁵⁴

He conjures up an image of the family working together as a cohesive unit, with the father in charge and the mother offering assistance. Hachirō's strategy makes sense given his audience, his own family and relatives. Echoing his discussions of filial piety elsewhere, he enumerates a number of prohibitions that should be observed in order to ensure familial prosperity. He proposes the simple observance of filial piety as a practical alternative for farmers, for whom the other three paths are not suitable.

Using the image of the Filial Piety Mountain, Hachirō characterizes filial piety simultaneously as the highest goal of human life and as the underlying path or way that unifies Confucianism, Shinto, and Buddhism. The Filial Piety Mountain defies comprehension when we try to compartmentalize its individual elements based on the binary of "religion" and "morality." For Hachirō, filial piety was integral to and never detached from the paths of sages, kami, and buddhas. This renders problematic the retroactive extraction of filial piety as an element of "conventional morality," separable from "religion." To return to Swidler's model introduced earlier, filial piety, Confucianism, Shinto, Buddhism, path, and mountaintop were all ingredients in Hachirō's "cultural repertoire." Hachirō strategically invoked these concepts and imageries to articulate his understanding of the world and his vision of how to live prosperously in it.

Conclusion: Hachirō and Meiji Japan

Hachirō's writings from the Meiji period reveal his concerns for the future of the country. In the fourth month of Keiō 4 (1868), Hachirō sent his nephew Yasuzō 安藏 to the Kantō region to investigate the situation on the ground as the battlefield of the Boshin War approached. In the sixth month of the same year, based on Yasuzō's reports, Hachirō composed an essay titled *Hachirō dokunendaiki* 八老独年代記 (Old Hachirō's solitary chronicle), expressing his views on contemporaneous political developments. Hachirō

54 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, pp. 117–18.

described bakufu loyalists as corrupt, claiming that the root cause of turmoil was the moral lassitude of domain lords, who were causing the deaths of innocent villagers and townspeople on account of their own selfishness. In his eyes, domain leaders lacking in trust and benevolence (*fushin fujin* 不信不仁) and committing violent and wayward acts (*bōaku mudō* 暴悪無道) had lost their legitimacy to rule.⁵⁵ At the same time, he also lamented that those supporting the emperor now welcomed foreigners to Japan and engaged in commerce with them. The imperial troops were even dressed in Western clothing, and appeared no different from foreigners. What the new government needed to do, he insisted, was to grasp people's hearts and to demonstrate its virtuous intentions by exempting people of tax burdens (*mitsugi o yurusare* 貢を免され).⁵⁶ In other words, he sought from the new Meiji regime the same benevolent governance (*jinsei* 仁政) that he had sought from the Tokugawa.

Yet, the new government failed to live up to Hachirō's expectations. In his last will, composed in 1882, he borrowed Umetsuji Norikiyo's language to describe modern society as a dark world dominated by yin forces. He lamented that people completely lacked the spirit of filial piety (*kōkō no kokoro sara ni nashi* 孝行ノ心更ニ無シ), and treated their parents like dogs and horses (*kenba o yashinaiu gotoku* 犬馬ヲ養フ如ク).⁵⁷ He warned that for the foreseeable future, people's spirits would deteriorate precipitously (*massaka kudari ni ninki ashiku otoroe* 真坂下リニ人氣悪ク衰へ).⁵⁸ Hachirō thus continued to stress the importance of filial piety in the Meiji period even as he deplored the degradation of society due to its neglect of this basic virtue. This was nothing new, as he had despaired of Tokugawa society in the same way. For him, the Meiji Restoration did not represent such a radical break; things were as bad now as they ever were.

This article has focused on Kanno Hachirō and his writings as a way of getting at Japanese "religion" in the nineteenth century from the standpoint of a local farmer, and so offers a rare perspective in the field of religious studies. Beyond the scope of this article is an analysis of the emergence of the category of "morality" that stands separately from "religion."⁵⁹ For many years, the framework of "conventional morality" served as a dominant analytical lens in the study of Tokugawa society, particularly in Japanese scholarship. Yet, just as an uncritical imposition of the category of "religion" on premodern sources can result in distortions, so too can an approach to Hachirō's writings through the modern lens of "morality" as distinct from "religion" lead to an overly compartmentalized view of his thought.

Of course, the fact that Hachirō himself did not have in mind categories of religion and morality does not necessarily preclude scholars from meaningfully employing them for analytical purposes. It is possible, for example, to draw a rough parallel between the modern category of "morality" and early modern "virtues" or "principles" such as filial piety, loyalty, and diligence. Identifying these conceptual analogues is necessary, for it helps us to see that the emergence of categories like religion and morality was not merely a Western imposition;

55 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, p. 163. Hachirō does, however, speak positively of Tokugawa Yoshinobu for his decision to give up the right to rule over the Japanese archipelago, thereby preventing unnecessary bloodshed.

56 Ienaga and Shōji 1970, p. 163.

57 Kanno 2010a, p. 286.

58 Kanno 2010a, p. 287.

59 For an analysis of discussions on "religion" and "morality" or "ethics" by leading thinkers in the Meiji period see Josephson 2012, pp. 198–210. Also see Maxey 2014, pp. 106–107.

these categories were informed by native ideas as well.⁶⁰ Yet, much more relevant than the religion-morality binary in understanding Hachirō's thought is his identity and concerns as a farmer, which he articulated through concepts and discourses available to him. More effort is needed to examine these formulations from an emic standpoint, in order to disrupt the neat boundaries set by modern categories and highlight areas of overlap. It is precisely through these points of ambiguity that we can begin to understand the worldviews of Hachirō and his contemporaries.

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⁶⁰ For a relevant discussion on the categories of "religion" and "secular," see Rots and Teeuwen 2017, pp. 6–9.

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