

development, and only as these conditions are realized does it become meaningful to encourage democracy and Western concepts of human rights. Sometimes the Asian leaders go so far as to point out how much more stable and crime-free are their societies than are the societies of those Western nations that place such high priority on human rights. It may be that these differences in the notion of what constitutes the good society will lead to sharp conflicts between the Asian and Western approaches to human rights over the next decades.

#### Notes

- 1 In speaking of Asia, we mainly refer to Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. China, Hong Kong and Singapore as well as other of the rapidly developing nations of Southeast Asia share many but not all of the attributes of the Asian model.

## TOKUGAWA JAPAN: THE CHINA CONNECTION

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I should like to begin my introduction to this paper with an apology. The title I have given it — “The China Connection” — is somewhat misleading, since the paper itself is by no means the exhaustive analysis of what China meant to the people of Tokugawa Japan that the title promises. Instead, it is my way of raising some questions about the part played by Confucianism in the Tokugawa Period because that’s a subject with which I have a certain amount of difficulty.

It’s almost impossible to read anything on Tokugawa Japan — whether in Japanese or English — without encountering the assertion that it was a Confucian society, that it was a society in which Confucianism — and by extension the Chinese example — was of peculiar importance. Further, there is a very strong implication in much of this writing that insofar as Tokugawa Japan failed to conform to Confucian/Chinese standards that failure is to be deplored.

I have to confess that I find all this hard to understand. Just what is a Confucian society? How do you know one when you see one? I can’t say with any certainty, but from the writings of those who claim that Tokugawa Japan was one it is possible to distill certain markers.

- a) A Confucian society is one which subscribes to the standard Confucian values —

benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, trustworthiness.

- b) A Confucian society is one which believes strongly in hierarchy, on the grounds that some people are naturally better than others, and that their positions within society should reflect that difference.
- c) A Confucian society is one which gives due respect to parents, and emphasizes the obligations owed to them by their children.
- d) A Confucian society is one which prefers stability — political, economic, social — over any kind of change.
- e) A Confucian society is one where complex issues are reduced to matters of personal morality.
- f) A Confucian society is one which looks back to a golden age where men lived in peace and harmony under the direction of wise rulers.

No doubt this list is incomplete, and I am sure any intellectual historian could add more, but that's enough to go on with.

Now the problem I have with this list of Confucian characteristics is that, while it may serve to describe elements of an ideal Confucian society, and should therefore be rather exotic, it in fact sounds rather familiar. Did the Japanese of the Tokugawa period really need Chinese assistance in working out this basis of their society? Does anybody seriously imagine that without Confucianism — if, for example, Japan had never heard of China or Confucius — the Japanese would have espoused values like Malice, Unrighteousness, Impropriety, Stupidity and Unreliability? Does anybody seriously imagine that without the Chinese example the Japanese would have been democratic, egalitarian, wilfully unstable and nasty to their parents?

In fact, these “Confucian” characteristics can be used to describe pre-modern societies in general. Take the pre-modern states of western Europe. They espoused values remarkably like benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and trustworthiness, but these were derived not from the Analects and Mencius, but rather from the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. You can certainly see a fixed belief in hierarchy, a preference for political, economic and social stability, and you can even see, with the Garden of Eden prior to the Fall, a belief in a Golden Age. So what people look at Japan — and only at Japan — might describe as a Confucian society seems to me to be more properly thought of as simply a pre-modern society.

It is from this position that my paper looks at what Confucianism and the Chinese model really meant to Tokugawa Japan. Certainly the Japanese derived their moral lexicon from these sources, using Chinese abstractions to rationalize impulses of a universal kind. But what else did Confucianism and the Chinese model give to Tokugawa Japan? If you look at the personal lives and characters of Tokugawa Japan's Confucian scholars — those presumably most committed to the values they preached — it's hard to believe that Confucianism made them better people. Many of them seem to have been rather nasty. They also seem to have been very much interested in salaries, positions and preferment. In short, these professional

Confucians were all too human, sharing the same attributes (I'm reluctant to say defects, because that's certainly judgemental, and it implies some absolute standard of behaviour) common to all human beings.

What then of the apparent willingness of Tokugawa Japan to follow Chinese statecraft, which was specifically aimed at rulers and officials. Perhaps this makes a Confucian society? Japan's rulers clearly considered it important that the general populace be instructed in the duties it owed the state. They all ultimately came to sponsor schools for their samurai in which the curriculum was almost exclusively Confucian/Chinese. Whenever they called for reform they did so in moralistic terms of a kind which would have been recognized all over East Asia. Their very vision of an ideal social structure, one based on four immutable estates, was a Chinese import.

But that's as far as it went. The rulers of Tokugawa Japan gave Confucianism a good deal of lip service, but were happy to leave it at that. It is hard to think of too many rulers more than politely interested in Confucian scholarship — Tsunayoshi certainly, Ienobu perhaps, but nobody else. It is not much easier to think of daimyo either, outside the standard half-dozen or so names — Mitsukuni of Mito, Mitsumasa of Bizen, Hoshina Masayuki of Aizu, Date Tsunamura of Sendai. For the most part daimyo seem to have been all too happy to keep Confucian scholarship at arm's length.

Instead, what they did was maintain an appearance of Confucian piety by hiring professionals, and this brings us to an intriguing aspect of the topic. Confucianism was the doctrine of the ruling class, but that's not where the scholars came from. A random sample of some 60-odd scholars, some well-known, others not, shows twelve doctors' sons, five who were themselves the sons of professional scholars, fifteen sons of farmers, and twenty-one coming from the commercial classes.

So we have the curious phenomenon of fifty-three scholars out of sixty with non-samurai backgrounds, spending their lives acquiring knowledge thought to be essential to good government, but at the same time barred by definition — by their very non-samurai status — from using that knowledge in any practical way. Government in Tokugawa Japan was the preserve of the samurai class, and it was difficult — virtually impossible, in fact — for outsiders to break into it.

That is intriguing. Equally intriguing is the readiness with which scholars of humble origins came to adopt the snobbery and elitism with which Confucianism can be all too easily identified. One more intriguing aspect is this. Of my sixty-odd Confucian scholars, only a handful came from the samurai class, and most of them from the lower rungs. The one big exception was Hoashi Banri, who, the son of a senior councillor to a daimyo, came to occupy that post himself in his fifty-fourth year. He stayed in the position for three difficult years, and then resigned to spend the remaining seventeen years of his life in teaching and scholarship.

One must conclude, therefore, that while Chinese learning in general, and Confucianism in particular, gave Tokugawa Japan a handful of moralists and metaphysicians, and a rather greater number of schoolmasters, librarians, archivists, chroniclers, translators, antiquarians

and poets, they really did not produce a significant number of statesmen or officials. Members of the ruling class who employed such scholars tended not to make much use of them, and particularly not in the area of government.

Now put yourself in the sandals of the *jusha*, the Confucian scholars. They believed that in China people lile themselves got top jobs, and knew this to be the case in Korea. But in Japan they were ignored — ignored, moreover, by people who had reached positions of power simply by the accidents of birth. So they were permanently embittered. Nobody asked them for their advice, and if they offered it anyway, nobody took any notice. They were research assistants, entertainers and fashion accessories; they knew it, and they resented it. It is no accident that the most characteristic product of these Confucian scholars in the Jeremiad. If by chance they actually got some power, they usually failed miserably. Their very training as Confucian scholars made them elitist, doctrinaire and unused to cooperation or compromise; it is hardly surprising that such men made extremely difficult colleagues, and that those who worked with them generally rejoiced to see them go.

Looking at the situation objectively, however, it was probably just as well that nobody paid them any attention. Look at what they wanted for society — commerce stopped, cities destroyed, restrictions on everything from rice consumption to reading matter, all those things which made Tokugawa Japan one of the pre-modern world's more agreeable places. All in all it's a matter for congratulation that Tokugawa Japan's acceptance of Confucianism and the Chinese model was so selective, and remained at a superficial level.

Beneath my argument therefore is the contention that rather than being in any way central or defining to life in Tokugawa Japan, Confucianism was largely irrelevant. Certainly the people spoke the language of Confucianism, but when it came to behaviour they acted like ordinary human beings. I think we can all take some satisfaction from this.

## Parody genre in the Edo Period literature

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The Edo period (1600-1868) was the time of incredible flourishing for any species of the popular literature in Japan. The appearance of a large mass of literate commoners stimulated the ever-increasing activity in writing and publishing of works primarily focused on entertainment. One of the distinguishing traits of this literature was a large amount of humorous and burlesque works. One may surmise that the parody occupied in the Edo